# LOCALIZING MEMORYSCAPES, BUILDING A NATION:

## *COMMEMORATING THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN SINGAPORE*

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This thesis is dedicated to the loving memory of my Mother. May you rest in peace!

**HAMZAH BIN MUZAINI**
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# SUMMARY

This thesis concerns itself with the way the Singapore state remembers its involvement in the Second World War, and the politics of space associated with the production and consumption of "local" memoryscapes to the war. While the thesis looks at war commemoration within the nation in general, it also grounds the discussion by analyzing two memorial sites – *Changi Chapel and Museum* and *Reflections at Bukit Chandu Centre*. Data was gathered through archival, survey and interview techniques, using a mix of qualitative and quantitative tools. The main findings are highlighted below.

First, in examining the way the Singapore state has attempted to spatially mobilize its war memories as a tool of nation-building, the thesis shows how the endeavour is challenged from within the nation as well as from outside, placing the configuration of the "national" within the Singapore context as lying in a precarious intersection between "global" and "local" forces. Upon investigating how the state has negotiated these challenges through various strategies of memory-making, the state's two-pronged aim in commemorating the war becomes clear: to make its memoryscapes more resonant with Singaporeans while still keeping it relevant for foreigners – particularly war pilgrims – who still visit them.

The thesis also looks at how successful the state has been in "localizing" – through its memoryscapes – what was really a "global" war. While Singaporeans do see the war as a pertinent aspect of the nation's history, it has not translated into any *real* desire to support the state's remembrance of it more actively. Some Singaporeans have even (covertly) resisted the way the state has commemorated the war, especially when they see it as a

way in which the state has marginalized certain groups, as in the *Reflections at Bukit Chandu Centre*, seen by the Malays as a site where their history is being sidelined. The problem essentially lies in how the term "local" is defined. In Singapore, the state's idea of the "local" as representing *all* citizens has been deflected by how some Singaporeans may define the term (e.g. as ethnically variegated). This shows how the views of the people may not necessarily coincide with the state; where "localizing" the war in Singapore becomes problematic in the light of the nation's multiracial complexion. It also exposes the over-simplicity of putting the "local" simply as a foil to "global" forces. As the thesis shows, the term "local" itself is a fraught concept, even within the nation.

Apart from showing how such memoryscapes are contested from within the nation, the thesis also shows how they can be contested from outside, as exemplified in the case of the *Changi Chapel and Museum*, where, given the war as being "global" in character, and its commemoration as transnational, other nations too may want to stake their own claims over how the war is commemorated locally. More broadly, it shows how, when considering "national" commemorations of such wars, it is critical to consider elements that may emerge from beyond the nation as well. In that sense, the thesis shows that memoryscapes of war in Singapore are indeed heavily contested as sites of nationhood.

## KEY PHRASES

**Memoryscapes; "global-local" nexus; politics of space; culture of commemoration; Second World War; Singapore**

# NATION-BUILDING, MEMORYSCAPES AND SECOND WORLD WAR COMMEMORATION IN SINGAPORE

## 1.1    The global-national-local nexus and the problematization of the "local"

Recent theorizations on the concept of the "nation" within the domain of the social sciences have generally accepted it as a "social-construct" and "the product of specific historical and geographical forces" (Jackson and Penrose 1993: 1). Anderson (1983: 7) refers to the "nation" as an "imagined community", a group constituted by heterogeneous individuals who may never know each other personally (hence "imagined"), yet feel a sense of "community" or a "deep horizontal comradeship with one another" by virtue of being in the same nation. This sense of the "community" extends even to members who are dead, as "ghostly imaginings belonging to the same national community, thus securing the nation's imagined continuity and transcendence of time" (Ashplant *et al.* 2000: 8). The characteristics that members of a nation share with each other towards a nation's collective consciousness give rise to its "national identity" (Gillis 1994).

Given its socially-constructed nature, it has been postulated that this sense of collectivity that the "nation" embodies is not stable and is constantly under threat (Kong and Yeoh 2003). Specifically, it is said to be in danger of being overcome by the onslaught of globalization, facilitating the removal of national barriers to flows of information, capital, people, ideas and commodities, hence collapsing time and space in the creation of a "global village" (Radcliffe and Westwood 1996). One argument refers to the "nation" as perpetually struggling to hold its own against the emergence of "global cultures" (Lowenthal 1994), seeking to homogenize and erase the particularity of single nations.

The counter argument to this is that nations are not mere passive receivers of the exogenous processes of globalization, and to say that nations would be rendered passé in the light of these global forces does not necessarily hold true (Teo and Lim 2003). This is because nations too may counter *similarizing* tendencies of global trends by exploiting local particularity so as to keep intact its sense of "national identity". Sack (1992) refers to this process where nations react to globalization by "returning to local communities" as "localization"; stressing the uniqueness of the "nation" so as to maintain its specificity against foreign invasions prone to render it the same as other nations. As Robins (1991: 21) puts it, "the idea of nationality continues to have a powerful, if regressive, afterlife and the sweeping [local] images which spring to life in times of [global] crisis testify to its continuing force". Hence, it is more instructive to conceive of the "nation" as an active (rather than passive) actor in tension with (and reacting to) global forces that act upon it.

While the "global-local" dialectic has been discussed extensively elsewhere (see Bird *et al*. 1993; Chang *et al*. 1996; Urry 1996), there has not been much interrogation of what it actually means to promote the "local". As Appadurai (1995: 207) puts it, "most studies have taken locality as ground not figure, recognizing neither its fragility nor its ethos *as a property of social life*". Indeed, what is considered "local" is a fragile concept. First, for the "nation" to be realized, there is the need to create a sense that all its inhabitants are "the same" by virtue of belonging to one nation. The problem arises if one accepts that members of most states today "include people who do not belong to its core culture or feel themselves to be part of a nation so defined" (Hasting 1997: 3). Sub-national affiliations may therefore fracture the collectivity that is the state's desired formation, as

the state's idea of "local" within the global arena may not be what the people in the nation see as "local". Hence, nation-building would require a process of uniting divergent (sometimes dissonant) interests as a means of providing threads to bind its population.

Second, there is also a need to produce subjects who would be able to relate to the idea of the "nation" – as the state envisions it – on a more *personal* level. Stressing "localization" as a "structure of feeling", Appadurai (1995: 206-7) avers that the idea of a "nation" needs to be something not only produced by the state but also one that is continuously reproduced by "local subjects possessed of the knowledge to reproduce [it]". In that sense, "localization" should allow for the "local" community to be directly in the act of "living through the nation" or "the material and experiential procession of citizens through the nation space" (Radcliffe and Westwood 1996: 118). As such, the notion of "localization" transcends the mere presentation of the "local" to a global audience, but one that reaches deep into the psyche of the people (within the nation); them embodying and internalizing these "localization" processes, rather than just existing superficially for the international community to reflect upon (Radcliffe and Westwood 1996).

To further problematize the "local", it is also a product of the context in which the term is defined. For one, the term "local" remains a "baffled" concept as any single "locality" may be perceived differently by different groups of people living within the nation (Appadurai 1995). In addition, the term "local" is also a historical concept in that it is a product of "our" times (Rodman 1992) and therefore may change over time due to new contexts. As Appadurai (1995: 210) puts it, as "local" subjects carry on the task of re-

producing the "local", they are continuously faced with "the contingencies of history, environment and imagination [which] contain potential for new contexts (material, social and imaginative) to be produced" (Appadurai 1995: 210). Hence, "localization" needs to be (re-) examined from both geographical and historical points of view.

There is therefore an apparent paradox in the process of "localization" as discussed here. Hastings (1997: 34) summarizes this paradox: "nationalism is to be justified as an appropriate protest against a universalizing uniformity … but its consequence is too often precisely the imposition of uniformity, a deep intolerance of all particularities except [the state's] own". While one purpose of nation-building is to preserve one's "local" identity amidst global forces, the other is to create a "national" culture that moulds diverse realities within the nation. The problem, however, lies in that, given the multiculturalism of most nations today, and problems with defining the "local", forging a homogeneous "national" culture may not be an easy feat to achieve. While, ideally, the "internalized imaginings of the nation" (how the people of a "nation" define itself) should be the same as the "externalized imaginings of the nation" (the idea of a "nation" the state projects globally) (Radcliffe and Westwood 1996), this is rarely the case in reality.

The "national" is then placed at the muddy intersections of what is "global" and "local", given that the process of "localization" – and the shaping of the "national" – is a highly embattled process involving the state, its people and global actors. As such, what can be seen as "national" is neither merely the product of global forces, nor of specific "localization" processes. In analyzing nation-building processes within states, it is more

useful perhaps to interrogate the complex interconnections of *both* global and local forces and how they intersect with each other in how the "national" is configured (Urry 1996).

## 1.2 The role of "collective memory" in nation-building

Given external (*global*) or internal (*local*) threats to the "nation", perceived or otherwise, the ties that bind the "nation" together are therefore "fragile" and need to be continuously "nurtured" (Kong and Yeoh 2003). "Nationalism" refers to the ideology behind this "nurturing", which calls for the invention of traditions to secure the "nation" and set it apart from other nations, at the same time providing its inhabitants with the symbolic capital to maintain its "imagined community" (Hobsbawm 1983). This capital which provides "national" citizens with the sense of belonging to each other can be rooted in a nation's past, common culture or even sometimes fabricated *ex nihilo* as icons of a nation's identity. These invented traditions aim towards inculcating certain values and norms of behaviour to foster group cohesion within the nation (Jackson and Penrose 1993). Central to this national "myth-making" is the notion of "collective memory".

"Memory" is, to put it simply, an individual way of looking at the past (Davis and Starn 1989; O'Meally and Fabre 1994). While "memory" can be personal, it can also be shared between people within the same group, producing what is known as "collective memory". In most cases, "collective memory" is forged through some common experience(s) shared and sustained among members of that particular group (Halbwachs 1992). The mobilization of "the force of history" (Kapferer 1988) in fulfilling certain objectives of the present can be seen in the extensive efforts put by nations to reach into their reserves

of the past as a means of "rooting" its people, such as in preserving historic landscapes (Datel and Dingemans 1988; King 1999), conserving archival records (Foote 1994), drawing from past legends (Kapferer 1988) or in other acts of capitalizing upon history in bringing the inhabitants within the "nation" together.

The salience of memory in the making of a "national" tradition lays in that it "holds the fabric of belief together … underpins social cohesion [and] reminds us [of] who we are, and what our place in that society actually is" (Kavanagh 2000: 43). For one, it serves to justify ideologies that the state may want imposed on its people, as "our experience of the present largely depends upon our knowledge and images of the past", hence the value of memory in the "legitimation of [national] authority and social cohesion" (Connerton 1989: 3). Collective memory also gives a nation a shared sense of its people and satisfy their need for "roots" (Samuel 1994), distilling "the past into icons of identity, bonding us with precursors and progenitors, with our own earlier selves and with our promised successors" (Lowenthal 1994: 43), giving the nation a "distinctive historical consciousness" (Cornwell and Stoddard 2001: 4).

The power of "collective memory" also lies in its ability to entice people to concede to what the group, in this case the "nation", believes even if it goes against what they personally believed (Kavanagh 2000). According to Kapferer (1988: 2), "the meanings [behind memories] carry implications for further action [and] can motivate action in accordance with the direction of the nationalist argument". In line with the transcendent nature of the nation, memory also allows us to connect with the heroics of the dead as a

means of inspiring generations to emulate sacrifices made for the nation by other "national" ancestors, hence securing "the willingness of current generations to die in [the nation's] defence" (Ashplant *et al*. 2002: 22). In creating a "national tradition", therefore, memory may "declare the nation to be whole and unified outside the mechanism of the state" (Kapferer 1988: 23).

Bearing this in mind, Anderson (1983: 3) warns, however, that far from being definitive truths, these inventions are merely "the cultural stuff out of which moral and material systems are charged and transformed". It is also important, therefore, to understand that memory is contextualized and necessarily ideological (Yoneyama 1999). In forging a "national" culture, collective memories that are fashioned by the state to become "official history" may also seek to erase "traces of the past which seem to impede the work of a new order" (Kwok *et al.* 1999: 6). At one extreme, it may even offer "a bogus history which ignores complex historical processes and relationships, and sanitizes less savoury dimensions of the past" (Johnson 1999: 190). Hence, official versions of the past are defined as much by what they forget as by what they remember (Gillis 1994)

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In that sense, "national memory" can be seen to involve the valorising of the past based on present day evaluations, conditioned by present needs and contemporary problems (Osborne 1998). However, the state's version of a nation's "collective memory" may not necessarily be accepted by others (Nora 1994). Threats to "national" memory can emerge from within the state, such as when the state's version of a collective memory is challenged by other versions of the same memory as held by members of that nation.

Threats may also emerge from external sources, especially when the *past* in question – that is shaped by the state to add ballast to its task of nation-building – is one that involved other nations as well. In the case of these "transnational" events, the way one nation attempts to remember its history would also have to consider how other nations would react to its interpretation of the event (Ashplant *et al.* 2000).

In this age of globalization, the salience of being sensitive to the reactions of other nations cannot be ignored, since it is not possible for one nation to exist completely divorced from the "interconnected world" (Teo *et al.* 2001) where nations are inevitably dependent on global engagements if they are to succeed within it. As diplomatic courtesy, or for fear of retaliation, nations do have to bear in mind how its actions affect other nations. Further, in the case of "transnational" events involving death, such as a war that takes place across national boundaries, the commemoration of the event may also be transnational, such as when families embark on "pilgrimages" to overseas sites where loved ones suffered or may be buried (Smith 1996). Hence, the way the event is recalled within a nation would also have to consider how these "war pilgrims" would react.

Another facet of the global threat to national memory takes the form of what some scholars have called "thanatourism" (Seaton 1999; Lennon and Foley 2000). This refers to a type of alternative tourism defined as "travel to a location wholly or partially motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death" (Seaton 1999: 131). As such, there are some who travel to sites where wars have taken (or are taking) place so as to get adrenaline rushes or simply for leisure. This is distinguished from "war

pilgrims" whose visits are motivated more by the desire for personal commemoration. For nations with a legacy that may provide fodder for the rise of such tourism, no less as they can contribute to tourism (Smith 1996), the demands of these tourists would also need to be considered when representing the war, even within national boundaries.

According to Adams (2001: 266), besides the obvious commercial incentives that these foreigners to a particular nation – "war pilgrims" or alternative tourists – bring in, they also "contribute [towards] reconfiguring ethnic and national perceptions" of the events, as they "become embroiled in and colour the politics of the places they [visit]". Apart from influencing these sites physically (or symbolically), these visitors may even be critical of the way a state projects memories of the events (Blackburn 2000a). Hence, while dissenting voices within a nation not aligned with the state's version of a "national" memory may be one form of resistance, there may also be forces emerging from "outside", giving rise to an "internationalization of heritage" where "[national] heritage is no longer immune to outside judgement" as the global community becomes an active player in the decision on what merits safeguarding (Lowenthal 1994: 48).

## 1.3    Contesting the past: conceptualizing the politics of landscape

In illuminating some of the above nuances, geographers have centred upon the analysis of "landscapes" and "landscape representations" (Jackson and Penrose 1993; Mitchell 2002). In line with developments within the field of cultural geography, landscapes are understood to reflect and reproduce social relations and the politics inherent in them (Price and Lewis 1993). According to Cosgrove and Jackson (1987: 96), "landscape" is

"a particular way of composing, structuring and giving meaning to an external world whose history has to be understood in relation to the material appropriation of land". It can be physical – material changes over space – or symbolic in the shape of meanings invested on and over space which are not directly verifiable by the senses. Hence, apart from the directly visual, there is also a need to highlight the symbolism inscribed in landscapes which produce and sustain social meanings.

Landscapes are often seen as convenient canvases on which the state writes its national memory, as a means of naturalizing it, such that "they are read and experienced as 'common-sense', creating what is experienced as an adequate and unalienated representation of subjects' lives" (Radcliffe and Westwood 1996: 11). This is what is referred to as "hegemony" which "does not involve controls which are clearly recognizable as constraints in the traditional coercive sense" but "a set of ideas and values which the majority are persuaded to adopt as their own" (Kong and Yeoh 2003: 11-2). When memory is set onto space, they become *lieux de memoire*, or mnemonic devices and anchors where "memory crystallizes and secretes itself" (Nora 1994: 284). Hence, through landscapes, "national" memory may be transformed from something that is shifting to one fixed: "from an external phenomenon to be engaged visually, to a psychic terrain of internalized symbolic meaning" (Osborne 1998: 433).

However, while such mediation over space holds out the potential hegemony of official national identities, what has been "written" onto landscapes may not necessarily be "read" the same way from below (Kong and Yeoh 2003). In that sense, landscapes can be

"denaturalized ... [or] changed physically or reinterpreted to reflect challenges to the dominant value system" (Duncan and Duncan 1988: 125). Resistance to the state's forwarded history may be achieved through overt confrontations or via more latent means "assembled out of the materials and practices of everybody life (Pile cited in Yeoh 2003: 42). While the former may seek to attain more immediate results, the latter may take place over time as they "invent new trajectories, and forms of existence, articulate alternative futures and possibilities [and] create autonomous zones as a strategy against particular dominating power relations" (Routledge cited in Yeoh 2003: 42).

In that sense, the interpretation of landscapes is very much "locked within relations of power" giving it its dual character: "as a repository of elite or state power and as a site of individual and collective struggle and resistance" (Yeoh and Kong 1996: 53). While this may take place within the nation, they can also unveil complex contestations between nations if the event (or its commemoration) was a transnational one. Memoryscapes therefore provide a good medium to examine how national memory is mediated between forces from within as well as those that lie beyond the nation, making them effective "lens" through which geographers can examine political processes that go into how memories are appropriated today. The issues discussed thus far would empirically draw upon and fold into the case of the Second World War and its remembrance in Singapore.

## 1.4    Research objectives and thesis organization

This thesis concerns itself primarily with the processes that have gone (and are still going) into how the Second World War has been – and is still presently being –

commemorated within the nation-state of Singapore. In line with the idea that history cannot be understood without understanding "[t]he significance and power of the concept of space, and its relevance to the historical imagination" (Yeoh 2003: 30), this thesis specifically examines war commemoration in Singapore through the "lens" of its memoryscapes of war in eliding some of the issues hitherto discussed.

In **Chapter 2,** the thesis reviews some of the literature on (war) memoryscapes. At the same time, it provides a framework to better examine how landscape is manipulated in the context of memory-making. In addition, it also reviews the methodological routes that were taken in gathering and examining data. **Chapter 3** provides a background to the war before focusing on how commemoration began in Singapore since independence in 1965, highlighting especially the period from the late-1980s when remembrance of the war became an important item on the state's agenda. Specifically, the chapter looks at the challenges that the state faces in "nationalizing" the war to allow Singaporeans to better relate to it. It also highlights the strategies the state has adopted – through the manipulation of its memoryscapes – in its attempts to overcome these challenges.

**Chapter 4** interrogates the issue of whether "local" Singaporeans do indeed feel any affinity to these memoryscapes and whether their views about commemoration coalesce with that of the state's official position. In examining the views of Singaporeans, the chapter will analyze various issues associated with their perceptions of memoryscapes in Singapore dedicated to the war. A particular concern is in discerning the ways in which Singaporeans accept *or resist* how the state has attempted to remember the war. In

**Chapter 5** and **Chapter 6,** the analysis is brought down to a more site-specific level through an examination of two "local" memoryscapes dedicated to the war, *Changi Chapel and Museum* and *Reflections at Bukit Chandu* centre respectively (see Map 1.1). Specifically, the two sites provide interesting cases to examine different aspects of what it means to "localize" (or "nationalize") in Singapore what was essentially a "global" war.

The reasons for choosing these two sites are three-fold. For one, they are both museums opened within a year from each other and located at or very near where the events that they commemorate actually took place. Second, they are both sites of *nationhood*, that is, they have been promoted as sites that have been "placed" critically within the Singapore state's task of nation-building. The two sites are also emblematic of how the state has attempted to "localize" the war through various techniques of spatial mediation. Third, they are sites promoted not only for Singaporeans but also foreign visitors. This means that they lie, more often than not, at the intersections of the state, Singaporeans and foreign visitors. For these factors, the sites provide useful comparisons highlighting some of the issues to do with practices of how the war is commemorated in Singapore, and the problematization of what is considered "local" within the nation.

**Chapter 7** concludes the thesis by summing up all the different arguments proffered in the thesis, specifically along the lines of the broader issues that have been brought up and discussed thus far. This final chapter will also give an overview of other related research strands that still need attention and can be taken up in future work.

**Map 1.1 Map of Singapore showing war-related sites mentioned in the thesis**

THAILAND

PHILIPPINES

MALAYSIA

INDONESIA

SOUTHEAST ASIA

MALAYSIA

* 2
* 1    * 3

* 4

SINGAPORE

* 6 * 7
* 8
* 5    * 10
* 9    * 12
* 11

CHANGI
PENINSULA

* 13    CITY
* 14
* 15    * 16 * 17
* 18    * 19

N

* 20
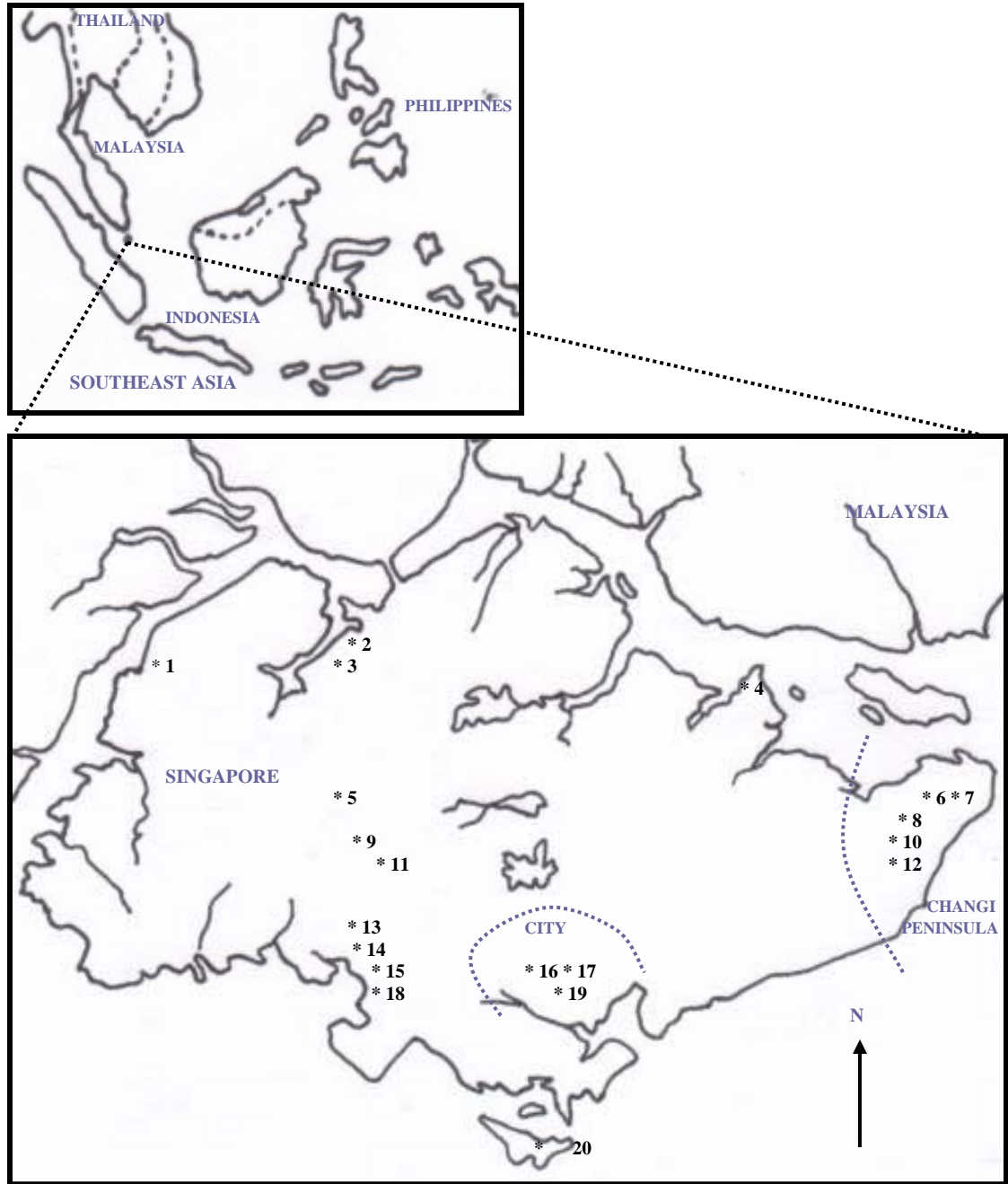
| | |
|---|---|
| 1 – Sarimbun Japanese Landing Site | 11 – Ford Factory (British surrender to Japanese) |
| 2 – Kranji Japanese Landing Site | 12 – Changi Prison |
| 3 – Kranji War Cemetery | 13 – Pasir Panjang machine gun pill-box |
| 4 – Punggol Massacre Site | 14 – Kent Ridge Park |
| 5 – Bukit Batok Memorial site | 15 – REFLECTIONS AT BUKIT CHANDU CTR |
| 6 – Selarang Barracks | 16 – Battlebox (former gun bunker) |
| 7 – Changi Murals/ St Luke's Chapel/ Changi Beach | 17 – Cathay Building/ site of old YMCA building |
| 8 – Johore Gun Battery | 18 – Labrador Gun Battery (Nature Park) |
| 9 – Bukit Timah Battle Site/ Syonan Jinja | 19 – Civilian War Memorial Park |
| 10 – CHANGI CHAPEL AND MUSEUM | 20 – Sentosa; Fort Siloso Gun Battery |

*CHAPTER TWO*
# LITERATURE REVIEW, CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGICAL ROUTES

## 2.1 Reviewing the literature: landscapes of memory and war commemoration

Over the recent years, the study on landscapes of memory has been a central thread among the works of cultural and historical geographers (Jarman 1993; Azaryahu 1996, 1999; Boholm 1997; Cartier 1997; Hartig and Dunn 1998; Gaffney 1998; Delyser 1999; Bell 1999; Moore 2000; Sidorov 2000; de Medeiros 2001; Leib 2002), presenting it as an area that has received much focus within the general discipline. In reviewing the wide-ranging literature dealing with landscapes of war memory, in particular, it is also clear that the bulk of these studies has tended to highlight cases outside the Asia-Pacific: in Europe (Young 1992; Charlesworth 1994; Koonz 1994; Heffernan 1995; Johnson 1995; Withers 1996; Morris 1997; Till 1999; Landzelius 2003; Azaryahu 2003), North America (Senie and Webster 1992; Bodnar 1994; Hayden 1999; Dwyer 2000; Eksteins 2000; Yoneyama 2001; Heffernan and Medlicott 2003), Israel (Loshitzky 1999; Mayer 2003), Africa (Nasson 1999) and South America (Starn 1992; Jelin and Kaufman 1999).

In comparison, far less has emerged (at least in the English language) in relation to landscapes of memory associated with wars that took place within the Asia-Pacific. The few that have been published include the memorialization of wars in Australia (Jeans 1988; Kapferer 1988; Curthoys 2001; Garton 2001), East Asia (Yoneyama 1999; Ben-Ari 2002; Young 1995; Trefalt 2001; Masaie 2001; Choi 2001; Dirlik 2001; Yang 2001; van Bremen 2002), and within Southeast Asia (for a general overview see Fujitani *et al.* 2001): the Philippines (Jose 2000), Indochina (Smith 1996; Logan 2002; Rydstrom

2003), Indonesia (Reid 2002), Malaysia and Singapore (Lim 2000; Blackburn 2000a, 2000b; Wong 2001; Ran Shauli 2002; Brunero 2002).[1] Hence, this thesis contributes to a relatively neglected area of geographical research on war remembrance in the Asian context. In this chapter, the major themes of these studies are elaborated before introducing a few more concepts used within the thesis. The last section deals with matters of how data was collected and analyzed within the thesis.

### 2.1.1 *Memoryscapes as symbolic landscapes of nationhood*

One major strand that typifies many studies is the focus on how "landscapes" represent platforms "on which the national past is inscribed and the genius of national life and character [can be] revealed" (Samuel 1994: 158). In terms of memory-making, this refers to how ruling elites invest symbolic capital and manipulate war memories through landscapes so as to forge a national consciousness (Piehler 1994; Winter 1995; Till 1999), where space rather than time provided the significant markers for remembering the past. Specific focus has been on how "particular place images [are] concretized into landscape as material bases for national imaginings" (Johnson 1995: 349), or what Boyer (cited in Till 1999: 254) refers to as "rhetorical *topoi* … compositions that teach us about our national heritage and our public responsibilities".

One way this is done is by inscribing national symbols (visible or implied) onto memoryscapes and their designs. In his study of the Commonwealth War Graves, Heffernan (1995: 299) described the symbolism behind the design of the Commonwealth war cemeteries as a means of forwarding certain ideal "British" values that "retain much

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[1] Most of the works are done by historians though these are not necessarily devoid of geographical insights.

of their extraordinary power over the British psyche and have become defining symbols of [British] national identity". Individual tomb designs were also strictly not allowed within the cemetery so as to produce a landscape that "expresses the idea of uniformity of service, equality of sacrifice and the comradeship of all ranks and classes" (Heffernan 1995: 299; see also Morris 1997). This reflects how the state may write history using the language of space as a means of forwarding ideologies that concretize the state's ideas of what the "nation" is (Johnson 1995; Yoneyama 1999; Azaryahu 1999; Yea 1999).

At times, how the state attempts to formulate a unified remembering of history is also characterized by an attempt to forget. In the study on the Hyde Park Memorial, Cooke (2000: 453, 462) explained the British state's stance against the Anglo-Jewry's request for a Holocaust memorial to be built at *Whitehall* (where the Cenotaph, an emblem of the British war dead, is), citing how the memory of the Holocaust was seen to be in conflict with "the heroic and exclusive memory of British role in WW2" and, hence, to be erased. Lacquer (1994: 157) also wrote of how memorials sometimes do not name individual soldiers so that the "national" population could "engage in the great symbolic act" where "every bereaved man or woman can say, 'That body may belong to me'", allowing them to personally relate to the war regardless of whether he or she was involved in it. This shows how memoryscapes can sometimes be extremely selective in its representations of war, promoting values only relevant to the nation (see also Savage 1992; Sturken 2001).

Of interest are also the debates around the question of authenticity, pitting the conversion of actual war sites into memoryscapes vis-à-vis the creation of "synthetic sites" of

commemoration possibly where the actual event did not happen (Charlesworth 1994; Winter 1995; Raivo 2001; Azaryahu 2003). The rationale for choosing the former lies in the ability of original "locale" to allow one to experience the "special aura" of the place where "the cruelty of war, death, fear, pain and hopelessness [can be] made very powerfully present" (Raivo 2001: 159). In nationalist rhetoric, such a strategy allows one to empathize more closely with those "nationals" who died for the nation, providing other members of the same nation with a source of inspiration and civic values – such as patriotism and the idea of putting the nation before self – which they can emulate.

As a counterpoint, scholars have also argued that, while "authentic" sites are indeed desirable, this is not always possible. For example, such sites may no longer have physical war remnants left on-site which might end up as "a disappointment", rather than inspirational, for the visitor (Raivo 2001). In such cases, Raivo (2001: 161) argues that "replica landscapes and simulacrum milieux" will do, so long as "tangible dimensions" of the event can be reproduced elsewhere through "replica copies of structures … whose originals are situated somewhere else; simulacra that accurately resemble such structures". Still, the point to make here is that, whether a memorial is located *in situ* or not, it is clear that "the space which monuments occupy is not just an incidental material backdrop but in fact inscribes [them] with meaning" (Johnson 1995: 348).

### 2.1.2   *Memoryscapes as contested landscapes*

Another theme focuses on the cultural politics of space associated with such war commemorative landscapes and the conflicts that they embody (Bender 1993;

Charlesworth 1994; Savage 1994; Zolberg 1996; King 1998; Johnson 1999; Yang 2001; Yea 1999). For the most part, these conflicts arise due to the failure of national memories to achieve consensus among its inhabitants in the "reading" of the "texts" as intended by the state. According to Dwyer (2000: 665), "no single memorial site is wholly given over to one perspective or the other; rather a dynamic tension exists between the two". In this case, the views of the state as imbibed in memoryscapes are not always accepted, hence breaking the ideological stranglehold of dominant narratives through the production of counter-hegemonic geographies by the people from below.

One element that has been observed to cause disagreement in how memoryscapes are produced lies in political affiliations. In the context of the Peace Day celebrations of 1919 in Ireland, Johnson (1999: 51) showed that "Dublin could launch a large scale spectacle, but there was no guarantee that it would be given a unanimous reading by all the city's citizens". This observation was made after reviewing how in the midst of the celebrations a few soldiers were attacked by the local citizens. As for the procession itself, "while some cheers were raised, the regular troops were received for the most part with silence". This, according to Johnson (1999: 36), was brought about by the manifold allegiances of the Irish people, some of whom "are still unsure about [Ireland's] political future within the United Kingdom", hence reflecting upon how conflicts may arise where the official "text" written onto a memorial is not read the same way by the people.

The other bone of contention revolves around how wars and its participants are represented at these landscapes. Jeans (1988: 261) examined the *Broken Hills Memorial*

to the Australian dead of the First World War, focusing on debates that arose out of the creation of the monument. Designed after the image of a "digger in the act of killing", the state wanted it to show "young men how their fathers stood for their country and deter strangers who might have designs upon Australia". Unfortunately, the state reading of the monument was resisted by the local community who argued that the violent portrayal "would only make passers-by think of revenge and hate, and cause many a mother bitter pain and anguish, as just a little of the horror of the battlefield is brought before her eyes" (Jeans 1988: 261). The debate over how the violence of war is to be represented, has also led Jeans (1988: 266) to proclaim that "the war never ends; it becomes a continuing symbol of qualities and issues that excite the emotions of the day".

Some studies have also narrowed in on the interface that occurs when collective memory collides head on with personal memory (Piehler 1994; Winter 1995; Becker 1997; Rowlands 1999; Low 2002). According to Jeans (1988: 266), "although for some, the function [of war memorials] was social, as a centre for public commemoration, the other role was personal, difficult to penetrate but no doubt important to individuals who lost close relatives in the war". For example, Heffernan (1995: 302) cited the example of the protest that took place over the decision of the British state not to repatriate their soldiers who died in overseas war fronts, many seeing it as "downright and absolute tyranny … [as] the dead are not the property of the nation or of the regiment, but of the widow, of the father and of the mother". While the war dead may be garnered as tools to forge national loyalties, for the family members of these war heroes, they are ordinary people who might be better commemorated privately.

Popular resistance can also emerge astride issues to do with race and racial representation (Savage 1994; Dwyer 2000; Curthoys 2001). In analyzing war commemoration in Australia, Curthoys (2001: 129) showed that "racial exclusions [may] shadow and undermine national narratives of harmony, unity and common purpose, revealing their fragility and provisionality", referring to how the indigenous Australians are resisting national accounts of the war which exclude their own history within the settler society. In another example, Dwyer (2000), in the context of monuments to the Civil Rights movement in America, reiterated how popular sentiments have begun to resist the memorials' claim to white supremacy and the exclusion of representations of the roles that the African-Americans played within the movement. This is a strong reflection of how race constitutes an important factor in considering the politics of memoryscapes.

Where the state purposely neglects the remembrance of a war, "locals" may end up doing it on their own. In a study of memorials in Malaysia, Lim (2000) states how, in light of the "ambivalence of war" brought about by the different ways the Japanese treated different races during the Second World War, resulting in "a collective amnesia" by the Malaysian state of the events", the Chinese community honoured the Chinese war dead through their own (private and collective) memorials so that their memories are constantly kept alive, and this is done completely without the involvement of the state. This act of resistance from the ground is what Azaryahu (1996: 502-3) refers to as "spontaneous memorialization", the underbelly of commemoration where "sacred ground is formed by unregulated public participation" (see also Sorkin and Zukin 2002). It also shows how contestations may also revolve around the official silencing of war.

Therefore, regardless of what the cause is, memoryscapes to war are usually subjects of conflict as "…even an authoritarian state cannot exercise complete control over war memories". While memorials can be "valued as loci of local, civic and national memory, [they are also] foci of dissent, civilian protest and political agitation" (Gough 2000: 214). As such, a "[memoryscape] does not so much seal and settle … as it opens a new chapter of struggle intimately associated with the mechanisms of memory" (Dwyer 2000: 668). The resultant landscape is the product of negotiations brokered among dissenting voices.

### 2.1.3    *Memoryscapes as sites of transnational commemorations*

According to Ashplant *et al.* (2000: 15), "in focusing on the internal relations of power, much of the work [on memoryscapes] has neglected the 'external' pressures of transnational power relations, brought to bear on the nation-state as it were from 'above', as it organizes its relations with other nation-states, and with a range of international institutions". National war commemoration may indeed be contested by external sources beyond the nation-state itself. This has been the main contention of studies that have emerged which deal with issues to do with transnationalism and its relationship with memoryscapes (Smith 1996; Seaton 1999; Blackburn 2000a; Gough 2000; Yang 2001; Adams 2001; Yoneyama 2001; Raivo 2001; Strange and Kempa 2003).

Raivo (2001), for example, wrote of how the Second World War as it was experienced in Finland had direct impacts upon how the nation-state remembers the war today. In the light of their affiliation with Nazi Germany during the war, Finland has had to be careful in the way it remembers the war so as to maintain its cordial diplomatic relations with the

Soviet Union, which was on the side of the Allies. This gives rise to an internal as well as an external war discourse, the latter written in such a way as to play down Finland's problematic war alliance with the Axis forces. In another example, Choi (2001) wrote of how the Korean state attempted to conceal the experiences of its women who served as sex slaves for the Japanese during the war so as to not only hide its failure to protect its women, but also because of the fact that Japan is a major investor in Korea today. This shows how the way one nation remembers the war cannot be dissociated from considerations of factors that lie beyond the geobody of the nation.

Studies have also pondered over the effects of promoting memoryscapes for tourism, and the fine line between "sacralizing" and "commodifying" a site. Gough (2000: 226), for example, stated that, while tourism may have positive effects at some level, too much of it may "threaten the avowed sanctity of such sacred places". Blackburn (2000a: 5-7) also showed how, once the element of tourism is introduced, memoryscapes may be slanted towards what tourists want to see rather than represent a true picture of what happened: while ex-POWs did not consider Changi internment camp in Singapore as "a site of horror", the image that tourists have is that of Changi as "a place of human horror", due to impressions inspired by fictional sources (Blackburn 2000a: 9). As a result, local tourism authorities decided to re-create the past within one memorial in Singapore based on what they think visitors want to see, to ensure high visitorship.

At one extreme, Blackburn (2000a: 2) showed how Kanchanaburi, home to the infamous *Bridge on the River Kwai*, became "a commodified-tourist site" through "manipulation

by the local community to attract tourists to the small town in order to show them the past that they want to see". Blackburn (2000a: 3) described the "commoditized" nature of the surrounding environs: "souvenir shops which sell every conceivable commodity that can be connected with the historic site, from T-shirts to miniature bombs and bridges" (see also Winter 1995). Therefore, in the light of how memoryscapes of war may potentially be seen as promoting tourism, the way they are appropriated within the nation would inevitably take into consideration the demands of these tourists. As Ashplant *et al.* (2001: 72) cited, "survivors of war must confront new forms of power: the cultural entrepreneurs of the global free market, now powerful adversaries in the battle over memory".

In another context, memoryscapes to war have also been hailed as a means of celebrating "shared harmonious relations and nurturing better relations between indifferent neighbours" (Gough 2000: 221; see also Yang 2001). In a study of war landscapes in Great Britain, Gough (2000: 220) calls them "landscapes of co-operation" or "the physical embodiment and focus of the will to resolve regional conflict [among countries] and help nurture biological, social and economic benefits". Yang (2001: 74) too looks at the many benefits that can be reaped – socially, economically and politically – if Japan and China were to just "join hands" and attempt to promote "friendly relations between the two peoples" by transnational collaborations in commemorating the historical event of the Nanjing Massacre, instead of quibbling over who is more to blame for the atrocity. It is therefore apparent that, in analyzing how the past may be manipulated to serve the present (such as for nation-building), there is a need to look at factors that pose a challenge to this task of memory appropriation from outside as well as inside the nation.

## 2.2    Memory-making strategies

If memory is socially constructed, it is also spatially appropriated. This section outlines some of the strategies – drawn mainly from the extensive literature above – that have been employed towards memory-making and producing memorial spaces: "locale", "design and symbolism", "performative memory" and "narrations". These concepts will then be applied towards discussing how memorial spaces are produced in Singapore.

<u>Locale</u> refers to the geographical location of a particular memoryscape. In deciding where a memorial is to be located, it is often the intention of the producers of a memoryscape to institute "place memory", defined as the use of geographical "place" as a means of triggering memories and permitting even those removed from the actual experiences to identify with historical (war) events. This is usually attained by locating a memorial at the exact place where the past event took place  so as to allow visitors to "imagine the past" akin to "actually being where it happened" especially if historical (war) relics are still visually present *in situ* (Young 1995; see also Charlesworth 1994; Ben-Ze'ev and Ben-Ari 1999; Raivo 2001).

<u>Physical and symbolic design</u> might take the forms of memorial architecture, display of artefacts, the use of moving images and graphics, or the use of "simulacra" where scenes of the past are recreated in the present for the purpose of allowing visitors to remember the event(s) in question. Another strategy is what Hayden (1999: 147) calls "body memory", defined as "live performance of survivor testimony" whereby visitors are told of what happened by those who went through it (e.g. recorded interviews), generally felt

to give a human touch to the visitors and impart to them the impression of "authenticity" and "realism" that cannot be achieved simply by reading history off storyboards. These are just some examples of how mnemonic strategies can be used within the design(s) of memoryscapes to link the present back to when the event in question actually happened (see also Clark 1988; Griswold 1990; Azaryahu 1999; Landzelius 2003).

Performative memory refers to tools where visitors are encouraged to interact directly with the past by being actively involved within the commemoration process itself. This can be through the simple act of public consultation or allowing for public participation in rituals, parades and other ceremonial acts dedicated to remembering the past (King 1995; Yeoh and Kong 1997; Azaryahu 1999). These would then allow visitors to empathize with those who went through the event(s) and make them feel as if they have a stake in the remembrance process by being part of it vis-à-vis strategies that simply produce the passivity of "gawking" at the experiences of "the Other" (Patraka 2001). In that sense, "performative memory" counters the "museum effect" of "being isolated for a kind of attentive looking [where memorials] would be turned into objects of visual interest apart from any relation they bore on [reality]" (Ben-Ze'ev and Ben-Ari 1999).

Narration refers to the ways in which the past is represented through the "written word". This is probably the most important since all the strategies mentioned above are usually dependant on what aspects of the past producers of a memoryscape would really like to relay to visitors. More often than not, these strategies are instituted around the substantiation of a dominant narrative aimed towards the realization of a particular

purpose. Here, it is critical to understand "selective representation", where aspects of a past (suited to the dominant narrative) are represented while others (detrimental to the dominant narrative) are concealed. For example, in excluding these dissonant elements of the past, producers of memoryscapes may adopt strategies such as "depoliticization" or "deracialization" – where the issues of politics and race are taken out of historical narratives respectively to ensure that no one gets offended (Patraka 2001) – and "universalization", where "memory is made sufficiently ambiguous and open-ended" (Young 1995: 297) so that all the diverse parts of society can identify with it.

Effectively, all of these strategies depend on their ability to "simulate or evoke experiences of other places [and time]" through the "overt manipulation of time and/or space" (Hopkins 1990: 2), where "history and culture, time and place are compressed, collapsed and disciplined to conform to an organizing leitmotif" (Yeoh and Teo 1996: 28), in this case that of a historical past. In doing so, "architecture of deception" (Sorkin 1992) is utilized which "constantly distances itself from fundamental realities" and allows visitors to leave the present by entering the past. In that sense, they "falsify time and place" (Yeoh and Teo 1996: 28) and act like "time-machines" able to transport the visitor to another time-another place (see also Sorkin 1992, 1996; Zukin 1991), hence allowing visitors to engage with past events in a more intimate and *realistic* manner. The concepts that have been discussed thus far are schematized into a general framework (see Figure 2.1) around which the issues and themes explored within the thesis revolve.

**Figure 2.1    Conceptual Framework**



```
        ┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
        │  "GLOBAL"/ "TRANSNATIONAL"           │
        │  (TOURISTS; PILGRIMS OF WAR)         │
        └─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  Hegemony/Resistance
              ┌────────────────────────┐
              │   "NATIONAL"           │
              │   (STATE)              │
              │   ┌──────────────────┐ │
┌───────────┐│   │ LANDSCAPES OF WAR│ │  ┌──────────────┐
│ CHANGI    ││   │ COMMEMORATION    │ │  │ REFLECTIONS @│
│ CHAPEL    ││   │ IN SINGAPORE     │ │  │ BUKIT CHANDU │
│ AND MUSEUM││   │ (Memory-making   │ │  │ CENTRE       │
└───────────┘│   │  strategies)*    │ │  └──────────────┘
              │   └──────────────────┘ │
              └────────────────────────┘
                  Hegemony/Resistance
              ┌────────────────────────┐
              │   "LOCAL"              │
              │   (SINGAPOREANS)       │
              └────────────────────────┘
```
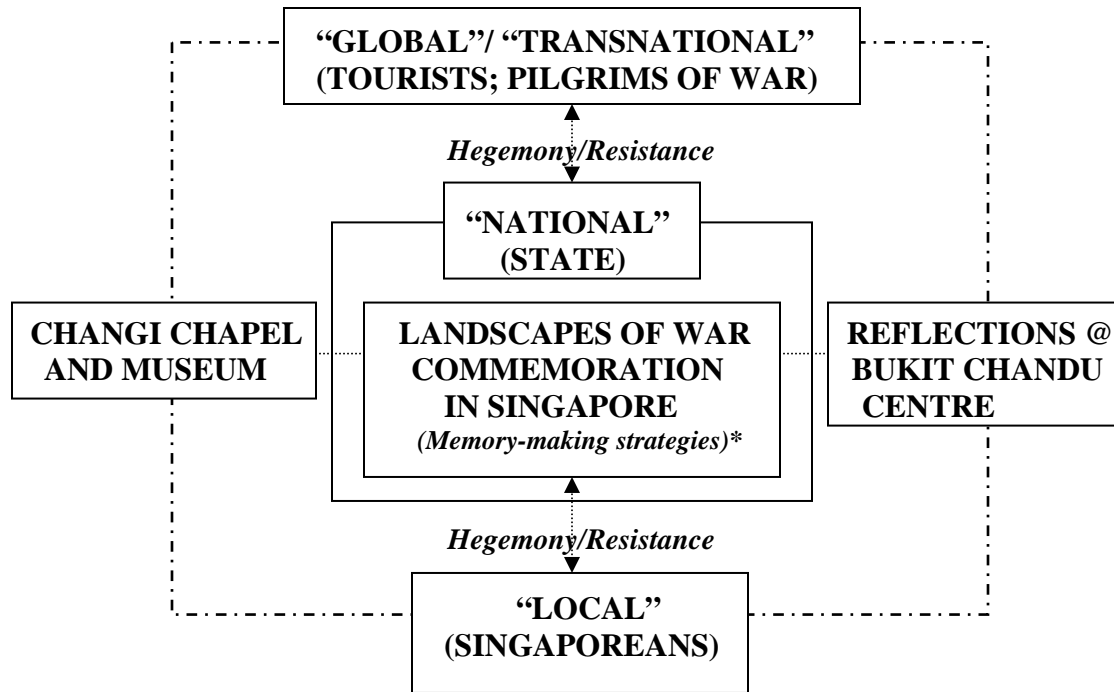
*Memory-making strategies: "locale", "design and symbolism", "performative memory" and "narration"*

## 2.3    Methodological routes

This thesis adopts both quantitative as well as qualitative means of gaining an understanding of how memoryscapes of war in Singapore are produced (largely) by the state, and eventually consumed by visitors. This section outlines the methodological routes and tools used to obtain and analyze the data collected. It also identifies the problems encountered in the process and general limitations inherent in the thesis.

### 2.3.1    *The production of war memoryscapes in Singapore*

Apart from secondary data related to (sites of) war commemoration in Singapore and elsewhere, the research depends on my own personal experiences: as a history researcher in a private firm (Jun 1998 to Jul 2000) and as the curator of *Changi Chapel and*

*Museum,* one of the sites this thesis is concerned with (Jul 2000 to Aug 2001). These are working experiences that have provided me with both access (to "local" sites of war that may not normally be opened to the public) as well as insights (into the inherent political dynamics involved in the production of memoryscapes within the nation). It has also facilitated my ability to come in contact with individuals who have played significant roles in the general process of "local" war commemoration.

Taking advantage of these contacts, I managed to interview key figures who were heavily involved in the production of these landscapes, which included senior executives of state bodies such as the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), the National Parks Board (Nparks) and the National Heritage Board (NHB) – agencies that have been at the forefront of official commemorative practices within the nation – as well as representatives of war sites such as *Changi Chapel and Museum, Reflections at Bukit Chandu* centre and *Fort Siloso*, the first two being the main empirical focus of the thesis. Through these interviews, I was able to probe into the processes that have gone into the making of these sites, and the problems that come alongside it. Apart from interviewing state agencies, I also spoke with two historians, Brian Farrell (National University of Singapore) and Kevin Blackburn (National Institute of Education), both of whom were actively involved in some of these projects (see Appendix A for profile of official interviewees). In addition, visits to the *National Archives of Singapore* were made to collect data on how war remembrance began in Singapore and why some sites were chosen (and others not) as sites of commemoration.

In further supplementing the above data, I also made multiple visits to the two case sites. This not only allowed me to map out the location and extent of these sites, but also to concurrently observe the behaviour of ("local" and foreign) visitors who go to these sites. I also proceeded to do "textual" readings of these sites, which involves taking down the literal "written text" and interpreting various on-site "sub-texts". I also participated in remembrance activities dedicated to the war. As a curator, I was also actively involved in the production of such activities, hence allowing me a deeper understanding of the manifold manifestations of these performances of memory. Through these means, I have managed to trace the historical background to war commemoration in Singapore, as well as gain information on the way the two empirical case studies were produced.

### 2.3.2 Popular perceptions of Singaporeans to war commemoration

Pertaining to the task of gathering "local" responses to the way the state has remembered the war, a questionnaire survey was drawn up. The questions were aimed at getting "local" perceptions to do with, for example, the importance of remembering the war, their motivations for visiting sites, and other aspects related to how the war should be represented. A pilot survey with about 80 Singaporeans was done to help sharpen the accuracy of the questions, and the final questionnaire was administered with 216 respondents (see Appendix D for final sample questionnaire), conducted at various locations (primarily in the Central, Eastern and Northern parts of Singapore) over a period of 6 months (Jul 2002 to Jan 2003). As much as possible, I used stratified sampling as a means of getting a representative cross-section of Singapore which I accomplished (but with lesser success with regards to ethnicity) (see Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1: Demographic Profile of Singapore Respondents**

| Categories | Sample (% in brackets) | National Breakdown* (%) |
|---|---|---|
| **Age of respondents:** | | |
| 11-21 | 37 (17.1) | 15.9 |
| 21-30 | 54 (25.0) | 17.2 |
| 31-40 | 40 (18.5) | 21.9 |
| 41-50 | 28 (13.0) | 20.5 |
| 51-60 | 26 (12.0) | 11.9 |
| > 60 | 31 (14.4) | 12.4 |
| *Total* | *216 (100.0)* | *100.0* |
| | | |
| **Gender:** | | |
| Male | 107 (49.5) | 50.0 |
| Female | 109 (50.5) | 50.0 |
| *Total* | *216 (100.0)* | *100.0* |
| | | |
| **Ethnicity of local respondents:** | | |
| Chinese | 115 (53.2) | 76.8 |
| Malay | 67 (31.0) | 13.9 |
| Indian | 29 (13.4) | 7.9 |
| Others | 5 (2.3) | 1.4 |
| *Total* | *216 (100.0)* | *100.0* |

*\*Compiled from Singapore Census of Population, Department of Statistics (2000)*

The questionnaire survey was conducted mostly in English and occasionally Malay was used for those not conversant in the English language. Subsequently, qualitative interviews were carried out with a group of 17 Singaporeans of various age, gender and ethnicity to obtain further elaboration on issues emerging from the surveys (see Appendix B for profile of Singaporean interviewees). These include a few of those who initially filled out the surveys – who were willing to be further interviewed – and those who were more intimately involved in the process of commemoration in Singapore, such as tour guides who have led group visits to war sites. These provided information on

Singaporeans' views with regard to how the state remembers the war, and helped to throw light on the question of whether there is a culture of commemoration in Singapore. Where these interviewees are cited within the thesis, pseudonyms are used.

### 2.3.3    Transnational perceptions of foreign visitors

Apart from examining "local" perceptions to memoryscapes of war, a secondary but important element within the thesis was to investigate the views of "foreign" visitors to some of these sites. Data pertaining to transnational consumption were obtained through interviews with 10 tourists and 4 pilgrims of war (3 male British ex-POWs who were once incarcerated in Singapore during the war and a daughter of a British ex-POW) (see Appendix C for profile of foreign interviewees). While the number was limited, it was not possible to interview more given extenuating circumstances (discussed below). In addition, I have also been fortunate to gain access to visitors' books – from both empirical sites – and over 400 memorial notes left at the *Changi Chapel and Museum* which gave an idea of what foreigners thought of the memorial sites. These provided the necessary data with regard to how memoryscapes of war may also be seen as contested terrains of a more transnational kind.

### 2.3.4    Research limitations

As in any research endeavour, several problems were encountered during the course of collecting data. First, there was the low tourist figure into Singapore, due to SARS, terrorism and the economic crisis, which affected the number of foreigners coming into Singapore during the period of fieldwork. Out of an initial plan to interview 15 tourists

and 10 war pilgrims, I was only able to accomplish 10 and 4 respectively, hence the much reduced focus on these foreign respondents within the thesis. Still, I was fortunate to have been able to interview a few. Second, given that the two case studies are new, it has been difficult getting access to information (e.g. research notes and visitorship) since government bodies are bound to keep official documents secret for at least 10 years. This has not allowed me to verify some of the data accumulated orally. This is partially solved through cross-referencing data obtained by various means, and partly through my own personal involvement in a few of the projects.

More importantly, with respect to positionality, my heavy involvement in the processes of war commemoration in Singapore for 4 years prior to working on the thesis also comes with its own difficulties. While it has allowed for deeper insights, it has also partially coloured my perceptions with respect to some of the issues. Effectively, it has also bound me, by the ethics of confidentiality, from divulging certain information that I have gathered through personal conversations with some of the key figures. I have attempted to minimize these problems, first, by keeping a safe distance between myself and my research objectives as much as possible. Also, where it was possible, and where they might shed light on some of the issues brought up within the thesis, I have included the information without giving away the speakers' identity. Bearing in mind these limitations, the thesis will now proceed to examine the processes that go into the production and consumption of memoryscapes of war in Singapore.

## CHAPTER THREE
# THE PRODUCTION AND "NATIONALIZATION" OF WAR MEMORYSCAPES IN SINGAPORE

## 3.1    Introduction

This chapter will first provide a brief background to the war before tracing the genesis of war memorialization in Singapore since the nation gained independence in 1965, focusing on the period from the late-1980s when the act of commemorating the war featured prominently on the state's agenda. It will then highlight the state's multiple aims for remembering the war, identifying the agencies involved in the process and the challenges faced by the state in moulding the war into a tool of nation-building. The main emphasis though is on examining how the state has attempted to resolve these issues – through (spatial) strategies of memory-making – towards bringing its people together into an "imagined community" using the war and Occupation years as a platform.

## 3.2    Historical background to the Second World War

The Second World War was a global one fought on numerous fronts, between the international cast of the Allied Commonwealth forces including Great Britain, U.S.A., France, Holland, and Australia, and the combined Axis might of Germany, Italy and Japan. Specifically in the Asia-Pacific theatre of war, one major unfolding of events was the battle for Singapore and the ensuing Japanese Occupation. Despite the many ways in which the battle has been described (Mant 1991; Leasor 1968), the most important impact of the war agreed upon by many scholars (Fujitani *et al.* 2001) was that it paved the way for many countries to gain their independence from their respective colonialists.

To briefly recapitulate, on 7 December 1941, the Japanese landed at various points in Northern Malaya and Southern Thailand, signalling the start of the Malayan campaign (Map 3.1). At the beginning of February 1942, with the fall of Malaya into the hands of the Japanese, the latter shifted its attention onto Singapore.[1] Landing at various points on the northern coast of the island, the Japanese forces fought numerous battles with the Allied forces before advancing towards the city (Map 3.2). After just over a week of entering Singapore, it saw the unconditional surrender of the island by the British to the Japanese on 15 February 1942. The reasons for the defeat have been discussed elsewhere such that there is no reason to rehearse them here (Murfett *et al*. 1999). It suffices to say that the failure of the British to defend its possessions was seen as "a great betrayal" to many who depended on the British for protection (Farrell and Hunter 2000).

The fall of Singapore then marked the beginning of the Japanese Occupation of the island and the start of a traumatic and tumultuous period of hardship and suffering (see Kratoska 1995; Wong 2000). For three and a half years from the fateful fall in 1942, Singapore, renamed Syonan-to to signify its metamorphosis from British colony to Japan's occupied territory, entered an interlude often depicted as "demonic, violent, ruthless, arbitrary, and almost totally devoid of compassion, consideration and benevolence" (Murfett *et al.* 1999: 248). Their lives as they knew it were no longer, as they quickly learnt the ways, the might and brutality of their new masters. The war ended in 1945 with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan which saw the surrender of the Japanese forces.

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[1] Singapore was the strategic center for the British by virtue of the fact that it was the location of the British Empire's Naval Base. For that reason, it was also heavily armed with a myriad of defence measures such as gun positions, underground tunnels and airfields among other fortifications. It was also for this reason that Singapore became a prime target of the advancing Japanese's aggression.

**Map 3.1 Malayan Campaign: Japanese landing and progress down the Malaya Peninsula, 1941-2**

**(Adapted from Commonwealth of Australia 2000: 33)**



**Map 3.2 Japanese landing on Singapore, 1942**

**(Adapted from Commonwealth of Australia 2000: 104)**

### 3.3    Commemorating the war in Singapore: *the early years*

The war was a significant event in Singapore's history as it paved the way for nationalism to take root which led to its independence from the British in 1965. Given this, it is interesting that official war commemoration did not come naturally for Singapore (Wong 2000). In fact, since its independence until the late-1980s, there was little regard given not only to its war past but to the role of history in general in the manufacturing of its national identity. As Wong (2001: 230) puts it, the "unremitting narrative of survival, which became the national text in the first decades of the nation's existence, was completely anchored in the present". As a result, many war-related sites during these years were either neglected or demolished, or re-adapted for other uses.[2] Where the state was concerned, it was as if the war did not occur, much less affected the lives of those who went through it. A few reasons for this are offered below.

First, the silence maintained by the state during this nascent period of its nation-building project was partly due to the fact that the war was not considered as one involving the "local" population. Although Asia was the stage upon which the war was played out, the Asian peoples, with the exception of the Japanese as the main aggressors, did not feature as notably in the fighting cast made up largely by actors from the major Allied countries such as the British, the Australians and the Dutch. As such, Singapore was simply "the background or more precisely, [the] battlefields for the clashes of the great powers" (Fujitani *et al.* 2001: 6), where the "locals" were more "spectators" rather than the main

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[2] Examples include the demolition of the *YMCA building* (where Japanese secret police tortured suspected dissidents); re-adaptation of war-related installations for military (e.g. *Selarang*) and commercial purposes (e.g. *Ford Motor Factory*); and the neglect of gun batteries around the island (e.g. *Labrador Park*).

"participators" of the event. The war was therefore one removed from the experiences of the "locals", and not considered as critical to be remembered.[3]

This relative absence of "memory work" then was also due to the immediate need to recover from the traumatic experience and make reparations for the damage done politically and economically (Wang 2000). The unwillingness of the state to reach into its repository of history might also be "because the city-state's needs of survival and success loomed so large in the early years of independence that interest in the past [was seen as] a luxury" (The *Sunday Times* 13 Jul 1997). Given other pressing needs, history was an extravagance the nation could ill afford. As Pamelia Lee, an STB director avers:-

> We were building modern toilets for everybody and trying to get people away from diseases and providing other pertinent needs. To be honest, the first few years of our country, we were busy with providing basic amenities and only after that, will you look for more in life, the things that affected us and the things that changed the face of our country. But when you are hungry, you are hungry!

The silence maintained on the war could also be due to the fact that memories of the war as it happened in Singapore "are not seamless [but] multiple, contradictory, unsettled and unsettling" (Fujitani *et. al.* 2001: 4). For example, some of the "locals" then were actually working against the efforts of the Allied forces by making pacts with the enemy to achieve their own goals (Kratoska 1995); making the identification of the enemy less clear cut. Hence, given that the war might potentially "re-ignite communal tensions", it was left unexplored in the years when Singapore was still largely an immigrant nation (Wong 2001: 229). As a result, a form of "collective lobotomy" was performed on the

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[3] Still, there were instances of private commemoration, such as the setting up of the *Civilian War Memorial* (1967) by the privately-run, Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce; and the *Kranji War Memorial* by the British-based Commonwealth War Graves commission (1950s). In these projects, the state played a very tangential role, mainly through financial support or the allocation of memorial space.

nation to "erase" its past and focus more on what needs to be "written" today for Singapore to succeed in the present as well as in the future (Kwa 1999; see also Kwok *et al.* 1999; Devan 1999).

### *3.3.1    The intermediate phase of war commemoration*

War commemoration began to emerge as a significant item on the state's agenda only in the late-1980s. This turnaround in the state's attitude was possibly a reflection of the fact that, by this time, Singapore had already come into its own "as the earlier sense of fragility and precariousness of survival had given way to the conviction of success" (Wong 2001: 234). It was, therefore, no longer taboo to talk about the dramatic turn of events that characterized the war years. Further, as the pain subsided and participants had time to mourn, increasingly, many started to "reminisce" about what happened during the war. For war survivors, the period marked "a final opportunity to relive their collective past and impart lessons of their shared experience to the generation for whom all that would be history" (Reid cited in Wong 2001: 219). The phase also saw the rise in scholarship works on the war and personal war autobiographies by Asians (Lim 1995).

The period also coincided with a new interest on the state's agenda of conserving its "unique heritage" as a means of "reclaim[ing] Singapore's Asian roots as a bulwark against Westernization" and developing a set of "core values to bind Singaporeans" (Yeoh and Huang 1996: 412) to prevent them from losing their Asian values due to decadent western trends. As the chairman of the *Committee on Heritage*, set up in 1988, puts it, "heritage makes us who we are now and determines what we will become" (The

*Straits Times* 18 Jun 1988). A critical juncture of the "heritage" movement was the setting up of National Heritage Board (NHB) in 1993 to take care of preserving the nation's heritage. Hence, in contrast to the initial silence around (war) heritage, the state had finally begun to engage "history" and "heritage" as *the* catchphrases of the day.

However, even with this increased general fervour in preserving heritage, the war remained a low priority within the nation-building apparatus of the state. Instead of promoting memories of the war to Singaporeans in general, it remained largely associated with the issue of national defence. For example, it was the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) who first marked, in the 1980s, the day Singapore fell to the Japanese in 1942 as *Total Defence Day* as a means of using the war to help build *esprit de corps* within the military (Ashplant *et al.* 2001). According to Wong (2001: 234), having no fighting history prior to 1965, the local military forces had to be anchored on the "only campaign that could be remembered and analyzed" which was the Malayan Campaign, tapped upon mainly as a source of inspiration for motivating the national servicemen of the time.

In fact, war commemoration then was pushed mainly by transnational, rather than "localized", concerns. For one, the period saw the return of many ex-prisoners of war (ex-POWs) and their families to Singapore and, upon realizing that nothing much has been done to commemorate their fellow comrades – many of whom were sacrificed – made vocal demands for the war to be remembered (Blackburn 2000a). For the ex-POWs, these trips to where they fought during the conflict represented a cathartic means of proverbially "confronting one's past in order to put it to sleep". For their families, it

was a way of understanding what their loved ones went through during the war. Requests were also made for war-related sites to be made accessible to them. These demands made it such that it became extremely difficult for the state to ignore its war past.

Another concern pertains to the task of generally promoting tourism within the nation, then criticized by the international media as a "city without a soul – clean and hygienic but dull" (The *Straits Times* 27 Sep 1988). In the mid-1980s, the economic recession, twinned with the dramatic fall in tourist numbers into Singapore then,[4] also served to motivate the state to make the country more attractive to foreign visitors. This provided another impetus for the state to initiate some "soul-searching" into the recesses of its past to draw in tourists. The success of the state's earlier move to convert *Fort Siloso*[5] into an attraction might have also indicated the value of promoting war heritage as a means of jump-starting tourism and resuscitating the economy. As Blackburn, a historian cited:

> In the 1980s, you had tourism being a major factor. The idea was that there were some foreigners interested to visit these sites. So there was an economic incentive actually for the state to go around commemorating. STB played the major role.

During this phase, the main state agency to take up this task of promoting the nation's war heritage was the then *Singapore Tourism Promotion Board* (STPB, now STB). As part of the Tourism Product Development Plan (1986), a *"Battle for Singapore"* theme was identified, which led to the first state-led commemorative projects in 1988, the *Changi Prison Chapel*, and the restoration of the *Changi Murals* drawn by an ex-POW

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[4] As an indicator, Singapore's tourist arrivals fell by 3.5% in 1983; modest growths observed until 1987 (Chang 1997).

[5] After the war, there were many batteries on Sentosa, one of the southern islands, left intact complete with bunkers and tunnels. In 1975, the island was handed over to a statutory board to "develop, manage and promote the island" as a premier island resort. As part of this, *Fort Siloso*, a gun battery, was converted and eventually developed into a full-fledged war theme park "tracing the development of the fort from the nineteenth century till the Battle for Singapore in 1942" (*'Fort Siloso'*, promotional brochure, undated).

during the war (Plates 3.1 and 3.2). A battlefield tour was also launched to meet the high demand for such tours (NATAS 1991). Hence, it was the attempt to meet these transnational demands that led to the turnaround in the state's attitude towards the war. As the then director of STPB puts it: "it became obvious … that we have a role to play in assisting [these ex-POWs] to retrace their steps, particularly where the path still involves sites which have not normally been accessible to visitors" (NATAS 1991).



**Plate 3.1 Changi Prison Chapel**
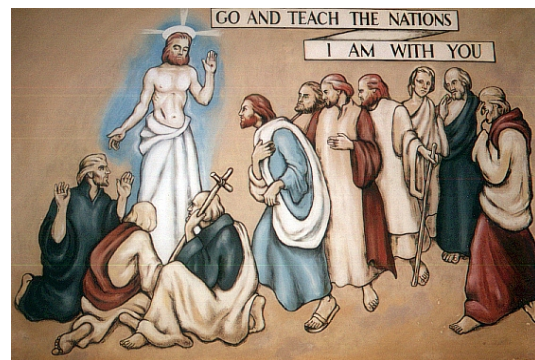


**Plate 3.2  A restored Changi Mural**

### 3.3.2    The "nationalization" phase

In the early 1990s, there was another discernible shift in the state's commemoration of the war, where the promotion of war heritage for the "local" population became more important. This was borne out of the recognition that Singapore today often resembles "a country with amnesia" (The *Straits Times* 29 Jul 1994), and the realization that "Singaporeans knew little of our past".[6] Its history (and war past), was therefore seen as critical in providing Singaporeans with the historical capital to "root" them as a nation. This led to commemoration taking on a "national" rather than merely a "transnational" character. As the then Trade and Industry Minister, once explained:-

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[6] In a survey conducted among Singaporean students, it was found that many of them were ignorant of our (war) history and heritage (The *Sunday Times*, 15 Sep 1997; The *Straits Times*, 9 Sep 1996).

In a few years, the older Singaporeans who experienced the war will be gone [and] without reminders, future generations will never appreciate the useful lessons of our history: that Singapore continues to be vulnerable (The *Straits Times*, 13 Nov 1995).

In 1992, a special committee was set up by MINDEF, together with the Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA), STPB and a few other agencies, for the purpose of "reminding Singapore's young of the major events of the war" (The *Straits Times*, 1 Jan 1992).[7] Eleven sites associated with the war were then to be identified with historic plaques for Singaporeans to go and learn about the war.[8] This project matured in 1995 to mark the 50th anniversary of the end of the war. A further impetus to the "nationalization" of war heritage in Singapore came in 1997 with the introduction of the *National Education* (NE) and *Learning Journeys* (LJ) programmes within the schools' syllabus. According to the then Minister for Education during the launch of LJ, while the former is aimed at "developing national cohesion, instinct for survival and confidence in the future", the latter is meant for children to visit historical sites so as "to understand how we have developed over the years and to take pride in what the nation has achieved".

Since then, war events have been added as key moments in the short history of the nation, a history that is often written "backwards" from the perspective and priorities of the present. The "flurry of commemorative activities" to remember the events of war (Wong 2001) have taken a variety of forms from officially written works (see Chou 1995; NHB

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[7] The committee initially set up by MINDEF evolved into the Historic Sites Unit (HSU) in 1996 under the ambit of NHB. It is now a multi-agency Committee chaired by NHB with representatives from various state agencies whose task is "to mark buildings and places associated with important events, organizations and people … so as to keep them alive in people's memories" (www.heritagehub.com.sg).

[8] The eleven chosen sites constituted six battle sites (e.g. Bukit Timah site), three sites associated with the civilian experiences of war (e.g. old YMCA building) and two memorial sites "at which memory had once been erased" (e.g. *Syonan Chureito*, a Japanese shrine at Bukit Batok) (Wong 2001).

1996) to televisual re-enactments of the war years. More significantly, the state has also increased its involvement in spearheading memorial projects, so as to bring the war closer to the Singaporean consciousness: from the marking and preservation of historic sites[9] (Plate 3.3), the setting up of war-themed museums and the organization of remembrance rituals. Hence, there is now a proliferation of war memoryscapes towards the nation-building objective of binding Singaporeans together using the "collective remembrance" of the war years as a platform.
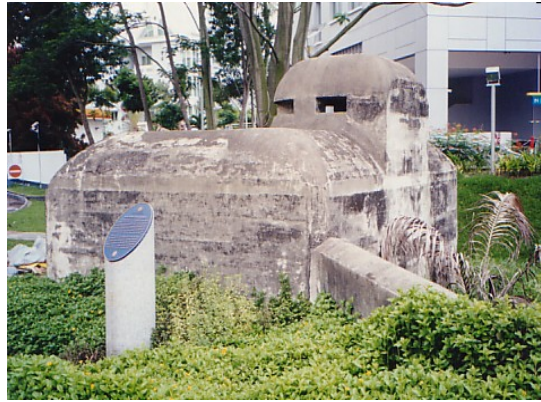


**Plate 3.3 A HSU plaque marking the historic Pasir Panjang pill-box**

### 3.3.3 *Agencies of war commemoration*

Generally, the state adopts a multi-agency approach to war memorialization. In place of an overarching agency that undertakes all projects related to remembering the war, the responsibility of doing so falls within the aegis of the state agency under which the management of a war-related site lies. Even NHB, which is the main custodian of the nation's memory and heritage, is not as active as one might assume. Although its logo is imprinted on all war-related projects, its function has been mainly advisory at its best. This approach is evident, for example, in the different agencies of the HSU committee

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[9] To date, the HSU has marked (and preserved the memory of) 22 war sites. See Appendix E for full list.

responsible for marking "local" historic sites. To provide another example, *Labrador Park* is a national park which, despite its war significance as a gun battery during the war, lies within the ambit of the Nparks. As such, when plans were mooted to preserve the site's war remnants as "war heritage", the project was spearheaded by Nparks itself, even though it did receive technical and advisory support from NHB as well as STB.

Given its significant role during the initial years of commemoration, STB still spearheads many of the projects set in motion since then. For example, when the *Changi Chapel and Museum* was set up in 2001, STB led the project, but this time alongside NHB. It might be argued that the continuing presence of STB cannot be helped since, despite the nation-building imperative, transnational commemoration still figure highly on the state's agenda. Still, the inclusion of NHB in many of the latest STB-led projects reinforces the idea that the war is now more than just a "foreign" event that took place locally. The co-spearheading of projects has indeed caught on with different agencies undertaking tasks depending on their expertise. For instance, the *Johore Battery* project involved the Prison Services (as site-owners), NHB (historical accuracy) and STB (marketing). Still, regardless of which agency spearheads the project, it is apparent that, in line with the general move to "nationalize" the war years, the state – through its different arms – has definitely made the move from being indifferent to the war to actively promoting it.

### 3.4 "Nationalizing" the war: adopted memory-making strategies

"Nationalizing" the war does not, however, come without potential challenges. As discussed in the first chapter, these challenges – to using the war as a platform for nation-

building – may arise from within as well as out of the nation. From within, Singapore is a plural society constituted by four ethnic groups, each with their own historical baggage.[10] Along with the problematic nature of the war – where a few "locals" were working against rather than for the Allied forces – and its potential for fracturing the national collective given the racial tensions that this might incite, representations would need to be impartial so as not to offend any ethnicity, hence aligning the state to its commitment to the ideology of "multiculturalism", which ensures parity of status to all ethnic groups.

From without, the challenge to the nation-building imperative lies in the transnational nature of the war and its commemoration. As many of the war participants were foreign, members of the public who constitute "communities of memory" (Irwin-Zarecka 1994) have continued to be largely foreigners as well. This is partly due to the *intermediate* phase of commemoration which has ensured that war representations at many sites have tended to focus on the experiences of the foreigners. This might have the effect of making the war irrelevant to "locals". Still, given transnational commemoration, the state would have to meet the needs of foreign visitors. In other words, war representations would have to steer between the needs of "local" and foreign visitors, and the state has to address tensions between nation-building and transnational commemoration by keeping its war representations both "foreign"-oriented and "localized" at the same time.

Another challenge to the nation-building imperative lies in that, given the transnational war and that its commemoration took so long to take shape; Singaporeans often find

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[10] The major ethnic groups in Singapore refer to the Chinese (76.8%), Malays (13.9%), Indians (7.9%) and Eurasian/others (1.4%) (Singapore Department of Statistics 2000)

themselves too far removed from these events. For one, compounded with the fact that commemoration thus far has been mainly focused on the foreigners, it has meant that the symbolic distancing between the "locals" and the war has extended to a point where the war may be seen as a largely forgotten phenomenon. Second, since many of the "locals" who did go through the war are no longer around, it makes it harder for the current generation of Singaporeans to "imagine" what it was like for those who suffered during the war. If the state is to succeed in driving home to its people its nation-building ideals built on the war, it would have to ensure that Singaporeans find learning about the war relevant and are hence able to relate, albeit vicariously, to these events.

Therefore, it is apparent that, while the challenge of mobilizing the war and its memoryscapes as a means of uniting its people into an "nation" can already be seen as daunting given that it has already been more than 60 years since the war, the state also has the concomitant task of having to steer the need for nation-building in the light of other challenges from within as well as without the nation. How then has the state attempted to navigate these challenges in "nationalizing" the war through its landscapes? It is to the state's memory-making strategies that the discussion now turns.

### 3.4.1   Narrating the war, representing the past

Out of the war, three main narratives have evolved in support of the nation-building objectives of the state. The main one pitches on the war as a prelude to nationalism, liberating Asia from the "fangs of western colonialism", shattering the myth of the superiority of the White man and awakening locals to the need to "depend on ourselves

and not on others for our defence" (Wong 2001: 223). In support of the main narrative, a second stand centres on the harsh living conditions of the people and the Japanese brutalities inflicted upon them, and how, regardless of ethnicity, the "locals" had to come together to survive. The third narrative in stirring patriotism is forwarded through the "scripting of national [war] heroes"[11] in the construction of "an ethos of nationhood" by reflecting on their spirit of self-sacrifice and the "communitarianism of Asian traditions defined as 'placing society before self'" (Hong and Huang 2003: 219). These three narratives became the national messages, around which all the stories of war revolved.

In analyzing the three narratives of war, it is apparent that they are all aimed towards the specific aim of forwarding the significance of the historic event in paving the way towards the nation gaining independence from the British in 1965. It is also clear that the state intends to make use of these narratives as a means of binding its plural population. For example, the need for "unity in the face of adversity", as forwarded by the second narrative, is instrumental in pushing the idea that regardless of how different one ethnic group is to another, in difficult times, differences need to be put aside in the interests of other needs as survival. As Jeyathurai, director of *Changi Chapel and Museum*, puts it:

> The war shows how a people can come together. It shows all the things that motivated people in those days … that we were a different people in different settings and were still able to come together to survive this difficult period.

The main narrative also emphasizes the undesirable situation of being colonial subjects, and having no resources to do anything when the British failed to protect Singapore, pointing to the fact that Singaporeans should never have to be in such a dilemma again.

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[11] "Local" heroes frequently named include Elizabeth Choy, a canteen operator tortured for aiding POWs; Lim Bo Seng, a Force 136 anti-Japanese leader, and Adnan Saidi, a Malay Regiment officer who fought valiantly during battles. The salience of the fact that they represent different ethnic groups is not lost.

In the scripting of national heroes, the strategy is to extract "universal" values – such as courage, strength and duty – from the individuals rather than focusing on the individuals themselves. This parallels Lacquer's (1994) reading of why some (war) memorials are nameless so as to allow all inhabitants within a nation – regardless of whatever divisions that might divide it – to relate to these memorials. Similarly, the tactic of the Singapore state in extracting "universal" values from heroes is significant in that it allows *anybody* to identify with these positive heroic traits, regardless of whether one is a foreign or a "local", and regardless of the individual's ethnic group. This is an example of how the state has "reframed" the war in "[narrative] forms which serve interests of that nation-state, establishing horizons and structures which condition the meanings assigned to any particular war" (Ashplant *et al*. 2001: 53).

In representing the war, the state has also sought to include more of the experiences of the "locals" who underwent it. For example, according to Sarin, HSU manager, the choice of HSU-marked sites is "meant to relate the war to the people so we know that it was not only the British who fought; we did too!" It is felt that, by doing so, "locals" would be able to identify with the war, making it more relevant. As Jeyathurai reiterated:

> For a long time the British position was seen as nothing to do with us. This has changed. It is now seen within the Singaporean context and there is more focus on the local people who fought, Singaporeans would connect better with that.

Appropriately, therefore, where the HSU-marking of sites is concerned, apart from historical significance, some sites were chosen because they represented the experiences of the different ethnic groups in Singapore. Examples include those related to the Indians (e.g. the *Indian National Army* monument [INA]), the Malays (e.g. *Kent Ridge Park*,

where the Malay Regiment fought) and the Chinese (e.g. *Punggol Beach*, where many of the Chinese were massacred). In addition, to make the sites something all the races could relate to, these marked sites (especially the earlier ones) have all four official languages on them: English, Chinese, Malay and Indian (Plates 3.4). As Sarin also cited:

> I think also because it is an important part of our history and it is for the benefit of those who had lived through the Occupation who may not be as well-versed in English … therefore all these plaques had different languages.[12]



**Plate 3.4 A HSU plaque marking the Punggol Beach massacre site in four languages**

The choice to mark the site of the monument set up by the Japanese to commemorate the INA is interesting because these Indians were, during the war, considered as "traitors" by the British for conspiring with the Japanese (Yap *et al.* 1995; NHB 2002). The remembrance of the INA might then be seen as a reflection of the state's desire to show the war as it was without any political agenda. As Jeyathurai puts it, "the decision to mark a site should be based on truth and not one that has an axe to grind; sensitivity is important but truth is critical". Still, one might look at it in another way: the honouring of the INA might be due to the lack of other Indian heroes, and in the spirit where war

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[12] For good measure, on some of these historic markers, there is also a Japanese translation. This is an indication that apart from the nation-building imperative, the need for these sites to relate to Japanese tourists (one of the biggest groups among all incoming international tourists) is still very important.

heroes of all the ethnic groups should be celebrated to ensure racial parity, the INA was probably the only one that could be traced back to the Indian community in Singapore. Hence, in terms of representations of war within memoryscapes, it is clear that there is indeed a conscious attempt by the state to be as ethnically all-encompassing as possible.

### 3.4.2   Locale and the role of "place memory"

Another state-adopted strategy is to place memoryscapes where war action did take place. For example, in marking historic sites, HSU will try to do it *in situ* wherever possible. Sites that have been converted to other uses and those replaced by modern structures are marked with plaques that inform people of its role during war. Sites adapted to uses too sensitive (e.g. *Selarang Barracks*, now a military camp) or dangerous (e.g. *Syonan Jinja* shrine, located in a forest) for people to access had plaques located close by. Even sites where there are no longer any visible reminders of war are marked, as Sarin indicated:

> We will mark a site even if there is nothing left. While some people may think we don't bother if the building is gone but to us, as long as it is significant and it made its own contributions to our history, we will go on and mark it.

War museums and interpretive centres are also located close to, if not exactly, where the events commemorated took place, such as the conversion of *Battlebox*, an underground war bunker, into a museum. In some cases, the marking of a war site extends to the emplacement of storyboards and trails to allow visitors to explore hidden war "treasures" amidst developed surroundings (e.g. historic war trails of *Labrador Park*). Some of these sites, where the existing war relics are still very visible, have been exploited to full effect when they are converted to full-fledged attractions themed on the war (e.g. *Fort Siloso*).

In that sense, in selecting a locale for its memorials, as far as possible, the state prefers to choose "authentic" sites where the war events actually took place, so as to take advantage of the sites' "multiple levels of sedimented history" (Yeoh and Kong 1996: 55). For one, it helps to increase the emotional quotient for visitors. As Jeyathurai puts it:

> For a child, going to an actual site, and knowing that this was where the thing happened, and having it recalled on an actual site makes it all more real. It becomes a constant reminder of the ways in which the war has impacted upon us.

By locating these memorials *in situ*, it would help to effectively "trigger" memories of the war for the people through situating them "in their immediate reality", where visitors can not only think about but also visually "see" the past (Nora 1994) (Plates 3.5).



**Plate 3.5 Entrance to an original ammunition bunker at Labrador (War) Park**

Most importantly, by locating the memorials at their original locations, it helps to relay the idea that, regardless of the fact that the "fighting" cast in Singapore was made up essentially by foreigners, the war *did take place* in Singapore and therefore affected the lives of the people who were here at that time, reaffirming the idea that the war was a period that was full of hardship even for the "local" inhabitants. By understanding the harrowing times that their forefathers had had to go through, it delivers the message that *this* is what will happen if we should ever allow ourselves to be colonized again. It was

also felt by Blackburn, a historian, that by focusing war commemoration on "the exciting places of the war, rather than the problematic history, we can make all Singaporeans and not just those who went through it interested to come visit", relating how geography or "place memory" can be generic enough to appeal to *all* Singaporeans.

The role of "locale" also plays itself out in another way. For memoryscapes not associated with any particular location (e.g. *Civilian War Memorial*, to honour the civilian war dead), they are usually sited in a central location to allow for easy access. Similarly, for some sites (e.g. *Cathay Building*, used in the war as a Japanese Propaganda Centre), the salience of their "place memory" ("where it happened") is twinned by their location within the city which allows Singaporeans to see these sites on an everyday basis. Unfortunately, not all war-sites in Singapore are so conveniently-sited. In fact, most war-related sites tend to be difficult to get to, giving rise to a paradox: *in situ* memorials are desirable because of its direct relationship with the event, but are usually inaccessible; a memorial in a centralized location allows for accessibility, but does not benefit from "place memory". Hence, to take advantage of one of the strengths of "place" usually means sacrificing the other. This point is revisited in Chapters 5 and 6 later on.

### 3.4.3   *Recreating war through physical and symbolic design*

Generally, it is only by literally "bringing the past to the present" via tools of simulation can people relate better to what happened. The ability for visitors to vicariously experience what war participants experienced would not only heighten their appreciation of the site, but also raise their emotional quotient by empathizing with the events (Patraka

2000). In Singapore, one way this is achieved is by re-enacting events associated with the war, as exemplified in the case of *Fort Siloso*, which has resorted, according to Juliana Yeo, the manager of the site, to "recreating battle scenes as a means to make these places more interesting" (Plates 3.6 and 3.7). Even the brochure invites and entices the visitors to "[b]e a soldier for a day and relive the dark days of World War II" (see Appendix J).



**Plate 3.6 Simulated watch tower at Fort Siloso**



**Plate 3.7 Recreated gun displays at Fort Siloso**

Within the site itself, there is an extensive restoration of the tunnels that make up the fort by putting in replicas of guns and ammunition hoists, setting-up of guard posts during the war and the use of mannequins as sentry look-outs for enemy warships. The range of tactics employed within the site has even extended to having simulated "live" gun firings at regular intervals; and reproducing "all the five senses of being in the war" (e.g. the smell of military food) for the casual visitors, making it as real as possible to help them imagine how it was before. On occasion, the management also organizes simulated shows such as "*Fort Siloso Live*", where actors are called in to re-enact scenes of the fort so the people can step back in time and relive history. On these shows, Juliana commented:

> If we just have tags and written displays, maybe not everybody will read, but if we have figures re-enacting war, it becomes a picture that people can straightaway understand. It also becomes fun and exciting for them.

As such, simulations serve to allow visitors "imagine" the war was like, and by the same token, they would be able to relate more effectively, to the war years.

A specific example of the use of symbolism can be discerned in the physical design of the *Civilian War Memorial* (Plate 3.8). The monument – dedicated to remembering the many civilians who died during the war years – takes the shape of "a 200 feet memorial formed by four tapering columns symbolizing the merging of four streams of culture into one which fits in the principle of unity of the four races" (SCCC undated). Text on the monument is written in the four official languages to indicate the war as one suffered by members of *all* the different ethnic groups. The idea of a pool of water around the monument can also be seen to reflect it as representative of Singapore as an island with a multi-racial people who, in the light of adversity, had put aside petty differences in order to survive the war years. This is another reflection of how the war has been "localized" within the context of its commemoration in Singapore (see Blackburn 2000b).



**Plate 3.8 Civilian War Memorial located at the heart of the city**

Simulation is also achieved through the use of pictures and other graphics. For example, in the HSU marking of historic sites, where it is not possible to mark original sites, according to Sarin, attempts are made to make them more identifiable to the public by:-

> Ensuring that we have images for all of them, at least people can see what these things look like, since a picture does speak a thousand words.

The use of these strategies of simulation is especially useful for war sites where there are no longer any on-site remains. Through these graphics, visitors are then still able to "imagine" the site as it was, even with no form of "triggers of memory" (Nora 1994) to help jolt the memories of visitors. In that sense, they help to provide "visual markers" to help visitors imagine the past (Osborne 1998). More significantly, it allows Singaporeans to better relate with the events that took place. Through these simulations also, Singaporeans may be able to identify with the war as having *truly* happened in Singapore.

### 3.4.4   *Performative memory and commemoration*

The other strategy of memory-making is through the performance of memory, another "invented" form of a "collective symbolic text" (Connerton 1989). Performative commemoration transcends the material object to involve a conscious attempt to *perform* the act of commemoration itself. This can be at the level of the personal, where individuals make a trip down to a museum, or it can be on a more "collective" level, where individuals come together at a specific site on a special day for the sole purpose of remembering the war, and the sacrifices that were made in the name of the war. As Connerton (1989: 50) puts it, "ritual functions communicate shared values within a group and reduce internal dissension as social stability and equilibrium are constituted, showing us what a culture's ethos and sensibility shaped by that ethos look like".

One such example is the unveiling ceremony held at the *Civilian War Memorial* (CWM) on 15 Feb 1967, attended by "the Prime Minister, government officials, members of the diplomatic corps, religious chiefs, representations of all races and organizations" (SCCC undated). Since then, the ceremony has become an annual event. Today, the number of participants of the ceremony has increased to include students, ex-POWs and other Singaporeans. Associated with the ritual are symbolic gestures, speeches by ex-war veterans, observance of a minute's silence and the laying of the wreaths by participants (The *Straits Times* 16 Feb 2003). In that sense, the commemoration of the war becomes more of a "national" event where representatives from all quarters of the nation congregate towards one objective: "to honour the civilian war dead".

To allow Singaporeans to commemorate the dead in their own way, special corners are set up where Chinese participants could burn joss sticks and say prayers (Plate 3.9).



**Plate 3.9 Chinese lighting joss sticks during a ceremony at the CWM**

First, this is symbolic of the state's multiracial stance where the unique practices of each ethnic group are not only tolerated, but encouraged. Secondly, it allows Singaporeans to feel as if he or she has a positive role in the process. Contrast this to the way war commemoration takes place at some other sites (e.g. *Changi Chapel and Museum*) that

have taken on a very "Christian" format (discussed later in Chapter 5). Having the government participate in the event also heightens its significance, as it is a reflection of the state's commitment in remembering these historical events (SCCC undated). By virtue of these factors – the multi-racial and multi-religious nature of the ceremony – the performance of war commemoration as "performance of national identity" (Radcliffe and Westwood 1996: 55) stands apart from others in being more "localized".

The other type of performative commemoration is that of organizing battlefield tours to sites associated with the war. Under the *Learning Journeys* (LJ) programme, one specific tour that is very popular with the schools is the *Battlefield Tour* where, depending on the tour, students are taken to various sites related to the war. This represents one way in which the state has attempted to make the nation's history more accessible to students who, on their own, would probably never go to these places. The main aim of these trails is to allow the students to get more excited about history beyond the academic textbook. According to Helen, a Chinese in her 40s, who is also a LJ facilitator:-

> On these tours, we visit places associated with the war so that they would be able to think about Singapore's history and be more curious to find out more about the war. Only then will students be able to appreciate, understand and feel for the war in a way that no reading of historical textbooks can ever do.

In some cases, the heritage trails come packaged with a ready-made commemorative ceremony such as the one organized by one private organization in Singapore. At the *Kranji War Cemetery* (KWC), students partake in a ceremony to pay their respects to the war dead where volunteer students would hold up flags of Allied countries with one chosen to place a wreath on behalf of the school. In my observation of the conduct of the trails, it is also interesting to note that at KWC, while the place is predominantly filled

with tombs carved with the names of "foreign" soldiers, guides would also make their way to the memorial walls where names of "local" soldiers who fought in the war are carved, such as the men of the *Malay Regiment* (Plates 3.10 and 3.11). As Helen cited:

> This is so as to give the idea the locals fought in the war too and they too are honoured here and some are even buried here … they too 'died for all free men'.

The impression given here is that the war was indeed one fought not only by "foreign" soldiers; that there were also "local" forces who fought (and died) during the war.
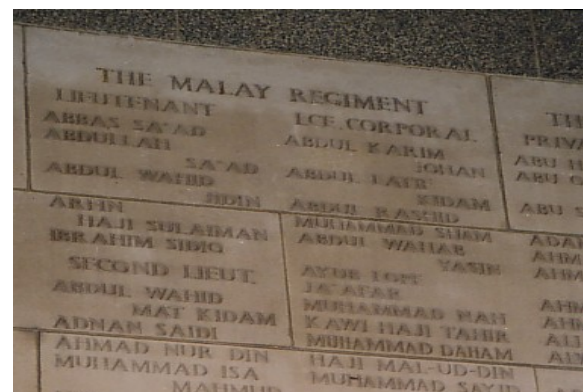


**Plate 3.10 Tertiary students on a tour of KWC**    **Plate 3.11 Honouring the Malay Regiment at KWC**

### 3.5    Conclusion

From the above analysis, it is apparent that memoryscapes of war in Singapore are manifestly complex entities and multiple in its functions. In "nationalizing" these landscapes, the state has been faced with challenges that emerge from both within (e.g. plural society) as well as outside (e.g. transnational commemoration) the nation. In that light, the state has employed memory-making strategies in producing its memoryscapes so as to make it more appealing to Singaporeans (yet still allowing for foreigners to continue consuming the sites). The next chapter examines how successful these strategies have been in bringing the "local" population together as an "imagined community".

*CHAPTER FOUR*
# POPULAR ATTITUDES TO WAR COMMEMORATION – AND MEMORYSCAPES – IN SINGAPORE

## 4.1 Popular attitudes of Singaporeans to war commemoration in Singapore

In this chapter, the focus is turned to examining popular attitudes of Singaporeans with regard to how the war is remembered and forwarded to the public.[1] The main emphasis is to evaluate if there is a culture of commemoration within the nation, and the extent to which Singaporean views are in line with those of the state in their perceptions of the memory-making strategies adopted to remember the war through memoryscapes.

## 4.2 The importance of remembering the war in Singapore

Generally, there is strong evidence to show that Singaporeans do see it as important to remember the war. Of the 216 "local" respondents, 90.7 per cent agree that "the war is a crucial link to our past that cannot be forgotten". Reasons given are shown in Table 4.1.

*Table 4.1: Main reasons for the importance of remembering the war (n=196)*

| *Reason* | *Number* | *Percentage* |
|---|---|---|
| Heritage/Pedagogical value | 206 | 52.5 |
| Commemorative value | 83 | 21.2 |
| Nation-building value | 79 | 20.2 |
| Economic value (re: tourism) | 19 | 4.8 |
| Multicultural value | 5 | 1.3 |
| *Total* | *392** | *100* |

*\* The number of responses (392) exceeds the number of respondents (196) due to multiple responses.*

Most perceive remembering the war as important because of its "heritage/pedagogical value" (52.5 per cent). In further probing what respondents meant, some mentioned that the war "allows us to learn about the nation's history so as to better plan our future", and

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[1] While the focus is on Singaporeans, the views of foreign visitors to war commemoration in Singapore are also secondarily and sporadically included, more as a basis for comparison to that of the "locals".

"prepares the population in case the threat of war ever comes again". In that sense, respondents tend to emphasize the value of remembering the war in terms of the lessons to be learnt rather than for its own intrinsic benefits. It reflects how the past is valorised according to how it may serve the present, with the future in mind (Cooke 2000).

Given that the war was one where many people died, one might expect that commemorating their deaths would be the main reason for remembrance. However, where most of the "locals" were concerned, the "commemorative value" (21.2 per cent) does not seem to be the main driving factor. This could be due to the fact that the war did not really involve the "locals" and also as Rahmat, a 54 year-old sales executive, puts it, "it happened too long ago". This reflects on how the war is seen by some to be one quite removed from the reality as known by today's generation and, hence, not what is seen as personally relevant. This can be compared to the views of most western visitors to Singapore, especially those with family who died in the war, who sees remembering as important mainly to honour sacrifices made by those who fought (Blackburn 2002).

Another indication of the "future-orientedness" of remembering (Yoneyama 1999) is the extent to which respondents see the value of the war as a critical ingredient in the "nation-building" recipe of Singapore (20.2 per cent). Further interviews reflect on the common thinking that war remembrance is important as it was what brought about the cycle of independence for the nation. As Hamid, a 29 year-old Malay tutor said:-

> "The war is a critical turning point in history that brought about our independence. If there is no war, we will still be ruled by others and maybe still be part of Malaya. We will still be using the Ringgit [Malaysian currency]".

In that sense, Singaporeans are well-aligned with the position promoted by the state that the salience of the war lies in catalysing Singapore's release from the colonial grip, reflecting the state's success in popularizing the rhetoric of the war as a platform for binding Singaporeans as a nation. This idea that the war should be remembered mainly for "locals" is also evident in the low figure accorded to "tourism" as a factor for commemoration (4.8 per cent). This, however, does not mean that tourism as a secondary motivation for war remembrance should be entirely discounted, as will be shown later on.

Another related finding is that only a few of the respondents perceive the war as important to be remembered because of its "multicultural value" (1.3 per cent) in showing how different ethnic groups had experienced the event differently from each other. This is significant in reflecting that, for many of the respondents, the war was a shared event which brought all the ethnic groups together in the face of a common enemy, the Japanese. As such, the value in remembering the war as a narrative through which a plural society like Singapore could be integrated becomes more evident. Hence, one might surmise that "locals" generally do identify with the nation-building imperative of commemoration as forwarded by the state. However, as the next sections show, it appears that this commitment to remembrance only exists within the arena of discourse.

### 4.2.1 Lack of "active" culture of war commemoration

While Singaporeans do generally recognize the importance of remembering the war, there is little to suggest that they would act upon these sentiments, or even feel any sense of attachment to sites associated with those years. For example, less than half of the

Singaporeans surveyed (45.9 per cent) have actually visited "local" war memorials, and even fewer (11.7 per cent) have bothered to attend remembrance ceremonies to the war. The reasons provided for this "inaction" to war remembrance are reflected in Table 4.2.

| *Table 4.2: Reasons for "inaction" in active commemorative activities (N=106)* | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Reason* | *Number* | *Percentage* |
| Lack of time | 75 | 36.9 |
| Too catered to foreigners | 57 | 28.1 |
| Poor knowledge | 45 | 22.2 |
| Lack of interest | 26 | 12.8 |
| *Total* | *203\** | *100* |

*\* The number of responses (203) exceeds the number of respondents (106) due to multiple responses.*
   .

The main reason cited as to why they have not visited any of the "local" war sites is "the lack of time" (36.9 per cent). Even though they do recognize the importance of recalling the war, the "high-paced lives of Singaporeans" have prevented them from pursuing a more "active" means of remembering the war. As Hamid stated:-

> We are too bogged down with work that we don't care much about the past. We care more about feeding our stomachs and leading a healthy life. War is about the past and nothing to do with us and our day-to-day pursuits, so I am not bothered.

The other main reason given is that the sites are "too catered to foreigners" (28.1 per cent). This, in a way, affirms that, even though Singaporeans do see the war as important to be recalled, the way the state has done it has yet to resonate with them on a more intimate level. Despite attempts to include more "local" stories within its memory sites, Singaporeans still see the sites as too foreign-centric in its representations of war.

Another important reason cited is that of "poor knowledge" (22.2 per cent) where "locals" just do not know that these sites exist. As Charmaine, a 25 year-old Chinese civil servant who organizes school programmes at one of the local museums, puts it:-

I do not think a lot of people know about these sites. You might walk pass these sites but don't even notice these markers. How many actually stop to read what it is all about? They don't bother simply because they are not aware!

In support of this, when posed to all respondents the question of whether there has been enough promotion of these sites to Singaporeans, many of them (71.9 per cent) said no. For some, such as Kevin, a 26 year-old Chinese executive, promotion of the sites to the public tends "to take place during the official opening and then dies down; nothing else to remind us!" Hence, until more is done to promote the sites, they will remain, as Rosman, a 33 year-old Malay researcher, puts it, "mere white elephants" (Plates 4.1 and 4.2).



**Plate 4.1 Johore Battery during the opening**          **Plate 4.2 Johore Battery on a typical day**

The lack of promotion of these sites to the public is also something that all the foreign visitors spoken to complained about. As Ricky, a 50 year-old American tourist puts it:-

I came upon Fort Siloso by accident. I did not know about it until I got to Sentosa itself. They should really promote these places more.

This view is echoed by Candice, a British visitor who came to seek out places in Singapore where her father had been incarcerated as a prisoner during the Occupation:-

I am here to seek out places where my father had served. But it is difficult to find these [war] places as not much public information on them exists. Even Singaporeans do not know of them, and some of these places are also inaccessible to the general public. It can be frustrating!

These views again reflect upon the sentiment that, despite the increase in the Singapore state's interest to physically commemorate the war, it has not really been accompanied enough by attempts to actually promote it to "locals" as well as foreigners alike.

Another reason cited by Singaporeans for not visiting war sites is that there is a "lack of interest" (12.8 per cent) to visit these sites, an indication of how there is a general lackadaisical attitude on the part of "locals" to actively commemorate the war. For them, the act of remembering the war then becomes a mere symbolic act. In relation to attending memorial services in Singapore, for example, Charmaine mentioned:-

> You hear on the radio about services and you go like 'ok, whatever!' Also, it seems to be just reserved for groups like Ministers and students. If I am interested to go, 'can I just drop in?' I am not too sure if they will allow us to join in.

This reflects a perception that these services are usually events where the general public are not privy, or even invited, to attend. Also, it shows how Singaporeans are sometimes not open to the idea of performative rituals. As Rosman suggested, in a rather tongue-in-cheek manner, that "since these ceremonies are usually held in the mornings, perhaps to entice Singaporeans, we can give them a wake up call and also free breakfast".

Some attributed the blasé attitude towards commemoration as rooted in the fact that Asians do not have the natural proclivity to remember given "different attitudes towards death", usually seen as "too morbid a fascination". It is also felt by some that the way the war has been commemorated thus far has been "too Christian". As Hamid puts it:-

> Being a Malay Muslim, I would discourage Muslims in Singapore from going because that is not the way we remember people who died during wars. The services are usually very Christian-oriented, read psalms, sing hymns. The Muslims have their own ways. I strongly do not support this idea for the Muslims.

This reflects two things. First, it shows how "locals" sometimes see the way the war is remembered here as being targeted more to foreigners than "locals". Second, it shows how commemoration is also tied to contentious issues astride racial and religious lines, especially in the light of a plural society like Singapore (to be discussed in Chapter 5).

### 4.2.2    Inappropriate behaviour of Singaporeans

The lack of a culture of commemoration among Singaporeans can also be discerned even among those who do visit war sites. This is apparent, for example, in examining reasons given by these respondents for going to war-related sites, as tabulated in Table 4.3. For a large majority (46.1 per cent), the main reason lies in that the sites are part of the *Learning Journeys* (LJ) programme which is "compulsory" (Plates 4.3 and 4.4).

*Table 4.3: Main motivations for visiting war sites (N=90)*

| Reason | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Part of compulsory LJ programme | 67 | 46.1 |
| Desire to learn about the war | 47 | 32.4 |
| Curiosity/ as a leisure activity | 28 | 19.4 |
| Personal commemoration | 3 | 2.1 |
| *Total* | *145\** | *100* |

*\* The number of responses (145) exceeds the number of respondents (90) due to multiple responses.*



**Plate 4.3 Students on a Learning Journeys tour**



**Plate 4.4 Students at the Changi Prison Chapel**

For them, the act of visiting was therefore, as Charmaine puts it, "more of a duty they had to perform", indicating that, for many of these "locals", visiting war sites is seen as an obligation to be fulfilled rather than something that they would do more privately. A smaller minority visited these sites so as "to learn about the war" (32.4 per cent) while others merely "out of curiosity to see the sites" (19.4 per cent). These findings reinforce the idea that, for a majority of the respondents, memorial sites are seen more as sites of heritage, which hold the potential for them to learn something rather than for the purpose of paying tribute to those who were sacrificed in the war (2.1 per cent). Compare this to the views of the foreign interviewees, whose response – to the question of why they visited these sites - can be summed up by Edward, a British tourist in his 30s, who said:-

> The main reason is to pay our respects to those who died during the war; not just the Second World War, but to the dead of all wars. It takes a lot for these people to just lay down their lives like that. We salute their commitment.

The way some Singaporeans behave at these sites is also very telling. According to Jeyathurai, director of *Changi Chapel and Museum*, "the locals who visit these sites are usually bussed about without a guide to explain the sites". Farrell complained that, at some sites, Singaporeans "behave like they were in a bloody zoo, chattering at the top of their lungs and running despite being told to be respectful". This behaviour of "locals", according to him, can be attributed to "the failure for many to understand what the place represents and the history being portrayed", yet another indication of a lack of a culture of commemoration here. Some also blamed it on the education system, as put by Charmaine, who felt that, while visits to war sites are part of the syllabus, "there is no attempt to follow up, making the war peripheral in our lives". As for Kevin, the sites sometimes "smack of propaganda, pushed down our throats we can no longer feel for it".

As such, in some cases, the state can be seen to be too aggressive in pushing the war for nation-building. As Yasmine cited, "if the state really wants us to feel for the war, it cannot rub patriotism down our noses; it will leave us feeling resentment". In that sense, not visiting war sites can also be seen as a form of symbolic resistance to the state's efforts to remember the war as part of its nation-building apparatus.

Therefore, it is clear that, even though Singaporeans do generally feel it as important to remember the war, not many would actually do more than expressing it verbally. When it comes to physically commemorating the war, not many would do it, reflecting that, for them, the salience of war remains merely at a discursive level. It is also obvious from the behaviour of some of these Singaporeans that physical commemoration does not necessarily translate to a more internalized act where they are able to relate to the sites. The discussion will now turn to the views of Singaporeans with regard to how the state has attempted to make these war sites more relevant to them.

### 4.3    Reactions to state's strategies of (war) memory-making

In terms of how the war should be remembered, as tabulated in Table 4.4, almost half of respondents feel that the most appropriate form is via "physical" means, such as museums "that seek to inform us of what happened during the event" (49.9 per cent). Such forms are seen to be effective because of the visual prominence and "depth of information" given, felt to be important if visitors are to relate to what the war was about. This reflects on how the state may be doing the right thing in deciding to remember the war by manipulating *real* landscapes. The size of memorials also matter in that they

should be "monumentally huge". As Norman, a 31 year-old Chinese executive, puts it, "it should really hit you to provoke feelings and promote empathy", and able to "speak about the scale of the sacrifice made by those who went through the war".

*Table 4.4: Most appropriate strategies of commemorating the war (N=196)*

| Form of commemoration | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Physical (e.g. museums; storyboards) | 293 | 49.9 |
| Bodily (e.g. war cemeteries) | 60 | 10.2 |
| Performative (e.g. dedication ceremonies) | 48 | 8.2 |
| Other means (e.g. books, media, internet) | 187 | 31.7 |
| Total | 588 | 100 |

*\* The number of responses (588) exceeds the number of respondents (196) due to multiple responses.*

In contrast, "bodily" means of commemoration do not seem to be highly regarded by Singaporeans (10.2 per cent). The low figure accorded to commemoration through cemeteries, for example, may reflect a general aversion to the appropriation of the dead for modern intentions of pedagogy and nation-building, yet another reflection of the Asian people's attitude towards death in general, which sees the mobilization of the dead for purposes of the present as sacrilegious. As Ajit, a 32 year-old Indian arts recruiter, mentioned, "the [war] dead should be left alone, they have served their time on earth and should just be left in peace; they should not still be made to work for the nation".

The low priority accorded to "performative" means of remembrance (8.2 per cent), which might be seen as a more "pro-active" and collective way of remembering the war dead (Winter 1994) may be an indication of the fact that, as Yasmine puts it, "not many "locals died in the war", and therefore not worthy of hands-on commemoration, "unlike the foreigners, many of whom had family members who were sacrificed". In a way, this sentiment might be grounded. It would at least explain why attendees to many of the

ceremonies at *Kranji War Cemetery* – such as *ANZAC day* (to honour Australian and New Zealander war dead), and *Remembrance Day* (to honour the war dead of both World Wars) – tend to be foreigners rather than the "locals" (Plates 4.5 and 4.6).


**Plate 4.5 ANZAC day dawn ceremony at Kranji**


**Plate 4.6 Remembrance Day memorial at Kranji**

Still, for Singaporeans who did cite "performative" means as a suitable form of commemoration, many cited the response that "dedication ceremonies have the ability to take Singaporeans out of their comfort zone and make them realize there is a bigger world out there". Further, such ceremonies are seen as integral in setting a tradition of "locals" coming together for a purpose, encouraging them to feel for the war and those who died. Jeyathurai related his experience with a group of National Servicemen:-

> I recall the men who became the guards for a service, men who knew they were sacrificing a Sunday but ready to do the necessary, but as the ceremony progressed, the significance of the service became clear, and at the end many showed their appreciation personally. It would have touched you!

Another preferred form of commemoration apart from the "physical" or the "performative", is through textual mediums like television shows and the internet (31.7 per cent). According to Farrell, television shows on the war provide "moving images of war and are accessible to more people". While this may be an indication of how the

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memory of today's generations is "intensely retinal and powerfully televisual" (Nora 1994: 293-4), it might also be reflective of a society that may not be willing to spend time visiting war sites when information on the war can be obtained within the comforts of one's own home. As Junaidah, a Malay factory supervisor in her 40s, puts it, "[Singaporeans] are busy; why physically go to these sites to find out about war, when we can get information from the Web". This is yet another indication of the general "passivity" of Singaporeans where more active forms of commemoration are concerned.

### 4.3.1    The salience of "locale" in war consumption

Despite the multiple views as to how the war should be remembered, a large proportion of Singaporean respondents do feel that "it is important for war memorial sites to be located at their original locations" (81.6 per cent) and that "more of such sites should be made more accessible" (68.4 per cent), indicative of the fact that "memory does attach itself to [original] sites" (Nora 1994). *In situ* commemoration was also felt to help trigger visitors' desire to learn more of the war. Rosman, for example, had this to say:-

> [Original] sites evoke a sense of realism and fires up the emotions of those who visit. It instils more interest to find out more. You capitalize on the 'soul' of the place, and you cannot do that in a new location right in the centre of the city.

In that sense, Singaporeans' views are aligned with the state's position with regard to the salience of "place memory" and the value of *in situ* war commemoration.

While this is so, respondents do not always subscribe to some of the state's reasons as to why it is sometimes not possible to commemorate the war at the original locations. For example, one argument cited by the state against *in situ* commemoration was that some

sites, like *Sarimbun*, where the Japanese first landed on Singapore in 1942, are just too inaccessible (Plates 4.7 and 4.8). According to a few interviewees spoken to, however, inaccessibility may not necessarily be a bad thing. As Farrell mentioned, "the wildness of the places makes it more appealing to visitors to go just for the fun of it", and that, in the spirit of adventure, "if you want to know war history, you have to go out there and have a look". Further, as Rahmat asserted, it ensures that "only those genuinely interested would go and not those who might not be able to show the same amount of respect to the sites".



**Plate 4.7 Sarimbun Japanese landing site**   **Plate 4.8 HSU plaque marking the Sarimbun site**

Some also felt that even if these sites are inaccessible, they may, as Junaidah, reminded, be relevant to "buffs out there genuinely interested in history to go", such that destroying them means "depriving the wants of a small group for the sake of many who are lazy". Also, according to Jeyathurai, where a site may not be accessible today, it might be in the future since Singapore is still developing and heritage concerns are still in its infancy:-

> A site now inaccessible, 20 years down the road may be accessible to a housing estate nearby, since the government is indeed still building new homes, but once destroyed, you take it out forever; there is no way to reverse that.

Bearing that in mind, Farrell reiterated that, since "some of these sites are now not used for anything and there is no reason to destroy them, just leave them as they are since there

is every teaching reason to do that". Therefore, it is apparent that while "place memory" is indeed useful in enhancing visitors' experiences, state reasons as to why this may not be done in some situations are not always accepted by those on the ground.

Even though it has been mentioned that people on the ground do not always agree with the state as to why *in situ* commemoration is not always possible, there are those who recognize that it can sometimes be a problem given the "lack of space" and the "high cost of maintaining the sites". Recognizing the real fact that there are pressing demands for land, a few respondents agree that it is unavoidable that some of these sites would *have* to go. As Yasmine puts it, "if you need an expressway, you need it, even at the expense of our [war] sites". She also felt that such sites are "expensive to restore" and that "money could go into other uses". Moreover, Hamid added that "visiting some of these sites do pose real dangers as they may be located where finding them is hard". This is a concern the state also keeps in mind when marking sites. As Sarin, the HSU manager said:-

> We have had situations where visitors had tried to visit the *Syonan Jinja* located somewhere in the Bukit Timah Reserve. Notwithstanding the fact that it is within restricted areas, we have had drowning cases or have to pick up lost trekkers at 3 o'clock in the morning. That's why we mark the site elsewhere at MacRitchie.

Hence, while most Singaporeans do identify with the salience of "place memory" and *in situ* commemoration, they diverge in their views as to the state's reasons for why this is not always possible. For a few interviewees, however, the issue of whether a memorial is located at the actual sites is immaterial. As Ajit puts it, "what's important is why we do it; even if a memorial is not located at the original site, we can always recreate the war at the site to make it look like the original", paralleling Raivo's (2001) view that, where *in*

*situ* remembrance is not possible, simulated sites do present as suitable alternatives. This also foregrounds the general sentiment that the most important consideration in setting up a memorial is what visitors can learn from the war, rather than where it is located. It also shows that, as the state had envisaged, simulations may indeed strike a chord with "locals" in helping them "imagine" the war, hence making them more interested to visit.

### 4.3.2    Questioning the "local" in "national" commemoration

Another area where the people do not necessarily see eye-to-eye with the state is with regard to sites of remembrance as "national landscapes". Occasionally departing from the state's stance, the public does have differing views as to how representations of war at such sites could be made "nationally significant". For one, despite state attempts, it is still felt that not enough has been done to reflect upon the role of the "local" people during the war. For example, more than half (58.7 per cent) felt there should be *more* focus given to "locals" rather than foreigners who went through the war. As Charmaine averred:-

> Many of the sites in Singapore are too geared to the experiences of the British and POWs and that instances of 'local' representations, are usually included merely as a 'by the way', 'always in passing' rather than as 'the main experience'. In that sense, we are always taking a back seat to the foreigners.

This reflects what has been brought up in the preceding discussions, that Singaporeans do see the war as one involving foreigners more than the "locals". Christian elements such as crosses and chapel altars also serve to reinforce the feeling that many of the memoryscapes to the war in Singapore tend to bend towards Eurocentric notions of death and commemoration. It is also a reflection that, in postcolonial societies like Singapore, the question of whose heritage warrants national remembering is also "complicated by

questions as to how far the colonial impress on the landscapes should be retained vis-à-vis indigenous [stories of war]" (Kong and Yeoh 1994: 256).

More importantly, however, it reiterates the point that the production of "local subjects" is indeed related to the production of "local spaces" (Appadurai 1995), and that, if such sites are to be valorised as national sites, they would have to focus on representing more of the "local" experiences and what they went through. As Blackburn, a historian, said:-

> For something to be seen as national, it has to be a community experience first. Since there is hardly any of that, it is still far from being nationally significant.

Still, there are those who dismiss the foreign-centricity and Christian focus of some these sites to the war being one mainly fought by Christian foreigners and where many who visit them are also Christians (Plate 4.9). As Helen, a Chinese heritage facilitator in her 40s, mentioned:-

> What do you propose we do? Change history so that the locals come out smelling like heroes? The war was a foreign one and, hence, cannot be helped. Also it was the foreigners who died, so commemoration would be foreign in nature as well.



**Plate 4.9 POW-built St Luke's Chapel restored by STB**

The other contention to what is considered "local" extends beyond whether there have been enough "local" representations of war at the sites. Interviewees sometimes feel, as

Ajit felt, that since each ethnic group "went through different experiences of war, there is a need to reflect their unique experiences" instead of merely lumping everything into one collective Singaporean experience. This is to say that, in the light of the plural society, there should be equal representation given to the experiences of all the groups within Singaporean society. In the survey, for example, a majority (91.8 per cent) agreed that "there should be equal focus on the war experiences of all the different groups in Singapore". This is borne out of the sense that, in conflating the experiences of all the ethnic groups, as Yasmine brought up, it might "lead to the marginalization of the experiences of the Malays or Indians, since many were working for the Japanese".

To be sure, there is already evidence of such perceptions of exclusionary practice taking place within war sites in Singapore. For example, a few respondents related how they felt some sites are too "sinicized" and too focused on Chinese stories. As Rosman puts it:-

> I think there is "local" coverage but it has generally been focused on the Chinese. The Malay coverage is lesser and none I know of "local" Indians. This is not justifiable as there are heroic acts by them which should be recorded, shared.

Blackburn also reiterated this when he said that, "if you look at the Singapore material on the war, the Chinese experience becomes the main experience". While Charmaine attributed this to the fact that "the Chinese are a majority", Rahmat interpreted it as "a political thing" where "the Chinese government attempts to erase [Malay] history to make us more Chinese". This can be seen as a reflection that what constitutes heritage is differently interpreted by communal interests with a stake in the built environment (Kong and Yeoh 1994) (to be revisited in Chapter 6). Specifically, it shows how perceptions of what is meant by the term "local Singaporean" differ and are sometimes in contention.

Still, a few interviewees did bring up that, to make a site "national", it does not need to become a rainbow where every product is organized to give equal time to everybody as this may, in the end, "drown out the story". It is also felt that, in a site such as a museum, there is a need to select what is most important to represent, as a site that tries to cover everything would merely end up "in a babble of voices without saying anything". The onus in this case, Farrell reflected, is on visitors to agree or disagree with what is represented and to make up their own minds since to merely "dismiss this as idle propaganda is to abdicate one's own responsibility". As such, popular perceptions do differ as to what it means to represent the "local" at such sites.

Another contention with regard to "local" representations pertains to whether narratives of war at such sites should be more on the experiences of the "local" people as a whole vis-à-vis those of a few iconic Singaporeans. While there are "local" stories, it was felt generally that, as Linda, a Chinese in her 40s, puts it, the focus has been more on war stories of "the upper class 'locals' and less on ordinary folks". This might be a reflection of Singapore's bent towards "promoting the culture of heroic consumption [and the scripting of national heroes], as opposed to the lived culture of everyday lives" (Yeoh and Teo 1996). These indicate that more should be done to tell the stories of the "locals" who did not fight but also went through the war, hence extending the breadth of representation at these sites. To relate it directly to the issue of national remembrance, a few respondents quibbled over the idea of "national heroes" since some of the "locals" who did fight were not fighting for Singapore *per se*, but for other nations. As Farrell reiterated:-

> From what I know of Lim Bo Seng, he saw himself as a China Chinese, a colonel in the KMT and an officer of China. He was also answering not so much to the British but to Chiang Kai Shek, a leader in China. So seizing him as a Singaporean hero would strike him I think as funny".

This can also be tied to the war having taken place before the independence of Singapore, when it was still but part of the colonial British Malaya. In the light of that, as Glenda, a Chinese housewife in her 40s indicated: "there was no Singapore at the time, how can we then call these 'local' men and women our national [Singaporean] heroes" (a point revisited in Chapter 6). Further, while wars may be seen at times to be the revolutionary war where nations are formed, in the case of Singapore, while it paved the way for our independence, it was not really one that was fought *for* our independence.

In contradistinction to the above point, however, it was brought up that such issues should be immaterial in mobilizing the war as a platform for building a nation. As Yasmine puts it, "what is important is not if memorials cover *some* or *all* aspects of war; we should seek to learn what is taught rather than criticize it for what it does not". Indeed, a few interviewees did mention that even the "stories of the British can help reinforce the idea of how unreliable they were and how we should ensure that it never happens again". As such, in terms of what is represented, curators should, as Linda mentioned, "just leave the facts as they are without downplaying or highlighting any particular aspects to suit special groups". It is therefore apparent that perceptions with regard to commemoration, and the issue of what is "local", are extremely contentious. Singaporeans diverge in their conception of what can be seen as "nationally significant", which in turn affects their perceptions of these memoryscapes as national symbols.

### 4.3.3    Agency in war commemoration

Generally, as tabulated in Table 4.5, Singaporeans surveyed feel that the state should be the main agency in charge of producing war memoryscapes in Singapore (63.8 per cent). In further probing why this is so, some mentioned that, as Sherrie, a 45 year-old Chinese outbound tour operator, puts it, "the state is the agency with all the necessary resources to do it, the skills, manpower and funding". Helen also indicated that, since "governments get us into wars in the first place, they should be the ones to take up the task of honouring those who suffered on their behalf". Michael, the former curator of the *Reflections of Bukit Chandu,* providing another reason, said that "the state is the most financially able to do it since historical sites *cannot* make money". Yet another reason is, as Linda puts it, "the state is most suited not only to commemorate the war but to promote the sites such that they become significant to us who still has no 'soul' to remember the war".

*Table 4.5: Agency responsible for producing war memoryscapes (N=196)*

| Agency | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Government | 125 | 63.8 |
| Non-government organizations | 42 | 21.4 |
| Community groups | 24 | 12.2 |
| Foreign groups | 5 | 2.6 |
| *Total* | *196* | *100.0* |

However, there is also a general feeling that the state should not be given free reign over how they attempt to commemorate the war years. This might explain a proportion of respondents (21.4 per cent) who feel that, while the state should be involved, "non-government organizations and individuals" are the ones who should be the main authority because "historians are able to provide an accurate account of what happened without any hidden agenda". Still, the problem with this is that, in a case where the private entity spearheading the project is affiliated with an ethnic community, it might be seen as

serving the desires of, not all Singaporeans, but a specific few. As Jeyathurai mentioned with respect to the memorial service that takes place at the *Civilian War Memorial*:-

> It is organized by the private Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce which might imply that it was only the Chinese affected by the war. I think the state has to come in. It should be a state thing aimed at all. If not, not all will be affected.

The fact that commemoration should not be related to any one ethnic group is also clearly seen in the low figure accorded to "community groups" (12.2 per cent). The minority who chose "foreign groups" (2.6 per cent) mentioned that, as Glenda puts it, "since many who died were foreign". Still, its low figure reaffirms the sentiment that commemoration should remain Singaporean and targeted mainly at the Singaporean population.

The other contention pertains to the multi-agency approach that the state has adopted, which is felt to be, as Michael pointed out, "too fragmented with different departments doing their own things which might be conflicting with commemoration". In a way, there might be some validity to this concern. Take the example of *Labrador Park* (Plate 4.10).



**Plate 4.10 Dense foliage surrounding original gun emplacements at Labrador Park**

Initially, when Nparks decided to excavate the history of the site as a war battery, there were plans for replicated guns to be brought in and emplaced where the originals used to be. Once the guns have been put in, it was suggested that the surrounding – now thick

with dense foliage – should be redesigned and the vegetation removed so as to simulate the park as it was during the war, providing a clear view of the harbour. A few individuals in Nparks, however, protested against this, proclaiming that such a move would entail types of precious plants to be destroyed, hence going against what Nparks, as guardians of the nation's green spaces, stands for. This shows how – in the multi-agency model adopted here – the aims of commemoration may sometimes be deflected or in conflict with other primary objectives of the state agency in charge of appropriating the landscape. This is also reflected in the words of a senior executive of Nparks who replied when asked why Nparks decided to begin commemorating the war at the Park:-

> What? No. We are not commemorating the war. Our main objective is to take care of *Labrador* as a nature park. That is our main priority. As for the new war emphasis, it is a secondary thing. We just want to make the park more interesting.

As such, many of the respondents agreed that there should only be one agency in charge of commemoration" and that NHB should be the main one given its role as the repository of the nation's history and heritage. By doing so, it is felt that, as Farrell indicated, "there will be less likelihood of commemoration being motivated by other agendas other than the desire to remember the war as it happened".

More importantly, most Singaporeans spoken to feel that, regardless of who takes up the leading role, the ordinary people on the ground should be consulted as part of the process (cf. King 1998). This is because, as Norman puts it, "the monopoly that the state holds on commemoration has served to deaden or blunt people's interest since the opportunity for 'locals' to participate is not readily available". Perhaps, to make these sites resonate more with "locals", the people should be given more say in how such site are produced so as to

allow them a stake in the process and feel a greater affinity to these sites. The question of who should lead in the commemoration process is hence a problematic one.

### 4.3.4    War sites as tourist attractions?

While the general sentiment, as reflected earlier, is that commemoration should be mainly for Singaporeans rather than foreigners who come to Singapore, it is interesting that a majority of the Singaporean respondents (80.1 per cent) also agree that tourism need not necessarily be sidelined in the process. The reasons for this are provided in Table 4.6.

*Table 4.6: Importance of tourism to war commemoration (N=157)*

| Response | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Sense of pride from outsiders knowing our history | 176 | 66.9 |
| Bring in revenue for the sites | 60 | 22.8 |
| Justify preservation of the sites | 27 | 10.3 |
| Total | 263 | 100 |

*\* The number of responses (263) exceeds the number of respondents (157) due to multiple responses.*

The main reason cited is that it would allow foreigners to know about the "local" history and provide another facet to Singapore not many tourists know about (66.9 per cent). As Farrell puts it, focusing on war heritage "reminds visitors that Singapore is more than a modernized theme park", and that "in the midst of the new, there is a colourful history here". It is also felt by some that, in promoting the "local" heritage, it allows "locals" to feel, as Glenda puts it, "pride from foreigners knowing 'our history'" which is interesting in that it shows how national pride can be defined by how outsiders perceive the nation. This reflects how the promotion of the war for tourism may not necessarily be against the aim of nation-building. It also shows how Singaporeans do align with the state in the view that such sites can also be concurrently promoted as tourist attractions (Dann 1994).

For the remaining (19.9 per cent) who are against the promotion of such sites as tourist attractions, some felt that it would alienate the "locals", as Yasmine mentioned:-

> I think the more you promote the sites for tourism, the less 'locals' would go because they do not feel that they can identify with the sites. But if you make it more a site for locals, then the locals would feel a stronger connection to the sites.

Others are afraid, as Norman is, that the tourist dollar might "dwarf, overshadow and overwhelm the commemoration aspect to the extent that they might become a theme-park like Haw Par Villa or Sentosa". According to Rosman, if these sites are promoted for tourism, it must be done such that the "profit motive does not take over" and the "focus is on giving of an accurate account of the war". As such, while, there is general consensus that war sites should also be promoted as tourist attractions, it must be done in such a way that, as Helen indicated, "the original aims of remembrance is not forgotten, and it is done in a sombre manner to keep the sacred nature and significance of these sites".

## 4.4    Conclusion

Generally, Singaporeans as a whole do see the war as important aspects of "local" history to be remembered. It is also found that, to a large extent, there is coalescence in the views of the state and the people pertaining to issues and strategies related to how memoryscapes should be produced. As a counterpoint, however, it has also been shown that popular attitudes do sometimes collide with the views of the state as well, as seen in the issues related to agency – who should lead war commemoration and how – and the definition of what is "local" with respect to how the war should be represented at memorial sites. The other important finding is that, while Singaporeans do converge in thinking that it is important to remember the war, it has not really translated into a more

"active" desire to physically participate in the actual acts of visiting the war sites or attending memorial ceremonies. As such, war commemoration, for many of these Singaporeans, remains merely symbolic and seldom goes beyond the level of discourse.

# THE *CHANGI CHAPEL AND MUSEUM*

## 5.1    Introduction

From the discussion thus far, it is clear that, while the state has been pushing for war commemoration in Singapore, no less as a tool to bind its citizens together, Singaporeans have been far from unequivocal in its support. While "locals" have generally professed the importance of remembering the war, this has not translated into an "active" culture of memorialization. It has also been observed that, despite the fact that Singaporeans are quite supportive of state efforts to memorialize the war, they do sometimes (covertly) resist the state in their perceptions of aspects of the process, not least because of different perspectives of what the term "local" means. The next two chapters will further ground the discussion in the analysis of two memoryscapes of war, *Changi Chapel and Museum* (this Chapter) and *Reflections at Bukit Chandu* Centre (Chapter 6).

## 5.2    Memory-making at the *Changi Chapel and Museum*

The *Changi Peninsula* was the name given to an area in the eastern coast of Singapore which, during the Occupation, became part of the Japanese internment camp networks within the region (see Map 1.1). Given there were already many military and civilian installations – such as *Changi Prison* – set up by the British in the area, the Japanese set it aside as the main camp for the imprisonment of Allied soldiers who surrendered after the fall of Singapore (Probert 1988). Camp conditions were harsh and, being away from family, religion became for these men *the* crucial point of solace who then constructed places of worship at various parts of the area (NHB 2002), one of which was a chapel set up within *Changi Prison* itself. Still, given the intensity of the Changi experience, many

of the interned POWs died, and even more suffered, in the hands of the brutal treatments imparted by the Japanese. It is therefore not surprising that when ex-veterans of war and their families came to Singapore in the 1980s and, on realizing that nothing has been done to remember their fallen comrades, wanted a memorial to be set up.

To meet this demand, *Changi Prison Chapel* was built by the now Singapore Tourism Board (STB) in 1988.[1] This new site became, for the "war pilgrims", a tribute to those interned during the war (Blackburn 2000a). As a central frame of memorialization, a replica[2] of one of the POW-built chapels was put in where visitors can honour the war dead. A museum was also set up, displaying POW mementoes and artefacts to recreate their lives then. The ex-POWs and their families were also invited to the site's opening, in a bid to involve them in the memory-making process (The *Straits Times* 9 Sep 1987). In addition, memorial services were held, usually upon request, where individuals can pay their respects. Its location outside *Changi Prison* also helped to conjure images of those whose lives were dramatically altered during the war.

In 2000, there was an announcement that the *Changi Prison* was to be demolished and rebuilt to incorporate minor prisons littered around the island into one huge prison complex. As part of the redevelopment process, the *Changi Prison Chapel* was to be removed so that land could be freed for the prison's new extensions (STB Press Release

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[1] Initially, STB allowed these "war pilgrims" to enter parts of the *Changi Prison* (which became an operational prison after the war). However, this soon became a logistical nightmare given the high number of visitors and the possibility of a security breach within the prison (Blackburn 2000a).
[2] After the war, many of the chapels were either destroyed or dismantled. The only original *Changi Chapel* in existence is located at the Royal Military College, Australia. Upon the Japanese surrender, the Australian POWs who were responsible for its creation brought it back to their home country.

2001). According to Blackburn, a historian who was involved in setting up the new memorial, there were initially views by some that there was no need for a new memorial because "the war generation was passing away", but still, a decision was made otherwise, as "there were still a few who felt the site is too well-known to be erased just like that". Indeed, according to Phillip, an ex-POW who returned with his family in 2000, the site "is synonymous with the identity of Changi, and the memories of the POWs who died would have passed down to the younger generations to whom history would still matter".

Led by STB and NHB, the new Museum, located a kilometre away from its predecessor, was officially opened on 15 Feb 2001. As the one before, the new site "pays particular tribute to the more than 50 000 civilians and soldiers interned in Changi". The chapel replica was also brought over, and a new museum was built around the chapel to capture "the stories of the dark [Occupation] years" (STB Press Release 2001) (Plate 5.1). Within the museum, the stories of those interned are related via photographs and artefacts (Plate 5.2). In the video area, war excerpts are shown while a library allows visitors to conduct further research on the war (see Appendix F for full description of Museum).



**Plate 5.1 Night view of new Changi Chapel**          **Plate 5.2 A view inside the Museum**

The Museum generally follows a thematic approach with sections devoted to aspects of the POW experience. It also adopts first-person quotations to allow those who went through the war to "tell" visitors, in their own words, the horrors of those hard times.

Specifically, the Museum "fulfils many roles: an important educational site, and for POWs and families, a site that allows closure of the many emotional scars of the war years" (brochure). Aside from that, the new site is also revalorised as "a powerful link to the past to stand as a reminder of our shared [Singaporean] history" (STB Press Release 2001). In line with the state's renewed stance towards the war then, the former Minister for Information and the Arts cited in his speech (2001): "[through this site], the war shows that it is important we do not take peace for granted, that we do not assume there will be no more war; that there's no need to defend ourselves", echoing the war narrative as spelt out in official discourse with implications for nation-building in Singapore today.

However, given the Museum was borne out of a site set up mainly to meet foreign demands, there was concern that war representations within the site, which was more or less a translation of its predecessor, would continue to focus on the experiences of the interned foreigners. While the Eurocentric focus of the Museum's predecessor was well-regarded by foreign visitors, it was observed by the director of the new Museum, Jeyathurai, that "hardly any locals visited the old site, since it was not their story". Hence, STB sought to make the new site relevant to Singaporeans by making it more "localized", while maintaining the personal meanings of the site to "war pilgrims". The strategies STB adopted to achieve these aims are hereby discussed.

### 5.2.1   *"Localization" through locale and design*

Given that the whole *Changi Peninsula* was used as an internment camp, the new site still draws upon the historical essences of the area despite its further location from *Changi Prison*. Set amidst "remote and tranquil environs, with no factories or estates nearby", it was also felt to "preserve the idea behind the chapel, to create a place of peace and worship for the prisoners" (The *Straits Times* 27 Sep 1999). In terms of design, the Museum's structure was modelled after a prison; high ceilings, a metal *ala* prison gate and barred windows to simulate the experience of being in a prison (Plate 5.3). Around the site, the flora of those days was planted to help visitors get an idea of what the area used to look like before. To link the new site to *Changi Prison*, a section was also dedicated to the display of prison items like old locks, the cat's tail whip and an artillery shell transformed into a bell. Outside the Museum, there is a "kampong" (village) setting to recreate Changi as it was before the war (Plate 5.4).[3]



**Plate 5.3 Heavy metal gates of the Museum**     **Plate 5.4 "Kampong" setting outside the Museum**

These tactics, meant to transport visitors to the past where they could vicariously witness the experiences of the POWs in those days, were crucial in making the site, according to Pamelia Lee, STB director in charge of the project, appeal to "*all*" visitors, foreign or

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[3] Much of the area before the coming of the British was occupied by a small villages and "kampong" houses which were inhabited by the "local" population, especially the Malay indigenous people.

local". It was felt that "place memory" was generic enough to make anybody interested to visit it. The "kampong" motifs also helped to "localize" the site by giving an idea of what the area looked like before the British came. In that sense, Changi becomes not only a place where foreign POWs were interned, but where "locals" too had a "place" in its historical (and geographical) imaginations. Further, by focusing on its "locale", it shows that the POW experience *did* take place in Singapore, regardless of the foreign-ness of the Museum displays. Hence, the salience of the site's location has been reoriented from a site not only where POWs suffered but also where "locals" were present as well.

### 5.2.2    Shifting towards more "local" representations of war

There is also now more emphasis on "local" war experiences on the storyboards and other displays within the Museum (Plate 5.5). For one, the story of Elizabeth Choy, a canteen operator tortured by the Japanese for helping the POWs, is now reflected. There are also a few accounts pertaining to accounts of what life was like then for the "local" civilians, such as of the *Sook Ching* massacre where many Chinese men suspected of being anti-Japanese were trucked off to beaches to be killed.



**Plate 5.5 One storyboard focused on the "local" war experiences**

These strategies can be seen as attempts to reduce the emphasis on foreign POWs by shifting to "localized" narration(s) of what happened to the "locals"; centring on the strength of will of "local" people under adversity. Therefore, it added a more "local" flavour to what used to be largely Eurocentric representations within the old site. Most of the displayed quotations culled from oral interviews are also those of "locals" who went through the war, reiterating the war as one where the "locals" were also involved. In addition, STB has also *depoliticized* the site. When the first cut of the "text" was submitted, STB threw it out for being "opinionated" and "British-centric". This was the reason for the first-person quotations. As Pamelia Lee explained, "I did it this way so that one opinion was that and your opinion was something else", done in the hope that the site will be "universal" in nature and "abstract enough to accommodate all visitors".

In "universalizing" the war experience, Jeyathurai reiterated that "there is a desire to have the people leave with hope rather than despair, to focus on what good man can do and other noble attributes the POWs exhibited under such harrowing circumstances". This is an indication of how visitors to the site are encouraged to reflect upon the humanity that came out of the war, something that anybody visiting the site could relate to, not only family members of those who died during the event itself. In that sense, it is a reflection of the desire by STB for the site to appeal to all: to keep the foreign visitors coming and also get "local" Singaporeans to relate more intimately to the site as a "national" site, where they can learn from the lessons and be inspired by the universally-applicable narrative of "spirit in adversity", hence showing one way in which narration has shifted between the old and the new memorial sites.

### 5.2.3 The use of performative memory

Performative elements were also adopted to allow visitors to be involved in the commemoration process. For example, there are plans to have a memorial walk which would "let visitors place markers on trees to honour those who had served in Singapore" (The *Straits Times* 27 Sep 1999). A box of Changi sand is placed at the chapel for visitors to pay tribute to "locals" who died in the massacres at *Changi Beach* by lighting candles. Visitors are also encouraged to paste notes on the chapel walls and, in a novelty move, to pluck hibiscus flowers from the bushes to be placed at the chapel altar. As one docent of the Museum puts it, this is "probably the only place in Singapore where you can pluck a flower and not be fined for it". Visitors are also allowed to lay wreaths and other paraphernalia, such as paper poppy flowers, at the chapel.

The Museum also organizes memorial services to remember those incarcerated at Changi. These services are usually solemn affairs held at the chapel, with a programme that includes observance of a minute's silence, sermons and the laying of wreaths. According to Jeyathurai, "these memorials are open to all; not only the ex-POWs". While in the previous site, services are mainly held only upon requests, the new site saw regular services to mark days such as 15 February (the fall of Singapore) and 8 December (start of the Malayan campaign)[4] where Singaporeans are encouraged, either through active promotional campaigns by the Museum as well as by word of mouth of visitors, to attend

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[4] It is telling that these dates were selected: while 15 September (the day the war ended) was ignored. This might be due to the fact that the British return in 1945 was generally not welcomed by the "locals" who saw them as having failed to defend them when it mattered most. The choice of 15 Feb is also interesting since, for a long time after the war, the British authorities had restricted celebrations on that day seen as glorifying Japanese victory, and a reminder of the British defeat to the might of the Asian force in 1942.

(Plate 5.6). In-house tours are also provided where visitors can learn more about the war, where focus is put on "local" stories as much as that of the foreign POWs (Plate 5.7).



**Plate 5.6 Memorial service at the Museum**



**Plate 5.7 In-house tour at the Museum**

The "localization" of the Changi experience also extended to making the site a quotidian landscape. A café onsite has sought to promote itself to residents living nearby in the hope that "locals" would visit the Museum as an after-meal activity, hence promoting visitorship. Regular services are also now held at the chapel by "local" church groups (Plate 5.8). It is apparent therefore that the Museum has been reoriented to transcend its foreign focus to make it more resonant with the "locals" who visit.



**Plate 5.8 Notice of "local" church services held at the Changi Chapel**

**5.3    Singaporeans' "readings" of the site**

From the preceding discussion, it is apparent that "location" still plays an important role in the way the Museum was conceived. The mobilization of "place memory" is also complemented with tactics of simulation to help visitors "imagine" the war. In addition, the Museum also narrates more of the "local" war experiences so that, unlike its predecessor, it would appeal more to Singaporeans, who would then identify with the national messages binding them under a common memory and a shared consciousness. This section will examine the perceptions of Singaporeans to the way that Museum has been "repositioned" within the national discourse of war commemoration.

*5.3.1    Divergent viewpoints over "locale"*

For most of the Singaporeans, the "location" still triggers memories of those interned during the war through the images conjured up within the Museum. According to Helen, a Chinese tour guide in her 40s, "being where it happened makes the place more solemn and meaningful". This shows that the Museum has not lost its importance despite being further from the Prison. Hence, the site still works in playing up visitors' imaginations of the Changi experience. As Yasmine, a 27 year-old Chinese visitor puts it:-

> It shows how detached Changi was which is why the Japs [sic] shoved the
> prisoners there. It gives you a taste of the place as the Prison is still around.

As such, not only does the Museum's "locale" allow visitors to "imagine" what the POWs went through "by being there", being far from the city, it has also helped them "imagine" why Changi was chosen by the Japanese. As Junaidah, a Malay visitor in her 40s, said: "it is not only the museum but the whole area steeped with many stories". In that sense, the Museum has indeed retained its "place memory" despite its new location.

However, its distance from the city has also attracted criticism from a minority of Singaporeans, such as Charmaine, a 25 year-old Chinese, who said that "it is located too far from the city and is too poorly promoted". This reflects that, while locating the memorial at Changi does help conjure up images of what the site used to be like, it might have also led to Singaporeans not being keen to visit. In that sense, "locale" becomes both a boon as well as a bane to the Museum's task of getting Singaporeans to visit, reflecting the paradox of *in situ* memorials mentioned in the previous chapter. Still, Yasmine dismissed the validity of the "it is too far" argument:-

> I think that's bull! If those living at Changi can go to the city all the time, why not the other way around; I think that Singaporeans are just lazy.

Hence, distance is seen as an excuse for the fact that Singaporeans are just not interested. From the discussion in the last chapter, this may not be a totally groundless fact.


### 5.3.2    *Working towards a more Singaporean memoryscape?*

In terms of the site's narratives, Singaporeans generally agree that the site is an apt means of raising public awareness of a shared history among Singaporeans, and how Singapore had attained its success. As Sherrie, a 45 year-old outbound guide, mentioned:-

> It signifies the turning point for Singapore, it ended British rule; seeing how the British failed us makes me realize the importance of not being colonized again.

Hence, Singaporeans do identify the site as a national landscape, an important place within the narrative of the war as that which broke the shackles of colonial rule and led to the nation's independence. There is also an appreciation of the inclusion of how the people then suffered even in their everyday lives, as opposed to just stories related to the fighting itself. As Kevin, a 26 year old Chinese sales executive, cited:-

> The new Museum allows us a way to appreciate sacrifices of those involved in the war; and I am talking about the life of the ordinary people; it is a more humanistic stance of war compared to the militaristic nature of the old site.

In that sense, Singaporeans have also identified with the Museum's attempts to include the stories of the ordinary people vis-à-vis the heroic escapades of a few iconic "locals".

As intended by the Museum's producers, the focus on "the human spirit" has also struck a chord with "locals" who are impressed with, as Linda, a 40 year-old Chinese woman whose parents underwent the war, puts it, "the site's depiction of how the people endured and survived, preserves values such as discipline and determination". The emphasis on the "universal" values within the site has also made it more relevant to "locals". For instance, according to John, a Chinese financial consultant in his 20s:-

> I know that the Museum still focuses on POWs, but still it is different from before; the focus is not on how foreigners fought and lost, but more on their spirit in navigating their days in incarceration; something we too can learn from.

In that sense, the Museum's focus on the POWs' "universal" values as something that *all* visitors could identify with has made the site more relevant to most Singaporeans who visit it. As Kevin puts it, "the increase in 'local' stories rectifies misconception that the war was one where only foreigners suffered; 'locals' did too!" The increased representations of what the "locals" went through during the war has also been well-received by most of these Singaporeans.

As such, Singaporeans do generally identify with the "repositioned" site as a "landscape of nationhood". In their perceptions, the Museum does reflect more of the "local" experiences of war, and "universal" attributes (even of the foreign POWs) that *all*

Singaporeans can learn from. It is also found that the perception of the site as being more relevant to Singaporeans does have a bearing on action. According to Michael, a Chinese tour guide in his 40s, "I am going to bring my kids here now that I can share with them what our forefathers went through to win the freedom we have today". This reflects on how the site's increased representations on the "locals" have made it more relevant for Singaporeans. In that sense, the reorientation of the site by the state to become a hegemonically-"localized" icon can generally be seen as a success. However, the opinions of the masses are not as unequivocal as the state would have wanted it to be.

### 5.3.2 Lack of a culture of war commemoration

For one, it has been found that, in terms of visitorship, there has not really been a major leap in the number of "local" visitors to the site. As Jeyathurai, said, like its predecessor:-

> Most of the visitors to the site are still foreign, 60 per cent of them; "locals" come but usually part of a school group; they make up 30 per cent of the remainder.

In that sense, it is clear that foreigners still predominate over the "locals" numerically (Plate 5.9). The lack of "local" participation is also observed during ceremonies held on-site, where the attendees tend to be foreign with hardly any "locals" in sight (Plate 5.10).



**Plate 5.9 Foreign visitors to the Museum**      **Plate 5.10 Foreign attendees to memorial services**

It is even more instructive to observe the behaviour of these "locals" at the site. Compared to the foreign visitors who tend to treat the Museum with respect and sombre attitude, "local" visitors tend to be talkative and indifferent to the sacred nature of the site as a place to honour those who suffered and died. As Sherrie indicated:-

> It is outrageous when you see these 'locals' and they are just running around without any sense that the place is a solemn place. They just do not see why they should be paying more due respect to the place.

It has also been observed that, as Yasmine puts it, "while foreigners usually spend a long time at the Museum, Singaporeans sometimes do not attempt to read at all". The Museum director attributed this to the fact that "many 'locals' do not understand why this site came about; the information is there but there is no one to explain to them the significance of the information". One explanation might lie in that exhibits are in English, and hence inaccessible to some "locals", such as senior citizens on tours, who are not conversant in the language. In that light, probably what is needed is "a mediated experience" to help them better relate. As Helen, who conducts tours at the site, said:-

> The mediated experience is important to make the site relevant to locals. For the kids, we need to explain why we are there. If not, it will be mayhem. I think that exhibits also need to be in other languages apart from English; or a guide who can translate English to their respective languages.

It may of course be another reflection of the lack of a commemorative culture among Singaporeans who are just not bothered with a war fought by "foreigners".


### 5.3.3. A landscape "too foreign/Christian" to be national?

Apart from "local" visitors who agree with the "national" narratives of the war at the site and those who are nonchalant about it, there are also those who do resist, albeit latently, the adoption of the site as an appropriate symbol of the nation. As Azaryahu (2003: 17)

puts it, meanings at such sites are not only of the state's, they are also "co-created by the visitors and may transcend official interpretations and intentions cast in the authoritative mould of [the state's] memory". This is to say that, alongside consensual "readings", there are a minority who feel that the site is still a long way from becoming a "national" landscape. There are three main reasons cited. First, a few brought up that there is still "little coverage of the 'locals' who went through the war". As an entry in the visitors' book by a "local" put it, "I find this museum disgusting as it pays no tribute to the thousands of Asians; it romanticizes the Europeans; where are the local histories?" (3 Mar 2002). To be sure, this was also once a theme in a play, as Jeyathurai stated:-

> There was a recent play called 'Occupation' focusing on the Siraj family. At one time an actor said she saw a visitor who cried because she read the words penned by an angry Asian who said 'this Museum is for the whites, what about the many Asians who died?', and then she said, 'yes, what about the Asians'?

This reinforces the idea that, despite state efforts, there are still "locals" who feel the site is too foreign, at the expense of the stories of "locals" who went through the war.

Second, there are also Singaporeans who cited the "Christian" focus of the Museum as the reason why "locals" have stayed away.[5] It is indeed salient that most of the memorial services held on-site have taken a very "Christian" form. For example, during a service in 2002 held there, the programme was lined up with a lot of specifically "Christian" elements such as "The Lord's Prayer", "Prayer of Thanksgiving" and the "Reading of Romans 12" (see Appendix G). Most of these services are also held at the chapel, a symbolic point in Christianity. This can be compared to services held at the *Civilian War Memorial*, for example, where an inter-religious form of remembrance takes place,

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[5] At this point, it is important to say that apart from being multiracial, Singapore society is also divided by a diversity of religions, the main ones being Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism/Taoism.

involving people from all ethnicities paying respect to the civilians who died in the war according to their own faiths (Blackburn 2001; see Chapter 3). In one instance, as a former curator of the site, I encountered a group of students from a "local" Islamic school who refused to enter the chapel due to the "Christian" associations. It was only after I told them that the chapel is an important relic from history that some of them went in. This in a way reflects upon how members of the non-Christian communities might feel detached from what is perceived as a "Christian" style of commemoration.

This is an issue that even the Museum is grappling with. According to Jeyathurai, "if we had our way, the Museum would be called *Changi Museum* so that element of religion is removed", indicating that the misconception of the site as a religious institution is a very *real* one. The main barrier to the name-change, according to the director, is that "STB wanted to keep within the name the element that had led to the setting up of the first memorial". This might be perceived as a fear on the part of STB that if the name is changed, foreigners may no longer identify with the site, reflecting on how, though the site has been revalorized as a "national" site, keeping the site relevant for foreigners still rank high on STB's agenda. The church services held on site has also perpetuated the idea of the site as being "too Christian". As Hamid, a Muslim, puts it:-

> When you hear Changi Chapel, the word chapel is linked to Christianity. So when the Malays hear it, they don't want to go because they feel the site will be slanted more towards promoting the Christians who died.

Third, there are those who complained that the site cannot be "national" because it does not cover the experiences of the different ethnic groups. According to one note in the visitors' book (11 Feb 2002), "I must mention that the Muslims who suffered and died

are not mentioned; the Malays are invisible in Singapore". Essentially, this oversight is verified by Jeyathurai who was stumped when asked if there were any representations of the Malay war experience within the site. The lack of coverage of certain races within the site has therefore been perceived negatively by some who saw it as ethnically-biased in its "national" portrayal of the war. As Rahmat, a 54 year-old Malay, asked: "Why is it there is the *Sook Ching* story of the Chinese? I doubt there were Chinese POWs in Changi". This again feeds into the perception some Malays have that they are being marginalized in Singapore seen as increasingly *Sinicized* (a point revisited in Chapter 6).

The main root of the above contentions lies in how the term "local" or "national" is understood. According to those who feel that the site cannot be seen as "national", it is by virtue of the fact that, in their minds, "local" is defined based on different variables: "local" as representing *all* Singaporeans", "local" as representing *all* faiths", and "local" as representing *all* ethnic groups", which have translated into perceptions of the Museum as being "too foreign", "too Christian-oriented" and "too *Sinicized*" to be "national" respectively. This can be compared to Singaporeans who do see the Museum as a site of nationhood. For them, for a site to be considered as "national", it is inconsequential that it reflects *all* Singaporeans, *all* races, or *all* religions. The important thing is the lessons imparted from the stories that *all* "locals" can learn from. As Blackburn, mentioned:-

> The most important thing that visitors should extract are the universal lessons that these men taught us – 'grace under pressure', 'symbols of humanity' and 'faith during those years' – these apply not only to foreigners but also the 'locals'.

Hence, for these Singaporeans, despite the foreign-focus of the displays, the site can still be considered "national" because it raises positive values of humanity that even 'locals'

could relate. Also, instead of seeing the site as "Christian", it is more important to extract the values from these stories regardless of their religious faiths. As Jeyathurai puts it:-

> We tell the story of man, regardless whatever faith one belongs to because when we tell the Christian element, we don't carry it out from a Christian point of view but in regard to man's relationship to God and that is done in a universal form.

Another way the "national" is interpreted by this group of Singaporeans is in terms of historical accuracy. For one, they accept that the focus on the foreign soldiers cannot be helped since most of the POWs were indeed foreign. As Helen cited, "there is a lot of focus on the Europeans but that is because they were the majority of the people taken as POWs, which cannot be denied". Also, according to Yasmine, "since many of these POWs were Christians, it is natural that the site mainly touches on that faith. Still, Helen saw the quibbling over the issue of religion as petty and not in the Singaporean spirit:-

> The POWs were Christians and so the chapel is Christian. Shall we rewrite history to further peoples' political interest? If it was a mosque, as a *Singaporean*, I will visit, I'm Christian, let's get religion out of the issue here.

More importantly, for them, it is not their "nationality" but what the stories teach us in relation to the nation's history that is critical. As Helen puts it, "the foreign focus serves nationalism as it helps us see how foreigners did such a bad job, and now we have to ensure the same thing does not happen again".  Further, as Farrell, a historian puts it:-

> Singaporeans created the site, decided how it would be, what would be in it; and given the war was a local and an international event, I think it is parochial or even insolent to say that if it is not about 'local' people, then it doesn't belong to us.

As such, it is apparent that, while a majority of Singaporeans who have visited the Museum do perceive the site as a "national" site, there are those who do not, reflecting how the "text" as intended by the state for the people may not necessarily be "read" the

same way in reality. This is especially the case in a plural society like Singapore where, given its multiracial and multi-religious complexions, inevitably also reflects a cacophony of voices from below that may not necessarily be in line with that of the state.

## 5.4    The Museum as a transnational landscape

This section offers an analysis of the transnational contestations and collaborations that have emerged within the site since it first opened. It has already been mentioned that the war was a global one which rendered its commemoration transnational as well. This is nowhere more evident than in the case of the Museum, which focuses on telling the stories of interned POWs in Singapore, and where the initial impetus for the site was borne more out of demands made by foreigners for their comrades and loved ones to be honoured. For one, as already implied, foreign visitors tend to be more sombre, and this can be attributed to the fact that the site holds for them personal meanings, especially those with family who died in the war. This is also evident when one analyzes the poignant notes pasted on the chapel walls (Plate 5.11).



**Plate 5.11 Memorial notes pasted on the chapel walls**

### 5.4.1 A more personal form of commemoration

In analyzing about 400 of such notes, a few things can be said. First, it is indeed true that foreigners do tend to personally commemorate family members who died in the war, the notes usually dedicated to "my father-", "my brother-", "my uncle-" or "my husband who perished in the war". This can be compared to the notes written by the "locals" where the emphasis is generally on "honouring the many [foreign] POWs who were interned". There was not one note that indicates that the "locals" too suffered and died. This is an indication that "local" visitors do regard the site as nothing more than one for foreigners where "locals" are not a part of. As such, despite increased "local" coverage within the site, the experiences of the foreign soldiers still seem to take centre stage.

The other interesting thing found in analyzing the notes is that, for the most part, foreign visitors tend to indicate clearly their nationalities – "British", "Australian" – as compared to the notes written by "local" students that tend to end with their names or the schools they are from. Also, looking at the notes' content, apart from the ones written to honour family members, the notes left by foreigners tend to be dedicated to their own nation's people who fought in the war. This is to say that Australian visitors would usually dedicate the note to "the Australian men and women who died" while the British visitors would honour "the Brits who went through the war". This is an indication of how "nationalistic" transnational commemoration can be, despite the fact that the site is located in Singapore. Together with the notes written by "locals", it is quite clear that the Museum is still regarded by many "locals", to be a landscape for the foreign visitor vis-à-vis one that has been "reconfigured" to become more of a site for Singaporeans.

### 5.4.2   A site of transnational collaborations and contentions

It is also interesting that, despite the general sentiment by most foreigners that the site is an appropriate tribute to their "national" comrades who died in the war, it has still not been spared from certain controversies. For example, in one incident, an Australian visitor came to the Museum and reflected in the visitors' book, "the picture of the Australian about to be executed is very disturbing and should be removed; God bless Australia" (Greta Freeman, Perth, 11/2/01). While the picture of the Australian is still part of the display within the site, the incident does reflect that the Museum is not entirely free from criticisms and negative impressions that arise from outside the nation.

To provide another instance, in 2002, the Museum was also criticized by a few American visitors for not telling the stories of the Americans stationed in Singapore during the war. To correct this, the Museum, in conjunction with the *American Association of Singapore* (AAS) held a service on 7 December 2002 to mark the significance of the date for both nations.[6] A section of the Museum has also been dedicated to displaying a collection of war memorabilia generously donated by surviving American POWs and their family. Essentially, these collaborative tactics are meant to remind us of the "shared sacrifices and friendships between Americans and Singaporeans [which] is indelibly written in the history of our two nations" (STB Press Release 2002).

In yet another example, it has been brought up by Jeyathurai that "the memorial site has also yet to get the Japanese tourists to the site, although a few have found their way there mainly out of curiosity", despite attempts to facilitate the process. As he continued:-

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[6] Americans for the day *Pearl Harbour* was attacked; for Singaporeans, the day the island was first bombed

> We try to make the site Japanese-friendly by putting some signs in Japanese, and ensuring stories do not reflect their forefathers too negatively. We tell students we cannot blame the Japanese today for what their seniors did.

In general, according to Jeyathurai, the main problem is not so much the representations within the site since "most of the Jap visitors tend to receive the messages of the Museum well, some of them actually feeling apologetic for what happened". The issue is to get them interested to come down, Jeyathurai continued, "as for them, the war was a point of shame which they would rather forget; some are afraid they might be blamed". To be sure, I *have* observed cases where Singaporeans, after their visit, feel rage against not only the Japanese then but also the Japanese today for the crimes inflicted in the past. That notwithstanding, the main thing is that despite the attempts by the Museum to reign Japanese visitors in, they have generally decided to stay away from the site.

Hence, it is apparent that the Museum is indeed situated in a precarious position as how it represents the war can potentially become points of transnational resistance, some overt, as in the Americans who lobbied for representations of American servicemen in the war, and others via more latent means, such as the Japanese who simply chose to stay away from the site. It shows how the Museum is definitely open to critique from within as well as without the nation, a reflection that it is not only Singaporeans, but also foreign participants who have attempted to claim a stake within the memorial space of the site. On the other hand, controversies may not necessarily be bad and may even result in something positive. In fact, at times, it might be a platform on which diplomatic ties between nations can be formed or strengthened, especially between those that went through a similar experience together (Gough 2000). A few examples can be seen.

In the case of the Americans, the AAS (mentioned above) and the Museum have agreed to make the memorial service dedicated to the two nations' war dead an annual event. The potential of cooperation between nations is also exemplified in the form of inter-museum loans of artefacts such as that between the U.K *Imperial War Museum* and the Museum. Foreign dignitaries are also invited for formal visits (Plate 5.12). In addition, the Museum also receives artefacts from other countries as gestures of goodwill. In Feb 2003, the Museum received an honorary plaque from the New Zealand High Commission dedicated to the ANZAC soldiers who died (Plate 5.13), and in 2002, it received from the *Australian Commando Association* a picture of the MV Krait trawler, used in one of the war's successful small-scale raids in Singapore (The *Straits Times* 6 Jul 2002). These events are highly publicized and also seek to further diplomatic ties.



**Plate 5.12 (left) Museum director showing foreign dignitaries around the Museum**
**Plate 5.13 (right) Presentation of plaque to the Museum by the New Zealand High Commissioner**

## 5.5    Conclusion

A few things can be said from the preceding analysis of the representations of war within the Museum. First, it shows that, despite the state's attempts to make the site more "national", it has not been able to completely do so in the eyes of Singaporeans. While most of the "local" visitors interviewed do agree that the site is an important "national"

institution, there are others who do not feel the same way. The main reasons provided are that the Museum is either "too foreign", "too Christian" or "too ethnically-biased" to be truly "national". In analyzing the reasons behind thinking so, it is apparent that the root of the issue extends to the ways in which the "national" or "local" is defined. While those who deny the site it "national" status do so because they perceive such a site should encompass "*all* locals", "*all* religions" or "*all* ethnicities", those who do align with the state has tended to define the "local", as the state has, based on other factors such as the extraction of "universal" values, regardless of nationality, religion or race.

Further, it is also clear that it is indeed difficult for the Museum to totally overlay the old meanings of the former site, set up to commemorate foreign ex-POWs. This may be the result of a problem, as brought up in the previous chapter, associated with the multi-agency approach that the state has taken with regards to commemorating the war here. It is obvious that, despite the revalorisation of the site as a national site, STB, given its primary objective of promoting tourism, has not really been willing to compromise the significance of the site to foreigners who visit the site. One might argue therefore that, if there had been an overarching agency with the authority over other bodies in matters to do with war commemoration in Singapore, it would have been able to oversee the way STB had developed the Museum, and ensure that the task of making the site relevant to "locals" does not get deflected by other agendas such as tourism.

This problem of "localizing" the Museum is further compounded by the fact that Changi was indeed where *mainly* foreigners were interned, and where *mainly* foreign POWs had

suffered. The previous site made no pretences about it and it became a significant site for the ex-POWs. Even "locals" who visited the old site accepted this in their comments on the old site's visitors' books. Ironically, however, in valorising the new site as symbolically reflecting upon nation-building in Singapore, visitors have now begun to reflect upon how "local" the memoryscape is – even raising questions about the state's commitment to its policy of multiracialism – hence opening up a floodgate that may not be as easy to control in the light of the state's nation-building aims.

It is also evident from the above discussion that the Museum is a contested landscape not only from within but also from beyond the nation. This can be seen particularly from the instances of transnational contentions that have arisen. This shows that, despite the "reorientation" of the Museum as a "national site", it still remains a landscape where other nations may also wish to claim a stake. On the other hand, such controversies do not necessarily end negatively. In more than one case, it has been shown how, emerging from such incidents, the Museum has become a platform for strengthening ties, especially between countries that went through the war, hence reinforcing the potential of these sites as "landscapes of cooperation" (Gough 2000).

## CHAPTER SIX
# THE *REFLECTIONS AT BUKIT CHANDU* CENTRE

## 6.1    Official "reflections" in the making of a memoryscape

The *Reflections at Bukit Chandu* (henceforth known as the Centre) was officially opened

on 15 Feb 2002 (Plate 6.1). The task was taken up by the National Archives of Singapore

(NAS), an arm of the NHB, to set up a centre dedicated to remembering the battle at

*Pasir Panjang*, where one of the fiercest fighting took place prior to Singapore's fall.



**Plate 6.1    External facade of the Centre**

Sited at a ridge called *Bukit Chandu* (by virtue of the British opium-packing plant located

nearby then), it was a battle fought between the Japanese and the Malay Regiment (MR),

a "local" force made up of volunteers from Malaya (then including Singapore). The

Centre relates stories of heroism and desperation as the men of the MR valiantly fought

and held the Japanese aggressors at bay for two days on the ridge until they were out of

ammunition. Forced to fight the enemy in hand-to-hand combat, the whole MR was

almost completely decimated soon after being overpowered by a better-equipped

Japanese Army.

Battle accounts are related through storyboards, and further supplemented with artefacts formerly belonging to the men of the MR.[1] One prominent personality featured in the Centre is Adnan Saidi, an officer with the MR, who displayed strength of character as he led his men against the Japanese before he was sacrificed at bayonet point. Essentially, the Centre aims to allow its visitors to reflect upon the courage of the men and internalize these positive virtues within them (Brunero 2002) (Plate 6.2). The Centre's message, as put by Chio, an NAS officer, echoes the main narrative of the war:-

> [The Centre] stresses the importance of history and reflects upon the story of one of the crucial battles in Singapore before the surrender, something we cannot afford to ignore [as] the war helped pave the way for nationalism and the desire not to be under the British or Japanese anymore.



**Plate 6.2   A bronze tribute to the courage of the MR (outside the Centre)**

More significantly, by recounting the trials and ordeals of the MR during the war, the Centre simultaneously presents a unique opportunity to showcase the heroic acts of the "local" Malays, as a means of showing the war as one where the "locals" played a significant role as well, making it more suitably-positioned for all Singaporeans to relate. By illuminating one of the few battles that involved the "locals", the Centre counters the

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[1] The exhibits were either borrowed from overseas institutions like the Imperial War Museum, or were donated by surviving family members of the men of the MR.

foreign-centric nature of the war (and commemoration), making it more amenable for the state to capitalize on the war as a tool of nation-building. Hence, beyond the rationale of just commemorating the men of the MR, the Centre has been elevated as a site that all Singaporeans should visit – regardless of which ethnic group they belong to – given its relevance to the nation's history, as indicated in the speech made by the then Minister for Defence during the opening ceremony: "[the site] honour[s] and reflect[s] on the contributions and sacrifices of our forefathers who built up this country [as well as] nurtures an understanding of lessons from our [war] past".

Apart from the national aim of the Centre, it was also meant to fulfil a demand made by members of the Malay community for the war role of the Malays to be commemorated. This public outcry was largely brought about by the fact that the bungalow is located near where the actual battle took place, hence presenting the chance to relate their stories in greater detail (Brunero 2002). Presently, while there are memorials around Singapore where "local" stories are told, they tend to highlight the experiences of the Chinese. As the NAS director himself admits, "the records of those who fought in the war had been unbalanced in the past, focusing mainly on the role of the British and the Chinese". In that sense, the Centre, with its focus on the Malays, is an attempt to correct the imbalance accorded to the Malay community, reflecting the state's attempt to be "even-handed" in its commemoration. Still, the NAS director was quick to add that "the centre is not just about the Malay community fighting in the war; it is about the *universal* values of duty, honour and courage" (The *Straits Times* 27 Dec 2001, my emphasis).

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## 6.2    Nationalizing "reflections", representing the "local"

Despite the twin bases for setting up the site, perhaps not surprisingly, the "ethnic" pre-cursor for the Centre was clouded over by the more nationalistic motive. Within the Centre (and the official publicity that was produced since it opened), it has been positioned more as a product of the state's altruistic initiative in correcting a long-drawn neglect in telling the stories of what happened to the "locals" – including the Malays – in Singapore more generally. The playing down of the ethnic pre-cursor can be better understood in the light of the political situation within the nation. Given that Singapore is a plural, multiracial society, where sub-national affiliations such as race and ethnicity can potentially threaten the state's desired formation of a specifically Singaporean "local", in producing the Centre (or any other memorial for that matter), the state cannot seem like it was favouring one ethnic group over another.

Where the Centre is concerned, the paradox lies in that, while it helps to capitalize on a particular "local" force *vis-à-vis* the largely "foreign" nature of memorialization in Singapore, by virtue of the ethnicity of the men of the MR, it runs the danger of appealing only to the Malays. By not playing the ethnic card, the Centre would therefore have a better chance of appealing to *all* Singaporeans, Malay or otherwise. More importantly, it shifts the focus of the Centre being a place where specifically "Malay" heroes are honoured, to one where *local* heroes are represented ("local" here to mean *all* Singaporeans in general). The need for a more all-encompassing boundary of the "local" is also achieved in the Centre through various other "localizing" strategies of memory-making adopted within the memorial.

### 6.2.1 Choice of "locale" and the politics of naming

Locationally, the site capitalizes on the symbolic investment of the place being "where it happened". Although the precise battle location nearby has, since the event, been developed into a car park, the bungalow still allows for a view of the original site and, while the bungalow itself was merely an ammunition store for the British during the war, by association, a sense of colonial history may be conjured on the basis of the site.[2] As the then Secretary to the Ministry of Information and the Arts cited, "this bungalow was where the [MR] made their last desperate stand against the invading Japanese forces and hence it is appropriate that this is where they are honoured" (NAS 2002). The importance of the "locale" cannot be understated as it is primarily what the Centre depends on to evoke empathy from visitors. As the Minister for Trade and Industry puts it, "when you remember that the men had defended that ridge, and fought a withdrawal battle and died there, suddenly you feel that this is hallowed ground" (The *Strait Times* 15 Feb 2002).

The geographical emphasis of the memorial site is also apparent in the naming of the Centre. Initially, there were several names suggested for the site before the present one was chosen (NAS 2002). According to Brunero (2002: 9), "while some may argue that the use of *Bukit Chandu* does not do enough to create an immediate associational link to the battle or the [MR], it is in keeping with the local name of this area and so draws on the idea of connection to place and the glory days of the colonial era". Two alternative "readings" of the naming process can also be provided: first, by focusing on the name of the "locale" rather than the MR, it helps to shift the focus from the actors of the battle

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[2] Furthermore, the location is close to Kent Ridge Park where the original plaque was put up in 1995 to mark the site near where the battle took place. It is therefore already a site well-known to visitors.

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(the *Malay* Regiment) to where the event took place, playing down the ethnic-focus of the site. More significantly, by putting focus on the "locale", it helps to counter the misconception of the war as being a purely "global" event by reinforcing the idea that the battle *did* indeed take place on "local" grounds. In both "readings", the nation-building emphasis of war commemoration is apparent.

### 6.2.2   Spatial design and the art of simulation

In addition, the producers of the Centre also simulated aspects of the location as it was before to allow visitors to empathize with the experience of the men. Raivo (2001: 160) once said "the sense of an authenticity of an historical site does not exist fortuitously, but has to be maintained by tending the physical landscape". At the Centre, through the restoration of the bungalow to its former "colonial glory" (Brunero 2002) and the use of technologically-assisted simulations of battle-scenes, the producers also further capitalized upon the historical mystique of the site so as to allow visitors to still experience the imagined sights and sounds of the war. To further recreate the "simulacra of an earlier period" (Brunero 2002: 7), tapioca and *lalang* trees are planted around the Centre to recreate what it may have been like during the 1940s.

In terms of incorporating "body memory" within the site, NAS also took considerable efforts to trace and contact "local" veterans of war (i.e. surviving men of the MR) and their family members, like the son of Adnan Saidi, so as to seek further information about the battle, and seek donations of original historical artefacts previously belonging to the men of the MR. These individuals were also invited to the Centre during the official

opening as a form of, as Chio puts it, "respecting that in war, it was not only the people who fought that suffered, but also their family members who had to suffer the loss of loved ones as well". The use of these tactics serves two functions. First, it helps to involve the public in the making of the Centre so as to allow them a personal stake in the way the war is presented. Secondly, it also has the effect of making the site meaningful to *all* who visit. For example, in one section of the Centre, visitors are allowed to pick up "telephones" and hear individual testimonies of the war, in the hope that it would further tug at their heart-strings (Plate 6.3). By undertaking these strategies to raise the site's emotive appeal, it becomes a place where *all* Singaporeans could relate to the battle.



**Plate 6.3 Telephones to listen to war survivors' testimonies**

### 6.2.3    *Narrating the history of the Malay Regiment*

Another way in which the site is made more "national" is in its generalized coverage of history where a story is told within the larger context of war, in such a way as to dilute the specificities of the original story. Yet again, from being a Centre that specifically deals with the story of the MR, it has become more of a generalized war centre where the battle of *Pasir Panjang* was just one of many battles that took place. The strategy here is the "recasting" of a battle onto a larger template of the war as a means of diverting attention from one particular aspect of the war, in this case the Malay-centeredness of the

battle. According to another NAS officer, the Centre aims to "tell the larger story of defence in Malaya against the backdrop of the Japanese invasion plan" (NAS 2002). The official brochure of the Centre also reiterates that the site is to be a memorial for *all* who sacrificed their lives during the war in general (see Appendix H):-

> It is not just a WWII Museum. It is not about POWs only. Neither is it just a memorial to the last moments of the [the Regiment]. It is to be a place … for the people of today; a place to reflect upon the deeds of peoples who valued honour and strength of character above their own lives; a place that beckons all to reflect on courage and national worth; also a place to reflect on the cost of war; and, perhaps more importantly, the price of peace; and how far we have arrived.

This might also explain the emphasis on "universal" values attached to the Centre; the focus on the notion of "homeland", "rootedness", "heroism" and the general lessons to be learnt, as a means of relating the experiences of the MR within the context of a "broader scope of nationhood" before the birth of modern states in Southeast Asia (Brunero 2002). This strategy is salient in the light of controversies over the origins of the men of the MR (see below). The emphasis on the "universal" values displayed through the acts of the men of the MR who fought – such as "courage" and "duty" – are meant to be ideals reflected upon by *all* Singaporeans, hence in line with the nation's strategy of scripting national heroes for the people to emulate. The need to remember acts of heroism echoes a remark made by then Minister of Information and the Arts earlier on:-

> If we do not remember our heroes, we will produce no heroes. If we do not record their sacrifices, their sacrifices would have been in vain, the greatest strength we have as a people is our common memories of the past and … for without those memories, the next generation will not have the fighting spirit to carry on (Transcript of speech, 21 Jun 1997).

In addition to the "generalized" depiction of the war, the Centre has also been *deracialized,* here understood as an attempt to prevent a site from becoming too focused

on any particular ethnicity by also including representations of the other races. For example, the Centre includes an exhibition of the works of a former Chinese resident of *Pasir Panjang* who witnessed the bombings as a 10-year-old (The *Straits Times* 7 Feb 2002). This act of *deracialization* reflects yet another way of generalizing the war such that the ethnic focus is "watered-down", enabling the site to relate to all ethnic groups; to present the Centre as a "national" site relevant to all Singaporeans vis-à-vis a Malay shrine relevant only to a particular community.

Unlike the *Changi Chapel and Museum*, there is not much of a "performative culture" within the Centre. Still, apart from promoting the site as part of Learning Journeys, NAS also organizes shows where actors recreate the battle of *Pasir Panjang* at the Centre (Plate 6.4). Unfortunately, this has had to be discontinued "due to the lack of funds and low visitorship". In fact, the "locale" of the Centre away from the main road has become a barrier to more activities taking place given its inaccessible location, although there are plans to market the Centre as a package together with other war sites in the vicinity such as *Labrador Park*.



**Plate 6.4   Recreation of Pasir Panjang battle scenes at the Centre**

## 6.3     Transnational "reflections" over the "local" Malay Regiment

These strategies of simulation, "recasting" and *deracialization* adopted for the Centre cannot be understood solely as a response to the "internal" need for the (national) site to appeal to all Singaporeans. Apart from the concern that the site might alienate non-Malay Singaporeans by focusing too much on the Malays, there is also the "external" concern that foreign visitors, some of whom do visit the Centre, may not be able to relate to the site if it was too *localized*. In a way, the site has deflected this concern by making the Centre "generalized" and focused on "universal" values rather than those particular to the MR. For example, Chio mentioned that the site appeals not only with Malays but to anyone who finds their way to the site due to the "universal" reflections on war:-

> This site resonates not only with the Singaporeans but also Koreans and Chinese who saw it as a place where they can reflect upon war themes like survival and suffering, as they too experienced similar things during WWII.

There is also the inclusion of a prison cell mock-up (*ala* Changi Prison as a POW incarceration camp) (Plate 6.5). This is an exhibit where a room has been converted into a prison cell, with a scripted recording of the life of POWs in Changi in those days.



**Plate 6.5 A Prison cell (ala Changi Prison) mock-up**

This might have arisen due to the desire not to alienate returning war veterans and other foreign visitors.[3] In that sense, the strategies adopted have made it relevant not only to the Malays but to *anyone* who visits the place. This shows how "a memorial site [is] not just the representation of a particular worldview, but rather the result of complex negotiations and compromises", both internal as well as external (Cooke 2000: 450). In the case of the Centre, while the state wishes for it to be the vehicle on which national norms are forwarded, appealing to all Singaporeans, it still needed to steer carefully against ("local" and "global") forces that might disrupt its salience.

The transnational issue of war representations at the site is, however, not always clear-cut. This is apparent especially when considering one particular contention with regard to the MR not being Singaporeans even though the battle happened here. The MR consists of mainly soldiers from Malaya and not from the island, a subject of contention with regards to the claim for the Regiment.[4] As Helen, a Chinese in her 40s puts it:

> *Bukit Chandu* is all about the Malays but not all were Singaporean Malays, some were Malaysian Malays, there is disagreement on whether Adnan is Singaporean or Malaysian, each calls him their war hero.

This is a point of contention especially when one considers that Malaysia too has sought to honour Adnan Saidi in its own way. For example, the Malaysian Defence Ministry has named a tank after him as a means of remembering its "son" and his role during the war that paved the way for Malaysian independence. Given that this act took place after the

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[3] Interestingly, however, the cell-mock display is not reflected on the official brochure of the site. In the brochure, where the display should be, there is only a blank space indicating a store-room.
[4] Historically, Singapore was part of Malaya, a British colony. While Malaysia got its independence in 1953, Singapore was only granted self-rule in 1963 on the condition that it merged with Malaysia. Two years later, due to differences, Singapore was severed from Malaysia. The relationship between the two states that used to be umbilically tied historically has been fraught with constant problems even till today.

opening of the Centre, one wonders if the act was not a politically-driven manoeuvre to stake a claim over Adnan Saidi. In fact, the "battle" of claims has also found its way into the realm of movie-making. In 1999, a docu-drama was produced in Malaysia by the Defence Ministry to portray the "bravery of a Malay soldier, Second Lieutenant Adnan Saidi, who was killed in a battle with Japanese troops in Singapore during World War II" (The *Straits Times* 13 Nov 1999). Interestingly, Singapore too has its own docu-drama produced in 2001, '*Bukit Chandu*', as a means of showcasing the MR and the battle that happened at *Pasir Panjang* (see Appendix I).

Comparing the two dramas from both sides of the Causeway is also very telling. For one, the coverage of the war as scripted by the Malaysians had a heavier emphasis on the MR prior to their coming to Singapore, focusing on their families and their homes in then Malaya. The section on Singapore and the battle itself only occurred in the last bit of the movie, which is surprising given the significance of the battle in the whole "myth-making" narrative of the MR. For one, it was one of the last battles (if not the last) that took place before the British surrendered to the Japanese; secondly, it was one that almost decimated the whole MR in the end; and most relevant to their subsequent scripting as national heroes, the battle was *the* "main event" where the courage and fiery determination of Adnan Saidi and his men were brought to the fore. Compare this to the docudrama that was produced in Singapore. Notwithstanding the geographical emphasis of the title, this movie focuses on the story of the men almost wholly on the battle in Singapore, and minimally on what happened prior to that. This led Blackburn, a military historian, to conclude that:

> [T]he representation of the battle in the two movies reflects the different ways the countries remember the Regiment and make the heroism of the men their own; while the focus by Malaysia is historical, in Singapore it was more geographical.

In that sense, given that the men of the MR were mainly from the "mainland" of Malaya, possibly the most legitimate claim that Singapore has to their heroism lies in that they fought on Singapore soil. This could be why the emphasis on the *location* was so important for the Centre. It was the only way in which the nation could lay claim to what "is also not the exclusive property of Singapore" (Hong and Huang 2003: 223). Even the Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, noted this when he noted that Adnan Saidi "was not quite [a] national hero, having been tortured and killed during the Japanese Occupation for defending for the British [and the fact that] Adnan has been made a role model and an inspiration for the Malaysian armed forces as well would reduce his suitability as a national hero in Singapore" (cited in Hong and Huang 2003: 225) (Plates 6.6 and 6.7).



**Plate 6.6 Bronze bust of Adnan Saidi**



**Plate 6.7 Roll of honour for the men of the MR**

The fraught question as to whether *geography* should override *history* in the scripting of the battle at *Bukit Chandu* is not surprising given the context that the two contending nations are marked by "a generally tense official relation with both sides invoking nationalist sentiments by demonizing one another" (Hong and Huang 2003: 226). Politically speaking, therefore, far from rising to the occasion of becoming a "landscape of co-operation: the embodiment of the will to resolve regional conflict and nurture biological, social and economic benefits" (Gough 2000: 220), the Centre now has the potential of re-opening wounds that still fester between the two nation-states. There are, however, those, like Helen, who see quibbling over questions of "who" and "where" in the manufacture of claims and counter-claims as the petty bids of nationalism:-

> At that time, Malaysia and Singapore were not even in existence; we were still under the British. So why lay claim on them? This was a neutral body. What we want to look at is their courage … more important than who owns them.

This point actually sheds a bit more light on the notion of the defence of the "homeland" reflected within the Centre. The generic claim that the MR was actually fighting for what the men of the MR saw as their "homeland" rather than fighting for Singapore *per se* is salient insofar as it deflects any potential counter-argument from Malaysia that the Regiment's men were strictly Singaporean heroes, thus sidestepping tensions that might potentially erupt between the nations. Historically, this would also be a more accurate representation since present-day Singapore and Malaysia were at that point part of one and the same British Malaya. The focus on the idea of "homeland" within the Centre could therefore be seen as another way in which the producers of the landscape has made it generic enough for all visitors to the site, Singaporeans as well as Malaysians.

## 6.4    (Dis) Honouring memories of the Malay Regiment

Despite the above attempts at making the site "open" enough for *all*, the "reading" of a site as intended by the state may not necessarily be the same as those on the ground. According to Atkinson and Cosgrove (1998), "whatever their original rationale, symbolic spaces are not static but are dynamic sites of meaning and depositories for [a variation of] ideological bric-a-brac". This is evident in the way the Centre is popularly interpreted since its launch. While public reception has been quite positive (Brunero 2002), there are those who remain sceptical about the "true" purpose of the Centre. One accusation that has been levelled is summed up by Rahmat, 54 year-old Malay sales executive:-

> *Bukit Chandu* is a political thing; not meant to really remember the deeds of the Malays but to shut us up. The state always shut us up because we are Malays.

This is to say that the Centre is just the state's way of paying lip service to the Malays in a bid to appease them, and not an attempt to sincerely honour the men of the MR as national icons; an attempt to "remember", yet at the same time "forget" their role in war.

This has to be understood in the light of a perceived continuous marginalization of the Malays in Singapore. Over the years, the way the Malays have been discriminately treated has been a source of contention within the Malay community here. For example, it has been said that Malays have been "prevented" from participating in "sensitive" vocations within the SAF due to reasons of "national security" so as to "avoid placing Malays in an awkward position when loyalty to the nation and religion came into conflict".[5] It has also been suggested that the Malays have not been given the parity of status emblematic of Singapore's strategy of multiracialism, as seen by the way the

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[5] This is due to Singapore lying among Malay-Muslim nations, such that in times when it is in conflict with these nations, the Malays may behave more Malay-Muslims than as Singaporeans (Rahim 1998).

community has been marginalized socially as well as economically (Rahim 1998). In that light, it is not surprising that the Centre has been perceived by a few, especially within the Malay community, as a political move to further "silence" the Malays and their historical memory, in this case, as related to their role in the war.

The question then is: from the perspectives of several Malay visitors to the site, how has the Centre perpetuated this sentiment that they have been sidelined within the Centre in the state's quest for a national (war) memory? First, by virtue of its location, it has been brought up that the Centre is "too far to visit", lending itself to the criticism that it was intentionally done to prevent it from being too publicly visible. According to Rahmat, "it is too far away and there is no bus that goes there … I don't think people would want to walk all the way". While quite a few have managed to trudge up to the site, many of the visitors are those who reach there by buses. According to Chio, since it opened till up to Nov 2002, "out of the 22 000 people who came, only 20 per cent were walk-ins, the rest were those who come as part of in-coach tours.

Given the ethnically-charged political situation in Singapore, the far-out location of the site has, therefore, led some, like Rahmat, to believe that "this is just another way to ensure the history of the Malays are forgotten". In this case, the state's strategy of placing the Centre *in situ* – to evoke an emotional response from visitors – has been misinterpreted by some within the Malay community that, due to its inaccessibility, it is another means by which memories of the Malays have been sidelined. This shows that in relation to issues pertaining to the "national", the "racial" factor cannot completely be

ignored. In fact, by defining the "local" as divorced from issues of "race", it has also heightened awareness of the Malays to their position within society. It shows how the "power" of place can work for *as well as* against purposes of national place-making.

Generally though, visitors do still appreciate that the site is located close to where the battle took place (NAS 2002), [6] indicating that geography does matter in people's "reading" of memorials (Ben-Ze'ev and Ben-Ari 1999). For one, as Hamid, a Malay 29 year-old personal tutor, puts it, it helps visitors imagine what it was like during the war:-

> When you are coming up, you see the efforts put in by the Regiment to defend this ridge, how they struggled to go up and down the hill to fight. When you look out the bungalow, you see the street where the Japs came, you are able to capture almost as real as the situation back then.

According to Norman, a 31 year-old Chinese, the location is also seen as suitable given "the tranquil and peaceful hill-top and away from the hustle and bustle of the nearby main road". In addition, the site also provides "an amazing vista where you can view the sea and imagine directions from which the enemy would approach". Ironically, however, Rosman, a 33 year-old Malay visitor, still feels that "not much has been done to take advantage of the surroundings, since many vital sites along the way up are passed without an attempt to recognize them, like the opium factory which lent its name to the ridge" This is an indication that more can be done to mobilize the "place memory" of the site by including relevant sites in the area into the Centre's narratives.

The "placing" of the Centre near its original battle-setting has also been problematic in another way. It has made some of its visitors confused about where the battle actually

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[6] This is also reflected on some of the messages written within the visitors' books as well as in the many conversations I had with some of the visitors to the site.

took place. According to Linda, a Chinese in her 40s, who visited the place for the first time in 2002, "it is a weak link between the site and the Regiment; some said it was where Adnan stayed before the battle and now they say it is not, so which is true?" She also said that, "all along, we have been brought to believe that the battle took place at *Kent Ridge* but now they say it is here" (Plate 6.8). This confusion has tended to diminish the salience of the site hence diluting the Centre's potential to raise the emotive levels of visitors. The irony here is that, in capitalizing on "locale" as a draw, it has invited cynicism over whether it *was* the original site. Rosman even doubted the Centre was set up there due to the site's "authenticity":-

> If the site was set up here because it was where the battle took place, it has not made it clear; there is hardly mention that the battle was at the car park, giving the idea the battle took place at the bungalow; signs could be put up to indicate this.



**Plate 6.8   Another marker (at Kent Ridge Park) dedicated to the battle at Pasir Panjang**

The preceding discussion has shown how the immediate environs of any memorial site too should have been capitalized on if the state has been serious about really choosing the site due to its "authentic" location. Furthermore, it is also mentioned by some that there is no historical verification of the site being where it happened. According to Michael, also the former manager of the Centre, "the bungalow is basically a house, no action there,

they used it as a store; you can play up rumours like the Regiment spending the night at the bungalow but it cannot be verified totally and they remain rumours; you can make it exciting but it all remains hearsay". The significance of these rumours in playing up the so-called "mystique" of the bungalow cannot be under-rated. For one, it remains a question-mark – due to insufficient information – if the rumour is true, but the fact that it is still circulated shows how it is more important that a rumour is believed to be true. Second, notwithstanding who started the rumours, one can begin to ask if it was circulated to save the bungalow in the first place. Again this shows how, by focusing on the "locale", it has drawn criticism and sown confusion from the public.

An associated issue is the lack of promotion of the site. As Michael, who managed the site when it first opened, mentions, "accessibility is one, awareness is another; even the signboard is hidden by trees, who knows where *Bukit Chandu* is", referring to the only signboard on the main road put up to indicate the existence of the Centre. This lack of promotion has also served to fuel the idea that the siting of the Center is just a ploy in the conspiracy to keep the history of the Malays silent. As Junaidah, a Malay in her 40s, says, "with the Centre, [the state] can say they remember the Malays but it is no use if no one knows about the place". In that sense, the state has somehow managed to proverbially shoot itself in the foot in its attempt to negotiate the complex webs of history, geography and ethnicity in building a site to promote national memory.

The other contention with regards to the Centre is that it has not focused enough on the MR. Despite the focus on the MR soldiers who gallantly fought against the Japanese,

some felt that the focus has been somewhat "watered-down" with the emphasis on the other battles, and the "out-of-place"-ness of the jail cell is not lost on visitors. As Junaidah mentioned, "why is there a jail cell here? There was no jail at *Bukit Chandu*, or is there? They should have used the space more for the stories of the Regiment". Apart from that, one Malay visitor was heard to have remarked upon reaching the exhibit of the Chinese paintings, "oh no, not the Chinese again", a reflection that much of what is considered "local" and commemorated "locally" have focused on the Chinese. This again enforces the idea that it is not possible for Malays to be represented without *sinicizing* them in some ways. Hence, in *deracializing* the site to prevent it from being Malay-centric, the state has ensured that visitors to the site think specifically in "racial" terms.

In any case, some visitors felt that the space could have been better used to further elucidate the stories of the MR. As it is now, the Centre focuses on "universal" values that have been abstracted from the experiences of the MR, and less on its history. The inclusion of other elements of the war is therefore seen as truncating the story of the MR, hence the criticism that the Centre has not really fulfilled its purpose of honouring the men. In a way, this is an indication that, even after attempts to prevent the site from becoming ethnic-specific, by focusing on the MR as the main highlight, it has inevitably become so. According to Chio, "out of the walk-in visitors received each day, 90 per cent are Malays". The perception of visitors is that it is a site to honour the *Malay* Regiment, and not much consideration is given to the site as "national". Hence, on getting to the site and seeing that the story f the MR has been truncated, it leads to disappointment, further fanning the perception that the Malay community has, yet again, been marginalized.

A few other respondents surmised that the producers of the Centre have deliberately *deracialized* the site and underplayed the role of the MR for fear of setting up an (unwanted) precedent with the other races. While it is to their advantage to focus on the "local" aspects of the war, the Malay emphasis might lead other groups to ask for a site of their own, one pitfall of Singapore-style multiracialism. This concern is a real one; in fact, it has actually raised comments that the site should have included perspectives of other races as well. One Indian visitor said: "This place is interesting, but I cannot fathom why Indians are not featured as prominently here" (visitors' book). In narratives that have come out, there is also hardly mention of how the site was the product of lobbying by the Malays. The focus is on how the Centre is the brainchild of the state, whereby it then emerges the "hero" in setting the Centre for the Malays and recognizing their war roles.

## 6.5    Conclusion

The preceding discussion has affirmed Atkinson and Cosgrove's (1998: 30) thesis that any official "intention[s] to express a fixed and discrete set of collective meanings in the landscape is inevitably altered, rendered mobile and opened to alternative and [sometimes] even contradictory readings". This has been clearly shown in the above discussion.  One "reading" represents the site as an attempt to rectify the prior "foreign"-centric (and to a large extent *sinicized*) emphasis of "local" commemoration through its focus on the "local" MR. In appropriating the site as a repository of national memory, in the light of the global war and a plural society, there is an overwhelming sense that, while focusing on the MR as one of the "local" forces who fought during the war, the site does not become something associated only with the Malays. Focus was also put on locating it

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near where the event took place so as to capitalize upon the emotive appeal of the site. The Centre has also generalized the war (and its ethnic specificities) by "placing" it within the larger context of the war. The main aim is to *deracialize* the site and "recast" history so as not to alienate other visitors such as the foreigners and non-Malays who visit the memorial site.

This has also, unfortunately, invited another "reading" of the site as merely another way by which the history of the Malays is being marginalized. By virtue of its location, and the truncated coverage of the Regiment's history, the site has been seen as an attempt to ensure that the history of the Malays is marginalized. In that sense, it shows how the "nationalization" of a particular memorial site cannot be considered without also examining issues to do with race and ethnicity. Further, in illuminating how the MR is a contested commodity in the manufacturing of heroes between Singapore and Malaysia, the chapter has also shown how, in the context of remembering the war, contested interpretations can arise not only from within, but also from without the nation.

# PLACING THE "NATION", THE POLITICS OF SPACE AND THE PROBLEMATIZATION OF THE "LOCAL"

## 7.1    The three themes of war commemoration in Singapore

This thesis is concerned with "deconstructing" memorials dedicated to the remembrance of the Second World War in Singapore as a means of examining the processes that are involved in their production by the state. While the focus is on seeing these landscapes through the eyes of nation-building and the role of such memoryscapes in it, it also touches upon the perceptions of "local" Singaporeans with regards to how the state has attempted to revive memories of the war years. This concluding chapter summarizes the main arguments by discussing three main themes – the place of the "national" within the "global-local" nexus; mediation through strategies of memory-making; the politics of space and problematizing the "local" in the (un-)making of these war sites.

### *7.1.1   Placing the "national" between the "global" and the "local"*

According to Ashplant (2000: 263), "one of the central tasks of the nation-state in war commemoration is to maintain or secure the unity of the imagined (national) community, and its associated narratives and rituals, in the face of sometimes acute [global and local] divisions". This is an appropriate description of the process of war commemoration in Singapore. While the state had maintained its silence about the war in the early years of its independence, since the early-1990s especially, it has embarked on a process of mobilizing memories of Singapore's involvement during the global war as a means of forging a shared consciousness binding its citizens into an "imagined community" (Wong 2001). This was largely done through the appropriation of memories associated with the

war and its attendant memoryscapes on which its war history is (re-)written by the state as a means of triggering these events of the past for Singaporeans in particular.

However, in line with the statement made above, the process of war commemoration in Singapore in the light of its nation-building objectives does find itself in a precarious position between potential threats that emerge from within as well as without the nation. Globally, the nationalization of commemoration here is made difficult given that the war was a global one fought mainly by other nations, even though geographically, the war *did* take place in Singapore (Fujitani *et al.* 2001). Given this nature of the war, it means that commemoration in Singapore is somewhat transnational as well, as indicated by the fact that most of the visitors to these memoryscapes of war have tended to be foreigners, particularly "war pilgrims" such as war veterans and those who have family members either involved or sacrificed during the war.

This was also evidenced by the fact that commemoration here did tentatively begin as a means of meeting the demands of returning ex-POWs and their families to honour their fallen comrades. The role of STB in the process also reinforces the foreign-centeredness of commemoration at that time. This has had two impacts on the nationalization of the war (and its associated sites of memory) in Singapore. First, it has meant that the way the war is represented here has tended to focus on the experiences of foreigners involved in the war, hence making it difficult for "locals" to relate themselves more personally to the war, much less internalize, the national messages "written" onto them. Secondly, the transnational nature of remembrance thus far has also meant that, aside from

nationalizing the war for the "locals", the state would have to take into consideration the demands of these foreign visitors in the way the war is represented at these sites.

These problems have been further compounded by forces that have arisen astride divisions within the nation. For one, the plural nature of the society and the state's commitment to multiracialism has meant that the state would have to steer carefully in representing the war such that it does not marginalize any one group to the point of contention. Muddy interpretations of war, such as implications that some "locals" were working for the Japanese enemy, also have the potential to work against the state's ideal of racial harmony (Wong 2001). These factors threaten local commemoration in that they might potentially incite "racial tensions" within the nation. The long period of amnesia by the state has also ensured the war remains "forgotten"; removed from the everyday reality of its citizens. There is also a historical disjuncture between the war as symbolic of the "birth" of the Singapore nation – releasing Singapore from the wraps of colonialism – and the fact that the event took place even before Singapore became a nation.

Hence, in producing its national memoryscapes of war, given that "memory is [merely] a political construction of what is remembered – different for many groups in society" (Ritcher cited in Yea 1999), the state would have to negotiate multiple factors that have emerged both from "below" as well as "beyond". While the state wishes to clothe its commemorative enterprise in nationalist rhetoric to allow Singaporeans to better relate to the war, at the same time, it would also have to ensure that it does not draw flak from the international community, especially foreign visitors who still come to Singapore to pay

their respects to those sacrificed during the war here. Therefore, the "national" has inevitably been placed between the "global" and the "local", the state as mediator between "global" (foreigners) and "local" (Singaporeans) actors. In other words, in representing the war at these sites, the state would have to "reach" out to the "locals" while still maintaining the appeal of these sites for the global audience.

### 7.1.2   *"Localizing" strategies of memory-making in Singapore*

Another major theme within the thesis is in illumining the strategies of memory-making – towards the production of war memoryscapes – the state has adopted to mediate between the abovementioned "global" and "local" forces. One strategy lies in the mobilization of "place memory" via "locale" and (physical as well as symbolic) design. While *in situ* remembrance presents to visitors a sense of place where the war can be made powerfully present, not only for "locals" but foreign visitors as well, more significantly, as argued in the thesis, by focusing on geographical authenticity, it helps reiterate that, even though the war was mainly fought by foreigners, it nevertheless *did* take place on "local" soil, hence making it natural for the state to remember it as part of its national initiatives. The power of "locale" also lies in that, by focusing on "geographical imaginings" and taking visitors back in time, commemoration is made generic enough to appeal to *all.*

The move to "localize" the war in Singapore is also accomplished through memorial designs such as by modelling *Changi Chapel and Museum* after a "local" building, the *Changi Prison,* and shaping its environs into a "kampong" (village) setting, the way the "locals" used to live before the coming of the British (Chapter 5). By focusing on such

"localized" geographical imaginings, the commemoration of the global war is therefore made more "local" – constituted in a way that *all* Singaporeans can relate to regardless of ethnicity. Aside from physical design after material "local" landscapes, the symbolism behind memorials, as exemplified by the implied meanings behind the *Civilian War Memorial* (Chapter 3), also helps to drive home national ideologies – such as the importance of multiracialism – by pushing the war as something that *every* Singaporean went through, and therefore, something that *all* Singaporeans today should relate to.

In relation to the "performance of memory", the state has also tried to involve interested parties in its commemoration projects so as to promote these sites as well as allow people to feel as if they have a stake in the process (King 1988). At one level, the state involves foreigners by encouraging war veterans to donate personal mementoes and sponsoring them to attend memorial days in Singapore. At another level, Singaporeans are also invited to participate during these services. By bringing the veterans to these sites, or even "local" personalities such as Elizabeth Choy, it helps to encourage the participation of the "locals", at the same time enhancing their experiences through the use of "body memory". It is also argued that by getting "local" war heroes to participate in these events, it naturalizes the national ideology that the war *did* involve "locals" as well.

Ideological hegemony is also attempted through war narration and representations within these sites. For one, the state has increased the volume and depth of "local" representations of war at these sites to drive the point home that the "locals" too were there during the war and suffered just as foreign participants did. To counter the idea that

"locals" did not take up arms, the roles of selected "local" heroes who fought and displayed their bravery – such as Adnan Saidi, as exemplified in the case of the *Reflections at Bukit Chandu* Centre (Chapter 6) – are also displayed in the hope that it might soften the foreign focus of these memoryscapes as a result of the *intermediate* phase of war commemoration brought about mainly by the demands of foreign war veterans and families of those who fought in the war for the global event to be commemorated. In that sense while the sites continue to remain appealing to foreign visitors, it might also allow "locals" to better relate to the war and the sites.

To enable the sites of memory to appeal to *all* visitors irregardless of ethnic affiliations, the strategies of *universalization* and *generalization* have also been adopted. While the former is the act of extracting universal values from the war, the latter focuses on the general aspects of the story without going into specifics (see Chapter 6). Also, to prevent criticism that any ethnic group within the nation is marginalized in any way, the strategy of *deracialization* is adopted where producers of these sites co-opt ethnic sentiments by either ensuring that all the ethnics are represented at the site or not at all. These strategies play a role in emphasizing the idea that the war equally affected all and sundry, hence furthering the desire of the state to frame a "collective memory" out of the messiness of the war, promoting "unity across ethnic lines" (Fujitani *et al.* 2001: 8).

In that sense, memoryscapes become "objectified political symbols" (Fujitani *et al.* 2001) mobilized by the state to "concretiz[e] and naturaliz[e] particular preferred ideologies" (Kong and Yeoh 2003: 202). Through these strategies, memorials in Singapore can be

seen to be a hybrid phenomenon, a result of mediating various influences emanating internally from within as well as transnational pressures from forces that lie beyond the territorial map of the nation. Hence, memorial landscapes represent themselves as "landscapes of nationhood" – in the case of Singapore – as well as "landscapes of transnational commemoration" (Gough 2000) among countries involved in the war. In "deconstructing" and later reconstructing the sites, it is apparent that the sites are embodiments of the state's "ideological underpinnings" and "vested with latent meanings beyond their manifest functions" (Kong and Yeoh 2003: 202). It shows how the "nation" (and ideals of nationhood) can be constructed through the mediation of space.

### 7.1.3    The problematization of the "local"

However, what the state may wish to forward through the language of space may not necessarily be accepted by those for whom the "reading" is intended. While "the state articulates nationalist discourses and identities through landscapes, alternative ideologies also seek to compete for authority to assert their meanings and values (Kong and Yeoh 2003: 202). In the context of our discussion, memorials and state discourses "need the explicit cooperation of the people", without which marks their "ultimate futility" (Young undated: 67). This politics of space – which places public memory "in the domain of cultural politics where social meanings are [contested and] negotiated" (Till 1999: 255) – can generally be discerned in the preceding analysis of memoryscapes in Singapore.

Generally, it has been found that the state and the Singaporean population converge in thinking that the war years are indeed pertinent aspects of the nation's history, especially

the salience of the war in releasing Singapore from the colonial grip. Unfortunately, the state has not really succeeded in getting its citizens to feel a deeper affinity to these memoryscapes. For example, there is little evidence to show that "locals" would act upon their sentiments by visiting these sites or attending memorial services dedicated to the war. Even those who do seem to do it not for the specific purpose of honouring those who died during the event, some of them not even showing the proper respect due to such sites. The lack of a culture of commemoration among Singaporeans becomes starker especially when compared with the perceptions of foreign who tend to be more sombre and subdued when visiting these sites (Chapter 4), hence showing how a memorial can be stripped of "their self-importance" and their "self-naturalizing certainty" (Young undated: 74) where it does not receive the support of the "local" people (King 1998).

While for the most part, Singaporeans have remained nonchalant about the status of war commemoration here, content for it to be merely a *symbolic* part of their lives, there are a few who feel strongly in resisting the way the state has remembered the war. In fact, the simple act of not visiting these sites can sometimes represent a latent form of resistance to the state's nation-building initiatives. Some also felt that the nationalist rhetoric of these sites has not been accompanied enough by the desire to promote them to "locals". In the case of *Reflections at Bukit Chandu* (Chapter 6), this has led to a few, particularly within the Malay community, feeling that the memorial was placed there precisely to erase the memories of the Malays and their role in the war, indicating how memoryscapes of war can also be seen as potential "symbolic battlegrounds for long-standing disputes over national [and ethnic] identity" (Savage 1992: 5) and what they entail.

It is also found that, despite the state's attempts to make the war (and its landscapes) more "local", Singaporeans still see it as too catered to foreign visitors, as seen in the case of the *Changi Chapel and Museum* (Chapter 5). This is surely a reflection of how, through its memoryscapes, the state has not been able to completely naturalize their versions of "local" history, or maintain its ideological hegemony over the "locals" with regard to the way the war is represented. In fact, the nature of commemoration here thus far which has tended to privilege foreign over "local" memories may lead one to proclaim that commemoration in Singapore is merely a "global" act in the guise of a "local" one. As Thompson (1994, author's italics) puts it, "while *local importance* does attach to a specific place, the concept of *national importance* [seems to be] no more than a vague value judgement [and usually] capped by *international importance*".

Part of the problem, according to Appadurai (1995: 208), lies in that there has not been enough interrogation of the "local" in analyzing how the "national" is configured. Bearing that in mind, the thesis problematizes what is meant by the "local". In the context of commemoration, the state's idea of "local" is a reaction to the "foreignness" of its memoryscapes, and has been defined in terms of Singaporeans as a collective, glossing over internal *and real* ethnic fault-lines, pertinent in the context of plural nations where inhabitants are not tied by common bonds. While this enhances the salience of the war as "common memory" for a people with diverse origins and multiple affiliations, it has made it difficult to produce a text where all would be able to relate to the war and its commemoration on a deeper level. Further, as evident in the findings, divisions such as religion and ethnicity continue to be significant fissures within the nation; differences are

made evident on close interrogation of the state's strategy of amalgamating individuals and groups into a dualistic collective "us" against "them" (foreigners).

The reason for the less than successful attempt by the state to make the war relevant to "locals" today might also be attributed to the multi-agency approach that the state has adopted. For one, such an arrangement might effect in making remembrance secondary to other agendas that the respective state bodies may have within their official constitutions. While at one level, the Singapore state does seem to want to actively promote war commemoration, this aim in itself might be deflected at another level by other priorities that the respective arms of the state might have (as in the case of Nparks and the dilemma of choosing between its official objective of preserving the nation's green and conserving the war heritage of *Labrador Park*) (Chapter 4). In some situations, as exemplified in the case of the *Changi Chapel and Museum* and the heavy involvement of STB in it (Chapter 5), it might also serve to reinforce the already prevalent idea that (sites of) war commemoration in Singapore are catered primarily to demands of foreign visitors.

In exploring the issue of agency, the thesis therefore, recognizes that, in analyzing how memoryscapes in Singapore are produced by the state – within the context of its nation-building project – it is important not to simply see the Singapore state as a homogeneous body attempting to accomplish particular intents within a nation (cf. Yural-Davis 1997). As the thesis has shown, the state is, in itself, made up of various agencies that have their own primary objectives to fulfil, to which war commemoration is but a secondary concern. In that light, the call by a few Singaporeans for an overarching agency to be set

up to strictly undertake and oversee the task of war commemoration in Singapore (Chapter 4) – without the distraction of other sometimes conflicting objectives that present state bodies may have – might actually be a sensible one.

Hence, in the light of its nation-building objectives, the idea of the "local" in the Singapore context remains "an inherently fragile social achievement" (Appadurai 1995: 205). Within the three moments, as suggested by Appadurai (1995), that go into the making of "locality" – "local space", "local time" and "local people", while commemoration here has achieved the first two, the third remains more a longing than a reality, given that the state has not succeeded in producing "reliably local subjects" that embody the "local" instead of merely occupying it. In fact, instead of one *Singaporean* "local" which the state has attempted to project internationally, in real terms, Singapore is still made up of multiple senses of the "local" (Rodman 1992). In that sense, "sites of memory can come to act not only as spaces of representation and re-inscription of political events, but also as sites of [local] contentions in and of itself" (Yea 1999: 26).

## 7.2    Future directions

The present research project is but only the tip of the iceberg in relation to the range of topics that needs further research and exploration within the specific sub-field of memorial landscapes. Specific to Singapore, a more in-depth study on the way commemoration is perceived by foreign visitors – tourists and "communities of memory" (Irwin-Zarecka 1994) such as those who come here specifically for commemoration sake – is an interesting further development. While the thesis did tangentially touch upon this,

it was not possible to pursue this to any great extent. A good departure point would also be to work on other sites of war memory in Singapore so as to corroborate the findings of this thesis. In problematizing the "local", the present research has merely touched upon the variable of ethnicity. Future research should also explore other variables – such as gender and age – to see how definitions of the "local" can be further "deconstructed", and examine what impacts these have on how memorials are produced and consumed locally.

Going beyond Singapore, future research should also focus on war commemoration in other countries in Southeast Asia, an area that has remained largely *terra incognita* (Fujitani *et al.* 2001). Such research would then address the lack of geographical studies done with respect to the commemoration of the Second World War (or any other wars) in the Asian context. This is significant in two ways. First, it would provide useful comparisons with the Singapore case especially in the context of why different nations in Southeast Asia, for example, have reacted to the Second World War in such differentiated means. Secondly, it would provide a possible matrix on which specifically Asian forms of war commemoration can be discerned and constructed, which would serve as a useful and instructive comparison to the way the term "commemoration" and its associated practices are conceptualized in the western context.

# APPENDIX A: PROFILE OF OFFICIAL INTERVIEWEES

| S/N | NAME | DESIGNATION (AGENCY) | KEY RESPONSIBILITIES |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Pamelia Lee | Senior Director, Special Projects, Singapore Tourism Board (STB) | The brainchild behind the setting up of the original *Changi Prison Chapel* and the restoration of the *Changi Murals* (1988); STB officer-in-charge of setting up the new *Changi Chapel and Museum* (2001); key figure in many other war-related projects undertaken by STB; Among many other projects, she was also involved in the restoration of decision to restore and develop *Johore Battery* into a National Education site. |
| 2 | Ng Cheow Kheng | Senior Executive, National Parks Board (Nparks) | Key Nparks figure in commissioning the conduct of the historical research – and subsequent restoration of the former *Labrador Park Battery* (2001). |
| 3 | Sarin Abdullah | Manager, Historic Sites Unit (HSU); HSU is an arm of the National Heritage Board (NHB) | Presides over the general HSU committee to select key historical sites in Singapore to be marked; also oversees continuous research work to be done on these sites so as to update information on the plaques placed onsite |
| 4 | Juliana Yeo | Manager (Attractions), Sentosa Development Corporation (SDC) | Oversees the development and maintenance of many of the attractions in Sentosa, including *Fort Siloso* and the '*Singapore Surrender*' museum. |

| S/N | NAME | DESIGNATION (AGENCY) | KEY RESPONSIBILITIES |
|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | Tan Sok Kia | Manager (Attractions), SDC | Assists Juliana in the development of the many of the attractions in Sentosa, including *Fort Siloso*. |
| 6 | Chio Shu Yu | Assistant Manager, National Archives of Singapore (NAS) | Present officer-in-charge of *Reflections at Bukit Chandu*; responsible for overseeing the proper management and administration of the site; she is not stationed at the site but makes frequent visits to the site to ensure that all is running smoothly. |
| 7 | Michael Chong | Former manager, *Reflections at Bukit Chandu* (RBC); A tour guide who also conducts *Battlefield tours* in Singapore | Appointed to head the management of RBC on behalf of the NHB when it was first opened in 2002; this lasted for approximately 6 months before RBC was given back for NHB to manage directly. |
| 8 | Jeyathurai A. | Managing Director, *Changi Chapel and Museum* (CCM); General Manager, *Singapore History Consultants* (SHC), a historical research firm; and *Journeys Pte Ltd*, and inbound tours agency; also a military historian | Assisted STB in the research and setting up of the CCM before becoming Director of the site (2001); SHC was the first private firm to introduce *Battlefield Tours* in Singapore along with other heritage trails which later inspired and became part of NE *Learning Journeys*. Sits on the advisory council for the development of the *Labrador Park* Project for Nparks. |

| S/N | NAME | DESIGNATION (AGENCY) | KEY RESPONSIBILITIES |
|-----|------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 9. | Simon Goh | Manager, *Changi Chapel and Museum* (CCM) | In charge of the general day-to-day running of the CCM; also a tour guide. |
| 10 | Brian Farrell | Military Historian; Associate Professor of History, *National University of Singapore* (NUS) | Interest in issues to do with the Second World War as it happened in the Asia-Pacific region, especially in Singapore; was also involved in the historical research that was done for *Labrador Park* (2001). |
| 11 | Kevin Blackburn | Military Historian; Assistant Professor of History, National Institute of Education (NIE) | Has written a number of works pertaining to the commemoration of the Second World War in Singapore (see Blackburn 2000a, 2000b, 2002); Involved in the setting up of original *Changi Prison Chapel* and the new *Changi Chapel and Museum.* |

# APPENDIX B: PROFILE OF SINGAPOREAN INTERVIEWEES

| S/N | NAME[+] (GENDER/AGE) | ETHNICITY | KEY PROFILE |
|-----|----------------------|-----------|-------------|
| 1 | Sherrie (F/45) | Chinese | Outbound tour operator; graduate; single;<br>No personal or family war background. |
| 2 | Jacqueline (F/40s) | Chinese | Housewife, married;<br>Mother/father/three elder siblings went through the war as civilians. |
| 3 | Glenda (F/40) | Chinese | Housewife, diploma, married;<br>No personal or family war background. |
| 4 | Helen (F/40s) | Chinese | Heritage facilitator/tourist guide, 'A'- levels, married;<br>Father/mother/grandfather/uncle went through the war as civilians. |
| 5 | Linda (F/40) | Chinese | Management consultant, post-graduate, married;<br>Grandparents/parents went through the war as civilians. |
| 6 | Norman (M/31) | Chinese | Senior executive, graduate, married;<br>No personal or family war background. |
| 7 | Yasmine (F/27) | Chinese | Business development manager/heritage trail facilitator, graduate;<br>No personal or family war background. |

| S/N | NAME[+] (GENDER/AGE) | ETHNICITY | KEY PROFILE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | Kevin (M/26) | Chinese | Sales executive, graduate, single;<br>No personal or family war background. |
| 9 | Charmaine (F/25) | Chinese | Civil servant, graduate, single;<br>No personal or family war background. |
| 10 | John (M/20s) | Chinese | Financial consultant, graduate, single;<br>No personal or family war background. |
| 11 | Rohan (M/50s) | Malay | Immigration supervisor, 'O' levels, married;<br>Parents went through the war as civilians. |
| 12 | Rahmat (M/54) | Malay | Sales executive, 'O' levels, divorced;<br>Parents went through the war as civilians. |
| 13 | Junaidah (F/40s) | Malay | Factory supervisor, 'O' levels, single;<br>Parents went through the war as civilians. |
| 14 | Rosman (M/33) | Malay | Researcher, graduate, single;<br>No personal or family war background. |

# APPENDIX B: PROFILE OF SINGAPOREAN INTERVIEWEES (cont'd)

| S/N | NAME[+] (GENDER/AGE) | ETHNICITY | KEY PROFILE |
|-----|----------------------|-----------|-------------|
| 15 | Hamid (M/29) | Malay | Personal tutor/translator, graduate, married; No personal or family war background. |
| 16 | Ajit (M/32) | Indian | Arts recruiter, graduate, single; No personal or family war background. |
| 17 | Prema (F/30s) | Indian | Magazine journalist, Postgraduate, single; No personal or family war background. |

[+] Pseudonyms

# APPENDIX C: PROFILE OF FOREIGN INTERVIEWEES

| S/N | NAME[+] (GENDER/AGE) | NATIONALITY | REMARKS |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Patrick (M/48) | Slovenian | Tourist; in Singapore for a few days; spent two hours in the *Changi Chapel and Museum* en route to airport; came with Elena (wife); Had family involved in wars back in Slovenia. |
| 2 | Elaine (F/41) | Slovenian | Tourist; came with Pater; Had family members involved in wars back in Slovenia. |
| 3 | Corey (M/50s) | American | First visited the *Changi Prison* and original *Changi Prison Chapel* in 1990; been in Singapore 13 years; now a bio-technician working in Singapore; have visited many war sites in Singapore (CCM, *Fort Siloso, Johore Battery, Battlebox* etc). |
| 4 | Jackson (M/60s) | American | Tourist/ engineer; in Singapore to visit friends; visited *Changi Chapel and Museum, Fort Siloso, Battlebox*; he was a child back in the US during the Second World War; grandparents and parents also went through the war. |
| 5 | Randy (M/20s) | British | Tourist; in Singapore on holiday, has been in Singapore for a week and visited the *Changi Chapel and Museum; Fort Siloso.* |

| S/N | NAME[+] (GENDER/AGE) | NATIONALITY | REMARKS |
|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | Edward (M/30s) | British | Tourist; in Singapore for a few days, visited *Changi Chapel and Museum and Battlebox.* |
| 7 | Haz (M/60s) | Israel | Tourist; in Singapore for a few days; only visited *Changi Chapel and Museum* due to the lack of time. |
| 8 | Jamie (M/49) | Israel | Tourist/IT programmer; in Singapore for a few days; only visited *Changi Chapel and Museum* due to the lack of time. |
| 9 | Ricky (M/50) | American | Tourist/manager; been in Singapore for a number of years; have visited the *Reflections at Bukit Chandu.* |
| 10 | Mark (M/30) | Australian | Tourist/journalist; been in Singapore for a while and has visited some of the sites associated with the war years (e.g. *Fort Siloso*). |
| 11 | Phillip (M/80s) Interview via email | British | Secondary education; father and uncles fought in Burma, Eritrea, North Africa and Italy; fought in the war and was incarcerated at *Changi* for a few months before being sent to the Indonesia; visited Singapore several times and visited many of the war sites, including *Changi Chapel and Museum, Fort Siloso, Berhala Reping* (a battery in Sentosa) and *Pulau Sajahat* etc; |

| S/N | NAME[+] (GENDER/AGE) | NATIONALITY | REMARKS |
|---|---|---|---|
| 12 | Candice (F/50s) Interview via email; First met her when I was a curator with the *Changi Chapel and Museum* when she was leading a group of people to various sites of war in Singapore | British | 'A' Level, married; never directly involved in the war but her father was once taken prisoner when Singapore; her father died in 1943 during the Occupation; since then, has been actively involved with *COFEPOW (Children of Far East Prisoners of War)*, an association of family members of those who had lost loved ones during the war. She visits the region regularly and organizes trips for the association. |
| 13 | Jimmy (M/70s) Interview via email | British | Secondary education; married; fought in the war and spent some time at *Changi* en route to another incarceration point. Has visited Singapore a few times and gone to sites such as the original *Changi Prison Chapel*; planning to come to Singapore again if he has the chance to in the future. |
| 14 | Billy (M/70s) Personal conversation | British | Bernard fought in the war and was incarcerated in Singapore for a short while; has visited both the original *Changi Prison Chapel* (when he was here in 1995) and the new *Changi Chapel and Museum* (when he was here again in 2001). He was travelling with a group of other ex-POWs upon invitation by STB to grace the official opening of the CCM. |

[+] Pseudonyms

# APPENDIX D: SAMPLE OF FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE

*STUDY ON COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND*
*LANDSCAPES OF WAR COMMEMORATION IN SINGAPORE*

I am a student with the Department of Geography, National University of Singapore. This survey is part of a postgraduate research project to study general perceptions of Singaporeans with respect to how significant events associated with World War II and the Japanese Occupation in Singapore are remembered through our physical and social landscapes. I am very interested in your opinion and would really appreciate it if you could help me by answering the following questions. Thank you!

1. Do you think it is important to remember the war years (1941-1945) in Singapore?

      **Y / N**       *(If no, go to 2 and __STOP__)*       *(If yes, go to 3 and proceed)*

2. If no, why not? (<u>Select up to **two** main reasons</u>)
      X      It is better to forget events associated with atrocities and death
      X      It is of no economic value
      X      It associates Singapore with shame for losing the war
      X      It involved mainly foreigners and not the local population
      X      Nobody would be interested, so why bother?
      X      Others (please specify: _____)

3. If yes, why? (<u>Select up to **two** main reasons</u>)
      X      To remember those who fought and/or were sacrificed
      X      To allow future generations to appreciate our history/heritage
      X      To learn from our mistakes in case the threat of war comes again
      X      To attract foreign visitors/tourists into Singapore
      X      To bond Singaporeans under one common memory and identity
      X      Others (please specify: _____)

4. Who do you think should be **MOST** responsible in leading war commemoration in Singapore? (<u>Choose **1** only</u>)
      X      Government (e.g. MITA, URA, NHB etc)
      X      Community groups (e.g. SCCC, SINDA, MENDAKI etc)
      X      Foreign groups (e.g. British, Australians, Americans, etc)
      X      Non-governmental organizations (e.g. Singapore Heritage Society etc)
      X      Others (please specify: _____)

5. Is it important for a memorial site to be sited near the original location where the war-related event commemorated actually happened?

      **Y / N**

6. Why?
_____

7. Do you think there is **ENOUGH** promotion of these sites of war commemoration to Singaporeans?

      **Y / N**

8. Which of the following are the most effective ways of remembering the war in Singapore? (Select the **top three** ways)
- a)     Monuments/Statuaries (e.g. Civilian War Memorial etc)
- b)     Museums (e.g. Reflections at Bukit Chandu Museum etc)
- c)     War Cemetery (e.g. Kranji War Cemetery etc)
- d)     Historic War Plaques and storyboards (e.g. Sarimbun landing site plaque etc)
- e)     Memorial ceremonies/services dedicated to those who fought during the war
- f)     Books and other literature (e.g. 'Price of Peace' etc)
- g)     Television/movies (e.g. 'A War Diary'; 'Pearl Harbour' etc)
- h)     Internet (e.g. cybersites on war and remembrances of war)

Of the selected three, which is the most effective way of remembering the war and why?

_____

_____

9. Do you think more should be done to preserve original war sites (e.g. Labrador tunnels, Johore Battery, Fort Siloso) in Singapore as part of our important heritage?

      **Y / N**   *(If yes, go to 11 and proceed)*       *(If no, proceed)*

10. If not, why? (Select up to **two** main reasons)
- X     Limited space/land in Singapore
- X     Expensive to maintain/upkeep
- X     Many of these sites too inaccessible
- X     Not an important concern at all
- X     Others (please specify: _____)

11. Rank the following aspects of our local heritage in terms of high important they are to be remembered with respect to Singapore's national identity (**1-5, 1** being the most important)

- ____     World War II heritage (e.g. Johore Battery, Fort Siloso, Labrador etc)
- ____     Ethnic/community heritage (Kampong Glam, Chinatown, Little India etc)
- ____     Civic/colonial heritage (Supreme Court, City Hall etc)
- ____     Natural heritage (Botanic Gardens, Bukit Timah Nature Reserve etc)
- ____     Others (please specify: _____)

12. Have you visited any sites of war commemoration (e.g. Changi Chapel and Museum, Battlebox, Fort Siloso) within the last two years?

      **Y / N**       *(If no, please proceed to 13 and skip to 16)*
                         *(If yes, please skip to 14)*

13. If not, why? (<u>Choose maximum of **2** options</u>)
        X      Lack of time
        X      Poor knowledge about these places
        X      Lack of interest
        X      Mainly catered for foreigners and not the locals
        X      Others (please specify: _____)

14. What was your main motivation for visiting these sites? (<u>Choose max of **2** options</u>)
        X      To better understand and learn more of our history
        X      To see for myself what war/Occupation sites look like
        X      To personally commemorate those who fought/died during war
        X      As part of a school/group field trip/tour (e.g. Learning Journeys)
        X      Others (please specify) _____

15. Do you feel that every Singaporean should visit these sites as part of National Education?

    **Y / N**

16. To what extent do you agree with the following statements of what should be represented on landscapes of war commemoration in Singapore?
(1 – Strongly Agree; 2 – Agree; 3 – Disagree; 4 – Strongly Disagree)

(a) There should be more focus on Singaporeans than foreigners who fought during the war
        **1…………….2…………….3…………….4**

(b) There should be equal focus on all who were involved in the war regardless of nationality
        **1…………….2…………….3…………….4**

(c) There should be equal focus on the experiences of all the different races in Singapore
        **1…………….2…………….3…………….4**

(d) There should be equal representation to the experiences of both men and women
        **1…………….2…………….3…………….4**

(e) They should highlight experiences of ordinary people as well as the soldiers
        **1…………….2…………….3…………….4**

(f) There should be focus on those who died during war as well as those who survived
        **1…………….2…………….3…………….4**

(g) There should be more focus on individuals than groups (e.g. soldiers, Singaporeans etc)
        **1…………….2…………….3…………….4**

17. Have you ever attended any memorial services dedicated to those who died in the war?

    **Y / N**

18. Should sites of war commemoration be promoted to as tourist attractions as well?

     **Y / N**   *(If yes, proceed)*         *(If no, go to 20 and proceed)*

19. If yes, why?
- X     To bring in revenue for the maintenance of these sites
- X     To allow tourists to know more about our war history
- X     To instill a sense of pride from outsiders knowing our history
- X     To justify preserving these places in the first place
- X     Others (please specify: _____)

## PERSONAL DATA

20) Did you live through or have family members/friends who lived through the years of the war/Occupation (1941-1945)?

     **Y / N**

21) Age:
- X     <20
- X     21-30
- X     31-40
- X     41-50
- X     51-60
- X     >60

22) Gender:
- X     M
- X     F

23) Educational Background:
- X     No formal education
- X     Primary
- X     Secondary
- X     Tertiary

24) Marital Status:
- X     Single
- X     Married
- X     Divorced
- X     Others (please specify)

25) Ethnicity:
- X     Chinese
- X     Malay
- X     Indian
- X     Others (please specify: _____)

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*THE END\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

# APPENDIX E:
# LIST OF WAR-RELATED HISTORIC SITES IN SINGAPORE MARKED BY HSU
## (AS OF 15 FEBRUARY 2002)

(Source: *Heritage Service Division* leaflet 2002)

1.    Sarimbun Beach Battle site
2.    Kranji Beach Battle site (Kranji Reservoir Park)
3.    Jurong-Kranji Defence site (Jurong West Neighbourhood Park)
4.    Bukit Timah Battle site (Bukit Timah Nature Reserve)
5.    Pasir Panjang Battle site (Kent Ridge Park)
6.    Labrador Battery Site (Labrador Park)
7.    Bukit Batok Memorial site (Bukit Batok Nature Park)
8.    Indian National Army Monument site (Esplanade Park)
9.    *Sook Ching* Centre site (Hong Lim Complex)
10.   Kempetai East District Branch site (Orchard Road YMCA)
11.   Japanese Propaganda Department Headquarters (Cathay Building)
12.   Changi Beach Massacre site
13.   Punggol Beach Massacre site
14.   Sentosa Beach Massacre site (Serapong golf course, Sentosa)
15.   Ching Kang Huay Kuan
16.   Machine gun Pill-box (Pasir Panjang Road)
17.   Alexandra Hospital
18.   Sime Road Pill-box and Flagstaff House (Sime Road)
19.   Pulau Sajahat
20.   Outram Prison
21.   Johore Battery (Cosford Road, Changi)

**Notes:**

1.    1-14 were marked in 1995 as part of the 50th Anniversary of the end of WWII.

2.    Apart from WWII and military sites, HSU also marks other types of heritage sites, i.e. Nation-building sites, Economic heritage sites, Social/Cultural/Community sites, and Pioneer Educational Institution sites. Altogether, HSU has marked a total of 59 sites (inclusive of the above war-related sites).

3.    HSU is a multi-agency committee consisting of representatives from the Ministry of Information and the Arts, Land Office, National Parks Board, Singapore Tourism Board, Ministry of Defence (Military Heritage Branch), Public Works Department Consultants, and Urban Redevelopment Authority; and chaired by the Chief Executive Officer of the National Heritage Board. The main function of HSU is to identify historic sites and buildings worthy of marking and oversees the marking of these sites.

# APPENDIX F: OFFICAL BROCHURE OF
## *CHANGI CHAPEL AND MUSEUM*



**General Information:**
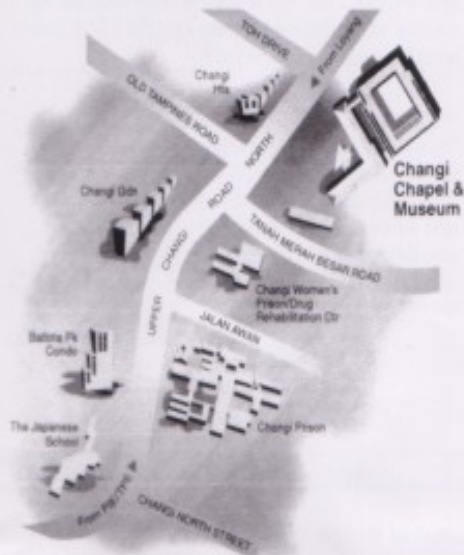
| | |
|---|---|
| Location | : 1000 Upper Changi Road North Singapore 507707 |
| Operating Hours | : 9:30am to 4:30pm daily |
| Admission | : Free |
| Getting There | : By MRT and Bus • SBS Bus No. 2 from Tanah Merah MRT (E9), or • SBS Bus No. 29 from Tampines MRT (E11) alight at the bus stop after the Changi Museum. |
| In-house Tours | : Visitors can take a 45-minutes guided tour (in English) that is ongoing at S$6.00 per adult and S$3.00 per child (below 12) |
| Customised Tours / F & B | : Pre-arranged / package tours and meals can be arranged for various groups, events or personal functions. For rates and bookings, please contact the Museum. |
| Telephone | : (65) 6214 2451 |
| Facsimile | : (65) 6214 1179 |
| Email | : changi_museum@pacific.net.sg |

## The Changi Museum

The Changi Museum is dedicated to all Prisoners-of-War and internees who were incarcerated in Singapore during World War II.

The Museum honours the memory of the many who faced adversity with spirit and commitment. It inspires visitors with stories of courage and sacrifice that occurred in those painful years.

The Museum fulfills many roles. It documents the events of the Japanese Occupation. It is an important educational institution and resource centre, and for the POWs and their families, it is a site that allows closure of the many emotional scars of the war years.

## Wartime Artistes

- During the 3½ years of incarceration, civilians and POWs kept their spirits and morale up in various ways. Some of them sketched and painted what life was like behind bars.
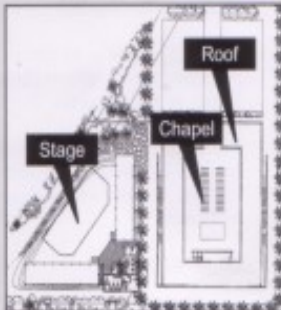
- This section showcases wartime artists such as Gladys Thompkins, Harold Young and William R. M. Haxworth who drew over 400 sketches of daily life in Changi.

### Available Facilities

## Rental of Space

The Changi Museum offers you several sites that can be used for a variety of functions and events. These include;

- The Chapel
  (For weddings and religious ceremonies)

- The Roof Top
  (Cocktails and parties)

- Stage
  (For talks, presentations and special occasions)

(For more information on the rates, please call us at 6214 2451)

## Changi Museum Gift Shop

- An impressive range of books depicting various aspects of the Japanese Occupation, including documented works, war diaries, fiction. Also included is a range of books about South East Asia and Singapore.

- Other items on sale include original Changi Museum souvenirs.

## The Changi University (Library / Research Centre)

- To promote academic interest, the library has a collection of books about Singapore during World War II, some of which are no longer in print.

- The Museum is actively searching for books about the war in Singapore and Malaya.

- The public is invited to donate their books to add to this special collection.

## The Chapel

☐ Originally built in 1988, the Chapel was sited next to Changi Prison. It was to be a representative replica of the many chapels that were found in various parts of Singapore and Malaya during the Japanese Occupation from 1942 to 1945.

☐ The chapel was transferred to the current site at the Museum and re-consecrated on 15th February 2001. Sunday services are conducted at 9.30am and 5.30pm and are open to the public.

## Museum Exhibits

Through maps, letters, photographs, drawings and personal items, this Museum tells the moving story of over three years of war and imprisonment for more than 50,000 civilians and soldiers in Changi, Singapore.

## The Changi Murals

☐ The Changi Murals were drawn by Stanley Warren who was a POW here.

☐ At the Museum, you can see a full-size replica of the original that can still be found in Block 151, Changi Camp. The camp was a POW hospital during the Occupation.

☐ The story of the murals provides an insight into the lives of the POWs and the trials and tribulations which they face.

## Wartime Artistes

☐ During the 3½ years of incarceration, civilians and POWs kept their spirits and morale up in various ways. Some of them sketched and painted what life was like behind bars.

☐ This section showcases wartime artists such as Gladys Thompkins, Harold Young and William R. M. Haxworth who drew over 400 sketches of daily life in Changi.
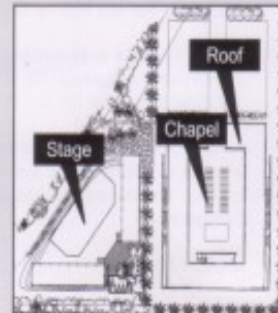
## Available Facilities

### Rental of Space

The Changi Museum offers you several sites that can be used for a variety of functions and events. These include:

☐ The Chapel
*(For weddings and religious ceremonies)*

☐ The Roof Top
*(Cocktails and parties)*
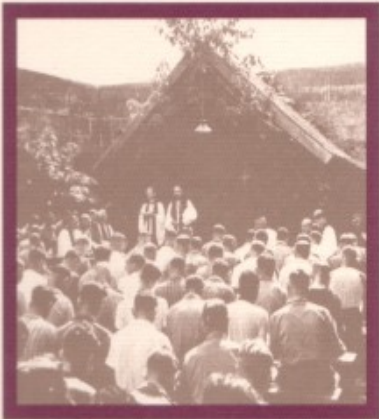
☐ Stage
*(For talks, presentations and special occasions)*

*(For more information on the rates, please call us at 6214 2451)*

# APPENDIX G:
# INVITATION CARD/ PROGRAMME TO A SERVICE
# HELD AT THE *CHANGI CHAPEL AND MUSEUM*

## PROGRAMME

### 15 FEBRUARY 2001



**THE CHANGI CHAPEL & MUSEUM**
1000, Upper Changi Road North • Singapore 507707

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## PROGRAMME

6.45pm "Lifting our Voices in Remembrance"
by the Peter Low Choir
Chapel Courtyard

7.15pm Arrival of Guest-of-Honour
Minister for Trade and Industry,
BG (NS) George Yeo

7.20pm Dedication Service
by Reverend Henry Khoo,
Honorary Prison Chaplain

8.00pm Placing of Wreaths at the Altar
by Country Representatives

The Last Post, Observance of One-Minute Silence
followed by The Rouse
by Singapore Armed Forces Veterans' League

Tour of the Changi Museum

9.00pm The Changi Long Table Dinner

10.00pm The Evening Ends

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### DEDICATION MESSAGE

"May this Chapel Bring Solace, Strength and Comfort to
Those who Fought Courageously for this Country, and to
Those Most Dear to Them"

### PROGRAMME

6.45 pm **GUEST REGISTRATION**
" Lifting Our Voices In Remembrance"
Peter Low Choir at the Chapel Courtyard

7.15 pm **ARRIVAL OF
GUEST-OF-HONOUR**
Minister for Trade and Industry,
BG (NS) George Yeo

· DEDICATION SERVICE ·

7.45 pm **TOUR OF THE
CHANGI MUSEUM**

· THE CHANGI LONG TABLE DINNER ·

10.00 pm **THE EVENING ENDS**

---

" The Changi Chapel & Museum Committee cordially invite

Mr HAMZAH MUZAINI

to the Official Dedication of the New Changi Chapel & Museum."

TIME: 6:45 PM
DATE: 15 FEBRUARY 2001, THURSDAY
VENUE: 1000 UPPER CHANGI ROAD NORTH
SINGAPORE 507707
DRESS CODE: MILITARY UNIFORMS OR
LOUNGE SUIT
(MEDALS MAY BE WORN)

RSVP
Nelyn Nah at 8313 889 or Nelyn_Nah@stb.gov.sg by 5 February 2001.

Guests are advised to park at the PWD Airport Development Division carpark (1800 Upper
Changi Road North Singapore 507695) where a shuttle bus will ferry guests to the Changi
Chapel & Museum.

# APPENDIX H: OFFICIAL BROCHURE OF *REFLECTIONS AT BUKIT CHANDU* CENTRE



We are located at:
31-K Pepys Road Singapore 118458

Transport:
**SBS** 10, 30, 51, 143
**TIBS** 176, 188
**MRT** Buona Vista and Red Hill

Opening hours:
Tuesdays to Sundays 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Closed on Mondays

Free admission until

Colman Chua
63327978

NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD

REFLECTIONS AT BUKIT CHANDU
A World War II Interpretative Centre

A dark hill... brandished orange
by the menacing flames of war.

A silent hill... roused
by the wild whizzing of bullets,
and the dying cries of the wounded.

A desperate hill... defended
by unyielding determination and courage.

NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD

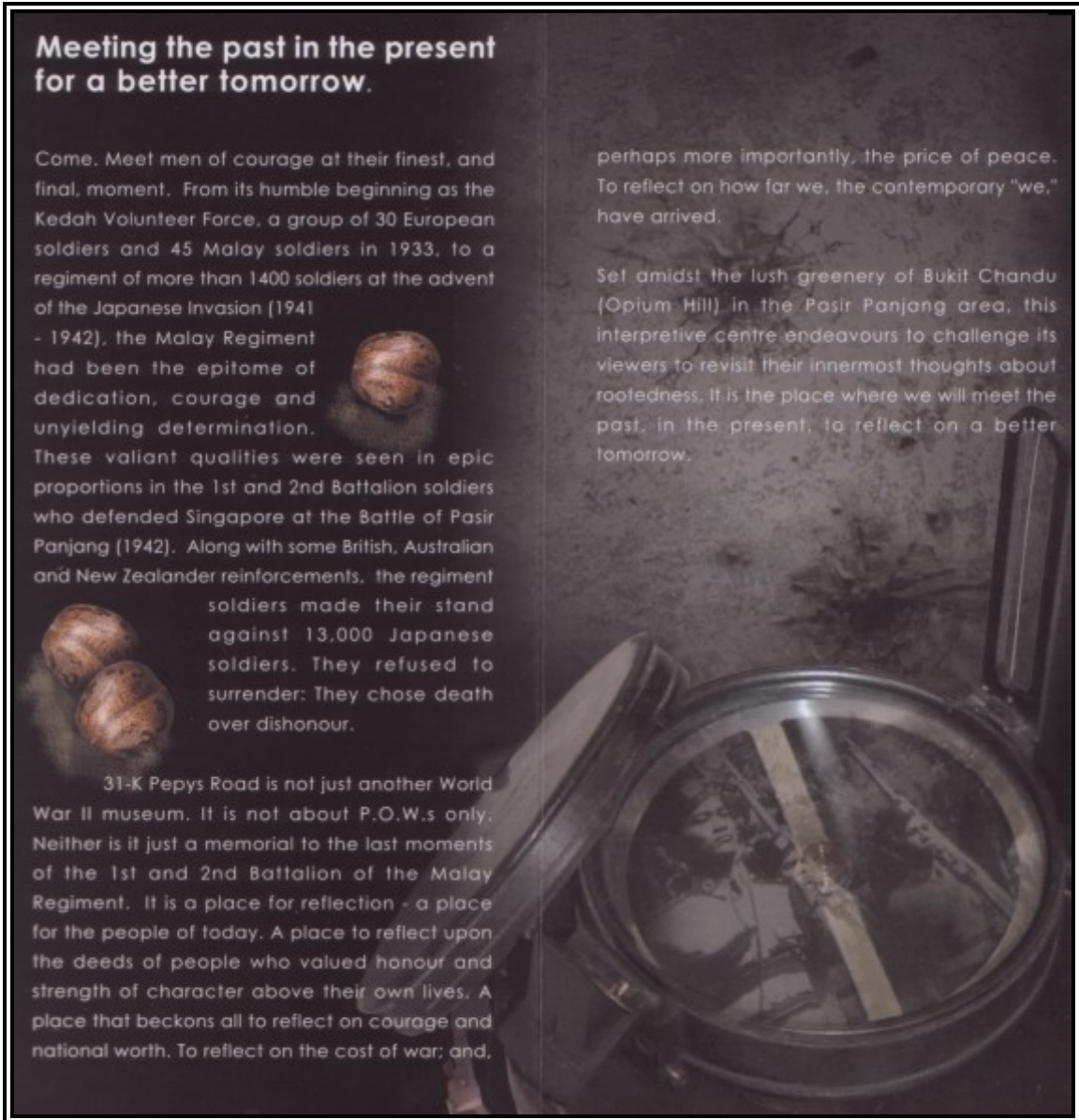## Meeting the past in the present for a better tomorrow.

Come. Meet men of courage at their finest, and final, moment. From its humble beginning as the Kedah Volunteer Force, a group of 30 European soldiers and 45 Malay soldiers in 1933, to a regiment of more than 1400 soldiers at the advent of the Japanese Invasion (1941 - 1942), the Malay Regiment had been the epitome of dedication, courage and unyielding determination. These valiant qualities were seen in epic proportions in the 1st and 2nd Battalion soldiers who defended Singapore at the Battle of Pasir Panjang (1942). Along with some British, Australian and New Zealander reinforcements, the regiment soldiers made their stand against 13,000 Japanese soldiers. They refused to surrender: They chose death over dishonour.
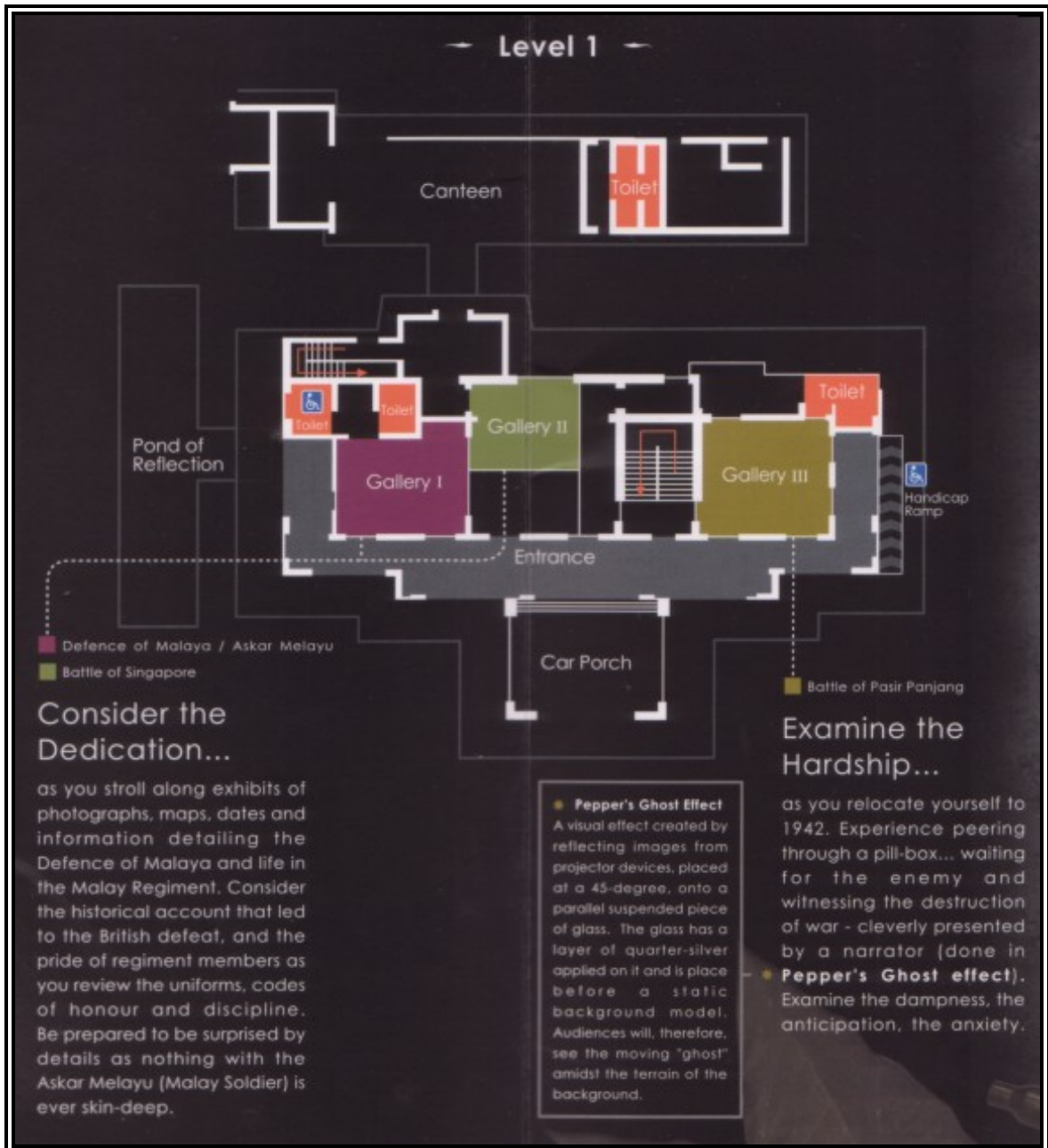
31-K Pepys Road is not just another World War II museum. It is not about P.O.W.s only. Neither is it just a memorial to the last moments of the 1st and 2nd Battalion of the Malay Regiment. It is a place for reflection - a place for the people of today. A place to reflect upon the deeds of people who valued honour and strength of character above their own lives. A place that beckons all to reflect on courage and national worth. To reflect on the cost of war; and, perhaps more importantly, the price of peace. To reflect on how far we, the contemporary "we," have arrived.
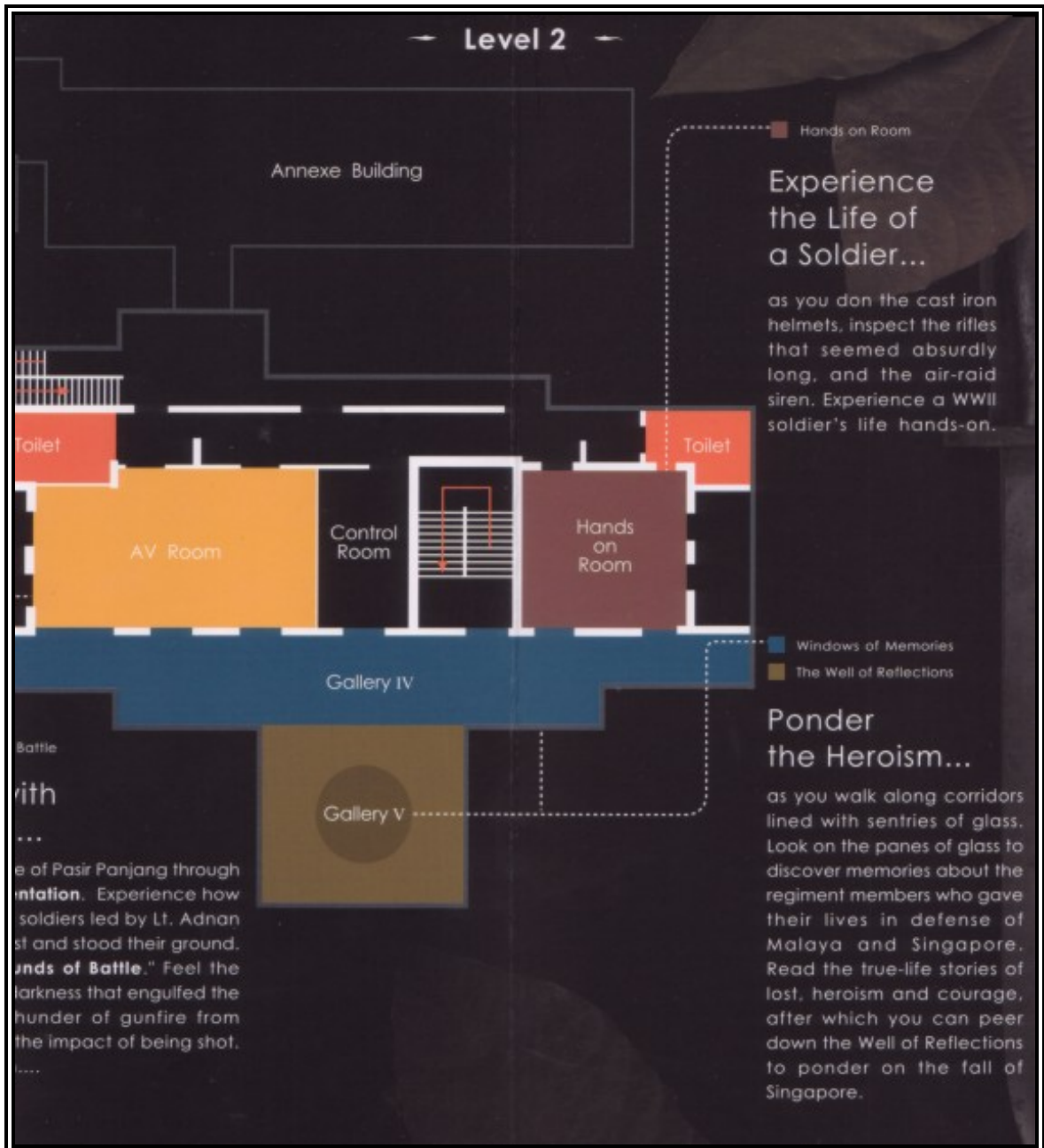
Set amidst the lush greenery of Bukit Chandu (Opium Hill) in the Pasir Panjang area, this interpretive centre endeavours to challenge its viewers to revisit their innermost thoughts about rootedness. It is the place where we will meet the past, in the present, to reflect on a better tomorrow.

— Level 1 —

Canteen

Toilet

Toilet

Toilet

Pond of Reflection

Gallery I

Gallery II

Gallery III

Handicap Ramp

Entrance

Car Porch

■ Defence of Malaya / Askar Melayu
■ Battle of Singapore
■ Battle of Pasir Panjang

## Consider the Dedication...

as you stroll along exhibits of photographs, maps, dates and information detailing the Defence of Malaya and life in the Malay Regiment. Consider the historical account that led to the British defeat, and the pride of regiment members as you review the uniforms, codes of honour and discipline. Be prepared to be surprised by details as nothing with the Askar Melayu (Malay Soldier) is ever skin-deep.

**● Pepper's Ghost Effect**
A visual effect created by reflecting images from projector devices, placed at a 45-degree, onto a parallel suspended piece of glass. The glass has a layer of quarter-silver applied on it and is place before a static background model. Audiences will, therefore, see the moving "ghost" amidst the terrain of the background.

## Examine the Hardship...

as you relocate yourself to 1942. Experience peering through a pill-box... waiting for the enemy and witnessing the destruction of war - cleverly presented by a narrator (done in **Pepper's Ghost effect**). Examine the dampness, the anticipation, the anxiety.

## sentosa
Singapore's Island Resort

### fortsiloso

**Getting There**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| By Bus | : | Blue and Green line (then transfer to Fort train) |
| By Monorail | : | Alight at M3 (recommended) |

**Admission**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Opening hours | : | 9am to 7pm Last admission at 6.30pm |
| Admission | : | $5 Adult, $3 Child (normal island admission charges apply) |
| Estimated tour time | : | 1 hr to 1 hr 30 mins |

For information, call hotline (65) 1800-SENTOSA (736 8672)
or visit www.sentosa.com.sg

33 Allanbrooke Road, Sentosa, Singapore 099981
Tel: (65) 6275 0388  Fax: (65) 6275 0161

Information correct at time of printing.          September 2002

**A Soldier's Story**

A multi-sensory experience is in store for visitors as they relive the life of a soldier at Fort Siloso. Life-sized replicas, interactive exhibits and even authentic aromas are recreated — from the smells of detergent in the Laundry Room to the aromatic whiffs of sizzling bacon in the Cook House.

# get ready for
# an assault on your senses
## and a history lesson like no other!

**Be a soldier for a day**
 - fatigues not required
 - and relive the dark days of World War II

**Holding the Fort**

Built by the British in the 1880s to protect the western entrance to the Singapore harbour, Fort Siloso is the only preserved British coastal fortification in Singapore today. Located at the western tip of Sentosa, the fort became a concentration camp for POWs (Prisoners Of War) during the Japanese Occupation (1942-1945).

In 1967 when the British troops departed, the island was handed back to the Singapore government. Less than a decade later in 1975, under its new custodian Sentosa Development Corporation, the Fort was granted a new lease on life — its doors opening to the public for the first time.

For many veterans and their families, it serves as an important window to our colonial past and a poignant reminder of the war years.

**Calling All New Recruits**

Would-be soldiers should begin their stint by reporting to Battery Sergeant Major (BSM) Cooper at the guardroom. The no-nonsense Sergeant will guide you through your Fort Siloso tour, barking out orders during "battle" and taking you through the drills of firing the then-weapon of choice: a powerful seven-inch gun. History buffs will be duly impressed by the realistic — though simulated — live firing sounds and special effects.

Then take a walk into Fort Siloso's oldest tunnel and see for yourself how ammunition is hoisted up for loading into the guns. Combat-ready visitors can test their skills at the assault course, take part in a simulated "live" firing drill of the 6-inch gun or examine the 12-pounder gun used in the Battle for Singapore in 1942.

## Battle Ready

Get into the thick of the action as the 1942 Battle for Singapore is recreated and gunners prepare to fight against advancing enemy aircraft. Do you have the tenacity to carry out BSM Cooper's orders, and destroy all ammunition to prevent any from falling into enemy hands? Your journey of discovery will culminate in the historic surrender of the Japanese, and the eventual return of Singapore to the British.

## History Relived

For a deeper understanding of Singapore's colonial history, walk through the comprehensive exhibition "A Soldier Remembers — the History of Blakang Mati" (the old name for Sentosa). An absorbing and insightful showcase of a soldier's life at the fortress, this permanent exhibition displays over 245 photographs, maps, building plans, artifacts and film clips.

Don't leave without viewing two specially-produced films, "The Story of Fort Siloso" at Theatre 1 and "The Fall of Singapore" at Siloso Point Tunnel Complex. Both are vivid audio-visual accounts of Fort Siloso's wartime role and development.

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