PALGRAVE *Studies in Oral History*

ORAL HISTORY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

MEMORIES AND FRAGMENTS

EDITED BY KAH SENG LOH, STEPHEN DOBBS, AND ERNEST KOH

PALGRAVE *Studies in Oral History*

Series Editors: Linda Shopes and Bruce M. Stave

Editorial Board

The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory, and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome, by Alessandro Portelli (2003)

Sticking to the Union: An Oral History of the Life and Times of Julia Ruuttila, by Sandy Polishuk (2003)

To Wear the Dust of War: From Bialystok to Shanghai to the Promised Land, an Oral History, by Samuel Iwry, edited by L. J. H. Kelley (2004)

Education as My Agenda: Gertrude Williams, Race, and the Baltimore Public Schools, by Jo Ann Robinson (2005)

Remembering: Oral History Performance, edited by Della Pollock (2005)

Postmemories of Terror: A New Generation Copes with the Legacy of the "Dirty War," by Susana Kaiser (2005)

Growing Up in The People's Republic: Conversations between Two Daughters of China's Revolution, by Ye Weili and Ma Xiaodong (2005)

Life and Death in the Delta: African American Narratives of Violence, Resilience, and Social Change, by Kim Lacy Rogers (2006)

Creating Choice: A Community Responds to the Need for Abortion and Birth Control, 1961–1973, by David P. Cline (2006)

Voices from This Long Brown Land: Oral Recollections of Owens Valley Lives and Manzanar Pasts, by Jane Wehrey (2006)

Radicals, Rhetoric, and the War: The University of Nevada in the Wake of Kent State, by Brad E. Lucas (2006)

The Unquiet Nisei: An Oral History of the Life of Sue Kunitomi Embrey, by Diana Meyers Bahr (2007)

Sisters in the Brotherhoods: Working Women Organizing for Equality in New York City, by Jane Latour (2008)

Iraq's Last Jews: Stories of Daily Life, Upheaval, and Escape from Modern Babylon, edited by Tamar Morad, Dennis Shasha, and Robert Shasha (2008)

Soldiers and Citizens: An Oral History of Operation Iraqi Freedom from the Battlefield to the Pentagon, by Carl Mirra (2008)

Overcoming Katrina: African American Voices from the Crescent City and Beyond, by D'Ann R. Penner and Keith C. Ferdinand (2009)

Bringing Desegregation Home: Memories of the Struggle toward School Integration in Rural North Carolina, by Kate Willink (2009)

I Saw It Coming: Worker Narratives of Plant Closings and Job Loss, by Tracy E. K'Meyer and Joy L. Hart (2010)

Speaking History: Oral Histories of the American Past, 1865–Present, by Sue Armitage and Laurie Mercier (2010)

Surviving Bhopal: Dancing Bodies, Written Texts, and Oral Testimonials of Women in the Wake of an Industrial Disaster, by Suroopa Mukherjee (2010)

Living with Jim Crow: African American Women and Memories of the Segregated South, by Anne Valk and Leslie Brown (2010)

Gulag Voices: Oral Histories of Soviet Incarceration and Exile, by Jehanne M. Gheith and Katherine R. Jolluck (2011)

Detained without Cause: Muslims' Stories of Detention and Deportation in America after 9/11, by Irum Shiekh (2011)

Soviet Communal Living: An Oral History of the Kommunalka, by Paola Messana (2011)

No Room of Her Own: Women's Stories of Homelessness, Life, Death, and Resistance, by Desiree Hellegers (2011)

Oral History and Photography, edited by Alexander Freund and Alistair Thomson (2011)

Place, Writing, and Voice in Oral History, edited by Shelley Trower (2011)

Oral History, Community, and Displacement: Imagining Memories in Post-Apartheid South Africa, by Sean Field (2012)

Second Wind: Oral Histories of Lung Transplant Survivors, by Mary Jo Festle (2012)

Displaced: The Human Cost of Development and Resettlement, by Olivia Bennett and Christopher McDowell (2012)

Exodus to Shanghai: Stories of Escape from the Third Reich, by Steve Hochstadt (2012)

Oral History in Southeast Asia: Memories and Fragments, edited by Kah Seng Loh, Stephen Dobbs, and Ernest Koh (2013)

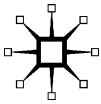
This page intentionally left blank

Oral History in Southeast Asia

Memories and Fragments

Edited by
Kah Seng Loh, Stephen Dobbs,
and Ernest Koh

palgrave
macmillan



ORAL HISTORY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2013

First published in 2013 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®
in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world, this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN: 978–1–137–31166–5

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the Library of Congress.

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Imaging Systems (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: July 2013

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 978-1-349-45703-8 ISBN 978-1-137-31167-2 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9781137311672

Contents

Illustrations

This page intentionally left blank

Series Editors' Foreword

Post–Second World War, globalization brought with it the emergence of Southeast Asia from its colonial status to an array of nations at varying levels of development. In terms of infrastructure and economic growth, few have modernized more completely than the small city-state of Singapore, perpetuating a state-encouraged "Singapore Story" of triumphalism. However, countering this saga are the many individual narratives that chip away at the official version of progress and demonstrate a more complex and multidimensional version of society, culture, politics, and economics. It is such fragments of memory that the contributors to this volume emphasize in three sections: "Oral History and Official Memory," "Memories of Violence," and "Oral Tradition and Heritage."

The book has its origins in a conference, *Historical Fragments in Southeast Asia: At the Interfaces of Oral History, Memory and Heritage* held in Singapore in 2010, which explains the attention given to that nation by four chapters of the ten herein. Two others concern Malaysia, and one each is devoted to the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia. The authors recognize that a number of nations such as Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos are omitted from consideration. Still, the composite story told provides useful insights into the emerging region and the value of oral history to counter official history supportive of elite institutions and government propaganda.

With this volume, the Palgrave Studies in Oral History series continues to extend its geographic reach beyond the United States. *Oral History in Southeast Asia: Memories and Fragments* joins works on India, China, South Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America to add a truly international dimension to the study of oral history. Moreover, it reflects our purpose to bring the best in oral history methodology and narrative to scholars, students, and the general reading public.

Bruce M. Stave
University of Connecticut

Linda Shopes
Carlisle, Pennsylvania

This page intentionally left blank

Preface

This book began as a collection of papers presented at the conference, *Historical Fragments in Southeast Asia: At the Interfaces of Oral History, Memory and Heritage*, in Singapore in 2010. The conference was jointly organized by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), a think tank, and the Singapore Heritage Society (SHS), an NGO. The convener was Kah Seng Loh, then a visiting research fellow at ISEAS and an ex-co member of SHS. As the program took shape, official concerns were expressed over some of the papers before, during, and after the conference. These papers had considered how the present influenced memories of the past and how oral histories of political and social change departed from established narratives that reinforced the role of the state and the frame of the nation. The offending papers were on Singapore and Malaysia, while the others—on the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar—appeared to raise no similar objections. One of the Malaysian papers was withdrawn from the publication process as a result.

The experience helped shape the thinking of the editors in translating the conference papers into a book. The conference had intended to investigate interdisciplinary approaches to the study of oral history in a diverse region (it still does), but the official concerns over its ideas and perceived implications highlighted a larger question about the role and meaning of academic endeavor in this part of the world. It was clear to participants who study Singapore or who work there that such concerns were the norm, even if they were puzzled at why concerns had arisen over this or that particular paper. It is never easy even for those familiar with Singapore to understand why some types of critical research are given the nod (or quietly ignored), while others receive unwelcome official attention. Such is the complexity in the making and silencing of historical narratives in Singapore. For participants unfamiliar with the country, it was not easy to understand an apparent conflict. On the one hand, there is a city-state aspiring to be a world city, eagerly appropriating and purchasing global ideas, talents, and brands. On the other hand, there is a state, in power since 1959, that presides over this ambitious venture

and is sensitive to criticism of its place in contemporary Singapore and in Singapore history.

The central theme of this book explores the impact of authoritarian rule on oral history. Particularly in the Singapore essays, it underlines how people often have to reconcile between their personal memories and officially sanctioned histories. Many of the chapters on other countries in Southeast Asia present more divergent memories that oppose the accepted historical account. But there are also signs that people in these countries constantly worry about telling their stories, or that they feel a need to narrate their experiences in tune with established accounts endorsed by authoritarian regimes, as many Singaporeans do. The chapter on the "Red Barrel" massacre in Thailand, written by a Thai researcher, suggests that Thais may be able to hold on to their own memories. This book offers a different approach to oral history, in not merely distinguishing it from official history, but also showing the relationship between the two to be far more ambivalent and nuanced.

The book would not have been possible without the support of ISEAS, particularly K. Kesavapany, Chin Kin Wah, Terence Chong, Michael Montesano, and the commendable team that provided administrative and logistical support. The same appreciation goes to the Singapore Heritage Society, which works within the constraints highlighted above to research and advocate Singapore history and heritage, and particularly to its immediate past president, Kevin Tan. We are grateful that through SHS, the conference received a donation of SGD10,000 from Lee Foundation, a local charity. We would also like to thank Alistair Thomson, who gave the keynote address at the conference and helped write part of the first chapter. We also benefitted from ideas and assistance from Isrizal Mohamed Isa and Pattaraphon Phoothong.

It is also with great pleasure that we record our collaboration with the editors at Palgrave Macmillan in preparing and revising the manuscript, particularly Bruce Stave who gave a seminar on oral history in Singapore in 2011.

Kah Seng Loh,
Ernest Koh, and
Stephen Dobbs

CHAPTER 1

Oral History and Fragments in Southeast Asia

Kah Seng Loh, Ernest Koh, and Alistair Thomson

This book offers a view from Southeast Asia, where oral history is embryonic and state led but is also being socially contested and redefined. The book began as a conference in Singapore in 2010, organized by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) and the Singapore Heritage Society. ISEAS had hosted a similar event 20 years ago, which resulted in the publication *Oral History in Southeast Asia: Theory and Method* (1998).[1] The interim years have witnessed significant changes in Southeast Asia that are transforming the practice of oral history.

The book will investigate oral history in Southeast Asia along two intersecting lines of inquiry. First, it explores how, as elsewhere in the world, interdisciplinary approaches are connecting oral history to studies of memory, oral tradition, and heritage. Second, the book pays attention to context and explores the relationship between oral history and the political, economic, and social circumstances in which the narrator speaks.

In bringing together these two approaches, this volume considers oral history as "fragments"—those individual or group accounts of the past that do not fit in with the mainstream or dominant narrative. The term, originating from subaltern/postcolonial studies, refers to perspectives of marginal groups that conflict with the dominant view. Here, it is used more broadly to include different sorts of relationships between oral history and dominant narratives

in Southeast Asia. The fragments discussed in the book are diverse and multifaceted: some oppose the accounts of the past produced by Southeast Asian states. Others are more ambivalent and reveal a closer connection between people's testimonies and official histories.

This complexity partly explains the concentration of papers on Singapore, which account for nearly half the book. Admittedly this was also due to the editors' personal networks (we work on Singapore)) and the conference being held there. The Singapore papers are useful in highlighting the "reasonable fragments" in oral history—to use a term from one of the editors. In Singapore, memory and speech are shaped by the influence of the authoritarian state, which nevertheless governs through a social consensus derived from robust economic development.[2] In contrast, most other essays examine how oral history challenges elite perspectives. While we have not been able to cover all the other states in Southeast Asia, we discuss participants' oral accounts of the violence and suffering that characterize much of the recent history elsewhere in the region. The diversity of fragments points to the various ways that people relate their pasts to the present.

Interdisciplinary Approaches to Oral History

In many English-speaking countries in western Europe and North America, oral history expanded in the 1960s and 1970s as an attempt to uncover the hidden histories of social groups that had been written out of the historical record. The portable tape recorder enabled oral historians to create an acceptable archive record, while the new field of social history legitimized the study of everyday life. When criticisms of the fallibility of memory first emerged, oral history handbooks developed guidelines to assess and enhance its reliability. From social psychology and anthropology, these guides suggested ways to determine bias and retrospection in memory. Early oral historians also adopted methods of representative sampling from sociology, and from documentary history—they borrowed rules for checking the validity and internal consistency of oral texts. These early responses were quintessentially interdisciplinary, although the method remained empiricist.[3]

That interdisciplinarity expanded from the late 1970s when imaginative oral historians turned the criticisms on their head. They argued that the unreliability of memory made it a useful historical source, in providing clues to the relationships between past and present, between memory and identity, and between individual and collective memory. Italian historian Alessandro Portelli argued that orality, narrative form, subjectivity, and the

relationship between interviewer and interviewee were strengths rather than weaknesses of oral history.[4] Memory became the subject as well as source of oral history, and oral historians and other scholars began to use an exhilarating array of approaches—linguistic, narrative, cultural, psychoanalytic, and ethnographic—in their analysis and use of interviews.[5]

Yet, such theoretically sophisticated work is still largely confined within distinctive academic "tribes" that have separate literatures and networks. This book brings together historians and social scientists in an effort to peer across disciplinary boundaries and find convergences, as well as dissonances, between oral history and neighboring fields. We agree with a wider concern articulated by Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes that oral historians and social scientists who study historical memory have seldom engaged one another.[6] Scholars of memory studies approach the subject not usually to reconstruct the past, but to understand the influences on social and cultural memory. Disciplines such as cultural studies, film studies, and literary studies focus chiefly on representations of the past; they often neglect individual experience and memory, or indeed the relationship between memory and public narratives. The focus on representation may overlook the importance of history itself, of using memory to make sense of the past, not least to critique official myths and construct more inclusive accounts. Oral history enables us to challenge distortion and half-truth and to write better histories.

As Lysa Hong noted at the 1990 conference in Singapore, Southeast Asian oral history was theoretically naïve, and many of the papers were still informed by empiricist approaches. Since then, the practice of Southeast Asian oral history has gained from the intervention of social scientists. Anthropologists have drawn attention to cultural specificities in studies of memory, narrative form, and interview relationships. Roxana Waterson observes that oral history, situated at the intersection between personal life and historical process, is "always representative of experience of living in that historical juncture."[7] This responds to the frequent critique that oral history only surveys a small fraction of the population in the past. Ann Stoler has also considered the challenges faced by "outsider" interviews in Java, and the importance of listening to the aural and gestural clues within culturally distinctive forms of expression.[8] This awareness of embodied and sensory memory connects to one of the most exciting recent growth areas across several disciplines, "the sensory turn" in the humanities and social sciences.[9]

The concept of the fragment has usefully guided postcolonial investigations into the histories and memories of marginal communities. Gyanendra Pandey conceptualizes the fragment as a trace of a lost history and a fracture within the dominant narrative. Such fragments are important, he surmises,

in challenging the dominant account and uncovering new perspectives. As examples, Pandey refers to people's diaries and poems about riots in India, and more generally creation myths, folk stories, and songs.[10] However, other scholars have been skeptical about what fragments can accomplish. Gayatri Spivak has suggested that fragments, being partial and even contradictory, will not enable the writing of counternarratives, at least those that conform to the norms of the historical discipline.[11] In discussing fragments, scholars have also tended to emphasize silence, as opposed to speech. Shail Mayaram's interviewees were unwilling to speak on massacres that occurred during the partition of India, because the state had discouraged public discourse on the violence in the name of maintaining ethnic harmony.[12]

While the idea of fragments is open to debate, we take it as a point of departure for understanding oral history in relation to the grand historical narratives that exist in Southeast Asia. Like local songs or individual writings, oral history has an incomplete quality to it—it is personal and subjective, and the narrator's memory may be distorted or unreliable. In its social role, however, oral history is important in contesting the accounts of elites or national histories that reduce the past to a homogenous set of experiences. In some cases, oral history is a public means to seek justice for past wrongs. In other cases, it is a way for people to reconcile their memories to the dominant account.

In this book, we aim to shed some light on the nature of the relationship between fragments and the whole of which they are necessarily a part. In examining oral history in Southeast Asia, the book problematizes the binaries between fragments and the dominant narrative; silence and speech; compliance and resistance, and state and subaltern. The complexity of Southeast Asian oral history is a result of the region's history, to which we now turn.

Fragments and Official History

Southeast Asia's political, economic, social, and cultural diversity has shaped its oral histories. The diversity has provoked scholarly debate over whether the term "Southeast Asia" has any positive attribution other than defining a region between China and India. Others have pondered whether the term, which the Allies used to refer to a theater of war during the Second World War, is meaningful for Southeast Asians.[13] There is much variation in the histories, polities, and societies both among Southeast Asian states, and within them.[14] Southeast Asian societies have been heterogeneous in ethnic, cultural, and religious terms, partly because there was never a single power that

governed the whole region. There have also been considerable differences between island and mainland Southeast Asia with regard to polity, culture, and trade,[15] while James Scott's recent work on Zomia illustrates the divides between lowland and upland groups.[16]

Western colonial rule further fragmented Southeast Asia. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Western powers colonized Southeast Asia, except for Thailand, which remained independent, while in the Philippines the United States replaced Spain, which had ruled the island archipelago since the sixteenth century.[17] Each colony was subordinate to the economic imperatives of the metropole, serving as a source of raw materials and agricultural exports and as a market for Western manufactured goods. The colonial governments also drew fixed borders around their territories, physically separating social groups that had shared a common history and culture and rendering them into minorities of the new states. The policy of encouraging immigration into and within the colonies also created Chinese, Indian, Javanese, and Vietnamese enclaves, particularly in the cities. The diversity of Southeast Asia complicates generalization and comparison, but is also useful for interrogating concepts and considering more nuanced perspectives.

Within this overall diversity, however, Southeast Asia has had a long-standing submission to political authority. Precolonial Vietnam had a more centralized administration based on the Chinese neo-Confucian model, but other states in Southeast Asia did not possess centralized bases of power. Instead, there were *mandala* polities of variable power, which drew upon the charisma and authority of an exceptional personality.[18] In the colonial era, the imperial powers established centralized bureaucracies to extend their control over outlying provinces and remote villages. The political system in Southeast Asia remained nonrepresentative; even in the Philippines, an American-style democracy was dominated by the power of the landed elite.[19] The Thai kings also ruled like European colonial governors to modernize the country in the image of the Western powers. Colonial rule came to an end after the Second World War, but the nationalist elites who inherited the colonial territories utilized the power of the centralized bureaucracies to build new, yet familiarly authoritarian, nation-states.

In the six decades since the end of the war, far-reaching political, economic, social, and cultural transformation has occurred in Southeast Asia, largely initiated by or mediated through the nation-states. The postcolonial elites launched nation-building programs that attempted to simplify complex societies into coherent "imagined communities."[20] State-authored "creation narratives," which sanction these programs, typically superimpose the "nation" over community and ethnic minority histories. In addition, these accounts

have mythologized and legitimized the rule of the postcolonial elites. Some social groups have been assimilated into the nation-state, while others have been excluded.[21] In oral history, we may find suppressed histories of marginal and minority groups, but they may also be colored by official histories.

The official accounts of the postindependence era extend beyond political narratives to economic history. In the 1950s, Southeast Asia remained narrowly specialized in the export of primary goods, which was the mainstay of these colonial economies. Since then, state intervention has propelled the region's economies toward import-substitution industrialization immediately after the war, and export-oriented industrialization in the 1970s and 1980s. Accompanying such changes were state-produced narratives of triumphalism, rapid growth, and "economic miracles" (especially in Singapore) that, like the political narratives, privileged the position of the postcolonial elites.

Countervailing histories of the social impact of development and urbanization do exist. We may find them in the experiences of diverse social and occupational groups, be it workers in factory belts like Jakarta's Tanggerang, women workers migrating from northeastern Thailand to Greater Bangkok, or Southeast Asians relocating to modern housing and reinscribing their interpersonal relations and identities in new mass societies. As a counterpoint to the official accounts, oral history is useful in uncovering the attitudes of Southeast Asians toward new forms and relations of work after the war. It particularly throws light on urban life from the perspectives of the city's residents, rather than its planners.[22] In rural regions too, there are untapped oral histories of recent experiences, such as the migration of farmers to new frontiers, the intensified commercialization of rice agriculture that accompanied the "Green Revolution," and the emergence of a post-peasant rural society.[23]

The concept of the fragment seeks to accommodate the diversity and authoritarianism that are the two key features in the history of Southeast Asia. The 1990 conference in Singapore highlighted the role of elite memory projects in fashioning shared identities in the new states of Southeast Asia. As the introduction to *Oral History in Southeast Asia* stated, oral history would "not only fill in the gaps in the records but would also provide a more complete and more coherent view of the past, grounded in the nation's sense of itself and its destiny."[24] In the 1960s and 1970s, national archive institutions in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand launched such projects, while ISEAS commenced another on memories of the Second World War and its aftermath in Singapore. These projects were intended to fill gaps in the official narratives of the historical moments that were held to define the birth of

the nation, such as the Japanese occupation and the independence struggles. They also emphasized, however, the contributions of the postcolonial political elites to the nation-building project, as the interviews were meant to compensate for a comparatively weak tradition of life-writing among the elites.[25] Early oral history projects, like Singapore's Oral History Unit (formed in 1979) and the Dokumentasi Sejarah Nasional (Documentation of National History) project in Indonesia in the 1980s, were often state funded and focused on national heroes and pioneers. Following the 1990 conference, the National Archives of Singapore coordinated a project to interview senior statesmen in ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations formed in 1967.

Elite oral history often excluded local histories and communist pasts that were deemed injurious to nation-building efforts. In Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, elite oral history privileged national over local and minority identities, particularly those of people living in troublesome frontier borderlands or in places with claims for independence. In countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, where conservative governments suppressed left-wing socialist and communist movements after the war, official histories have denigrated the socialists and communists as subversive threats to the nation. As Hong has argued, histories that challenge the carefully constructed facade of national homogeneity remain a source of anxiety for the postcolonial state.[26]

Nevertheless, social scientists of Southeast Asia have recorded oral histories that coexist in tension with dominant state narratives, nurtured by discourses that circulate at the family and community levels. James Scott has noted how oral accounts of the Malay peasantry, including rumors, gossip, folktales, jokes, and threats, constitute "hidden transcripts" by which they undertake "a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant."[27] Such story fragments are not public or oppositional: they are expressed to those whom one can trust, be it a family member, a close friend, or occasionally an interviewer.

The case of Singapore suggests how oral history is entwined with the official account: an individual's recollection may depart from the latter without becoming antagonistic. The People's Action Party has enjoyed an unbroken period of political control since 1959 based on consensus rather than coercion, and Singaporean memories are often colored by the state narrative, without however being its mirror image. Silence on controversial pasts is, until very recently, commonly encountered. As a former political activist and detainee surmised, "Once you have been bitten by a snake, you will be frightened at the sight of a rope for ten years."[28] Many elderly Singaporeans are

wary of telling stories that challenge the state narrative to outsiders, and these accounts usually circulate in private discussions.[29] Hong and Huang Jianli warn of the power of the Singapore state in constraining oral history.[30]

Such a view is commonly adopted by critical scholars of the city-state: that all public life in Singapore inevitably bows to a hegemonic state. Oral history in Singapore often exalts the role of the People's Action Party, plays down the state's socialist and internationalist origins, and muffles the role of defeated leftists in the independence movement. These themes were encapsulated in longtime prime minister Lee Kuan Yew's authoritative two-volume memoirs, "The Singapore Story."[31] The ongoing Singapore Memory project is an initiative of the National Library Board to collect five million items of memory from ordinary Singaporeans to celebrate the country's fiftieth year of independence in 2015. It is an example of an oral history project that is state led and circumscribed within the frame of the nation.[32] There are instances of countermemory work by social activists and former political detainees in Singapore, but this is the work of a minority.[33]

Yet, as the first section of this book shows, even oral history accounts in Singapore may be ambivalent fragments. Kevin Blackburn's chapter demonstrates that we can find more divergent accounts of The Singapore Story in conversations between family members.[34] Blackburn and his colleagues at the National Institute of Education train student teachers to conduct life-history interviews with elderly family members. These interviews reveal that while family oral histories in Singapore are not fully independent of official accounts, they are contesting narratives. Though the state has a strong influence on some family discourses, it is not hegemonic. Some elders endeavor to pass on family stories that project countervailing views of the recent past: of their resistance to public housing resettlement and their refusal to believe in the official allegations about the communist threat.

Similarly, Loh Kah Seng's chapter on the British military withdrawal from Singapore in the late 1960s further extends our understanding about the multifaceted nature of memory. He argues that oral histories can be conceived as "latent fragments" and "reasonable narratives." His interviewees have largely accepted the official account, yet are able to retain memories that are neither wholly oppositional nor compliant, but are personal and different. As fragments, these memories are reasonable in that they reconcile personal memories to the official account. Loh argues that Singaporean narrators exercise an important degree of agency in contesting or appropriating the past, without fully departing from the official narrative. His approach draws from Sharon Roseman's thesis that countermemory can exist in the middle ground of accommodation instead of outright resistance.[35]

Ernest Koh's chapter, which outlines his interviews with former Chinese pilots who had served in the Second World War against Germany and Japan, offers strong evidence of fragments that oppose the official account. The pilots' testimonies, he observes, differ markedly from the official narrative. They do not trace the birth of the nation out of the conflict, but underline a tension between different identities that was intrinsic to the cultural world of the Chinese diaspora within the British empire. While the public history of the war is dominated by state-sanctioned acts of commemoration, these fragments are sustained through everyday interactions between family members and friends.

Memory and Violence

Another feature of Southeast Asian oral history is the emergence of testimonies of political and mass violence in recent years. The Cold War inflected decolonization and the creation of nation-states in the region. In the former French colonies of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, communist regimes came to power through armed struggle in the postwar period. Elsewhere, insurgent communists were defeated by right-wing governments, sometimes with Western assistance, while constitutional communists and left-wing socialists were charged to be directed by Moscow or Peking, deemed to be security threats, and suppressed.[36] With the end of the Cold War, however, these "forgotten wars" have resurfaced in public discourse. Defeated individuals and groups have belatedly responded to the old allegations of communist manipulation, submitting claims about their roles in the decolonization and highlighting the illegitimacy of their suppression.[37]

Extending from memories of political suppression, and central to the lived experiences of many Southeast Asians, are recollections of mass violence that often accompanied political change. Planned killings and massacres, driven by political, ideological, and ethnic motives, occurred in several countries as late colonial and postcolonial governments turned on their subjects in the name of national security. The Malayan Emergency declared against the communists between 1948 and 1960 saw Chinese squatters forcibly relocated en masse into fenced New Villages. The toppling of Indonesian strongman Sukarno in 1965 ushered in a new political order led by Suharto, another dictator, and precipitated large-scale killings of suspected communist sympathizers. In Thailand, street violence and murder marked the contests between prodemocracy and military groups in the Octobers of 1973 and 1976. Seizing power in Cambodia in 1975, the Khmer Rouge embarked on horrific purges,

which have been deemed genocidal, against perceived enemies of the revolution. Violence precipitated by armed separatism has also highlighted the contested nature of the nation-state in parts of Southeast Asia, such as Aceh and East Timor in Indonesia, and the Muslim south of Thailand and the Philippines.[38]

In recent decades, however, a number of factors operating at transnational, national, and local levels, such as the end of the Cold War, regime change, and the appearance of social media networks, have made Southeast Asians more critical of authority.[39] Social activists and researchers are conducting counterhegemonic oral histories of violence and upheaval, often in vernacular languages, which interrogate official versions of contested events in the recent past. The Institut Sejarah Sosial Indonesia (Indonesian Institute of Social History), formed in the post-Suharto period in 2003, has launched oral history projects led by young researchers on such topics as the women's movement, labor, and the 1965–66 killings.[40] A recent publication supported by the institute contained survivors' accounts of the 1965–66 massacre in Bali, throwing further light on an event that still eludes public discourse in contemporary Indonesia.[41] In Malaysia, former leftists, activists, and scholars established in 2011 Pusat Sejarah Rakyat (People's History Centre), which aims to uncover histories of "the common people—students, squatters, farmers, fishermen, and workers."[42] In Thailand, despite the difficulty of breaking the silence on the October 1976 massacre, former radicals publicly recounted their experiences in 1996, eliciting widespread sympathy in the process.[43] In the Philippines, perhaps the most politically open country in the region, oral history work began earlier. NGOs and activist groups like the First Quarter Storm veterans and the Samahang Demokratiko ng Kabataan (Democratic Association of the Youth) have been involved in memory projects to document political activism during the period of martial law under Ferdinand Marcos and the "People Power" movement that toppled him in 1986.[44] Besides topics on political activism, oral history has also been used as a source to write local and regional histories in the Philippines.[45]

But although critical memories often have to await regime change before they emerge publicly, the floodgates are never fully open. In Thailand, some forms of historical trauma remain difficult to accept. Thai historian Thongchai Winichakul observes that while most Thais now accept the history of the 1973 student uprising against the military regime, the suppression of the democratic government three years later has been more difficult to acknowledge (figure 1.1). This struggle to remember, Thongchai concludes, stems from the Thai belief in social harmony that makes it difficult to address the state's crimes.[46] Regime change might also produce narrow,

Figure 1.1 "Remembering 36 years of the 6th October Democracy Movement," Thammasat University, Thailand, October 6, 2012. At the seminar "6 October and the Direction of Thai Politics," testimony from the parents of one of the student victims is shown on the screen: "When they broadcasted news on 6 October, we knew that our son would join the demonstration because he was always talking about politics. Until today, we cannot find him. Some said that they saw our son in the forest, so we went there on motorbike. We tried searching for him in six forests but couldn't find him." Photograph by Patporn Phoothong.

derivative memory discourses and familiar forms of political manipulation. Despite the fall of Suharto in 1998, the nation-state remains the defining frame of new historical accounts that have emerged in post-New Order Indonesia.[47] The new discourses in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore have also tended to focus on communists and left-wing socialists as counterpoints to the state, to the detriment of other historical perspectives such as social history.[48] As Michael Leach observes of Timor-Leste, which became a sovereign state in 2002, the new government has followed its Portuguese and Indonesian predecessors in selecting and discarding from the country's past to produce a national narrative that will forge a shared identity. This policy marginalizes the role of the youth-dominated civilian resistance and the Timorese diaspora in the struggle against Indonesian rule.[49]

As formal mechanisms to address historical issues of violence and injustice, truth and reconciliation commissions demonstrate the tension between

oral history and national/state interests. Victims of persecution and violence have often seen the reconciliation process as an outlet for articulating their memories, which in itself may be a therapeutic exercise, and for challenging past injustice. Oral history, when publicly expressed in a truth and reconciliation commission, may help to humanize the storytellers, provide individual catharsis, protest against injustice and violence, and build social solidarity among the victims.[50]

In Southeast Asia, however, the idea and practice of truth and reconciliation commissions have been undermined by political injunctions to forget contentious pasts. In postconflict Cambodia, Colin Long and Keir Reeves observe, the commission for massacre victims has been overtaken by an official amnesty for many Khmer Rouge perpetrators. In failing to confront past atrocity, the amnesty ignored popular sentiment and may ultimately work against the task of national reconciliation.[51] After Suharto was ousted in Indonesia, efforts to confront the massacre of alleged communist sympathizers in 1965–66 have also been plagued by political manipulation; victims' and participants' accounts have been distorted to fit contemporary divides between the left and right in Indonesia, and between communism and Islam.[52] There is widespread skepticism about the possibility of any genuine reconciliation process in Indonesia, aptly summed up by the popular saying, "The crocodile is quick to sink, but slow to come up."[53]

In investigating memories of violence, the second section of this book opens with a chapter by Rommel Curaming and Khairudin Aljunied on the so-called Jabidah Massacre in the Philippines. Curaming and Khairudin highlight both the vast power and malleability of memory and the complex relationship between individual memory and collective myth. The oral testimony of Jibin Arula, a survivor of the massacre, has been appropriated by various sociopolitical actors in the country, including the media and civil society groups. Most crucially, the insurgency group, the Moro Nationalist Liberation Front, has recast the killings into a powerful myth on the genesis of the Muslim conflict in south Philippines. Curaming and Aljunied argue that Jibin's memory is significantly more unstable than any of these unyielding narratives: in recounting the massacre over an extended period, he has mediated what he perceives as a personal tragedy through the sociopolitical discourses on the incident.

An important insight gleaned from this book is how local memories may elude efforts by both states and nongovernmental groups to homogenize the violent past. Julara Damrongviteetham's essay explores the "Red Barrel" incident: the Thai army's slaughter of alleged communist sympathizers in the early 1970s. She finds conflict between the memories among villagers residing at a

former massacre site. Activist workers encouraged a singular view of the event by constructing a memorial to the victims and through other public acts of commemoration. Such activism attempts to unite the villagers within a common frame of experience, but this version of the past is privately contested in the individual memories of some residents, who continue to be affected by the trauma and who subscribe to different memories of the event.

When acts of violence are remembered publicly, it becomes clear that oral histories differ significantly from interviews conducted in private settings. Illustrating this point, Leong Kar Yen's chapter examines survivors' public accounts of a British massacre of rural Chinese in the New Village of Batang Kali in Malaya in 1948. Besides uncovering the dark sides of life during the Malayan Emergency, the survivors have employed their testimonies as a means to seek apology, restitution, and compensation from the British colonial regime, and to remove the stigma of being branded as "communist terrorists." As public narratives, these oral histories oppose not only the British account of the counterinsurgency, but also that of the ruling state, which has based the founding of the Malaysian nation on the defeat of violent communism.

Oral Tradition and Heritage

In the final section, the book explores the interfaces between oral history and two related discourses that relate to the social role of the past: oral tradition and heritage. Anthropologists and folklore and cultural studies researchers have made crucial contributions to the study of oral traditions, which are cultural memories transmitted across generations within families and communities. Oral traditions often represent the origins, myths, and cultural values of the family and community.

This book explores the overlapping areas between oral tradition and oral history. Both kinds of narratives are strongly shaped by the social context. Oral tradition is often viewed as being stories about others, while oral history seemingly is "first-hand" and highlights individual, rather than communal, identity. However, in many instances, both oral history and oral tradition perform social roles: they speak to official narratives, address social and individual needs, and help the narrators make sense of the present. In modern contexts, too, oral traditions are unlikely to consist of a "pure" or autonomous narrative, but may include projections of the narrator's experiences and needs as a way of reconciling with the present. As interviewees may appropriate or internalize broader narratives and community stories in their

own accounts, so too oral history may incorporate bits of oral tradition and contain descriptions of other people and other narratives. In an American context, Barbara Allen has pointed to the convergences between oral history and folklore, notwithstanding differences between the two.[54] If we define oral tradition broadly as stories that are transferred between people, then it should include narratives that move between members of families and communities. The intergenerational dialogues in Blackburn's chapter are arguably a form of oral tradition in an urban setting (Singapore), where the transmission tries to depart from the official narrative, but is not fully free from its power. The line between oral history and oral tradition is less distinct than it appears to be.

In a chapter written using an anthropological approach, Emilie Wellfelt considers how the Swiss American anthropologist Cora Du Bois has been remembered as a heroic magical "good being" by the community of Alor, where she lived with and studied in the 1930s. Wellfelt observes that the character of the stories changed as oral history morphed into oral tradition in the 1990s. At the same time, in both types of accounts, memories of Du Bois among the people of Alor have been influenced by historical developments before, during, and after her presence on the island, and by the heritage discourse in the present day.

In contrast with oral tradition, heritage is manifestly a formal, expert-driven response to the alienating impact of modernity. It has an important social role in acknowledging the experiences and memories of older people and drawing younger people into historical discourses. Nevertheless, heritage is problematic because it tends to privilege partial, celebratory accounts of the past. The idea of conserving places of historical value, and of "authentic" pasts, may also ignore local opinion about development and history. An ambivalence exists, as Laurajane Smith and Emma Waterton observe, between the heritage discourse, which is frequently deemed to be "of relevance to the nation, *selected* by experts and *made* to matter," and the histories of local communities.[55] In Southeast Asia, heritage is often seen by capital-hungry states as a form of tourism, rather than being of intrinsic value to the local people. Representations of the past often emphasize the majestic, classical, and exotic that appeal to the sensibilities of tourists. International experts on heritage typically utilize external, often Western-centric, standards to determine the value of Southeast Asian pasts, although conservation in the name of authenticity may clash with local wishes for development.

Locals may critique tourist-friendly representations of their pasts and the external standards of international experts. At the world historic site of Angkor in Cambodia, for example, state and international heritage practices have conflated: the result is an externally imposed conservation program that

reproduces simple binaries between the regal and vernacular, and between the classical and modern. In a country emerging from a traumatic history of invasion and genocide and attempting to reinvigorate its heritage and tourist industry, the conservation of Angkor has ignored the expressed wishes of rural Cambodians for development.[56]

The case of Angkor underlines the complexity of local attitudes toward heritage. Oral history can play a role in eliciting local histories, values, and needs, but the role also comes with considerable difficulty. As Karen Olwig reminds us, local discourses on the past are frequently marginalized as "matter out of place" because they are deemed to fail Western or state-determined standards.[57] Oral history may, then, reveal how local places are meaningful to the users. This may be a useful source for the excavation of "intangible cultural heritage" that looks beyond high culture and eye-catching architecture to the community's rituals, cultural representations, skills, and knowledge. However, intangible heritage is also a problematic discourse. Critics have pointed out that all forms of heritage are based on criteria defined by elites and experts, and thus intangible.[58] Ahmed Skounti contends that the decisions of an international elite of "concerned experts" on intangible heritage necessarily separate the community from its history.[59] There is growing international awareness that intangible heritage is a problematic concept, but much of the discourse in Southeast Asia remains outside of local decision making.[60]

In this book, Chou Wen Loong and Ho Sok Fong, members of a small collective of social activists known as the Save Valley of Hope Solidarity Group in Malaysia, utilize oral history to preserve the memory of former leprosy sufferers residing in Sungai Buloh settlement. The asylum, like others elsewhere in the world, is facing the threat of redevelopment as leprosy diminishes as a public health concern. Through oral history, Chou and Ho seek to accomplish both academic and social endeavors. They unearth hidden histories of the leprosarium not acknowledged in the public record, highlight how the residents' identity has been shaped by the lifelong experience of living with leprosy, and reveal past and continuing stigma against the disease. The authors also acknowledge that the relationship between residents and interviewers is complex: fractures exist in their joint discourses on heritage and history that attempt to bridge personal stories, public advocacy, and conservation.[61]

Focusing on Singapore, Stephen Dobbs's paper in this volume also complicates oral history as a source for the heritage discourse. His interviews with the Singapore lightermen a decade after their relocation from the riverfront reveal shifting memories of the locality, since then drastically refashioned into an office and recreational corridor. The oral histories, Dobbs further

notes, bear the imprint of the state discourse on the need to sanitize the polluted river, even as the lightermen reject the official accusation that they were responsible for the pollution. The narrators, while critical of the redevelopment of the river, have accommodated themselves to the shape and discourse of modernity in Singapore. Dobbs's conclusions resonate with those of Blackburn and Loh on the ambivalent nature of memory in Singapore.

As illustrated by the papers on the Red Barrel memorial and the Batang Kali graves, oral history shows how death sites in Southeast Asia have historical and cultural meanings that extend beyond the heritage discourse. They are historically significant because of the dramatic events they refer to, which had affected individuals and social groups, and also the history of the nation-state. Yet, national and community interpretations of death sites may differ because of local cultural practices, such as the practice of ancestor worship among the Chinese. In colonial Singapore, the cultural worldview of the Chinese on death and graves differed markedly from British perspective, leading to conflict over the uses of the spaces of the dead.[62] Moreover, Southeast Asia's massacre sites and war memorials are what Logan and Reeves have termed to be "places of pain and shame," which contain dissonant and contested memories of mass deaths.[63] The sites provide a reminder for oral historians and social scientists to traverse beyond the heritage discourse, to be mindful of attending to cultural and historical specificity, to listen to community stories, and to discover communities connected by trauma.

Conclusion

Fragments are useful in relation to thinking about the whole, but it is not a choice of one over the other. The idea of fragments is relevant to Southeast Asia where colonial and national histories continue to cast a shadow over memory. However, what may differentiate Southeast Asia from western Europe and North America is that nationalism remains an important organizing principle. The issue is perhaps not so much the desirability of national history but the need to make it more inclusive and pluralistic. The idea of fragments makes us aware of the "little histories" that exist within spaces in the dominant account, yet are not limited to only counterhegemonic narratives. The fragment is not a frustratingly partial view of the past, nor does the whole constitute a unifying, all-encompassing account. The idea is to try to include various fragments within the whole, and to see national history itself as a fragment. This is possibly a better way for Southeast Asians to reconcile their personal histories with imagined national pasts.

Southeast Asians will continue to relate their pasts to the present in different ways. In zones of political and military conflict and in contexts of regime change, oral history may remain counterhegemonic, with fragments disturbing the whole. Its dissonant character will be expressed in various forms, such as through truth and reconciliation commissions on acts of political and mass violence. Public oral history projects that are more modest in scale may also shatter silence and precipitate or follow regime change. Oral historians in Southeast Asia, as elsewhere, will have to uphold a role that is academic and social. Thongchai has called for new histories of marginal groups in the region to be written from the "margins" and "interstices" of nationalist narratives.[64] In these spaces, oppositional oral history fragments can be found.

In other cases, particularly but not just in Singapore, official national discourses will continue to have a major influence on oral history. Fragments will also converge with or become even derivative of the dominant narrative. Yet, even where fragments appear to blend in with the whole, there is still a need to understand why and how some people accommodate dominant narratives. Singapore oral histories can provide more nuanced perspectives of the recent past, and their inclusion may make The Singapore Story more representative of a wide range of people's historical experiences. Oral historians should also pay attention to a fundamental premise of their craft: by listening to their voices, we understand the motivation and worldview of the narrators. Reconciling fragments and the whole in one context is as much an act of agency as speaking out against official history in another.

Notes

1. P. Lim Pui Huen, James H. Morrison, and Kwa Chong Guan (eds.), *Oral History in Southeast Asia: Theory and Method* (Singapore: National Archives of Singapore & Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1998).
2. Chua Beng Huat, *Political Legitimacy and Housing: Stakeholding in Singapore* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
3. Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Alistair Thomson, "Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History," *Oral History Review* 34.1 (2007): 49–70.
4. Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," in *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd edition, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 37–38.
5. See Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, pp. 1–114, 211–331.
6. Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes (eds.), *Oral History and Public Memories* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), p. vii.
7. Roxana Waterson (ed.), *Southeast Asian Lives: Personal Narratives and Historical Experience* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2006), p 14.

8. Ann Laura Stoler, with Karen Strassler, "Memory-Work in Java: A Cautionary Tale," in Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, pp. 283–309.
9. Paula Hamilton, "The Proust Effect: Oral History and the Senses," in *The Oxford Handbook to Oral History*, ed. Donald A. Ritchie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
10. Gyanendra Pandey, "Voices from the Edge: The Struggle to Write Subaltern Histories," in *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial,* ed. Vinayak Chaturvedi (London: Verso, 2000), pp. 281–99.
11. Gayatri C. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,* ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–313.
12. Shail Mayaram, "Speech, Silence and the Making of Partition Violence in Mewat," in *Subaltern Studies IX: Writings on South Asian History and Society,* ed. Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 126–63.
13. Donald K. Emmerson, "'Southeast Asia': What's in a Name?," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 15 (1984): 1–21.
14. The 11 states of Southeast Asia are Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam.
15. Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680*, 2 volumes (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988, 1993).
16. James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).
17. The British colonized Burma and Malaya, the French, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, and the Dutch, the East Indies.
18. O. W. Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982).
19. Benedict Anderson, *The Specter of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (New York: Verso, 1998).
20. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
21. Anthony Reid, *Imperial Alchemy: Nationalism and Political Identity in Southeast Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
22. Hans-Dieter Evers and Rüdiger Korff, *Southeast Asian Urbanism: The Meaning and Power of Social Space* (Münster: Lit Verlage; New York: St. Martin's Press; Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000).
23. R. E. Elson, *The End of the Peasantry in Southeast Asia: A Social and Economic History of Peasant Livelihood, 1800–1990s* (New York and Basingstoke: St. Martin's Press and Macmillan, 1997).
24. Lim Pui Huen, et al., "Preface," in *Oral History in Southeast Asia*, p. vii.
25. Kwa Chong Guan, "The Value of Oral Testimony: Text and Orality in the Reconstruction of the Past," in *Oral History in Southeast Asia*, pp. 19–32.
26. Hong Lysa, "Ideology and Oral History Institutions in Southeast Asia," in *Oral History in Southeast Asia*, p. 42.
27. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. xii.

28. Cited in Loh Kah Seng, "Encounters at the Gates," in *The Makers and Keepers of Singapore History,* ed. Loh Kah Seng and Liew Kai Khiun (Singapore: Ethos Books & Singapore Heritage Society, 2010), pp. 21–22.
29. Kwa Chong Guan, "Oral Histories in the Making of Our Memories and Heritage," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 36 (2008): 612–28; Loh Kah Seng, "Seeking the Bukit Ho Swee Fire," in *The Makers and Keepers of Singapore History*, pp. 79–91.
30. Lysa Hong and Huang Jianli, *The Scripting of a National History: Singapore and Its Pasts* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), chapter 4.
31. See Lee's influential memoirs, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings, 1998) and *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story: 1965–2000* (Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings & Times Editions, 2000).
32. Singapore Memory Portal, http://www.singaporememory.sg/, last accessed Aug 17, 2012.
33. Former leftists and social activists detained without trial in the 1960s and in 1987 have recalled their experiences in interviews, books, and private discussions. See the work of Function 8, http://fn8org.wordpress.com/, last accessed Aug 17, 2012, and Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore, interview with Lim Hock Siew, Aug 5, 1982; Tan Jing Quee, Teo Soh Lung and Koh Kay Yew (eds.), *Our Thoughts Are Free: Poems and Prose on Imprisonment and Exile* (Singapore: Ethos Book, 2009).
34. For "particular publics" see Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 9.
35. Sharon R. Roseman, "'How We Built the Road': The Politics of Memory in Rural Galicia," *American Ethnologist* 23.4 (1996): 836–60.
36. Greg Poulgrain, *The Genesis of Konfrontasi: Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia 1945–65* (Bathhurst, NSW: Crawford House Publishing, 1998).
37. Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Wars: The End of Britain's Asian Empire* (London: Penguin Books, 2008).
38. Lim Joo Jock and S. Vani (eds.), *Armed Separatism in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1984).
39. Norman G. Owen et. al (eds.), *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia: A New History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press; Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2005).
40. Institut Sejarah Sosial Indonesia (Indonesian Institute of Social History), http://www.sejarahsosial.org/, last accessed Aug 17, 2012.
41. *Melawan Lupa: Narasi-narasi Komunitas Taman 65* (*Against Forgetting: Narratives from Komunitas Taman 65*) (Bali: Taman 65 Press, 2012). No specific authors are named in the book.
42. Pusat Sejarah Rakyat, https://www.facebook.com/pusatsejarahrakyat; and *Inside Sarawak*, May 24, 2011, http://www.isarawak.com.my/v2010/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=722:coming-soon-peoples-history-cetre&catid=34:news&Itemid=53, last accessed Aug 17, 2012.
43. Thongchai Winichakul, "Remembering/Silencing the Traumatic Past," in *Cultural Crisis and Social Memory: Modernity and Identity in Thailand and Laos,*

ed. Shigeharu Tanabe and Charles F. Keyes (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), pp. 243–83.

44. Another group is the Task Force Detainees of the Philippines, established in 1974 during the martial law period, http://www.tfdp.net/, last accessed Aug 17, 2012. For a recent work based on the accounts of activists, see Ferdinand C. Llanes (ed.), *Tibak Rising: Activism in the Days of Martial Law* (Manila: Anvil Publishing, 2012).
45. National Historical Institute and Philippine National Historical Society, *History from the People: Kasaysayan mula sa Bayan*, Vol. 1 (Manila: National Historical Institute and Philippine National Historical Society, 1998).
46. Thongchai, "Remembering/Silencing the Traumatic Past."
47. Fadjar I. Thufail, "Ninjas in Narratives of Local and National Violence in Post-Suharto Indonesia," in *Beginning to Remember: The Past in the Indonesian Present,* ed. Mary S. Zurbuchen (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), pp. 150–67.
48. Loh Kah Seng, "Leftists and the Blurring of History," *publichouse.sg*, July 1, 2012. http://www.publichouse.sg/categories/topstory/item/661-leftists-and-the-blurring-of-history, last accessed Aug 16, 2012.
49. Michael Leach, "Difficult Memories: The Independence Struggle as Cultural Heritage in East Timor," in *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with "Difficult Heritage,"* ed. William Logan and Keir Reeves (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 144–61).
50. William Westerman, "Central American Refugee Testimonies and Performed Life Histories in the Sanctuary Movement," in *The Oral History Reader*.
51. Colin Long and Keir Reeves, "'Dig a Hole and Bury the Past in It': Reconciliation and the Heritage of Genocide in Cambodia," in *Places of Pain and Shame,* pp. 68–81.
52. Mary S. Zurbuchen, "History, Memory, and the '1965 Incident' in Indonesia," *Asian Survey* 42.4 Special Issue on The Legacy of Violence in Indonesia (Jul-Aug 2002): 564–81.
53. Mary S. Zurbuchen (ed.), *Beginning to Remember*, p. 29.
54. Barbara Allen, "Oral History: The Folk Connection," in *The Past Meets The Present: Essays on Oral History,* ed. David Stricklin and Rebecca Sharpless (Lanham: University Press of America, 1988), pp. 15–26.
55. Laurajane Smith and Emma Waterton, *Heritage, Communities and Archaeology* (London: Duckworth, 2009), p. 29.
56. Tim Winter, *Post-Conflict Heritage, Postcolonial Tourism: Culture, Politics and Development at Angkor* (Abingdon, Oxon; NY: Routledge, 2007).
57. Karen Fog Olwig, "The Burden of Heritage: Claiming a Place for a West Indian Culture," *American Ethnologist* 26.2 (May 1999): 370–88.
58. Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa (eds.), *Intangible Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2009).
59. Ahmed Skounti, "The Authentic Illusion: Humanity's Intangible Cultural Heritage, the Moroccan Experience," in *Intangible Heritage*.
60. Loh Kah Seng, "History of the Dead, Heritage of the Living: Bukit Brown Cemetery in Singapore," *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*, forthcoming in November 2012.

61. See also Loh Kah Seng, "'No More Road to Walk': Cultures of Heritage and Leprosariums in Singapore and Malaysia," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 17.3 (2011): 230–44.
62. Brenda S. A. Yeoh, *Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment*, 2nd edition (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003).
63. Logan and Reeves, *Places of Pain and Shame*, pp. 1–14.
64. Thongchai Winichakul, "Writing at the Interstices: Southeast Asian Historians and Post-National Histories in Southeast Asia," in *New Terrains in Southeast Asian History*, ed. Abu Talib Ahmad and Tan Liok Ee (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002), p. 11.

PART I

Oral History and Official History

CHAPTER 2

Family Memories as Alternative Narratives to the State's Construction of Singapore's National History

Kevin Blackburn

Transmission of family memories from generation to generation through oral history can provide unique insights into events in a nation's history that have been directly experienced by the older members of the family. These family narratives may be at variance to those usually propagated by the organs of the state through history taught in the schools and stories told in the state-controlled media. Ruth Finnegan has described how family narratives are myths and traditions that become the shared stories meant to bind the family together, not bind together the nation, which is what the state is concerned with.[1] In a society such as Singapore, where the state keeps a tight rein on interpretations of the past, memories as they are passed down from the older generations of the family to the younger could even be constructions of oppositional or alternative narratives to those given by the state because their purpose is different from the official histories of the state-run education system.[2]

Daniel Bertaux and Paul Thompson contend that it is wrong to assume, as many sociologists from Emile Durkheim onward have, that the rise of modernity and the greater influence of the state in educating the individual have significantly diminished the family in transmitting its own culture and

values across generations. They argue that the family is still a key institution in shaping the social characteristics, personality, and perspectives of the individual, and that much of this is done by family members passing down their memories through oral history.[3] Singapore, with its powerful state and strong traditional Asian families, provides a good case study for exploring the influence of the family and the state on memories.

Young Students Recording Family Memories through Oral History

Researching family memories remains problematic in Singapore because the state has a strong hold over the official version of the past. In Singapore, narratives constructed from memories that challenge the state's version of the past have been quickly "corrected" and suppressed when they have entered the public realm through public forums and the media.[4] At other times, oral history testimony that can be used to construct alternative narratives has been adapted and absorbed into the dominant official narrative of the past with surprising skill to prove that it is correct.[5] However, there has long existed a general environment in which individuals who wish to express memories contrary to the version of the past upheld by the state have not felt confident in voicing them publicly.

The official scripted version of Singapore's nationalist history is best exemplified in the memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's first prime minister from 1959 to 1990, and leader of the People's Action Party (PAP), which is still in power more than 50 years after self-government in 1959.[6] This version of the past is reflected in the textbooks of the history curriculum in Singapore schools, and is often called "The Singapore Story."[7] In this official narrative, the Japanese occupation of the Second World War is seen as the start of an anticolonial political awakening that ran from 1945 to 1955. The communists emerged as a dominant, yet underground, force, as they were banned by the British colonial ruling power under the Malayan Emergency (1948–1960). The PAP was founded in 1954 by Lee Kuan Yew as a moderate political party working for a noncommunist independence but was soon infiltrated by large numbers of communists trying to manipulate it. The years 1955 to 1961 are seen as the period in which the PAP defeated the "communist threat." Almost all labor unrest in industry and political activities in the Chinese schools are viewed as orchestrated by the communists to gain power. Eventually, the communists broke away from the PAP and formed the Barisan Sosialis (Socialist Front) in order to grab power, but were suppressed

by the PAP government, which from 1968 to the present has initially ruled with no opposition members in the parliament, and later only a handful.

In the official "Singapore Story," 1961 to 1965 is the period of the "merger and separation" with Malaysia. The PAP took on communalism in Singapore during this period in an attempt to build a "Singaporean Singapore" rather than one in which its citizens primarily identified themselves as belonging to one ethnic group, as was the case in Malaysia. Communalism has long been defined in Malaysia and Singapore as a situation in which the members of the different ethnic groups only mix among themselves and view the other racial groups with suspicion and antagonism.[8] During the "merger and separation" period, the ruling party of Malaysia, which represents the Malay majority in Malaysia, the United Malays Nationalist Organization (UMNO), is seen as conspiring to start the 1964 racial riots between the Malays and Chinese in order to discredit the PAP's multiracial credentials in Singapore. This tactic failed. However, the merger with Malaysia also failed, according to the "Singapore Story," because of UMNO's communalism. Singapore then became a separate independent country in 1965. The period from 1965 to the present is portrayed as a time when Singapore "overcame the odds" and survived as a small nation, even though it had no resources except its own people.

After independence, the nation had unprecedented economic and national progress all because of the PAP's wise governance, which emphasized meritocracy in all its institutions. From the 1960s to the 1980s, the PAP government moved the mass of its people from villages, known as "kampongs," and urban slums into "modern" high-rise flats to use the limited available space for industry and manufacturing to provide jobs. During this time, the policies of the PAP not only brought progress and prosperity but also created a racially harmonious society out of what had once had been a society where communalism was strong. Singapore at independence was made up of 74.4 percent Chinese, 14.5 percent Malays, 8.1 percent Indians, and 3 percent others (these figures remain roughly the same today). Opponents of the PAP were branded as either communists or communalists working against the interests of the nation.

The pervasiveness of this official narrative tends to suffocate many alternative versions of Singapore's past.[9] However, families may express alternative narratives when recalling their memories of key events in national history as they experienced it, and pass on their personal perspectives to the younger members.

Interviews of family members may also reflect the family context in which these narratives unfold. The closely knit stereotype of the Asian family

may not uniformly fit Singapore because of its rapid modernization. Most interviews are not conducted with grandparents or uncles or aunts, as they often do not live under the same roof as the younger generation. Seeking out members of the extended family may mean contacting someone whom a member of the younger generation does not know very well if they do not live together.

Overall, the composition of the family in Singapore has tended to move away from the extended family living as a single household to the nuclear family model. The number of families with grandparents living with them fell from 36.5 percent in 1957, to 22 percent in 1970, to 15 percent in 1990, where it has remained in recent times.[10] But it is not the case of large numbers of grandparents living by themselves. It is a case of grandparents choosing to live with one of their children. In 1995, 84.5 percent of seniors aged above 60 still lived with one of their children accompanied by grandchildren in the same household.[11]

However, the Asian family has been under stress in Singapore. Government housing policies have tended to allocate to the general population small flats more suitable for a nuclear family rather than an extended one. This is quite significant given that 85 percent of the population lives in government flats. Government housing policies to encourage the elderly to live with their children or in nearby flats have been put in place but have had uneven results. Modernization also has implications about whether the grandparents and the younger family members share similar sets of beliefs. Language policy may mean that it is harder for the grandparents and their grandchildren to communicate because the elderly are better versed in their traditional dialects and have limited or no abilities in the more commonly used English among the young.

Despite these changes that have put the extended family under stress in Singapore, surveys done by Stella R. Quah for Singapore's Ministry of Community Development indicate that members of the extended family are still the individuals to whom more than 70 percent are likely to go to for help, advice, and assistance. Quah's study also revealed that 95 percent believed in filial piety, defined as "to respect, help and obey one's parents and elders and to love one's family and maintain cohesiveness." The same surveys suggest that grandparents are active in teaching their grandchildren values such as filial piety.[12]

This mixture of the modern and the traditional in the family could produce varied results in the young generation seeking out family memories. There may be disagreement over family memories between young and old when they do not live together, or see each other regularly, whereas there may be agreement when they are more closely knit.

A project on uncovering these family memories of modern Singapore was undertaken at Singapore's National Institute of Education, which trains the teachers of Singapore. It began in 1998, and was part of an emphasis on teaching history and social studies trainee teachers how to gather and use the primary sources of history. From the late 1990s, there was a shift in the Singapore history curriculum, from rote learning to teaching historical skills. This was part of the overall "Thinking Skills, Learning Nation" initiative introduced by the government in education so that students could be more prepared for a knowledge-based economy by possessing creative thinking skills. A new feature of this trend in history school teaching was exploring oral history testimony as an additional source for enriching the history curriculum and making a more creative classroom.[13] The project on recording family memories originated in the History Division within the National Institute of Education, which was part of Nanyang Technological University. It was done within the framework of the relative freedom of inquiry that Singapore universities have increasingly operated under since the late 1990s in order to compete in the international rankings of universities.[14] The Singapore government's aim is to attract outstanding researchers to work in its universities and create innovation that will drive a knowledge-based economy. This has meant there have been few restrictions on academic freedom. However, inquiry is much more restricted and state controlled in the more public agencies, such as the media, which has a much greater impact on public opinion than academic research in the humanities.

The family memories project required young trainee teachers to complete an oral history interview with preferably an individual in their family on any topic in Singapore's history that they had lived through (figure 2.1). The most popular topics tended to be those that the students already had prior knowledge about; and this generally meant the topics they chose were somehow connected to Singapore's national history that they had learnt in school.[15] Inherent in this activity was the possible tension between family narratives and the official history taught by the state. In the oral history project, memories that bound the family together as shared myths and traditions about the past would not bind people together as Singapore citizens. Memories that contradicted the narrative of the national past taught in schools were also expected in addition to the ones that reinforced the curriculum's narratives.

The thousands of trainee teachers who worked on the oral history project came from the full cross section of Singapore's ethnic groups, Chinese, Malays, Indians, and Eurasians, in proportions similar to their numbers in the broader community. There was a disproportionately large number of female

Figure 2.1 Singapore Eurasian schoolgirl, aged 10, interviews her grandfather, aged 70, for a school oral history project. Photograph by Kevin Blackburn.

interviewers, reflecting the gender composition of the teaching profession. The two things they all had in common were that they were young, almost all in their 20s, and of course they were training to be teachers.

The students' oral history interviews took the form of assignments that were graded, and then copies were retained in the History Division to help future students complete their own projects. The emphasis was on students learning about the process of oral history, not accumulating an archive of oral history interviews. In their own interviews, the National Institute of Education's trainee teachers were to persuade the subject to reminiscence and draw out the meaning and impact of the events as they related to their whole life and their self-identity; not just treat them as "eyewitnesses" to history. In their training, they were taught to see, in the words of Paul Thompson, "each family as an intergenerational system of interlocking social and emotional relationships" that shaped life stories and oral history testimony.[16] The students were then required to write an analysis assessing how the memory of the individual had been influenced by the passage of time, how both the young interviewer and older interviewee jointly created the testimony, and to what extent the official narrative of the past provided by the government and heard in documentaries on state television and feature articles in state-run

newspapers had been absorbed into the memories of the individuals being interviewed as part of their memory.[17]

The young students themselves had been through the state education system and were well aware of the official versions of the past. Most of them unquestioningly believed what they had learned in history classes. Others had experienced, read, or heard of stories that did not fit into the official narrative and had started to question the state's version of the past. The students, in preparation for their interviews, were made aware that Singapore's history was very strongly scripted by the PAP and the Singapore state. It is time to briefly review some of the results of the family history project at Singapore's National Institute of Education.

The Official History of Housing Resettlement versus Alternative Family Histories

The outcome of running this family history project has been the realization that the official narrative of Singapore's history as found in the state-run media and history textbooks has been absorbed into the memories of some families, while others either reject it openly or are unaware of it. For some families, the official narrative has become part of their identity as Singaporeans. To tell their story in the context of the official story of unbridled progress under the government of the PAP and its prime minister Lee Kuan Yew is for a considerable number of families a way of affirming their identity and explaining why their lives have followed a certain path. Other families affirm their identity in opposition to it. Delving into family histories was an opportunity for students from these families to draw upon their family myths and traditions to construct alternative narratives to those scripted by the PAP-dominated state. In both these types of interviews, the young member of the family and the older person being interviewed sought to explore the family memories of the past in the context of the state-scripted past. Some families would assimilate the state-scripted past, while others would keep their own family interpretation of the past.

Some conversations between family members can convey memories that form the basis of oppositional narratives that go against what the state churns out in its history of the PAP government. This was so in the case of Cherie Tan, aged 19, when she did her interview with her father, Tan Swee Guan, aged 57, in March 2000. She uncovered family memories of the move from "backward village" to "modern flats" in the late 1960s that were scathing about how the PAP government handled the move and what

happened to the family. This family narrative ran counter to the official narrative of the transition as being the "march of progress." Her father informed her, "We were just told to leave; we had no say; for us there was no compensation for the loss of our home." He continued: "When we moved into the government flat things got worse for our family, as we had lost the income we had working on the land. We had to find new jobs." Tan Swee Guan responded negatively to Cherie's question whether there was any improvement in their lifestyle. He said: "No, we were just harassed to leave. The police would have come and taken us away if we had not obeyed the notice to leave." He added, "We had a better life in the village. It was a struggle to hold the low paying jobs that also had long hours as well . . . We never experienced any improvement in our lives." Cherie's response to hearing her father reveal her family's memories was to embrace the family narrative and become very critical of the official narrative. Cherie wrote that the adversity and decline in the fortunes of her family after the move were part of the memories that bound the family together in opposition to the government. In her appraisal of the interview with her father, she constructed an oppositional narrative of the move. She wrote: "The PAP government's propaganda that the transition from village to flats made the lives of people better has to be balanced by telling the stories of people such as my father who resented the move and never experienced 'progress.'" For Cherie, the interview with her father was a trigger for constructing an oppositional narrative: "What I learnt in the history textbooks at school and what I learnt from the memories of my family were not the same. These bad experiences need to be addressed in the way history is written."[18]

Official narratives contradicting the "march of progress" theory came out during class time as well as in the assignment. Class discussion on the topic of resistance to housing resettlement brought out the following response from a middle-aged teacher discussing his family's experiences and memories. Shah bin Ahmad responded with memories of forcible removal of the kampong residents in the Geylang area by the state during the late 1960s:

> About the standoff between the kampong residents and the riot police, it happened in the 1960s when I was around 9 or 10 ten years old. I remembered the incident but not the exact year because it was quite rare to see "Black Marias" [riot police vans for holding prisoners] or uniformed personnel in the vicinity of my kampong. I was living in Jalan Keladi where the present Darul Aman Mosque in Eunos Crescent stands today [corner of Changi Road and Jalan Eunos]. The incident happened at the nearby kampongs bounded by Jalan Sawi and Jalan Nenas, approximately where

> the roads were named after local vegetables. I could feel the tension in the air as everybody seemed to be rushing towards one direction with shouts of "*Polis datang*" [the police are coming] and such likes. I saw a gathering of men in a standoff with several policemen and there was shouting. My mother dragged me back to our house as she was afraid for my safety. The next day, our kampong was abuzz with the news that several villagers were unhappy with having to move out of their kampongs as some were unhappy with the compensation for their fruit trees, or that they had just completed an extension of their house, etc. It is interesting to note that rumors (unconfirmed, perhaps speculation) were flying around at that time (1960s) that the "government" would send "arsonists" to burn whole kampong if there was resistance to resettlement. The few fires that broke out in the nearby kampongs spooked everybody and gave credence to the rumors. Yet, like it or not, we were resettled to new housing estates. It was heartbreaking to return to these desolate and deserted kampongs especially in the inner kampongs after Jalan Sawi to see abandoned houses and overgrown weeds (before the bulldozers moved in) where my childhood friends used to be.

Shah bin Ahmad's testimony in class about his family and the removal appears to be a perspective from the marginalized residents of the kampongs at the Jalan Eunos Malay Settlement in Geylang. The conflict and removal are not well documented from the perspective of the kampong dwellers, even though there was limited coverage in the press of the conflict during June 1969, with those resisting being labeled by the authorities and the press as "trouble-makers," whom the police were "rounding up" in "clean up" operations.[19] The passage highlights Shail Mayaram's point that "speech" and "silence" about conflict and riots are equally revealing. She says that often with violence in riots "writing is the clue to both the representation and obliteration of violence" while "it is counterposed by the lexical reordering in the speech of victims."[20] The written word of the press in its representation of violence at the Jalan Eunos Malay Settlement is counterposed by what we hear from the oral history of the "weak." The incident at Jalan Eunos Malay Settlement also illustrates the view of another Indian subaltern scholar, Shahid Amin. He says that events, such as riots by the weak, through the use of metaphors to describe them, became distorted in collective memory and these distortions are reinforced over time. Acts of resistance and protest gradually, through the use of metaphors, are turned into criminal acts and that is reinforced in collective memory.[21]

Both the interview of Cherie Tan with her father and Shah bin Ahmad's testimony in class demonstrate James C. Scott's thesis that the weak have

"hidden transcripts" of the past that are distinct from those of the powerful. These "hidden transcripts" are a form of resistance to domination.[22] In both interviews, the hegemony of the PAP's Singapore Story is being challenged by mocking the objective of the resettlement from kampong villages to government flats. In Cherie Tan's interview, there was a strong sense of sarcasm at times, particularly when her father mocked the claim of "the improvement in our lives."

Family members are generally more able to convince their elderly to speak freely than strangers. However, oral historians who have created a rapport with these marginalized individuals may also be able to learn of these "hidden transcripts." This is because, as in the case of Cherie Tan's father and Shah bin Ahmad, although they may be marginalized and weak, they are very vocal voices that become empowered through the act of narrating their experiences. The testimony of the past offered by Shah bin Ahmad demonstrates that the family is not the only context for hearing these marginalized voices.

Cherie Tan's father's discussion of resettlement in Singapore, though running against the hegemony of the official story, tells us little that we do not know. There was unhappiness about moving from kampongs to government flats. Even Lee Kuan Yew in his official memoirs mentions that the adjustments to this new way of living were very difficult for some groups, but he contextualizes this as the necessary price of progress and a prerequisite for the economic development of the nation:

> Resettling farmers was the toughest. We paid compensation . . . As our economy thrived, we increased the amount, but even the most generous payment was not enough . . . Living in flats, they missed their pigs, ducks, chickens, fruit trees and vegetable plots which had provided them with free food. Fifteen to 20 years after being resettled in HDB new towns, many still voted against the PAP. They felt the government had destroyed their way of life.[23]

In contrast, Shah bin Ahmad's description of the riot police at the removal of the Jalan Eunos Malay settlement kampong resembles what Gyanendra Pandey and several of the Indian subaltern studies scholars have labeled "fragments." These are incidents or fragments remembered and told from perspective of the weak, or the minorities. They are not widely known, and they destabilize the official myth about the past. Pandey argued that the "importance of the 'fragmentary' point of view lies in that it resists the drive for a shallow homogenization" of story of the nation.[24]

Family Memories Challenging the Official View of National Service

The experience of Loh Chin Pin, aged 21, in October 2003, when he did his oral history interview with his father, widens our understanding of the past history of community and nation by illuminating what was not known because of the state's "homogenization" of the past. The oral history interview was a trigger that led to a critical view of the official past. Loh Chin Pin had been taught at school that all Singapore males when they reached 18 years of age must do compulsory military service, called national service. Everyone shares the burden equally, whether they were sons of ordinary citizens or the offspring of high-ranking politicians in the ruling party, senior civil servants, and the wealthy. All were treated the same, and a sense of national unity had grown out of the experience since national service had been introduced in 1967. According to the versions of the past provided by the Singapore state, national service was perceived as molding the youth of the different races and classes in Singapore into one united nation because they were supposedly all equal in national service. It was a part of the national development of Singapore set in motion by the PAP government. However, there had been rumors since 1967 that the sons of the powerful were given an easy time and cushy jobs compared to the rest who did not come from influential families. These young men were called "white horses." In November 2003, the Singapore government finally acknowledged that there was a "white horses" designation, but to gasps of disbelief, claimed these young men were singled out so that they would not receive any special treatment.[25]

Chin Pin in his oral history interview with his own father on the subject mentioned how his recent experience of national service had caused him to question the official narrative, stating "having been through national service myself . . . there are always two companies that these 'white horses' go to and all the instructors will know when they were enlisted. There will always be extra rest, canteen breaks and longer book-out durations."[26] He questioned his father about his experience of national service, as his father was one of the first to have to do it in 1967. Chin Pin recalled that "through the interview the subject [his father] mentioned that those that 'sucked up' to the superiors generally have a better 'life' in national service, not unlike today." His father shared with Chin Pin his impressions: "It's a natural thing . . . who wants to offend the minister and risk losing his rice bowl [job] in the regular service?"[27] For Chin Pin, what he had experienced himself and had been confirmed by his father's memories led him to question the official version of the past. In his report on his interview, Chin Pin went to the extent of

juxtaposing the official history of the Singapore Armed Forces' claim that there were no distinctions made on background with his family's memories in a clear attempt to create an oppositional narrative to that given by the PAP-run state.[28]

Chin Pin and his father, as well as Cherie Tan and her father, were able to share what Finnegan has called a "family myth" or tradition about the past that bound them together. From this family myth they could construct an oppositional narrative to that of the PAP-run state's history of the past.

Family Memories of the "Communist Threat"

Interviews done by students with members of their families who had participated in political protest and industrial action in the 1950s and 1960s, considered by the official narrative to be part of a communist conspiracy, draw out for the young students how the PAP has tarred many people with the communist brush in their version of the past. They learn that some of their relatives were involved in strike action and protests and yet never considered themselves as communists trying to overthrow the government with violence. These family memories excite in some students a keenness to redress the balance, while other students tend to experience what Borland has called "interpretative conflict," where they clearly see their relatives as having been manipulated by the communists, just as the official PAP version of the past says.

In October 2004, Larry Loo, aged 22, interviewed his aunt Madam Ng Swee Ting, aged 66, about her involvement with other Chinese high school students in helping the striking workers during the Hock Lee Bus Riot in 1955. She gave some background on why she participated in student politics:

> I was still studying in Chung Hwa Girls Secondary and I was 17 years old when the riots happened, at that time my classmates and I were overage students due to aftermath of the World War II. At that point of time, students like me like to participate in the politics issues…
>
> We were all very active in those days; all of us would participate in almost every strike that was of concern to us. As we, as students, want to be involved in the political issues, and I knew of this incident [Hock Lee Bus strike] when my friends brought up this issue to me. Also, my classmates and I would gather with students from other class to hear talks and issues given by the student leaders to understand the situation. My family was against of me participating in all these riots. Despite that, I continued to participate in all those riots.[29]

Madam Ng quickly demolished the PAP version of the past that the riot from the strike was communist inspired when she told her nephew that the bus workers had been receiving very low wages for many years and were striking for better conditions, not for political reasons. She affirmed: "I felt that the bus workers were very pitiful, due to poor welfare of long hours of work and low pay that they received from their employers. There were some students in my school who volunteered to help the workers, I volunteered myself as well."[30] Her nephew, Larry Loo, desiring to remove any conflict with the official version of the past, still believed in the communist conspiracy behind the riot, but saw his aunt as a young student who was being manipulated by the communists. For him, "the communists went all out to gain power by instigating students to create havoc, and therefore students should have been careful and not followed blindly."[31] This is an example of what Katherine Borland has noted as interpretative conflict between generations.[32] The conflict was evident between Madam Ng and her own family when she was a politically active student. When Laurence asked how her own parents responded to her participation she replied:

> No parents would want their son or daughter to be in danger. They were, of course, worried about my safety on participation in such events. You wouldn't know when chaos will break loose. And there was this one time when my father would come on-site to drag me home, they were afraid of me getting caught by the police and eventually get expelled. But I didn't care so much, and so I still continued to participate when I had the chance.

A contrasting reaction to Larry's response to family memories of protest in the 1950s and 1960s was evident in a September 2002 interview done by Dean Chen, aged 21, with a member of his extended family, Mr. Tan Tee Hong, aged 59. Mr. Tan recalled being a student at the Chinese high schools of Singapore and participating in protests against the government:

> I studied at Chung Cheng High School from 1956 to 1961 for both my secondary and Pre-University education. It was a breeding ground for the communists with many students supporting the communists led by Lim Chin Siong and Fong Swee Suan…
>
> In Chung Cheng High, the seniors formed small groups with the new students giving us tuition. The small groups were called *Hsuei Hsin Xiao Tsu*. Many of us looked up to the seniors. They were not only outstanding in their academic careers; they were also caring and helpful. The seniors were like mentors to us. Their teaching methods were on par with our teachers…
>
> At the time, we were still politically naïve to the age of 13. The seniors did not tell us anything about communism in the beginning. We had large

> group outings after each tuition session where we would participate in games. Through these group activities we cultivated a sense of unity and belonging.[33]

Dean then asked Mr. Tan directly about his involvement in the 1956 student protest at the school, which was said to be communist instigated:

> *Dean Chen*: *In October 1956, students from Chinese Middle Schools barricaded themselves in Chung Cheng High School. Were you part of the group?*
>
> *Mr Tan*: The majority of the Chung Cheng students took part in this boycott of lessons and barricading. Although we did go home for a change of clothes, many of us were there for about two weeks. I stayed there mainly for the fun of it and I also did not want to be the odd one out. There were some students who wanted to leave but they were afraid of the union leaders from SCMSSU [Singapore Chinese Middle School Students' Union].
>
> *Dean Chen*: *Did you stay until 26 October 1956?*
>
> *Mr Tan*: I did not stay till this date. Like many others who wanted out, I came up with an excuse that I needed to go home for a change of clothes and was allowed to leave. The actions taken by the students were supported by many parents who brought their children clothes. My parents were ignorant of what was going on until close to the end of the riots. When I reached home, they forbade me to leave the house. They had heard rumors that the policemen would be arresting students in a short time. True enough, they did so the next day.[34]

Mr. Tan told Dean that later in 1961 he and the students were protesting against the introduction of new examinations that disadvantaged students who had studied the syllabus offered by the Chinese high schools. He affirmed: "The government said we were being made use of by the communists but no one felt this way. Most of us thought that we were fighting for our rights and standing up for the Chinese community."[35] On many occasions, Mr. Tan Tee Hong stressed that the actions they took were not inspired by the communists as the PAP indicated. Dean was fascinated to hear memories from someone close to him that contradicted the official version of the past, and argued that the family narrative "delivered the other side of the story—the view of the Chinese intellectuals . . . which many of the younger generation like myself have never heard of." He was surprised to learn that young Chinese students were "not as disruptive as they had been painted by the PAP," and that they had a "positive side."[36] For Dean, embracing family memories meant definitely

revising the image of communists as "bogey men," which he had learnt in the school textbooks to the extent that he was fashioning an oppositional narrative to that of the PAP's official version from his interview.

The contrast between the reactions of Larry and Dean to family members discussing their memories of the "communist threat" illustrates the powerful pull of both the state and the family in their influence over the historical understanding of young students growing up within their families and being educated by the state. These two interviews demonstrate that family memories in Singapore may be more varied and contested than is assumed. The work of Hong Lysa and Huang Jianli depicts the official history of The Singapore Story as virtually hegemonic in many spheres and suggests that oral history does not seem to be a viable way to confronting it. Yet, analyzing family memories does reveal more contested memories and dissonant voices than would appear to be the case if The Singapore Story was as dominant as Hong and Huang suggest.[37] Thus, there is a varied mixture of testimonies with some that agree with The Singapore Story, while others dissent from it.

In conclusion, the oral history project with trainee teachers at the National Institute of Education in Singapore on family memories tends to confirm Bertaux and Thompson's idea that the family as a transmitter of social characteristics and values has not been substantially diminished by the state. However, the state's powerful influence can be seen in memories of members of the younger generation that have assimilated state versions of the past. This experience of gathering family memories illustrates that they can form the basis for constructing alternative narratives to the versions of the past provided by the state. However, access to these memories is usually through "insider" interviewing by family members rather than "outsider" interviewing by oral historians.

Notes

1. Ruth Finnegan, "Family Myths, Memories and Interviewing," in *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd edition, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 177–83.
2. Kevin Blackburn, "History from Above: The Use of Oral History in Shaping Collective Memory in Singapore," in *Oral History and Public Memory,* ed. Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes (New York: Temple University Press, 2008), pp. 31–46.
3. Daniel Bertaux and Paul Thompson, "Introduction," in *Between Generations: Family Models, Myths and Memories,* ed. Daniel Bertaux and Paul Thompson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 2–7.

4. Kevin Blackburn, "Ex-Political Detainee Forum at Singapore in 2006," *Oral History Association of Australia Journal* 29 (2007): 56–59.
5. See for example Sonny Yap, Richard Lim, and Leong Weng Kam, *Men in White: The Untold Story of Singapore's Ruling Political Party* (Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings, 2009).
6. Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (Singapore: Times Editions, 1998).
7. See Michael D. Barr and Zlatko Skrbis, *Constructing Singapore: Elitism, Ethnicity and the Nation-Building Project* (Copenhagen: NIAS, 2008), pp. 18–38.
8. See K. J. Ratnam, *Communalism and the Political Process in Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1965), pp. 208–13.
9. Hong Lysa and Huang Jianli, *The Scripting of A National History: Singapore and Its Pasts* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008).
10. Shirlena Huang and Brenda Yeoh, "Under One Roof: Housing, Family Ties and Domestic Space," in *The Ties That Bind: In Search of the Modern Singapore Family,* AWARE edition (Singapore: AWARE, 1996), p. 57.
11. Stella R. Quah, *Family in Singapore*, 2nd edition (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1998), p. 209.
12. Ibid., *Study on the Singapore Family* (Singapore: Ministry of Community Development, 1999), pp. 35, 37, 51.
13. Goh Chor Boon and Saravanan Gopinathan, "History Education and the Construction of National Identity in Singapore, 1945–2000," in *History Education and National Identity in East Asia,* ed. Edward Vickers and Alsia Jones (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 203–26.
14. Selvaraj Velayutham, *Responding to Globalization: Nation, Culture and Identity in Singapore* (Singapore: Institute of South East Asian Studies, 2007), pp. 131–32.
15. I have outlined the rationale for a similar project in Kevin Blackburn, "Reminiscence and War Trauma: Recalling the Japanese Occupation of Singapore, 1942–1945," *Oral History* 33.2 (Autumn 2005): 91–98. See also Blackburn, "Oral History as a Product of Malleable and Shifting Memories in Singapore," in *The Makers and Keepers of Singapore History*, ed. Loh Kah Seng and Liew Kai Khiun (Singapore: Ethos, 2010), pp. 205–31.
16. Paul Thompson, "Family Myth, Models, and Denials in the Shaping of Individual Life Paths," in *Between Generations: Family Models, Myths and Memories,* ed. Daniel Bertaux and Paul Thompson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 27.
17. For a definition of the official narrative of Singapore's history, see Loh Kah Seng, "Within The Singapore Story: The Use and Narrative of History in Singapore," *Crossroads* 12.2 (1998): 7.
18. Interview with Tan Swee Guan, born in Singapore in 1954, businessman; recorded by Cherie Tan, March 2000. Pseudonyms are used for interviewees and interviewers in this paper.
19. *Straits Times*, June 6, 1969.
20. Shail Mayaram, "Speech, Silence and the Making of Partition Violence in Mewat," in *Subaltern Studies IX: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, ed. Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 126–63.

21. Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, and Memory: Chauri-Chaura 1922–1992* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2006).
22. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
23. Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First, The Singapore Story: 1965–2000* (Singapore: Times Editions, 2000), pp. 120–21, 206–7.
24. Gyanendra Pandey, "In Defence of the Fragment: Writing about Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today," *Representations* 37, Special Issue on Imperial Fantasies and Postcolonial Histories (Winter 1992): 28–29; and see Gyanendra Pandey, "Voices from the Edge: The Struggle to Write Subaltern Histories," in *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*, ed. Vinayak Chaturvedi (London: Verso, 2000), pp. 281–99.
25. *Straits Times*, November 12, 21, 2003.
26. Interview with Loh Chong Tee, born in Singapore in 1950, businessman; recorded by Loh Chin Pin, October 2003.
27. Loh Chong Tee interview, October 2003.
28. Mickey Chiang, *Fighting Fit: The Singapore Armed Forces* (Singapore: Times, 1990).
29. Interview with Ng Swee Ting, born in Singapore in 1938, housewife; recorded by Larry Loo, October 2004.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Katherine Borland, "'That's Not What I Said': Interpretative Conflict in Oral Narrative Research," in *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd edition, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 310–21.
33. Interview with Tan Tee Hong, born in Singapore in 1943, education officer; recorded by Dean Chen, October 2002.
34. Tan Tee Hong interview, October 2002.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Hong and Huang, *The Scripting of A National History*, pp. 65–73.

CHAPTER 3

"You Have Picked a Wrong Candidate": Latent Fragments and Reasonable Narratives of the British Military Withdrawal from Singapore

Kah Seng Loh

"I really believe you have picked a wrong candidate to relate to you of my father's retrenchment story, simply because our situation was very different from others'" was Lim's response to my inquiry about the effects of the British military withdrawal from Singapore in the late 1960s. His father, a senior clerk at the Singapore Naval Base, was retrenched like thousands of other base workers. But this, he emphasized, turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as his father received a "golden handshake" in the form of a five-figure retrenchment benefit, found new work in private firms, and retired comfortably several years later. Unlike the preceding decade where the family struggled financially, the British pullout was an ironic turning point for the family of seven in the 1970s. "Hence," Lim concluded, "I would not be able to provide you the relevant or required information for your project."[1]

Lim's narrative sits in the gray zone between history and memory. In opposing the received view, his account appears to support Paul Thompson's contention that oral history represents the authentic "voice of the past," invaluable for obtaining insights into history as ordinary people experienced it.[2] Yet,

Lim did not eventually contest the official narrative of the British rundown as a severe crisis for Singapore; he placed his family on the "wrong" side of history and clarified their experience as exceptional.

Oral History in Convergence and Conflict

I wish to take Lim's problematic memory as a starting point to break down walls between oral history, memory, and heritage. This disciplinary divide is partly due to the differing aims of the three fields. Many oral historians, myself included, attempt to utilize the recollections of people to fill important gaps in the historical narrative. This view originated in the use of oral history in the 1960s and 1970s inasmuch as an instrument of social empowerment as of academic endeavor.[3] Memory and heritage scholars of more recent vintage, by contrast, are more concerned with the politics of remembering and representing the past, particularly the influence of robust state-authored narratives. Where many oral historians believe in the intrinsic value of the memory of people, memory and heritage scholars often view it as being susceptible to influence.

Postcolonial studies, for instance, began as an endeavor to recover the "subaltern" from elite narratives. However, conducting oral histories of the 1922 Chauri-Chaura riot, an event highly placed in Indian national history, Shahid Amin admits that memory has been tainted by the hegemonic nationalist narrative. "The subalterns make their own memories," he concludes, "but they do not make them just as they please."[4] Amin's colleagues have either accepted the position that "the subaltern cannot speak" or conceded that what they say are ambivalent and contradictory fragments, which may disturb the dominant narrative, but do not necessarily enable the excavation of whole suppressed histories.[5] Outside of postcolonial studies, Iwona Irwin-Zarecka has found spans of silence in oral narratives, masked by the strong presence of "noise."[6] Similarly, in heritage studies, there is a strong emphasis on how representations of the past are dominated by political or economic interests.[7]

Many oral historians are not positivists: they are not unaware of issues of power and representation in their craft and have taken a reflexive approach toward their interviews. However, their reflections, being nontheoretical, have mostly been ignored outside the historical discipline.[8] Alessandro Portelli has taken perhaps the most drastic step of departing from the positivist tradition to argue that oral history's true value is its subjectivity.[9] Many oral historians have partially retreated from more optimistic pronouncements about oral

history; they have accepted that memory mutates over time and is shaped by its social context. In my work on a great fire in Singapore and on leprosy in Singapore and Malaysia, I separated the strands of memory that spoke about people's experiences and others that gave insights into why and how people remembered.[10] This was my rudimentary way of retaining some of the original social advocacy of oral history while taking into account critiques from memory studies.

What I attempt here is to move beyond separating the different strands of oral history. I wish to examine the strands in their original, entangled state, so we may see the "converging" where they meet and intertwine, and in other instances where they remain in conflict. My approach draws from Alistair Thomson's apt observation that oral history and memory are not necessarily opposed, for the empirical and the subjective may complement each other to produce a fuller picture of the past.[11] Allan Megill concurs that bridges exist between history and memory, although not necessarily directly from one end to the other.[12] As Jeffrey Olick and Toyce Robbins point out, the reminiscences of people may constitute a countermemory, but it is not simply opposed to the official memory, but may interact dynamically with it.[13] Sharon R. Roseman sees within extreme positions of memory a middle ground where people accommodate to the dominant account. Such reconciliation involves an act of "making do," and this concept has much relevance in Singapore.[14] As more ethnographic fieldwork is carried out on heritage issues, scholars are also realizing that public history, like official memory, is often not hegemonic but contested.[15] Communities may prefer development, as in the case of Cambodia, where the conservation of a historic site has not served the economic interests of people living near it.[16]

I discuss here the ambivalence of oral history accounts in Singapore. While oral history provides new insights into the dynamics of historical change, it also necessarily introduces into history presentist influences, such as nostalgia and state-sanctioned representations of the past. Oral testimonies are often latent fragments, which while offering new views of the past may not challenge the official narrative. In fact, I view many Singaporeans' recollections of the recent past as markedly reasonable and conciliatory accounts, where the narrator mediates between their experiences and the official history of the nation-state.

The British military withdrawal, which occupies a high place in the national history of Singapore and which occurred a mere two years after the island became independent, is an excellent case study. In official history, it is framed as a severe crisis that galvanized both the People's Action Party (PAP) government and Singaporeans into a united response. Writing in his

memoirs 30 years later, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew views his government's success in steering the nation to safety in this difficult time as no less than a "near miracle."[17] I have, however, argued elsewhere that the British rundown should be seen as a powerful catalyst, operating within the frame of crisis, for Singapore's surge to become a dynamic industrial nation-state in the 1970s based on foreign capital investment.[18] To maintain investor confidence and the morale of redundant base workers, the PAP government carried out vigorous policy measures, often with British assistance, such as converting the bases to commercial use, bringing forward public projects, expanding technical and vocational education, and retraining redundant base workers for blue-collar work. The rundown years, as the British High Commission in Singapore surmised, were a period of "non-stop action."[19]

Lim was one of over 50 former base workers I interviewed in 2009–2010, mostly from the most important base in Singapore, the naval base in Sembawang in the north of the island. They comprised ethnic Chinese and Indians, with a larger number of men over women, ranging between adolescence and middle age during the rundown. A few of the men went through the retraining courses, while many others confronted a radically new culture of work when the naval dockyard was converted into Sembawang Shipyard, a commercial shipyard owned by the government and initially run by a British managing agent.

Latent Fragments and Reasonable Accounts

Unemployment, besides defense, was a major concern of the PAP leadership when the Wilson government announced in January 1968 that it would accelerate the timetable for the withdrawal of British forces from Singapore by March 1971. The British bases employed some 28,000 enlisted and civilian Singapore citizens, not counting numerous people in small trades and services whose livelihood also depended on the British military presence. The bases provided work for about one-sixth of Singapore's active workforce and contributed to one-fifth of its general domestic product. It is within this economic and strategic context that the British pullout has often been viewed as a national crisis.

Yet, speaking to former base workers 40 years after the pullout, the ambivalence in their memories became acutely apparent. I did not find any singular experience out of the many voices. In some accounts, like Lim's, the British withdrawal did not precipitate a personal crisis, while in others it did, but the family coped quite comfortably in the end. Toh, a young clerk at the

naval dockyard, worried about the pullout's effect on his family, although his father, a tradesman at the dockyard, took the news "as a matter of fact." The event would appear to herald a collective calamity for Toh's family, for his mother and two elder brothers also worked at the naval base. But, as it turned out, Toh was selected to take up a similar clerical job at Sembawang Shipyard, while most of his family members either received some form of compensation or found new employment. Toh's oral history also supports the role of the British rundown as a catalyst: "it was such a buzz—rather than the pull-out!" he stated emphatically, pointing to the emergence of new towns, hotels, and construction companies in this time, linked directly or indirectly to the withdrawal.[20] Similarly, Susan Tan, who joined HMS Simpang near the base as a typist in 1966, passed a qualifying test and joined a typing pool in Sembawang Shipyard. By her own account, she was too young to be overly concerned about the prospect of unemployment; her anxiety was rather over the typing test, which was partially relieved when her supervisor allowed her to bring her own typewriter.[21]

For Padmini's family living in the naval base, the British withdrawal was a defining moment of change. But this was because her father, previously a driver for British officers, accepted the offer to migrate to Britain with his family. His wife had not wanted to leave, for she was happy with life in the base for its "free light bulbs" and medical care and disliked the cold in London, but he made the decision to depart. Their subsequent history in Britain, where her father found work as a laborer at the Ford Factory before saving enough to buy a house, is a fragment drifting at the margins of Singapore's official narrative.[22] But it is also not a completely British or transnational fragment, but one tangled with a resilient historical strand in Singapore. Padmini's aunt, Kanika, was married with a ten-month-old baby at the time of the rundown. Sarojini wanted to leave with her family but had to remain in Singapore with her husband and child. "[I was] afraid to discuss with him [her husband], Kanika told me, "He said no and that's it." She could only keep in touch, tearfully, with her family in Britain on the phone, and occasionally when they visited Singapore.[23] For the family, the British withdrawal was a crisis, although not the same crisis Singapore faced as a nation. Many of my interviews produced such latent fragments that provide new insights at the peripheral spaces of the official narrative, but do not disturb it. They are "discursive memories" of a different sort, which reconcile the narrator not with traumatic or violent pasts, but with development desired and attained.[24] On the economic effects of the pullout at least, my interviewees are reconciled with their experiences.

In assisting the redundant base workers, the PAP government refused to simply provide dole, but aimed to use the opportunity more constructively

and ambitiously to mold them into disciplined workers of industry. As Lee Kuan Yew emphasized in an interview in Britain in 1968, Singapore's workers needed to realize that "the world does not owe us a living."[25] The government sought not only to produce new industries or jobs but to forge a new type of worker, who would possess both a set of skills and a work attitude defined by the emerging industrial economy. This philosophy of social governance was, to use James Scott's concept, characteristically "high modernist," being grafted upon the rationalist premise that human nature could be transformed through scientific forms of physical planning.[26]

On one level, the government passed the Redundancy Payments Act, which required that base workers' redundancy payments be paid into a state-run fund, from which they could make monthly withdrawals. This was to prevent, as Lee and his cabinet colleagues feared, the money being squandered overnight. Some 9,000 white-collar and unskilled base workers under 40 years of age were also selected to undergo 120-hour crash retraining courses to pick up the basics of a technical or vocational trade, with the most promising trainees picked for advanced courses. Three-quarters of the solution for redundancy, as Lee believed in high modernist fashion, lay in maintaining the worker's morale through such retraining.[27] At Sembawang Shipyard, which became operational in 1968, a tougher labor regime replaced the more leisurely work culture of the British dockyard in order to match the hectic schedules of commercial ship work. Spearheading this socialization of labor was the personnel director of the shipyard, Lim Cheng Pah, who took tough measures against worker absenteeism, liberal taking of medical leave, theft of equipment, and gambling and malingering during work hours. When interviewed for the public history book commissioned by Sembawang Shipyard, *Of Hearts and Minds* (1998), Lim recalled how, through a tough policing approach, "in just about four years, about 1974, the difference was noticeable . . . no more theft, and the workers were disciplined, no more malingering and time wasting."[28] The early years of commercialization entailed an experience of momentous change particularly for the 3,300 former base workers, mostly blue-collar staff, transferred from the dockyard to the shipyard. Finally, over and above these changes, the relationship of workers to Singapore's economy was radically redefined by new labor laws that weakened the power of trade unions; gave management the right to hire and fire; and sought to raise worker productivity by increasing the number of working hours and reducing fringe benefits.[29]

On the labor policies, my interviews significantly qualify the official record. The frame of reference in the interviews was also change, but this referred to a transformation in the identity of former base workers, from

being "servants of the British empire" into disciplined workers of the shipyard and more generally, model worker-citizens of the nation-state. The official narrative says much about policy but precious little about social experiences. It emphasizes the necessity of the labor policies, while representing, against the demands of commercial ship work, the attitudes of base workers as dated, delinquent, or deficient. The value of oral history in excavating new sources on the recent past is in contextualizing the change in workers' identity when the dockyard was converted to a shipyard. It shows the culture of work at the dockyard was a rational, not deficient, one, in keeping with the demands of naval work, while the more regulated culture that quickly replaced it at the shipyard served the commercial nature of work. When I spoke to Seng, the British withdrawal itself had "no impact whatsoever" on him, for he was undergoing training as an apprentice to become a fitter. The impact came later, he said, when he was transferred to the shipyard. As typical "colonial subjects," Seng and many of his colleagues had been accustomed to thinking that "Britain was Number 1." This mentality was consistent with the nature of naval work, Seng related, so that to install a starter on a ship, you had one group of technicians lay the cable, another to link it to the control panel, a third to install the panel, and a final group to test the panel.[30]

Oral histories like Seng's reveal that such terms used by Sembawang Shipyard's management as "absenteeism" and "malingering" were not disinterested description but deeply discursive representations: they defined what was right or wrong in the pursuit of rapid industrial change. Taking frequent medical leave was a common, indeed acceptable, practice at the naval base. As Roy, a marine engine fitter who worked in both the naval dockyard and shipyard, recalled, the medical center in the base was always full on Monday. But the British were not overly concerned as long as the naval work was duly completed. Nair understood that the faster pace and greater stress of work at the shipyard was due to the more demanding nature of commercial work. However, remembering he once received a five-month bonus at the shipyard, Roy admitted, "Only thing good in Sembawang Shipyard is you get promoted if you worked hard."[31] Likewise, Shaam, who rose from a lowly cleaner at the naval base to become a department manager in the shipyard, rejected the idea of sloth at the naval dockyard, for British officers also took action against idle workers. But Shaam pointed out an important change in the collective psyche of workers, whose aim now was not simply to finish the "8–4" work cycle as before, but to complete the allotted work quickly and move on to overtime work that offered higher pay; it was "continuous work, day and night," he said.[32] Both Roy and Shaam became model worker-citizens following the British departure.

My interviews also struck me as reasonable accounts, attempting to "make do" between individual experiences and accepted history. They demonstrated that the nature of commercial work mandated a new type of worker in tandem with Singapore's shift to an industrial economy. Yet, my informants also accepted the necessity of the changes; indeed it was the marriage between the new policies and the substantial material rewards that made the socialization of labor, however abrupt and stressful, possible. This was a clear instance of how the PAP government has attained political hegemony over Singaporeans, not through coercion in the main but by building an ideological consensus based on fulfilling the citizens' material interests.[33] Accepting his new prescribed role in the shipyard, Roy observed, "if the British were still here, Singapore would not be what it is today."[34] By most accounts, Lim Cheng Pah's tough measures were unpopular with workers, but, as Toh acknowledged, "someone has to be appointed to 'crack' that whip."[35] The oral histories are reasonable in the way they exist in conjunction with, and in an important way also in support of, the official narrative.

My interviewees, in accepting the need for labor discipline, have largely assumed a new identity as worker-citizens of an industrial nation-state. Toh, in stating why he viewed the British rundown as a "buzz" rather than as a crisis, attempted to reconcile personal and public perspectives:

> Perhaps [it was a crisis] for the politicians who might have thought we were vulnerable, [but] not many ordinary citizens (like myself included) really understood what national security means.[36]

The social consensus has made contemporary Singapore a developmental state, where the government's political legitimacy is based on an excellent track record in growing the economy and sharing the fruits of success.[37] The new identity of worker-citizens forged during the British withdrawal is still remembered by the former base workers. How and what they remember, however, is defined by the same identity. No oral history, then, is independent of the historical forces that determine the narrator's identity. Strangely, too, the accepted narrative is neither dominant nor contested, and the oral testimonies both accommodate the official account and express countervailing experiences.

Vanished Landscapes and Conciliatory Nostalgia

Commercialization also transformed the physical and social landscape of the naval base. Following the conversion of the dockyard, the base workers and

their families left their quarters for housing outside the base in the 1970s. Their own departure, rather than that of the British, was the truly poignant event that many of them still remember, vividly, through the lens of nostalgia, as bringing an end to a closely knit community. By the late 1980s, these quarters were all but demolished. Karen Fog Olwig has pointed out that narratives of the past have to be expressed within accepted "genres" in order to be heard and considered by a wider audience.[38] In Singapore, the history of the naval base, as an economic and cultural world defined by British power in postcolonial Singapore, has not largely been compatible with the city-state's heritage discourses, which are based either on nation-building imperatives or the marketing of an "exotic Asia" for tourists.[39] The transformed landscape of the naval base heralds a deep disjuncture between what base workers remember and what one now sees on entering the area.

This presents a difficulty in the use of oral history for public history or heritage projects. On the one hand, the removal of the Asian quarters arguably makes memory and oral history all the more important for reconstructing the heritage of a place that, until the late 1960s, played a vital role in Singapore's defense and economy, and in the lives of those who worked there. Workers' oral accounts may transcend what some critics of built heritage have termed "object fetishism" and an excessive fixation with physical structures, usually of the high culture sort.[40] When former base workers recall their living environments in the 1960s, their actual lived experiences not only bring to life old spaces and places; they also lend support to social narratives that are a useful counterpoint to mainstream heritage practices and discourses, which typically privilege physical structures and elite culture.[41]

When I interviewed Sim, a former policeman of the naval base, and his wife, Loke, at their Housing and Development Board (HDB) flat in Sembawang, the present had physically triumphed over the past. Over the proximate site of his present home, his former accommodation at Block 140 near the medical center in the base had once stood but had long been demolished. But as a teenager who spent much of his time in the base, collecting empty drinks bottles from British servicemen for a five or ten cent refund per bottle, his memory remains vivid. In Sim's recollections, the naval base was more a home and a community than it was, as expressed in public memory, a pillar of Singapore's economy and defense. Sim warmly recalled his neighbors, the distinctly multiracial and closely knit nature of the community (he could speak Tamil, and you could "see an Ah Seng, a Muthusamy and an Ahmad together"), the football fields and matches (he was a football player), and the shops and cinemas in the base. The gates of the naval base, now demolished, were another important landmark in his mind, just as they were

for other people I interviewed; this was where visitors had to exchange their identification card for a pass. The gates afforded the residents a strong sense of security, in contrast to which Chong Pang Village, located just outside the base, was the liminal "Other," full of gangsters and danger.[42] Loke repeatedly interjected during the interview, that Sim, a taxi driver, should drive me during the day to point out the places they were remembering, for I could "see" them better this way.[43] Many of these landmarks are gone or converted to new uses, but the couple's recollections demonstrate that social meaning can be vested in what still remained to form a cultural heritage based on local memories of home and community.

Heritage based on actual lived experiences, however, may also be ambivalent. It alienates as much as it engages because, as Barbara Kirshenblatt Gimblett observes, heritage is based on what is gone and is consequently a virtual exercise.[44] In addition to the transformation of the base area, the fact that the lives of the former base residents have changed significantly shortens the reach of heritage. If public history is to have meaning for those who did not participate directly in the past, there is a limit to the imagination with which one could relive the past in the present. Two of my other interviewees kindly drove me through Sembawang. Narayanan, who had lived in Kampong Wak Hassan to the east of the naval base, mapped the social geography of the area, intertwined with his family's story (his father had worked in the naval base in the 1950s). One landmark in Narayanan's mind, analogous to Sim's memory of the gates, was the southern entry point into the naval base at the cross-junction between Sembawang Avenue and Sembawang Road; today, it is flanked by undeveloped state land overgrown with grass on most sides and a cluster of high-rise HDB blocks on the remaining side. Later, as we drove past the military "black and white" bungalows where British officers had resided, now occupied by Americans, he commented, "You don't think you are in Singapore."[45] But I was, and there was sadly nothing left of the Asian quarters, which were an important site of community life in the naval base (figure 3.1).

Roy also took me and his friend Chong, a shipwright at Sembawang Shipyard, on a drive-through of Sembawang. We drove up Old Nelson Road to Admiralty House at the top of a low hill, where the British Admiral used to stay. The building still stands but is now part of a commercial establishment run by a country club. Later on, Nair and Choy pointed out another group of relics from the British era, namely, the road names of the naval base: Canberra, Canada, Pakistan, Ottawa, Malta, Gibraltar, Cyprus, and so on.[46] Significantly, these were imperial place names rather than names of British personalities who had a link to colonial Singapore, such as Raffles, Clementi,

Figure 3.1 The naval base area today, with colonial housing for expatriate personnel. Photograph by Kah Seng Loh.

and Balestier. What could not be found, however, were the three roads along which the Asian base workers once lived—Madras, Delhi, and Kowloon—although Canberra Road along the westerly flank of the quarters has survived. These Asian road names had a genuine social meaning, for they referred to the mostly Indian and Chinese residents in the area. Of the Chinese population, a large proportion were Cantonese immigrants who had come to Sembawang from the British naval facility in Hong Kong.

A similar sense of historical disconnect accentuated the virtual quality of my trip through Sembawang with tour guide, Margie Hall, who has lived in the locality for over 20 years. One acknowledges that the tour, meant for members of the British Association, naturally focused on what would be of interest to them, such as the European black-and-whites rather than the Asian quarters. But the real disconnect turned out not to be between the British and Singaporean narratives of the base, but rather between the past and present. As our coach traveled in a northward direction toward Sembawang, Hall's detailed narration of Singapore's place and name history highlighted the theme of change and the experience of virtuality: she explained the history of a place or landmark while referring to a vastly changed landscape or new

building standing in its place. Pointing to a group of modern bungalows, she spoke about vanished villages. It was disconcerting. Hall also referred to the migration of place and road names due to the displacements brought about by housing development in Sembawang. The name of Chong Pang, the son of well-known local businessman Lim Nee Soon, had been adopted for the village that stood opposite the main gates into the naval base; presently, however, Chong Pang City referred to an HDB estate further south. Perhaps, the most acute sense of surrealism occurred along Sembawang Road when Hall said, "We are going down the Naval Base," as we drove past HDB flats and coffee shops. We reached the end of the road at Sembawang Park, a green belt area for recreation and dining built after the British withdrawal.[47] The historical alienation was not due to any failing of my three guides, who knew their histories well, but was deeply embedded in the tension between heritage and development in contemporary Singapore.

A related aspect of the cultural heritage of the naval base was the inscription of nostalgia in social memory. Listening to their fond recollections of places and community, one quickly became aware of the nostalgic frame of a "romance gone wrong." There is considerable debate over whether nostalgia is a form of resistance to the present or whether it actually accommodates change. In Singapore, nostalgia is frequently expressed toward life in *kampongs* (villages in Malay), which were wooden housing settlements cleared to make way for public housing and economic development from the 1950s. Public apartments built by the HDB is the dominant form of housing in Singapore, in which four-fifths of Singaporeans live, the vast majority of whom are owners, not tenants. The frequent sense of longing for a "kampong way of life," however, does not entail a genuine desire to reverse the sequence of modern development and revert to the past; rather, it is a statement that one wishes to regain control over one's life, the rhythms of which are now commanded by the business and work norms of a high modernist society.[48] In fact, nostalgia in Singapore, as a characteristic form of "making do," is essentially conciliatory; it allows the consensual worker-citizen to partially critique the present state of affairs without undermining his or her own participation in the development.

Speaking to former base workers about the disappearance of the naval base as they knew it in the 1960s, I did not detect any strong desire for recovering the past. Most base workers moved out of the area in the 1970s, either to Jurong Town Corporation (JTC) flats nearby for shipyard workers or HDB flats in new towns further away like Toa Payoh. Toh's family moved into the former. His recollections are typical of base workers I interviewed about the radical change in housing from base quarters to an HDB flat. Wan

recalled his youthful days at Block 14, Room 12, at Kowloon Road as living in a "kampong" environment, where the neighbors knew one another, no one locked their doors, and kids ran around and climbed trees freely, unfettered by the regime of school. Yet, as Toh acknowledged, moving to a HDB flat provoked "mixed feelings": while life in public housing isolated families from one another, it also offered clean living. As more families bought, rather than simply rented, their houses or upgraded to larger flats, he observed, HDB life "evolved to be somewhat a 'show-off' living," parallel to the ceaseless pursuit of national and personal success in Singapore.[49] Likewise, Lee, who lived with her parents and nine siblings in Block 28, Room 11, Madras Road, remembered the naval base as a "protected area," from which they moved to a JTC flat in Sembawang in 1975. In underscoring her point about security, she recounted the case of a girl who was raped and murdered while walking home from the base area to her JTC flat. Lee remembered Chong Pang Village as a "notorious" place, full of gangsters. But, like most of my interviewees, she has also come to accept life in public (or private) housing and to desire to own her home.[50]

Lamenting about kampongs and the loss of community has become an accepted genre for speaking about the disappearance of historical landmarks in postcolonial Singapore. The National Archives of Singapore, a statutory board, published a book in 1993 titled *Kampong Days*, which sought to "pass on to our younger generation Singaporeans our memories, the joys, the inconveniences, hardships and most importantly the kampong values of neighborliness, thrift and hard work."[51] The nostalgia for vanished pasts that has an official endorsement is also emerging broadly. The generation of former base workers and residents has become middle-aged or elderly, with personal cause to reflect on the changes they had experienced over the past 40 years. Their recollections might be viewed as "memory heritage," which is valuable in being based on actual lived experiences of the working class. However, such memory heritage expresses a nostalgia that reconciles with the present and is not truly critical of change; it does not oppose elite narratives.

Conclusion

Oral history is a patently useful method for constructing social history and local heritage. My informants vividly remembered how they and their families were affected by the economic impact of the British rundown in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and how the culture of work abruptly became regimental and profit driven when the dockyard was commercialized. The

changes did not merely apply to shipyards, lands, and rules, but also to the very identity of labor, which was drawn closely in a high modernist manner to the emerging new economy based on foreign capital investment. In remembering the areas where they lived, the former base workers also mapped a place that was a home and a community, framed by the themes of security and harmony. In these ways, oral history throws new light on the past and qualifies official views of the British pullout as a crisis.

At the same time, my oral history work does not locate "pure" or autonomous "voices of the past" that can stand against dominant master narratives. This is at least so for a closely managed city-state like Singapore, where the ruling government has been in power since 1959. The PAP's hegemony is not chiefly based on coercion but on a consensus derived from successful development. Its legitimacy is not merely in political matters but also extends into areas of social governance like housing and, as this paper indicates, memory. Many of my participants made active efforts to fill the gaps between their own experiences and official representations of Singapore history. They do so not out of concern about leading a researcher toward a "counter-history" but in an attempt to synchronize their experiences and identity. Their continuing role as worker-citizens, forged in the early years of industrialization and coinciding with the British rundown, has led them to reconcile private and public narratives. What we hear, then, are both latent fragments and reasonable accounts, which exist in conjunction with, but do not discursively oppose, the dominant narrative. On the question of heritage, too, my interviewees express warm memories of home and community in the naval base in conciliatory accounts. These recollections discursively mediate between the quarters the people still recall fondly and the flats they presently own and furnish. But the possibility of heritage based on actual lived experiences is also lessened in both objective and subjective terms as a result, with so much destruction at the former base area and so little remaining of the group of "servants of the British empire."

Much of my analysis of the Singapore case would not apply in another place and time, for the depth of the PAP's political legitimacy and breadth of its success in development are remarkable, if not unique. But a few general points may serve as a useful guide. We may note that history and memory are not set in opposition. Oral history may be inflected by nostalgia or official narratives, but they remain an important means to throw light on the dim spaces of history. The oral historian can check them against the documentary record that, under scrutiny, will reveal its own biases and ideological commitment. One of these dim spaces is the relationship between an individual and the state; another is the individual's experience in a time of rapid change

and transformation. In both instances, oral history provides an entry point into subjective experiences that elude the official archives or are discursively represented there.

We may also observe that the people who speak to us are not necessarily subalterns, opposed to those in power. Memory, oral history, and heritage are not only interesting or important when they challenge dominant narratives. The early Paul Thompson believed firmly in the oral history of people as representing autonomous "voices of the past." In exploring issues of memory and heritage formation, we can see that this is a simplistic view. But we should also note that the ways in which people mediate between different accounts, to make them agreeable and reconcile between them, so as to make do in the present, also demonstrate the agency and dignity of people, which Thompson was at pains to highlight. The reasonable accounts and latent fragments of the past are issues that also deserve our attention and study.

Notes

1. Author's email interview with Lim, November 15, 17, 2009. Pseudonyms are used in the paper.
2. Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).
3. Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Maya Knauer, eds., *Contested Histories in Public Space: Memory, Race, and Nation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 3–4.
4. Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, and Memory: Chauri-Chaura 1922–1992* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 130.
5. Gyanendra Pandey, "Voices from the Edge: The Struggle to Write Subaltern Histories," in *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial,* ed. Vinayak Chaturvedi (London: Verso, 2000), pp. 285–86, 296.
6. Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994), p. 118.
7. See for instance Dallen J. Timothy, ed., *The Political Nature of Cultural Heritage and Tourism* (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007).
8. Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes, eds., *Oral History and Public Memories* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), p. xiii.
9. Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," in *The Oral History Reader,* 2nd edition, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 2006).
10. Loh Kah Seng, "History, Memory and Identity in Modern Singapore: Testimonies from the Urban Margins," *Oral History Review* 36.1 (2009); and "'Our Lives Are Bad but Our Luck Is Good': A Social History of Leprosy in Singapore," *Social History of Medicine* 21.2 (2008).

11. Alistair Thomson, "Fifty Years On: An International Perspective on Oral History," *The Journal of American History* 85.2 (September 1998): 588.
12. Allan Megill, "History, Memory, Identity," *History of the Human Sciences* 11 (1998): 54, 56.
13. Jeffrey K. Olick and Toyce Robbins, "Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 127.
14. Sharon R. Roseman, "'How We Built the Road': The Politics of Memory in Rural Galicia," *American Ethnologist* 23.4 (1996).
15. John R. Eidson, "Between Heritage and Countermemory: Varieties of Historical Representation in a West German Community," *American Ethnologist* 32.4 (2005).
16. Tim Winter, *Post-Conflict Heritage, Postcolonial Tourism: Culture, Politics and Development at Angkor* (Abingdon, Oxon; NY: Routledge, 2007).
17. Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story: 1965–2000* (Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings and Times Editions, 2000), p. 145.
18. Loh Kah Seng, "The British Military Withdrawal from Singapore and the Anatomy of a Catalyst," in *Singapore in Global History,* ed. Derek Heng and Syed Khairudin Aljunied (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), pp. 185–204.
19. FCO 24/875, Singapore: Annual Review for 1969, February 5, 1970.
20. Author's email interview with Toh, January10, 11, and 13, and May 4, 2010.
21. Author's interview with Tan, December 19, 2009.
22. Author's interview with Padmini, February 17, 2010.
23. Author's interview with Kanika, February 17, 25, 2010.
24. Jennifer Cole, "Malagasy and Western Concepts of Memory: Implications for Postcolonial Politics and the Study of Memory," *Ethos* 34.2 (2006).
25. FCO 24/309 Transcript of interview, January 15, 1968.
26. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 4.
27. OD 39/8 Letter from Lee Kuan Yew to minister for Overseas Development, December 15, 1967.
28. Melanie Chew, *Of Hearts and Minds: The Story of Sembawang Shipyard* (Singapore: Sembawang Shipyard Pte Ltd, 1998), pp. 110–13.
29. The labor laws were the Trade Union Act (Amendment) of 1966, and in 1968 the Employment Act and Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act.
30. Author's interview with Seng, January 15, 2010.
31. Author's interview with Roy, December 17, 2009.
32. Author's interview with Kunjamba Sukumaran, February 25, 2010.
33. Chua Beng Huat, *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995).
34. Author's interview with Roy, December 17, 2009.
35. Author's email interview with Toh, January 11, 2010.
36. Author's email interview with Toh, May 4, 2010.
37. Martin Perry, Lily Kong, and Brenda S. A. Yeoh, *Singapore: A Developmental City State* (Chichester, UK: Wiley, 1997).
38. Karen Fog Olwig, "The Burden of Heritage: Claiming a Place for a West Indian Culture," *American Ethnologist* 26.2 (May 1999).

39. See for instance Peggy Teo and Brenda S. A. Yeoh, "Remaking Local Heritage for Tourism," in *The Political Nature of Cultural Heritage and Tourism,* ed. Dallen J. Timothy (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007).
40. Lucy Taksa, "Machines and Ghosts: Politics, Industrial Heritage and the History of Working Life at the Eveleigh Workshops," *Labor History* 85 (November 2003): 66.
41. Brenda Yeoh and Lily Kong, "The Notion of Place in the Construction of History, Nostalgia and Heritage in Singapore," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 17.1 (1996): 59.
42. Author's interview with Sim, December 16, 2009.
43. Author's interview with Loke, December 16, 2009.
44. Barbara Kirshenblatt Gimblett, "Theorizing Heritage," *Ethnomusicology* 39.3 (Autumn 1995): 376.
45. Author's interview with Narayanan, December 2, 2009.
46. Author's interviews with Roy and Chong, December 17, 2009.
47. Margie Hall, "Discover Sembawang—The History of the North of Singapore" tour, April 28, 2010.
48. See Chua Beng-Huat, "Nostalgia for the *Kampung,*" *Political Legitimacy and Housing: Stakeholding in Singapore* (Singapore; New York: Routledge, 1997), and Loh, "History, Memory and Identity in Modern Singapore."
49. Author's email interview with Toh, January 10 and 11, 2010.
50. Author's interview with Lee, December 6, 2009.
51. National Archives of Singapore, *Kampong Days: Village Life and Times in Singapore Revisited*, ed. K. F. Tang (Singapore: National Archives, 1993), Foreword.

CHAPTER 4

Remembrance, Nation, and the Second World War in Singapore: The Chinese Diaspora and Their Wars

Ernest Koh

On June 25, 2011, a group of 70 Malaysian and Singaporean Chinese set off from the Ee Hoe Hean Club in Singapore in a convoy of 21 private cars, bound for Kunming, China. The motorcade would take the same route as groups of overseas Chinese volunteers from Malaya had traveled along in the late 1930s, when they responded to a call by the Chinese government of the day to serve as drivers, mechanics, laborers, and nurses on the last land link between China and supplies from the outside world, the Burma Road.

The choice of Singapore as the starting point for this commemorative journey is understandable, once one comes to know something about Nanyang Chinese nationalism during China's war against Japan. Between 1937, when the Sino-Japanese War began, and 1942, when Singapore fell to invading Japanese armies, the British colony was the epicenter of China's overseas war relief movement. The Federation of China Relief Fund of the South Seas, which was the largest overseas Chinese relief fund organization in the world, was headquartered on the island. It raised nearly C$200 million for the war effort, and was responsible for sending volunteer labor and troops to China and the Burma Road. From across Southeast Asia, thousands of Chinese converged on Singapore, where they were marshaled by

the Federation before being sent north by train or ship. Yet 70 years on, no monument to the volunteers exists in Singapore. Nor have they ever been a part of the nation's carefully managed war narrative, which has focused exclusively on the Japanese occupation of the island.

Pro-China nationalism was not the only wartime political movement among the Chinese population. From the moment Britain declared war on Germany, the Anglophone population too mobilized for hostilities. This rallying occurred despite the fact that there was no imminent threat from Nazi Germany to Singapore, or to any of the empire's Far Eastern possessions for that matter. Still, there was a vested interest in a British victory. Many Chinese who identified chiefly with the British Empire donated cash for the war effort, volunteered for armed service, and some even found themselves in distant theaters of conflict. Once again, in the country's war histories, we see no mention of this.

Finding Singapore's Second World Wars

Writers working on Singapore's history have produced a great deal of literature on Singapore's wartime past, although the popularity of the subject is a relatively new development. It is, in part at least, a product of the Singapore state's incorporation of the Japanese occupation experience into the nation's creation myth, as will be explicated later. But since the fiftieth anniversary of the fall of Singapore, and emerging out of much international fanfare about half-centenaries of the Second World War, researchers and popular authors alike have become inspired to revisit the role of the conflict in shaping the former British colony into a nation-state. In these studies, there is an inevitable focus on how ordinary residents of Singapore made sense of the occupation, since that is the most abundant quarry to mine for the origins of postcolonial nationalism. At the same time, more sophisticated works on commemoration and the deliberate forgetting of the heterogeneous, racialized occupation experience provided a crucial dimension to understanding the nature of Singapore's war remembrance. But there is a curious assumption in this body of writing that has remained unproblematized. Studies of the war have concerned themselves with events and experiences that occurred within a defined time period and geography. War came to Malaya in December 1941, heralded by the landings at Kota Bahru and southern Thailand, and ended in August 1945 with the Japanese surrender. Where the experiences of the colonial citizenry are concerned, scholars have marked this temporal span as when the Second World War took place. Before that, Malaya was not at war.

There is a functional logic to this approach. War began when bombs were dropped and shells were fired in anger. There was none of this in Malaya until December 1941.

What limitations are there to such a literal framework? Overseas Chinese involvement, and their absence from histories of the wider Second World War outside of the traditional framing of the conflict, compels a series of historical questions. Just how did they frame their experiences of the war? What were their points of reference? Have the emphases on space and postcolonial nationhood led to a distortion of historians' understanding of Singapore's war history, where its ultimate end has been traditionally painted as being postcolonial state sovereignty?

Since it was first put forward in 1961 in *The Origins of the Second World War*, English historian A. J. P. Taylor's idea of "the long war Second World War" has provided scholars with a way of thinking about the disparate nature of the conflicts between nation-states that have come to be collectively termed as the Second World War.[1] The war in which China and Japan found themselves set against each other was distinct in theme and shape from the ones that saw fighting occur between Japan and Britain, Germany and France, the Soviet Union and Germany, and the United States and Japan. Historians have brought these wars under an umbrella term, a world war, because fighting took place on battlefields worldwide, but in reality they often had little to do with one another. To demonstrate his line of reasoning, Taylor pointed to the vagaries of the Second World War's opening. The answer to the simple question of when the conflict began depends on which war one was referring to. "Russians date it from 22 June 1941, the Chinese from November 1937, the Abyssinians . . . from October 1935, and the Americans from 7 December 1941."[2]

Taylor's ideas provide us with a useful framework to consider how we might unpack Singapore's Second World War and recognize its historical plurality. There is an ideological heterogeneity among the Chinese of Singapore (and the colonial citizenry more broadly) that is often overlooked in existing war literature. For instance, a constituency of Chinese in Malaya, the ones who looked to China as their political center, lived in a state of war following the Marco Polo Bridge incident. After the Anglo-French declaration of war against Germany, an Anglophone faction that identified with the British Empire followed suit. As such, different political and cultural groupings within the Chinese community were, essentially, living and experiencing different sets of conflicts asynchronously. Many of these wars did not resemble the one presented in the national narrative of the past. Loyalties to political centers of the day, principally the British Empire or Nationalist China,

shaped alternative war experiences. Put simply, there were multiple Second World Wars, depending on one's affiliations.

This article is not, however, a military history. Instead, its concern is with remembrance, and how the idea of the nation has come to shape the way the war has been presented in public narratives. It tracks the emergence of what I refer to as "Singapore's national Second World War" by outlining the nature of war commemoration on the island. It demonstrates how the Singapore state has proved to be adept in harnessing war memory as a means to shore up its own political legitimacy and to construct a coherent story of the past that is intended to tamper racial divisions by fostering a sense of belonging, even though it arrived relatively late into the field of war remembrance. By focusing on the steady marginalization of the Chinese diaspora's war experiences in two sets of specific conflicts—that of the Sino-Japanese war, and that of the struggle between the British Empire and its enemies—I hope to show how public war remembrance in Singapore has moved progressively away from existing in plural forms connected to distinct, specific conflicts toward a story that is narrated around a common, unifying conflict.

However, these developments have not, I argue, come at the expense of how the Second World War is remembered in private spheres. Even in interventionist regimes, it is simplistic to assume that the state is solely responsible for the proliferation and staging of all war remembrance, and it is not my intention to suggest that war remembrance in Singapore exists within a hegemonic paradigm. On the contrary, I show how a variety of sources, including private war memories, allows scholars to trace the contours of a very different landscape of the past in a way that allows us to avoid dehistoricizing the nation. Three examples follow.

'Ho Meng Sen' was born in 1921 near Ipoh in Malaya. He was sent to Hong Kong for his university studies and was attempting to complete a degree in engineering when the Second World War came to the British Crown Colony in December 1941. Making his way first by boat then by truck through to the unoccupied Chinese city of Guilin, serendipity eventually allowed him, along with other Malayan Chinese, to volunteer for a new Allied flying group on the China-Burma-India front. By late 1944, Ho was piloting American bombers over the Chinese southwest in support of the Allied campaigns to stave off Japanese advances both there and in India.

Ho's story is remarkable not just for the nature of his experience, but also because it does not conform to the stories associated with Singapore's national Second World War. The histories of Singapore's war are usually configured entirely around the Japanese invasion and occupation of Malaya. The

population was, the story goes, caught up in an imperial war that they had little connection with, united as victims under a callous and exceptionally barbarous regime, and therefore came to desire self-rule over colonial rule.[3] The Japanese occupation is cast as the undisputed centerpiece of the experience of the war, serving as a key plot device in the historical narrative of the nation. Singapore's war is thus situated exclusively in a particular geographical space with boundaries defined by postcolonial borders, and defined through the national story's ultimate end—that is, state sovereignty. Yet Ho's story challenges the dominant paradigm by taking the story of Singapore's Second World War out of that definitive space. His is a story about the ideologies of diaspora, and Ho's story is part of a wider history that reflects a reality beyond the comprehension or concern of postcolonial nationalism.

There is evidence of similar stories scattered across ordinary households in Singapore and Malaysia, as well as in international repositories. Housed in the Public Records Office in Kew, London, are the records of one Sergeant Chew Teng Soon of Singapore, a pilot with the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. On September 5, 1940, he was in action with No. 17 Squadron over Debden, England.[4]

Chew left no memoirs, nor was he publically lauded in service histories in postwar Singapore. But we can piece together some information about his life from records housed in the British National Archives and others in the Royal Air Force's holdings. We know he was born in Singapore and arrived in England for his studies in 1938. We know he volunteered for the RAF shortly after war broke out in September 1939, and that he indicated on his enlistment forms that he had "some flying experience with mono engine plane," which suggests private flying lessons at some point in his earlier life. We know he flew with No.17 Squadron RAF between mid-1940 and late 1942, when he was shot down by German fighter aircraft over the English Channel and presumed to have died.[5] That no other entries appear under his files seems to confirm this.

Another entry, this time in the supplement to the *London Gazette* on March 17, 1944, details an equally fascinating story of a pilot from Singapore at war in distant lands. Flying Officer Tan Kay Hai of No. 225 Squadron appears in the *Gazette* as a recipient of the Distinguished Flying Cross.[6] Meanwhile, his log books from the RAF reveal to us that Tan—one of over a hundred pilots from Singapore who served in the RAF—flew more missions over France as the Allies landed in Normandy on June 6, 1944, before being shot down and captured three weeks later. He escaped captivity by early 1945, and made his way back to his squadron just before the end of the war in Europe. Following the surrender of Japanese forces in the Pacific,

Tan returned to Singapore where he was later made Wing Commander of the Malayan Auxiliary Air Force.

We know far more about Tan than we do of Chew, in no small part due to the former's granddaughter's deep interest in his story, and her access to family oral histories. This is a powerful history that lends itself to defining the motivations of particular constituencies of Chinese during the Second World War and what they felt the conflict stood for—whether it was the defense of empire or a sense of duty to Nationalist China. But despite his leading role in the establishment of what would come to be the Republic of Singapore Air Force, Tan's story is a noticeable omission from the nation's air force museum today.

These and other stories of Singapore's Second World Wars as fought by the Chinese from the island—but also away from it—remain outside of the mainstream of war remembrance and commemoration in Singapore today, which remain anchored to local sites of violence and conflict, as well as spaces of colonial humiliation. The old Ford factory where the British signed the surrender of their forces was fully restored in 2002 as an interactive museum that highlights the incompetence of the British High Command in organizing the defense of the island. At the War Memorial Park in downtown Singapore, four identical 70-meter pillars, each signifying one of the four racial classifications used by the government following independence in 1965 (Chinese, Indian, Malay, Eurasian/Other), tower from the base of the memorial. These symbolize the idea of shared and equal suffering at the hands of the Japanese among the four racial groups during the occupation. The Malay Regiment's bitter stand at the Pasir Panjang ridge in the last days of the Japanese assault on the island was memorialized in the form of a national interpretive center in 2002, housed within a two-story colonial bungalow at Bukit Chandu. As geographers Hamzah Muzaini and Brenda Yeoh observed from listening to the guided talks, the chief message of the center is to honor the Malay Regiment for its defense of what would come to be, for Singaporeans, their country.[7] Yet despite the plenitude of memorials dedicated to the experience of the Second World War, this nationalized remembrance of the island's wartime past is a relatively new phenomenon, as we shall see later in this chapter.

Ethnicity and Remembrance in Postcolonial Southeast Asia

The characteristics of how Singapore's war is remembered speak to wider trends in war remembrance throughout the Asia-Pacific region. In their

volume on the remembering of the Pacific war, *Perilous Memories*, T. Fujitani, Geoffrey White, and Lisa Yoneyama argue that the politics of decolonization throughout Asia at the end of empire have meshed with the histories and memories of the war, and that the national histories of the Second World War in Asia are also, at once, histories of decolonization and nation formation.[8]

The violence of invasion and "liberation" as well as the politics of the Cold War created periods of transition whereby the identities of the disparate colonized communities throughout Asia were subject to great stresses.[9] Being Chinese for example was potentially deadly in Malaya in the aftermath of invasion, while being Malay was hazardous in the months following Japan's surrender, when roving mobs sought retribution for what was perceived as Malay complicity in race-specific atrocities. The proclamation of the People's Republic of China and a new "Chinese International" saw Chinese once again become a dangerous label as questions were raised about the nature of diasporic loyalty. Historian Wang Gungwu suggests that the Western retreat from empire, especially in Southeast Asia where most of the Chinese resided, witnessed the sensations of anticolonial nationalism metamorphose into "forces which would not tolerate any kind of foreign enclave nationalism in their newly independent countries."[10] Under the pressures of postcolonial nationalisms that stressed the importance of homogeneity, Chinese who were still pondering the currency of their identification with mainland China were obliged to privilege local national causes. Those who did not embrace these new nationalisms were threatened with deportation, or worse, as was the tragic case of hundreds of thousands of Chinese in Indonesia.[11] Allowing the public submergence of private memories and actions belonging to alternative political loyalties became essential to ensuring continued existence as citizens of the new postcolonial states.

As imperial systems of rule came to an end after 1945 in the face of nationalist movements, new local elites emerged in their place and reconfigured the identities of local communities to suit national projects of unification. In Asia, these elites were often groups who had a long-running historical relationship with the departing colonial order, and thus had power handed to them. In other instances, the new political elites were those who were able to mobilize the support of one of the Cold War superpowers most effectively. Regardless, history became a way for these embryonic regimes to construct a persuasive reason for their leading role in the new order following the end of empire.

The past was, therefore, used in national remembrance activities to naturalize the authority of specific constituencies within the new nation.

In Sukarno's Indonesia, this entailed homage to *Pancasila* during national commemoration. It comprised common values, ostensibly sprung from a history shared by the archipelago's ethnically and religiously diverse inhabitants, and was deployed as the binding force of the new nation centered on Java. In Malaya, the politics of the Cold War cemented the future of Malay-dominated sultanate rule. In Singapore, similar concerns by the British Military Administration over the communist insurgency resulted in legislation and security actions that marginalized the predominantly Chinese left, and enabled the rapid emergence of a conservative, English-educated, and ethnically plural elite. Through these processes, the identities, histories, and languages of the citizenry were actively brought into line with the ideology of homogenization by the ruling regimes, with public contradictions marginalized or expunged. Debates raged in what would come to be Malaysia throughout the late 1940s and 1950s about whether or not the Chinese ought to have citizenship rights, and to what degree, in the new federation. The Chinese written script was banned from public spaces in Indonesia, as were Chinese religious rites, and Chinese Indonesians were required to adopt an Indonesian name for public use. In Chinese-dominated Singapore, English became the language of governance and education, with Chinese second equal as an official language alongside Malay and Tamil.

Unlike what was happening in much of Asia, most notably in South Korea, Burma, and India where commemorations of the Second World War quickly emerged in political importance within a decade of the war's end to drive nationalist narratives, the vocabulary of postcolonial nationhood in Singapore and Malaysia did not draw initially from the memories of the Pacific War. For the Malaysian state, the Emergency came to be deployed as the critical moment of succession from colonial to postcolonial governance, while in Singapore the expulsion of the state from the Federation of Malaysia in 1965 was the starting point for the national story, at least until the mid-1980s.[12] S. Rajaratnam, then foreign minister, explained the Singapore state's take on the deemphasis of pre-1965 history in an interview with journalists in 1984:

> Until very recently Singapore's past was a matter of supreme indifference for most Singaporeans simply because they believed this island never really had a history worth remembering… because all of that history was British colonial history… Patriotism required that we performed some sort of collective lobotomy to wipe out all traces of 146 years of shame.[13]

In October 1966, just over a year after Singapore's independence, a brief article in *The Straits Times* carried the triumphant proclamation that the

Japanese and Singaporean governments had reached an agreement on a compensation for Japan's occupation of the island (the Singapore government was asked not to refer to the money as war reparations, and signed an agreement renouncing any future claims) to the value of US$ 25 million in payment, and an equal amount as a low-interest financial loan.[14] The timing was understandable. Foreign investment was seen to be critical in kick-starting Singapore's stagnant economy, and Japanese firms looking to outsource components of their production process made ideal candidates for courtship. "It is important that we put this dark episode behind us," then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew announced, "so we can now look forward to a future as economic partners."[15]

Lee's words were not just obligatory to the occasion; as part of the Singapore state's acceptance of compensation, he insisted that all Chinese clan organizations publically recognize that the matter of Japanese atrocities against the Chinese on the island was forever closed, so as to not impede Japanese business investment.[16] In exchange, some of the money was channeled into funding a war memorial to the Chinese war dead, but with an important caveat. The new Civilian War Memorial, located at the center of the War Memorial Park along Beach Road, was transformed from a memorial that was originally conceived by Chinese community leaders to commemorate the 25,000 Chinese civilians executed by Japanese troops during the occupation, into a monument dedicated to all civilians killed during the invasion and occupation, regardless of ethnicity. This arrangement was conceived as a means to avoid igniting any lingering racial tensions between the Malays and the Chinese on the island.[17] This early homogenization of the country's war history would set the tone for remembrance later.

War Remembrance Before 1992

The acceptance of the Japanese government's payout and its conditions was a clear indicator that the state was convinced then that the conflict did not need to be mined aggressively, either for political capital or to construct a national narrative of the past that advantaged the ruling party. But the war's absence from the foreground of domestic politics did not translate into a forgetting of the conflict among the citizenry, as relics of the past reminded Singaporeans about the conflict almost on a daily basis. Right up until the 1980s, unexploded Japanese bombs and shells or British ammunition caches were regularly uncovered during preparatory work for building projects. In Labrador Park, the old six-inch batteries that guarded Singapore's southwest

from the Japanese naval assault that never came served as a popular photograph backdrop for countless local and foreign visitors to the area.

Mnemonic devices such as these also inspired remembrance activities in the face of political forgetting. The relatively secluded grave of Lim Bo Seng, a Chinese resident of Singapore who was promoted posthumously to the rank of Major General by the Republic of China government for his resistance against the Japanese in Malaya, generated enough curiosity among daily joggers in MacRitchie Reservoir to inspire a brief article in *The Straits Times* in 1977 about his exploits, and how Lim's remains were transferred from his war grave in Malaya after the Japanese surrender to the MacRitchie site in 1946.[18] At the looming Shuanglin Monastery in Toa Payoh—a focal point for those Chinese in Singapore who volunteered to serve as drivers on the Burma Road between 1937 and 1941—curious onlookers would gather to witness annual prayers conducted for the monastery's war dead, including its abbot who was executed by the Japanese for his part in organizing the training of the drivers and the raising of funds for the Republic of China government in the war against Japan.[19] In Punggol village, where four hundred Chinese civilians were massacred by the Japanese in late 1942, local residents made it a point to present offerings during the Hungry Ghost Festival each year so as to appease the souls of the dead, a ritual that was also performed at the Civilian War Memorial by other relatives of those missing or killed.[20] In the Malay settlement at Pasir Panjang, not far from the final position of the Malay Regiment, villagers commemorated the fallen through religious ceremonies each year, until the settlement itself was moved to make way for new container wharves in the 1960s.[21]

The remnants of the plural and distinct conflicts experienced by those from Singapore are not limited to material relics or sites of violence and memorialization. In the absence of veteran's associations that championed, commissioned, or inspired service histories, the private memories of war veterans and survivors were kept alive as oral histories retold to friends and kin. While Winkie Ho's war service with the Chinese-America Composite Wing was never formally recognized by the state, since it was regarded as service in the military of a foreign country, his exploits were retold time and again through the decades to his children and grandchildren, and in uncounted get-togethers with his Singapore Airlines student-pilots, which earned him their ungrudging respect as a pilot who had vast experience in intense flying conditions.[22] Li-Er Hanson grew up with household stories of her grandfather Tan Kay Hai's service with the RAF in England, and at one point was inspired to write a book about him. When her grandfather passed away in 1991, her family paid for a detailed obituary in *The Straits Times* that described his

service and awards to the Singapore public.[23] Jimmy Chew, a technician with the RAF Far Eastern Command who was captured in Java by the Japanese while fleeing to Australia after the fall of Singapore, relived his Second World War innumerable times through the rest of his life as he sought to explain his physical scars to his friends and family.[24] 'Tan Ah Choon,' a truck driver for the Chinese army on the Burma Road, made it a point to meet for a meal at least once a year with fellow survivors—a ritual that continues to this day.[25] 'Chai Ah Kee,' a member of the controversial Chinese volunteer regiment "Dalforce" at Kranji during the invasion, told the stories of his affiliation to only a trusted few for decades out of a fear that he would be identified as a member of the Malayan Communist Party and deported by the Singapore authorities.[26] In contrast, Tan Choon Keng confided the darkest secrets of his Second World War to anyone who would listen. As a doctor pressed into service with the Japanese Army on the Burma-Thailand Railway, Tan was forced to set fire to a camp of Asian slave laborers who had been infected with cholera. To his deep frustration, whenever he retold the story his listeners would recoil in horror, but none ever seemed to show enough empathy toward the reasons for his actions.[27]

These public and private acts of remembrance and retelling remind us that the relationship between war memory and history is not an easy one in Singapore. There is ample evidence to show that war remembrance and commemoration, while excised from the national stage until the early 1990s, persisted in localized and heterogeneous forms. It continued to exist in everyday life, marginal to the national story. More importantly, these stories of remembrance did not cohere as a national story. Instead, because they involved commemorations of specific sets of conflicts—between Japan and Nationalist China, or Britain, or the United States—they crossed national boundaries and connected with war experiences elsewhere.

The Emergence of Singapore's National Second World War

Throughout the late 1960s and the 1970s, the modern history of Singapore barely featured in primary and secondary school curricula. Nor was there any attempt by the state to organize war-remembrance activities. The People's Action Party (PAP) government looked to distance itself from its colonial roots (though several of its English-educated founding members were educated in the United Kingdom) and had little time for history. But this was to change by the first half of the 1980s. The Singapore government began to take

an interest in the teaching and staging of national history, previously ignored in both the national curriculum and in the state's political lexicon. Historians Lysa Hong and Huang Jianli astutely tie this development to the political capital evident in the country's confident celebrations of twenty-five years of self-governance in 1984. With economic prospects finally looking promising after decades of uncertainty, for the first time a National Exhibition, entitled "25 Years of Nation-Building, 1959–1984," presented to the public the triumphant story of Singapore as a nation that survived against all odds.[28]

The shock defeat of the PAP candidate Pang Kim Hin by Joshua B. Jeyaratnam of the Worker's Party in the Anson by-elections in 1981, which broke the PAP's monopoly on electoral seats since 1968, also seems to have jolted the Singapore state into considering strategies to deploy history to buttress its legitimacy. Jeyaratnam's successful defense of his seat in Anson in 1984 heightened anxieties within the ruling government that Singaporeans were at risk of "forgetting" the importance of the party in masterminding the country's successful economic development.[29]

The year 1984 proved to be a watershed for national history-making when, alongside the National Exhibition, the first ever Singapore history textbook, which spanned Raffles's arrival in 1819 to full independence in 1965, was also introduced in Singapore schools—the first time since 1972 that history was taught as a stand-alone subject in the school syllabus.[30] It was the quintessential creation story, focusing on how the forefathers of students came to the island, battled difficult economic and political conditions, were inspired by the Japanese invasion to fight for self-rule, and thus helped forge modern Singapore.[31] Just as importantly, the PAP's triumphant victory over communist elements and its new policies of industrialization bookended the new text, signaling to students that 1965—the birth of the new nation—marked the triumphant dawn of ordered modernity and deliverance from the forces of chaos.[32]

Under the direction of the PAP, the Oral History Unit was set up as early as 1979 with the principal focus of interviewing the elite of Singaporean society (chiefly pioneering politicians, civil servants, and entrepreneurs) in order to preserve their advice and wisdom for future generations.[33] This was broadened to encompass the perspectives of ordinary people during the Japanese occupation in 1985, and then of the lived experience of ethnic minorities in Singapore such as the Armenians, Eurasions, Peranakans, and Jews. Yet as Kevin Blackburn points out, the interviews were highly constrained, with a series of deterministic questions that subordinated the life story of an individual to the national narrative, and were designed to simply elicit a chorus

or refrain to "add color . . . [and reaffirm] the story of Singapore's national history."[34] In the interviews with survivors of the occupation, Blackburn notes, interviewees were merely asked to comment on what they saw and witnessed insofar as Japanese brutality and local suffering were concerned. Little attention was paid to their lives before or after the war.[35]

While the Second World War gained some measure of state attention through the Oral History Unit's project, it was only in 1992 with the fiftieth anniversary of the fall of Singapore that a national Singaporean Second World War formally took shape. The National Museum hosted a hugely successful exhibition entitled "Syonan-to" ("Light of the South," the Japanese name for its Singapore colony during the occupation), which emphasized the lessons learnt from the ineptness of the British plans for defending the island—namely, that the war had convinced the residents of Singapore that they could not depend on others for their defense.[36] In preparation for the 1995 commemorations that would mark the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Pacific war, the Ministry of Defense set up a committee to identify sites that were important during the war. Eleven were eventually identified, and throughout 1995, remembrance ceremonies were consecutively staged with great public fanfare to mark the "opening" of these new sites and their reintegration into Singapore's national past.[37]

At each ceremony, the standard script of remembering how naïve the colonial citizenry had been in expecting others to defend their freedom was driven home. On Sentosa Island, the famous 15-inch caliber fortress guns that protected Singapore's seaward approaches—in 1941 by far the most powerful and formidable pieces of coastal artillery ever sited in the British Empire—had a plaque placed on their mountings that reminded visitors of the folly of having defenses that pointed the wrong way. This was an old myth, a legend told among circles of military *grognards* that predated the fiftieth anniversary commemorations. In reality, the fortress guns fulfilled the role that they were designed for by forcing Japanese planners to dismiss the possibility of an invasion from the sea. Furthermore, the guns could traverse a full 360 degrees, and were used to good effect to defend the island's landward approaches during the Japanese assault on Singapore when both the Japanese 18th Division, during their advance on Tengah airbase in the island's west, and the Imperial Guards, while forcing a crossing at the causeway spanning the Straits of Johor, came under attack, blunting both Japanese initiatives and buying precious hours for evacuation.[38] Nonetheless, the legend was seized upon by the National Heritage Board as a worthy hook for the national story. At the memorial, the blurb on the plaque stressed the

need for the nation to be able to defend itself, rather than rely on others to do the job (badly). The theme of colonial ineptitude was too compelling to be dismissed, even in the face of historical inaccuracy, and was an opportunity to service the national narrative.

In the lead-up to these anniversary commemorations, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong further underscored the importance of the conflict in Singapore's national past by noting the lessons within the experience that younger Singaporeans could learn from. What the population took from the war, Goh noted, was a desire for independence, and the war set in motion a struggle for self-rule—a struggle that was ongoing, and relevant to 1990s Singapore:

> The 44 months of Japanese Occupation were a period of terror, fear and atrocities. It was also a period of bravery, patriotism and sacrifice… From these events and in memory of these men and women, we learn to honor that quality of bravery when others around are giving up, the need to stand firm and not wilt in the face of enemy advance, and the fortitude of enduring hardship in the dark hours… If we want peace, we must work for it, and if necessary, fight and die for it. We may seek the help of others, but, in the end, we must rely on ourselves… Without struggle, there is no Singapore.[39]

We can track the rise of Singapore's national Second World War through an examination of the level of importance ascribed to the anniversary of the fall of the island, February 15. Up until 1992, the anniversary was largely noted by civilians who organized religious prayers and food offerings to the spirits of the deceased. But on the fiftieth anniversary of the fall of Singapore, the PAP government announced that the day was to be designated Heritage Day, to convey the message of the island's diverse races bonding to defend the island and, in doing so, win their freedom from foreign rule.[40] By 1998, the day had been rebranded as Total Defense Day. Embedded into the anniversary now was the idea of helplessness among the colonized citizenry, the fragility of peace and racial harmony, the need for unity, and—through the legitimating of the need for national service—the importance of the nation-state being able to defend itself. Alongside the newfound importance of February 15 was the rise in prominence of war history in Singapore's schools. War sites on the island became closely integrated into narratives in history text books while school trips to war memorials, known as "battlefield tours" and "learning journeys," became a normal feature in the secondary school curriculum.[41]

The creation of a national Second World War and its insertion into public spaces and vocabulary need to be understood within the context of the

"economic miracle" that the developmental state had engendered. Public war remembrance was a response to the idea that an economically successful nation-state without "a history" was soulless, and it was based on a notion that the war could be, as Muzaini and Yeoh argue, "pressed into the service of nation-building, reworked as a prelude to nationalism."[42] In other words, the war was now the first act in Singapore's national story. Any sense that the war was experienced in a heterogeneous way was submerged under the weight of the state's official take on the war. Blackburn, for instance, observes that the testimony of Tan Yen Hoon, a Chinese clerk during the war who was interviewed by the national Oral History Centre, was disingenuously edited when it was presented as a quotation in an exhibition about the occupation to highlight how it was in fact the Japanese who sowed divisions and discord between the Malay and Chinese communities on the island with insidious lies about each other.[43]

Another strategy employed by the Singapore government to construct a national Second World War was to identify local war heroes among the colonized citizenry. These were men and women who had been involved in resisting Japanese rule, and whose stories could be woven into the narrative of nascent nationalism. Lim Bo Seng was one of the earliest to be identified as a local war hero by the state. In the lead-up to the fiftieth anniversary commemorations, on February 6, 1992, *The Sunday Times* carried a special two-page report on his life and wartime activities.[44] Ten days later (the day following the commemoration of the fall of Singapore), *The Straits Times* followed up that article with a special interview with one of Lim's children in a piece entitled "Papa the Hero."[45] In 1995, a biography prepared in collaboration with the National Archives, *Force 136: Story of a WWII Resistance Fighter*, celebrated the exploits of Lim and his comrades. More importantly, it explicitly referred to Lim as a Singaporean, rather than a Malayan Chinese or as a Chinese who resided in Singapore, who was "willing to lay down his life to win back his country."[46]

A different source of local war heroes proved to be more controversial for the Singapore state. The Malay Regiment's actions at Pasir Panjang ridge appeared ideal for the state's heritage arms to demonstrate a national claim over the war by showcasing "Singaporeans" engaged in a life and death struggle with the invaders.[47] It was also an opportunity to paper over frayed ethnic tensions that resulted from parliamentary comments made in 1987 by then-deputy prime minister Lee Hsien Loong, who doubted the commitment of Singaporean Malays to defend the nation in the event of war with Malaysia.[48] Integrating the memory of the Malay Regiment's last stand into the national war was therefore an ideal strategy for reconciling questions of

loyalty within the new national narrative that commenced with the Japanese invasion as a precursor to postcolonial nationhood.

However, the potential for the memorial to focus only on a specific ethnic community in the battle for Singapore sat uncomfortably with the PAP regime, which, through a raft of policies drawn up since independence, had long attempted to downplay public events and rhetoric that emphasized the role of one ethnic group over all others. The homogenizing of the Civilian War Memorial's message from one that was specific to the Chinese to one that presented a shared, multiethnic experience described earlier in this chapter is a powerful example of such wariness. Hence the design of the Pasir Panjang memorial came to incorporate representations of other ethnic groups in Singapore. The paintings of a former Chinese resident of Pasir Panjang village, as well as mock telephones through which visitors could listen in on interviewees of all ethnic groups narrating their experiences of the invasion and occupation, became prominent features at the memorial.

Controversy also followed the highlighting of the Malay Regiment's role in Singapore's national Second World War when the Malaysian government also claimed the memory of the soldiers for its own nation-building project. Many of the soldiers were indeed originally from the Malay Peninsula itself, including most famously one of the officers, Lieutenant Adnan Saidi. A locally designed Malaysian assault vehicle was named "Adnan" by the Malaysian defense ministry in his memory, while the Malaysian government conferred a posthumous medal for bravery.[49] Two documentaries were made of Saidi and the Malay Regiment, one in Malaysia in 1999 and one in Singapore in 2001. The Malaysian documentary emphasized Saidi's formative years growing up in Malaysia, and extrapolated a message that the virtues of the Malay Regiment's soldiers came from being inherently "Malaysian." The Singapore documentary focused entirely on the battle at Pasir Panjang, staging it as a battle to defend the homeland with no discussion about where the soldiers came from. In 2003, commenting on the regiment's memorial at Pasir Panjang, the Malaysian government argued that the Malay Regiment that fought there was later renamed the Royal Malay Regiment and brought into the Malaysian army, and hence should be thought of as a Malaysian formation.[50]

Diaspora at War

These challenges over the national ownership of war memories are significant as they demonstrate how problematic the projection of homogenizing and

anachronistic claims can be in postcolonial contexts. Neither Singapore nor Malaysia existed as political entities in 1941. Nor could the soldiers of the Malay Regiment or Lim Bo Seng and his comrades have made sense of affairs in terms of these political institutions. Yet these claims (and counterclaims) are merely the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

Equally important to questions about whose stories are included are questions about the absences in Singapore's national Second World War. Just as the Singapore state has been anxious about downplaying ideas of ethnicity in its national narrative of the past, the state has also been apprehensive about casting heroes whose loyalties were openly in contrast with the needs of the postcolonial state. This uneasiness was clear for all to see in the aftermath of Malaysia's challenges over the memory and meaning of Adnan Saidi when Singapore's then prime minister Goh Chok Tong declared, "[Since] Adnan [Saidi] has been made a role model and an inspiration for the Malaysian armed forces as well [it] would reduce his suitability as a national hero in Singapore."[51] Tan Kay Hai's absence from the Republic of Singapore Air Force's museum has been noted earlier. In similar fashion, the wars experienced by 'Ho Meng Sen' and the Burma Road volunteers remain outside of the nation's Second World War due to their affiliation with governments and war stories that are seen to have no place in Singapore's official creation story.

In the face of exclusion from a powerful state-centered narrative, the members of the Chinese diaspora that went to war in service of different political centers looked to alternative channels to connect with histories and memories that resonated with their own lives. Tan Kay Hai attended a reunion of pilots for RAF No. 225 Squadron in England in the early 1970s after at first declining numerous invitations following the end of the conflict. Ill health and the sheer distance involved, however, prevented him from making subsequent trips. In similar fashion, Ho Meng Sen turned to his former comrades' national commemorations for annual opportunities to affirm the validity and significance of his memories. Each year, the pilots of the Chinese-America Composite Wing would gather for a reunion on VJ (Victory over Japan) Day, alternating in Taiwan and the United States. Ho himself received a medal for his service from the Republic of China government in Taiwan, and—like the other Malayan Chinese who served in the Wing—is included in the Taiwan regime's official registry of pilots who flew for China in the Second World War.

Yet living with and accommodating Singapore's national Second World War have left an indelible impression on the memories of the veterans whose war experiences fell outside of the national narrative. Ho began his

interview with me asking why his service had never been recognized in the state-sanctioned versions of the conflict, yet toward the end of our first interview his reflections revealed a fascinating overlap between personal and public memories when he declared that he was uncertain if he was telling me anything that was relevant to the history of Singapore's Second World War because "our flying stories . . . are not relevant to my country."[52] Likewise, Tan Ah Choon's memories of the war were reshaped to fit the narrative of Singapore's national war, with the Burma Road driver noting that the war fought in Burma was one that was fought on behest of a foreign power, China. The war that was fought "at home was the important one."[53] The anachronism was clear: "home" was postcolonial Singapore.

If there is a need to address the absence of the communities that Tan Kay Hai, Ho Meng Sen, and Tan Ah Choon were historically affiliates of in the dominant narratives of remembering Singapore's war experiences, then it has less to do with "completing" a picture and more to do with us gaining an understanding about the complex, interlinked processes before, during, and after the war that drove a particular kind of historical myopia. What is clear is that there is not one, but multiple Second World Wars, such as Singapore's national Second World War, which has been crafted to fit neatly within the nation-building project; or the Malay Second World Wars, which span a continuum of experiences from co-option with the Japanese to defending the symbols of the British Empire; or the Chinese Second World Wars, which are shaped by loyalties to Nationalist China, or communist ideology, or the English Crown.

These are of course far from the exhaustive limits of the different Second World Wars that exist in private memories and public memorials in Singapore. But if we think about the Second World Wars as conflicts experienced by members of diasporas, instead of being cast as postcolonial creations, and if we consider as sources the evidence left behind by the Chinese diaspora at war—not only in archives and repositories internationally, but also in private memories, localized remembrance practices, personal collections, and sites of history—then the heterogeneity that is provided by these sources allows us to mine far richer meanings of imagined belonging and diasporic life in colonial and postcolonial worlds. These are stories and experiences defined by ideological affiliations to overseas political centers, rather than to the nation-state that was yet to be.

Notes

1. A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (Harmondsworth: Hamilton and Penguin, 1961).

2. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, p. 1.
3. D. Wong, "War and Memory in Malaysia and Singapore: An Introduction," in P*War and Memory in Malaysia and Singapore,* ed. P. H. Lim and D. Wong (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000), p. 6.
4. Public Records Office AIR50/9.
5. Details are obtained from Chew Teng Soon's service record as held by RAF Disclosures at RAF Cranwell, Sleaford.
6. Supplement to the *London Gazette*, March 17, 1944, p. 1282.
7. H. Muzaini and B. Yeoh, "War Landscapes as 'Battlefields' of Collective Memories: Reading the Reflections at Bukit Chandu, Singapore," *Cultural Geographies* 12 (2005): 348–49.
8. T. Fujitani, G. White, and L. Yoneyama, eds., *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), p. 9.
9. Ibid., p. 10.
10. G. Wang, "Migration and New National Identities," in *The Last Half Century of Chinese Overseas,* ed. E. Sinn (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1998), p. 3.
11. Ibid., pp. 3–4.
12. D. Wong, "Memory Suppression and Production," in Fujitani, White and Yoneyama, *Perilous Memories*, p. 229.
13. Cited in Wong, "Memory Suppression and Production," p. 230.
14. *The Straits Times*, October 22, 1966; see also H. Hirakawa and H. Shimuzu, *Japan and Singapore in the World Economy: Japan's Economic Advance into Singapore 1870–1965* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 214.
15. Hirakawa and Shimuzu, *Japan and Singapore in the World Economy*, pp. 214–15.
16. K. Blackburn and K. Hack, *War Memory and the Making of Modern Malaysia and Singapore* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012), p. 292.
17. G. B. Lee, *The Syonan Years: Singapore under Japanese Rule 1942–1945* (Singapore: National Archives of Singapore & Epigram Pte Ltd, 2005), p. 327.
18. *The Straits Times*, April 20, 1977.
19. See C. W. Chan, *Light on the Lotus Hill: Shuang Lin Monastery and the Burma Road* (Singapore: Khoon Chee Vihara, 2009).
20. See for instance *The Straits Times*, February 15, 1972, August 16, 1982.
21. *The Straits Times*, February 12, 1960. See also Muzaini and Yeoh, "War Landscapes as 'Battlefields' of Collective Memories."
22. Author's interview with "Ho Meng Sen," September 6, 2008.
23. *The Straits Times,* November 2, 1991.
24. Interview with Jimmy Chew dated September 27, 2001, Imperial War Museum, Asc No. 24222.
25. Author's interview with "Tan Ah Choon," translated from Mandarin, January 28, 2009. (Pseudonyms have been used in instances where individuals are referred to with single quotation marks.)
26. Author's interview with 'Chai Ah Kee,' translated from Mandarin, February 1, 2010.
27. Interview with Tan Choon Keng dated February 10, 2001, Imperial War Museum, Asc No. 23733.

28. L. Hong and J. Huang, *The Scripting of a National History: Singapore and Its Pasts* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), p. 5.
29. A. Lau, "The National Past and the Writing of the History of Singapore," in K*Imagining Singapore,* ed. C. Ban, A. Pakir, and C. K. Tong, 2nd edition (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2004), pp. 43–44; and C. M. Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore 1819–2005,* 3rd edition (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), p. 333.
30. Wong, "Memory Suppression and Production," p. 230.
31. Hong and Huang, *The Scripting of a National History*, pp. 5–6.
32. T. N. Harper, "Lim Chin Siong and The Singapore Story," in *Comet in Our Sky: Lim Chin Siong in History,* ed. J. Q. Tan and K. S. Jomo (Kuala Lumpur: Vinlin Press, 2001), p. 6.
33. K. Blackburn, "History from Above: The Use of Oral History in Shaping Collective Memory in Singapore," in *Oral History and Public Memories,* ed. P. Hamilton and L. Shopes (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), p. 32.
34. Ibid., pp. 34–35.
35. Ibid., p. 35.
36. Muzaini and Yeoh, "War Landscapes as 'Battlefields' of Collective Memories," p. 347.
37. Wong, "Memory Suppression and Production," pp. 230–31.
38. M. H. Murfett, J. Miksic, B. Farrell, and M. S. Chiang, *Between Two Oceans: A Military History of Singapore from First Settlement to Final British Withdrawal* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 167.
39. *The Straits Times*, February 10, 1992.
40. Blackburn & Hack, *War Memory and the Making of Modern Malaysia and Singapore*, p. 10.
41. Ibid., p. 325.
42. Muzaini and Yeoh, "War Landscapes as 'Battlefields' of Collective Memories," p. 347.
43. Blackburn, "History from Above," p. 42.
44. *The Sunday Times*, February 6, 1992.
45. *The Straits Times*, February 16, 1992.
46. See C. T. Tan, *Force 136: Story of a WWII Resistance Fighter* (Singapore: Asiapac Books, 1995).
47. Muzaini and Yeoh, "War Landscapes as 'Battlefields' of Collective Memories," p. 349.
48. *The Straits Times*, February 23, 1987.
49. Muzaini and Yeoh, "War Landscapes as 'Battlefields' of Collective Memories," p. 351.
50. *The New Straits Times*, June 20, 2003.
51. Muzaini and Yeoh, "War Landscapes as 'Battlefields' of Collective Memories," p. 351.
52. Author's interview with 'Ho Meng Sen,' September 6, 2008.
53. Author's interview with 'Tan Ah Choon,' translated from Mandarin, January 28, 2009.

PART II

Memories of Violence

Chapter 5

On the Fluidity and Stability of Personal Memory: Jibin Arula and the Jabidah Massacre in the Philippines

Rommel A. Curaming and
Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied

Introduction

For many Muslims across the Southern Philippines and beyond, March 18 is a day that evokes memories both intensely emotional as well as political. In their imagination and the rhetoric of the elites in their midst, it marks a crucial moment in the history of the Philippines that laid the foundation for a protracted secessionist movement in the Muslim South. On that day in 1968, military trainees on an island known as Corregidor were killed. Over a hundred young men, mostly Muslims and hailing from various ethnolinguistic groups, had been recruited by the military into a special guerrilla training aimed at destabilizing Sabah—a vast land space that formed a part of the newly created Malaysia but was construed by the Philippine government as rightfully theirs. Months of intense jungle amphibious training had created much apprehension among the recruits. Things came to a head when the recruits' remunerations were withheld and when the supply of basic provisions in the training camp ran short. The soldiers protested and mutinied, and their superiors reacted violently. On the night when the men

were supposed to be sent back home, shots were heard that left a dozen or so[1] Muslim soldiers dead.

"The unfolding of history," Maurizio Peleggi deftly reminds us, "is fraught with irony."[2] Although the events that happened on the island involved both Muslim and non-Muslim recruits, and although all parties implicated were apparently willing partners in the road toward personal and/or national gains, the Jabidah massacre as it was later to be called, has been abridged to become a part of the alleged Christian majority's grand and historic efforts to marginalize, even eliminate, Muslims in the Philippines. Part of the reason why the incident has taken on such an interpretive twist has to do with the long history of violence against, and neglect of, Muslim Mindanao. Also, the pro-oppositional elements among politicians (both Christians and Muslims) and the media had been unrelenting in their attempts to embarrass the Marcos government and had used the Jabidah massacre as a pretext to further their anti-Marcos campaigns. Their approaches in swinging public opinion behind the opposition ranged from the conduct of inquiries about the massacre, to organizing protest marches and the writing of critical and often polemical commentaries in newspapers and well-known periodicals.[3] One unintended consequence of these campaigns was the popularization of the "Moro problem" in the public sphere.

Why the Jabidah massacre was persistently deemed by many as more significant for the development of Moro nationalism than any other political killings that preceded and followed it may be partly explained by the testimony given by a sole survivor—Jibin Arula. If it is to be accepted that dead men tell no tales, Jibin was certainly one of the few who came back from the dead to tell tales that gave life to the fallen. The dramatic nature of his narrow escape by jumping off a steep cliff, evading death even after having been hit by a bullet, and being rescued only hours after drifting many miles from the killing zone has made Jibin a sort of living legend and a spokesman for the murdered. His ability to remember details of the circumstances that led to the massacre was remarkable. In many of the interviews by the media, Jibin also exhibited little signs of trauma. He appeared to embrace the limelight with much enthusiasm and was the center of media attention in the weeks following the incident.

To be sure, Jibin's importance was beyond himself. He had, since his fortuitous flight from death, received encouragement and support from various prominent groups and individuals who, for political though not necessarily selfish motives, had encouraged him to tell and retell his story in commemorations, media interviews, and documentaries.

What is truly remarkable about his memories of the incident is the extent to which they prove both pliable and resilient in the face of the changing

temporal and social contexts of remembering. To identify which aspects of his recollections were malleable and which proved to be fairly stable, and to suggest possible explanations why this may be so are the main objectives of this chapter.

Geoffrey Cubitt observes that while the reconstructivist view presupposes both the fluidity and stability of memory, "[t]he prevailing tendency of . . . recent scholarly thinking has been to . . . focus less on what endures in memory than on how the memory of the past is repeatedly adjusted to present needs and ways of thinking."[4] He echoes the view of one of the pioneers of social memory studies, Sir Frederic Bartlett, who held that the purpose of memory is "to provide the kind of selective and organized appreciation of those experiences that is serviceable as a foundation for purposeful action in the present."[5] The danger of overemphasizing fluidity, as exhibited in these lines of reasoning, is to neglect the stability that characterizes memory work. That is to say, by reducing the art of remembering as determined merely by fancies of the present and overemphasizing the inherent links between the past and the present, past scholars,the likes of Cubitt and Barlett, have failed to register that memories are often marked by stability just as they are fluid and change in accordance with the contexts within which they are produced. While exploring the link between the past and the present, this chapter seeks to uncover the social and psychological mechanisms that enabled the fluidity and more crucially the stability of memories of the Jabidah.

To put it differently, we seek to provide a critical analysis of what W. James Booth has termed the "uneven topography of remembering and forgetting." Although Booth is largely concerned with the constructions and elisions of collective memories, it is our view that most of his insights are applicable to the study of personal memory as well. Booth maintains that we tend to "pick out those moments that are of autobiographical importance, that reveal the character of the subject, moments of moral significance or those bound up with the intimacies of a life-in-common."[6] Charlotte Linde in her classic study entitled *Life Stories* drives home the same point by stating that life stories and personal memories are often replete with the "creation of coherence":

> In addition to being a social demand, adequate coherence is also a personal demand that we make on ourselves. Just as the life story as a social unit has some correspondence to an internal, private life story, so the coherence that we produce for social consumption bears a relation to our own individual desire to understand our life as coherent, as making sense, as the history of a proper person.[7]

In the same vein, we argue that three intertwining coherent strands defined the topography of Jibin's personal memories of the Jabidah incident since the time the killings occurred—Jabidah as imagined personal tragedy, Jabidah as a communal myth, and Jabidah as a critical intervention to an unending "memory war." These strains were shaped by both the chequered contours of Philippine society and politics, and by Jibin's ambivalent sense of the self and community. Seen from a more theoretical plane, what this essay hopes to demonstrate is that personal memory is flexible but not totally fluid. Personal circumstances set the limits for the elasticity of memory just as it is influenced by broader sociopolitical forces. Elements that remain constant, coherent, and stable can be explained not just by the intensity of a particular event upon a person's mind, but by the reinforcement provided by external circumstances.

Rather than taking on a linear, evolutionary analysis of Jibin's memory, in what follows, we will show that Jabidah as a personal tragedy, a communal myth, and as a site of memory wars developed in parallel to one another. The mythicization of Jabidah started as soon as a Muslim body—the National Coordinating Council for Islamic Affairs (NCCIA)—modified Jibin's claims about the root causes of the mutiny. The germ of memory wars started as soon as the Jabidah incident hit the headlines in March 1968. We begin this essay with a brief biography of Jibin, which, to him, provides the crucial ingredients of his own reminiscence of the killings as a tragedy. In the second part on Jabidah as a communal myth, we proceed with NCCIA's reversal of Jibin's claims. Here we also discuss the Moro Nationalist Liberation Front (MNLF)'s availing of this tragedy to launch and sustain rebellion in Mindanao and show how Jibin's memories were affected by these vicissitudes. In the third part on memory wars, we explain how Jibin's recollections ran against the various efforts in appropriating the memories of Jabidah in the manner that befitted the goals of the MNLF, the media, and civil society in the Philippines. This strain in Jibin's recollections is a product of his continuing life struggle, which is revealing of the fact that the topography of his memory of the incident tends to be shaped by contemporaneous concerns.

Jabidah as Imagined Personal Tragedy

A dominant strand of Jibin's memories of the Jabidah incident conceives the event simultaneously as a beginning and as a culmination of a series of personal tragedies that defined his life and, later on, the lives of his children. That is to say, the killings that took place on March 18, 1968, were not

politically significant, as politicians, activists, and the media made it appear. It was important only insofar as it was part of the unfolding of his tragic life story. The emplotment of this story was enmeshed with narratives of poverty and distress faced by a person coming from the south of the Philippines, with the climax of this predicament being the Jabidah killings. In Jibin's formulation, the experiences that he underwent in his early life severely limited his options and made death under military service probable. The overall impression one gets from his recollections is that he was a weak character or a puppet in the hands of fate.[8]

In a series of interviews conducted by the media in 2008–2010,[9] Jibin described at length the tangled circumstances that led to his entrance into the Philippine military. He recounted that he was born on December 12, 1941[10] into a family of farmers. He married a Christian named Noring with whom he had four children. He implied that this was a logical move given that his family could not afford the dowry for him to be wedded to a fellow Tausug. Jibin acknowledged that he was illiterate. His family could afford to send him to school only up to Grade 2 and, because of this, he found it difficult to find regular and gainful employment. He was largely dependent on his mother to sustain his family. Such a situation was common among his peers. An opportunity arose in late 1966 for him to serve as a farm hand in his uncle's small land in Zamboanga del Sur. After a year, in early December 1967, he and his family returned to Jolo, only to find that his mother had already sold the house and moved to Bonggao, one of the islands in the Sulu archipelago close to the Malaysian border.[11] Days later, Jibin and his family joined her.

It was in Bonggao that Jibin heard that his cousins, also illiterate, were among the recruits for military training in Simunul, an island just about 10 miles off Bonggao and within 50 miles of Sabah. Jibin enlisted into the military almost immediately upon hearing about the recruitment drive. He recalled that among youths in the community, soldiering was a very much sought after profession; it meant a sure way to a reliable and decent income. The literacy requirement, however, proved an obstacle to Jibin and others. When they heard that it was not a requisite, they grabbed what seemed to be a rare opportunity. Their paramount concern was to have a job. It was sometime in mid-December 1967 and the state of the economy in the south was not kind to choosers.[12]

Jibin's life was utterly transformed soon after the news of the massacre exploded in March 1968. From an unknown and impoverished trainee, he became a celebrity of sorts. A crucial witness to a politically scandalous event that could make or unmake the next Philippine president, and push the

country close to a war with Malaysia, he was given protection and fostered by some of the most powerful men in Philippine politics. And yet, at the same time, he was wanted dead by the opposing faction. While he basked in the media attention, he feared for his life.

Jibin's usefulness for the opposition waned considerably when Marcos and the Nationalista Party (NP) prevailed in the 1969 elections. His benefactor, the former governor of Cavite Delfin Montano, encouraged him to go into hiding in a place far from both Jolo and Manila. He arrived in Antique in the Visayas in early 1970 to start a new life, with a new wife.[13] It seemed to be a marriage of convenience: he needed a place to hide, and here was this woman from the Visayas who seemed interested in him. He sent a letter to his former wife Noring, informing her that he could no longer come home to Sulu, and that he was setting her free to marry someone else. Noring was told to leave the children to his mother until four years later when they were brought to Antique to live with him. He, his second wife, and his children from both marriages lived under the constraints of severely limited resources.

Jibin was quickly forgotten just as fast as he rose to national prominence in 1968. In February 1971, the court acquitted the accused military personnel of wrongdoing. With the declaration of martial law in September the following year came the muzzling of the press, which ensured that the Jabidah massacre and Jibin Arula were kept out of public knowledge until 1986 when the new Aquino government opted to reopen the investigation of the case. But as the inquiry proceedings into the Jabidah massacre were done behind closed doors. Jibin remained out of the limelight.

Meanwhile, Jibin and his second wife struggled to raise seven children. Life was difficult for them, as usually was the case for most Filipinos of lower and lower middle-class background. None of the first four children went to school longer than a few years. The younger three children received more years of formal education but not enough to be usefully employed.

In 1994, Jibin's second wife died. Life remained a challenge for him and his children. In a twist of fate, the Final Peace Agreement (FPA) between the government and MNLF was signed in 1996, and Jibin was appointed as "consultant" on peace by Nur Misuari, the leader of MNLF and third governor of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. Jibin received an honorarium of 7,000 per month from 1997 to 2000, an amount which he described as "enough to put food on the table." He lost a regular source of income after the end of his stint as consultant and had to rely on the support of his children for sustenance. Jibin had to wait until the occasion of installing the marker in Corregidor in March 2008 to be offered a job as "personal bodyguard" of a mayor in Cavite. By then, he was old and frail. The mayor

happened to be the son of the police officer entrusted by Liberal Party (LP) politicians to protect and help Jibin in Cavite in 1968–69. This job offered little consolation for Jibin; by this time he nurtured bitter feelings regarding his involvement in Jabidah.

So bitter was Jibin about his life experience that had the organizers of the fortieth anniversary commemoration of Jabidah massacre at Corregidor not sought him out, the event would have passed without him minding at all.[14] He claimed that, as far as he was concerned, Jabidah meant nothing to him anymore, especially since it happened a long time ago.[15] When asked about the extent to which the Jabidah incident affected his entire life, Jibin responded swiftly and firmly: "Very much. It destroyed my life and my children's."[16] As if asking for recompense, he was quoted saying, "So now, all I am asking is for President (Gloria) Macapagal-Arroyo to *help me* and Mindanao as well. Though it wasn't her fault, it is still the same Philippine government we are talking about" (emphasis added).[17] In other words, the Jabidah massacre and Mindanao appear, at this point in Jibin's recollection, as an afterthought.

This is unsurprising. For much of his life since the Jabidah massacre happened, Jibin stayed out of Mindanao. While the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)'s website is keen to emphasize that "he was still a Muslim," in reality, Jibin seems to have lost most of his ties to the community. His children who were raised in Antique were baptized Catholics because, in his words, that was what his "in-laws wished."[18] For him, his memories harked back to his early life, growing up in poverty, and being a survivor in a massacre that would shape the destiny of Muslims in the Philippines in general. Being a survivor also meant having to face the consequences of his speaking about that fateful event for the rest of his life. The Jabidah massacre, from this strand of Jibin's memory, stands midway between his disadvantaged beginnings and a lifetime of struggles thereafter.

Jabidah as Communal Myth

Jibin's personal memory was not only colored by the vision of tragedy as a recurring theme, it was also fashioned by a set of communal myths about the Jabidah killings. This is expected given the intense struggle for political supremacy between factions within the Philippine elite class, and between groups of opposing ideologies and religions. The upsurge of Islamic consciousness in the Muslim world, among other factors, set the context for the making of an enduring communal myth surrounding the Jabidah. By myth, we do not suggest false or distorted belief. We employ the term in a semiotic

sense to refer to a perceived "cultural reality" that has power to influence people's thoughts and behavior.[19] More to the point, the fact that Jibin's personal memories were, in some measure, influenced by these communal myths is inevitable in view of his association with groups and persons who played instrumental roles in couching the Jabidah in terms of Muslim-Christian aggrandizement. In that regard, Jeffrey Blustein has succinctly observed:

> Collective memories and individual memory do not exist in completely separate domains. On the contrary, each inevitably contributes to and is intertwined with the other. The collective memory of a group is incorporated, explicitly or implicitly, into the individual memories of its members, at the same time that they put the stamp of their personal memories on the memories they share.[20]

When the news about the massacre hit the headlines in March 1968, intriguing tales about a secret group of Muslim trainees who mutinied because of bad food and the nonpayment of the promised allowance of 50 pesos began to shape public opinion. Filipino Muslim youth leaders quickly issued through the NCCIA a "clarification" claiming that based on their interview with a "reliable source," the "real reasons" that led to the mutiny were not food and money, but the soldiers' "discovery" that the mission was the destabilization and invasion of Sabah. Realizing the possibility of "violating Islamic principles and Koranic rules," that is, killing fellow Muslims in Sabah including their own relatives,[21] so the NCCIA claimed, the Muslim trainees had threatened to resign en masse prompting their handlers to kill them for insubordination.[22]

The full import of the "Islamic twist" in the explanation for Jabidah massacre did not readily catch the attention of the national press at the time, reared as it was in the long tradition of disinterestedness in Muslim affairs and in Mindanao, in general. Major dailies consigned the news about the NCCIA's alternative explanations to the inner pages under other "minor" events and updates.[23] Among radicalized Filipino Muslim students, politicians, and the intelligentsia, however, the political significance of NCCIA's claims could hardly be missed. The simmering distrust and suspicion toward the Christian-dominated government blew up in anger almost overnight. Many Muslim students became convinced that their future could be redeemed only through the establishment of an independent state.[24]

Nur Misuari, the leader of Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), was one of the Muslim youths whose political career was catapulted in the wake of the Jabidah massacre. He recalled, rather dramatically, that he became deeply

involved in separatist politics on the nights he and other Muslims activists held a nightly protest vigil in front of Malacanang to demand justice for the victims.[25] Arguably, no other Filipino Muslim leader had played a more crucial role than he did in the making of a communal myth around Jabidah. Through his writings and speeches, he conjured up a very powerful grand narrative that locates the Jabidah incident as part of a "genocide" that the Christians were carrying out against the Muslims. Adopting a *longue duree* perspective, he posited that the Jabidah massacre was part of a genealogy of violence inflicted by the Spaniards, Americans, and the Philippine republic, designed primarily to obliterate the Muslims.[26]

This myth blossomed into its fully developed form only recently. In the past ten years, the media, along with civil society activists and sections of the general public, has become increasingly sympathetic to the Muslim cause in Mindanao and has come to imbibe the idea that the continuing conflicts in Mindanao are rooted almost singularly in what the Jabidah massacre stood for. This could be clearly seen during the fortieth anniversary commemoration of the Jabidah incident held in Davao City. When interviewed by the news media in 2008, the president of Suara Bangsamoro said that the Jabidah massacre is remembered from time to time because

> it became a signal of unity of the Bangsamoro and awakened their consciousness as a nation . . . Jabidah for the Moro gave us a collective memory that the state policy has not changed in responding to the pleas and struggle of the Bangsamoro for self-determination.[27]

Jibin himself shared this belief for a few decades but became disenchanted with the communal myth as the conflict in the Southern Philippines worsened. In 2009, he stated with remorse that had he not opted to disclose what had happened in 1968, the persistent conflict in Mindanao that has caused the suffering of so many people for such a long time would have not materialized. Blaming himself, he said, "I actually regret why I complained or why I had to live because so many people suffered along the way."[28]

Jibin recalled how he might have been led into believing that Jabidah was a "Muslim" issue rather than that of a simple mutiny gone violent. He was at the house of Governor Montano of the Cavite province sometime in 1969–1970 when he came to know about the MNLF. Nur Misuari, the founder, told him that he will avenge the "Bangsa Islam" (Muslim Race) and fight the Marcos government. Jibin had been convinced by the rhetoric then. But almost four decades of killings and conflict between the state and Muslims later, he implied in his 2009 interview that what he stood for was wrong.

Jabidah was not solely about Muslims and the communal myth that he subscribed to through the years. It was about the loss of more than 200,000 innocent lives, which he believed could have been saved had he remained silent about the incident. With this in mind, he urged "those in Mindanao, Muslim or Christian, [to] help each other [and] seek help from government to sign the MOA (Memorandum of Agreement) for peace in Mindanao."[29]

Clearly, for Jibin the meanings of Jabidah had shifted in alignment with the needs of the time, but what remained stable was the communal myth that the Jabidah was a "Muslim" issue rather than an isolated incident. Indeed, while Jibin was disenchanted with the myth propagated by the MNLF that the beginnings of Muslim resistance against the Filipino state could be traced back to the Jabidah, he still maintained that the Jabidah involved violence between opposing "communal" groups. This is clearly evident from his call for "Muslims" and "non-Muslims" to work together in light of the violence between the two communities since the Jabidah incident.

Jabidah as a Critical Intervention to Memory Wars

Politically contentious events such as the Jabidah massacre are liable to be called "memory wars"; they are often open to questions about the "proper" ways by which such events should be remembered. The shifting power relations that undergird these contests of interpretations have influenced Jibin's recollection. Simultaneously, Jibin's memories themselves constitute a crucial intervention in this contestation.

In the months following the Jabidah incident, the military and the Marcos regime launched a concerted effort to deny the massacre, and when this proved untenable, they sought to explain it in ways favorable to their interests. In their view, the killings were a legitimate response to a mutiny launched by soldiers who were unable to bear the strain of military training.[30] The military and the Marcos regime also claimed that the Jabidah group was formed not to infiltrate or invade Sabah but precisely to forestall the alleged plans of certain groups to launch such an invasion on behalf of the Sultan of Sulu.[31]

As noted previously, Muslim youth activists and politicians—particularly those not allied to Marcos—quickly rejected the government's explanation and even reversed Jibin Arula's claims about the cause of the mutiny. NCCIA's claims formed the backbone of MNLF's "official" narrative of Jabidah. MNLF's subsequent predominant position in the struggle for separatism up to the mid-1990s, in turn, significantly defined the contours of the communal myth about the causes and implications of the killings.

Elsewhere, we have noted that the media and civil society activists have in the past years grown sympathetic to the "Islamized" interpretation of the Jabidah incident.[32] The shifting tenor of the discourse, responding to the increasing clamor to solve the "Mindanao problem," also constituted a much more central role for the Jabidah massacre in the narrative on the origins of the Mindanao conflict. Whereas before it was mainly a MNLF discourse—forming part of Misuari's grand narrative of genocide—the Jabidah incident has evolved into a broader metaphor for a range of the state's sins of omission and commission against Muslims and Mindanao, and sometimes other anti-state groups as well.

In the Christian-dominated public sphere, however, the prominence of the "Islamized" narrative of the Jabidah massacre is relatively of recent origin, as we discuss in detail elsewhere.[33] After dominating the headlines for months, the Jabidah incident was largely forgotten, particularly after 1972 when martial law was declared. It was not until 1986, upon the demise of the Marcos regime, that the Jabidah massacre and the person of Jibin Arula crept back into media attention, if only momentarily. Wary of jeopardizing diplomatic ties with Malaysia, the Aquino government, as noted earlier, decided to conduct the reinvestigation behind closed doors.

The Jabidah narrative gained a foothold only sometime in 2000 when a long article by Vitug and Gloria came out in one of the top dailies, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. This article later appeared as a chapter in a book entitled *Crescent Moon,* which was published shortly thereafter.[34] The writings by these two journalists constituted the most thorough account of the Jabidah massacre to date, and they are notable for setting a sympathetic tone toward the Muslims despite being written by non-Muslims. They represent a turning point in the historiography of the Jabidah massacre. What followed were fictional writings, films, documentaries, and various journalistic output either on or inspired by the narrative.[35]

Still, there is one particular film, and other journalistic pieces that were produced and written, which added to contentious character of the Jabidah prior to Vitug and Gloria's article. Simply titled *Jabidah Massacre,* the film was screened in cinemas in 1990. The film was written by one Daniel Martin and was directed by Jerry O. Tirazona. Well-known actors in the Philippine movie industry in the late 1980s and 1990s such as Bembol Roco, Anthony Alonzo, and Roi Vinzons were part of the cast, which made it likely that it performed creditably in the box office despite being shoddily made. This film is interesting for it offered an interpretation of Jabidah that sharply differed from the communal myth. Not only did it emphasize brotherhood and cooperation among Muslims and Christians, it also absolved the Marcos

government of the main responsibility. Instead, it blamed the vested business interests involving the rich and the military.

Arnold Molina Azurin, a perceptive writer and critic of academic and sociopolitical issues, went a step further. In an article published in the *Philippine Free Press* in 1994 and later expanded to form a chapter in his book *The Cult of Dissidence* (1996), Azurin bluntly called the Jabidah massacre a myth that Nur Misuari and the MNLF have nurtured, appropriated, and promoted for their political interests. Jibin's testimony, according to Azurin, was inconsistent and contradictory to what he was reported to have said on different occasions. It was a weak source to buttress the fact that the massacre actually took place. Azurin also hinted at the involvement of the CIA and other American operatives, in addition to the likelihood that Malaysian spies had infiltrated the Jabidah group and that they are well-placed even in Malacanang.[36]

It was against the context of these memory wars that Jibin talked publicly about the incident possibly for the first time since 1969.[37] His apparently nonchalant, even neglectful, attitude toward Jabidah and Mindanao—as his pronouncements during the fortieth anniversary commemorative activities in Corregidor in March 2008 indicated—soon gave way to open activism to attain peace in Mindanao. As we discussed in a separate paper, the months leading to the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD), a key agreement between the government and the MILF in August 2008, marked a frenetic effort by "hyperactive" civil society groups to mobilize support for what seemed to be a milestone in building a lasting peace in Mindanao. When it was aborted, open conflict between MILF and government troops resumed, shattering hopes and anticipations that for some time have been building up. The return of Jibin Arula to national political stage—a reprise of what happened in 1968–69—was made possible in this context. [38]

Before audiences in major cities in Mindanao and as part of the huge March 2009 Peace Power Day celebrations, Jibin narrated what happened during the day he escaped from the killings. He also took part in the rallies that drew an estimated crowd of 200,000 along national highways from Cotabato City to Davao. In interviews following the ones in Corregidor, his regretful attitude about what happened acquired a new twist. This time his recollections coincided with the dominant discourse on the "Mindanao problem." Rather than highlighting Jabidah as a personal tragedy, as he clearly did in March 2008, he allocated a central place for it within the broader socioeconomic and political malaise that kept Mindanao, not just the Muslim community, impoverished and conflict ridden. He called for the signing of the MOA-AD between the

MILF and GRP saying, as other peace activists believed, that it would pave the way for peace and development in Mindanao.

What remained fairly constant and stable in Jibin's recollection amid the intensity of the memory wars were the mundane and worldly roots of the incident: money, food, and corruption. In a lengthy interview, which appeared in April 2010 in the ABS-CBN documentary *I Survived: Jabidah Massacre*,[39] Jibin narrated once again about inadequate food and unpaid allowance. He also added a new detail that five or six of his Muslim friends had to share a stick of cigarette because of this. He highlighted in addition that young women sex workers were brought by the officers to the camp, hinting not only at the contrast, but also at the causal link between the good time the officers had and the difficult one for the trainees.[40] More interestingly, for the first time in published interviews, he quoted one military officer exhorting trainees, "If you get millions in the bank, that's yours. If an officer tries to get it from you, you may kill him because that's yours. So everyone was encouraged. They'd be instantly rich!"

It is pertinent to note in the light of the above recollections by Jibin that the robbing of banks appeared to be part of the plot to create a general atmosphere of fear and instability in Sabah. What appears plainly as the monetary basis of the trainees' motivation in this and other recollections flies in the face of the adamant claim by Muslim leaders that the trainees were misled into joining the group, and that the upholding of Islam, not money, was the reason for the mutiny that led to their killings. Jibin's narrative of what took place on Corregidor thus harked back to his past, of him joining the military to escape poverty but was tragically brought back to the very conditions he had intended to escape. The incident would not have happened, so he reckoned, had he and others who shared his background not chosen the army as a means to obtain a better life. Apparently for him, Jabidah was a tragedy not just because his friends died but more so because his having survived the killings and then becoming a pawn in political intrigue did not result in a better life for him and his family.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates the malleability of Jibin's recollections, the enabling contexts of his shifting memories and also the parameters that ensure their stability. As a form of episodic memory, it should not come as a surprise that some aspects of Jibin's recollections of the Jabidah massacre and his interpretations of its place in the larger scheme of things have been altered,

influenced, or reshaped by dominant discourses of the time. The change was particularly acute between his attitude of indifference before March 2008 and his views later, when he actively participated in campaigns for the signing of the MOA-AD, and when Jabidah assumed a central role as a metaphor and an originary point of the continuing conflict in Mindanao. What used to be a narrative of personal tragedy has been enmeshed with or transposed onto the misfortunes of Mindanao. The intensifying hope and campaign for peace in Mindanao in 2007–2008 provided a very conducive atmosphere for the re-coding of the meanings, with some new details, of the memory of the Jabidah massacre. Jibin's refashioning of aspects of his memory largely conformed to the demands of this time.

Perhaps the more significant contribution of this chapter lies in exploring possible factors that provide stability to personal memory. We may take a cue from the encoding/retrieval model of memory that scholars such as Endel Tulving have developed to describe how personal memory works and how and why it may change over time. The resilience of some aspects of Jibin's memory may be explained by the congruence between the features of the mental templates, called schemata, that facilitated the encoding, and those that enabled the process of retrieving sometime later.[41] Offering a less mechanical-sounding model, James L. McClelland argued for a "connectionist model" that sees stable "memory traces" as an offshoot of patterns of connection among numerous interconnected processing units in the brain that have been established through repeated mobilization of, or exposure to, elements that share similarities with the original experience.[42]

As we have tried to show in this chapter, his persistent economic marginalization and sense of victimhood that cries out for redemption are among the personal experiences of Jibin Arula that reinforced the constancy of his schemata for remembering the worldly and mundane roots of the mutiny. Despite the early history and the forceful and repeated claims in the media by Muslim leaders about the religious reasons for the incident, Jibin was not only consistently clear in referring to food and money as the fundamental causes, but he grew increasingly more vigorous and detailed in sharing this view. This was clear in his last major media interview before he passed away in 2010. For those who are informed of the difficult life he and his family went through, they could hardly miss the subtext of his narrative: "Help me, for I am a victim of injustice." We can only speculate on the possible reason for this narrative. Feeling guilty for failing to provide a better life to his family, weighed down by continuing poverty, and stricken by old age, Jibin probably found comfort in the belief that such a difficult situation owed to his decision in 1968 to speak out in public about the Jabidah massacre and that he

felt an increasing urge to seek out sympathy and possibly compensation that could reverse the situation. As if struck by cruel fate, his death in a vehicular accident during Ramadhan in 2010 remained unnoticed by the media and the public until several months later.

Personal memory, in short, is not simply a duplicate of experience stored in the minds of a given person, ready to be summoned at times when the person is queried or provoked. Rather, it assumes form depending on the shape of the mental templates or patterns of mental connections at the time of the recollection. These mental templates are as influenced by extraneous circumstances, social, political, economic, and ideological encounters, as by one's attitude and experience. Personal memory, therefore, is contingent and will display its checkered character as it unfolds. In the case of Jibin, he had couched the Jabidah in tragic, mythical, and contentious terms, and those three strands coexisted uneasily. It remains to be seen how the Jabidah will continue to be remembered now that Jibin has since passed on, and the conflict in Mindanao continues. We may surmise that Jibin"s personal memories will be appropriated and used in a host of ways compatible with the projects and agendas of various groups and individuals in contemporary Philippines. If anything, such memories of violent events and the impact they have had in shaping the contours of society tells us that the study of oral cultures in the Philippines, as elsewhere, is more pressing than ever.

Notes

1. Claims of fatalities range from the low of eleven to the high of several dozens, even over two hundred. Eleven seems to be most credible.
2. Maurizio Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Refashioning of the Siamese Monarchy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), p. 1.
3. See Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied and Rommel Curaming, "Mediating and Consuming the Memories of Violence in the Philippines," *Critical Asian Studies* 44.1 (2012): 227–50.
4. Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 77.
5. Frederic Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995 [1932]), as cited in Cubitt, *History and Memory*, p. 79.
6. James Booth, *Communities of Memory: On Witness, Identity and Justice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 25.
7. Charlotte Linde, *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 17.
8. Carolyn Arguillas, "Q and A with Jibin Arula: 41 years after the Jabidah Massacre, 1st of a Series," *MindaNews*, March 16, 2009, http://www

.mindanews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=6085&Itemid=50, last accessed October 24, 2012.

9. Interviews with Jibin appeared in various forms: documentary (GMA's *Case Unclosed: Jabidah Massacre*, February 26, 2009, and ABS-CBN's *I Survived: Jabidah,* April 15, 2010); video news feature (*Al Jazeera*, March 26, 2009); text of full interview (*Mindanews,* March 16–19, 2009); and news items in newspapers (various, see for example Jocelyn Uy, "Lone Survivor Recalls Jabidah massacre," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, March 19, 2008, http://news info.inquirer.net/breakingnews/nation/view/20080318–125522/Lone-survivor-recalls-Jabidah-Massacre), last accessed October 24, 2012. Unless otherwise indicated, Jibin's recollections are culled from these sources.
10. In early media interviews, Jibin claimed that he was born on December 12, 1944. See for example Isagani Yambot, Cesario del Rosario, and D. Y Caparas, "24 Found; 37 Still Missing," *Manila Times*, March 25, 1968.
11. Apparently, Jibin's family shared the house with his mother and possibly other siblings. This arrangement was also common among Filipino households at that time.
12. Patricio N. Abinales, *Making Mindanao* (Quezon City: Ateneo De Manila University Press, 2004), p. 123.
13. Carolyn Arguillas, "Q and A with Jibin Arula: 'sana wala nang gulo sa Mindanao,'" *MindaNews*, March 19, 2009, http://www.mindanews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=6104&Itemid=50, last accessed October 24, 2012.
14. Jocelyn Uy, "Lone Survivor recalls Jabidah massacre."
15. In words tinged with bitterness, he said in Tagalog: *Wala na talaga ito sa akin, lalo na 40 years na ang nakaraan. Wala naman nangyari sa Senate investigation* (This is nothing to me already, really. I had forgotten this, especially after 40 years had passed and nothing happened to the Senate investigation). Jocelyn Uy, "Jabidah Massacre's Survivor Would Rather Forget," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, March 19, 2008, http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view/20080319–125597/Jabidah-massacres-survivor-would-rather-forget, last accessed October 24, 2012.
16. Carolyn Arguillas, "Q and A with Jibin Arula: 41 Years after the Jabidah Massacre," *Mindanews*, March 19, 2009.
17. Uy, "Jabidah Massacre's Survivor Would Rather Forget."
18. Arguillas, "Q and A with Jibin Arula."
19. As cited in Elliot Gaines, "Semiotic Analysis of Myth: A Proposal for an Applied Methodology," *The American Journal of Semiotics* 17.2 (2001): 311–27.
20. Jeffrey Blustein, *The Moral Demands of Memory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 301.
21. The movement of people across the porous borders between Mindanao and Sabah ensures that people on each side had (and still do have) relatives on another.
22. Anonymous, "Another Secret Army Man Talks," *Manila Times*, March 23, 1968; *Congressional Record of the House of Representatives*, March 25, 1968, p. 55.
23. For instance in the *Manila Times,* March 23rd issue, the news did not even deserve a separate title; it merely forms a segment in a bigger news article.

24. Eric Gutierrez, "The Reimagination of the Bangsamoro," in *Rebels, Warlords and Ulama: A Reader on Muslim Separatism and the War in Southern Philippines,* ed. Kritina Gaerlan and Mara Stankovitch (Quezon City: Institute of Popular Democracy, 2000), pp. 309–10.
25. Thayil Jacob Sony George, *Revolt in Mindanao: The Rise of Islam in Philippine Politics* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1980).
26. Ibid. The Muslim world's fervent support for Misuari's cause, particularly from Libya, was largely premised on this idea of genocide. Muammar Gaddafi's very strong support for the Muslim cause in Mindanao, particularly under the leadership of Nur Misuari, was instrumental in the backing given by the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC).
27. Carolyn Arguillas, "40 Years after Jabidah, Moro Struggle Continues," *MindaNews*, March 18, 2008, http://www.mindanews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4032&Itemid=75, last accessed October 24, 2012.
28. Q and A with Jibin Arula, March 19, 2009.
29. Ibid.
30. Anonymous, "Army's Version: Simple Mutiny," *Manila Bulletin*, March 22, 1968.
31. Anonymous, "21 Jabidah Suspects Cleared," *Manila Times*, February 20, 1971.
32. Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied and Rommel Curaming, "Mediating and Consuming the Memories of Violence in the Philippines," *Critical Asian Studies* 44.1 (2012): 227–50.
33. Rommel Curaming and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, "Social Memory and State-Civil Society Relations in the Philippines: Forgetting and Remembering Jabidah 'Massacre,'" *Time and Society* 21.1 (2012): 89–103.
34. Marites Dañguilan Vitug and Glenda M Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao* (Quezon City: Ateneo Center for Social Policy and Public Affairs, 2000).
35. For newspaper articles, see, for example, *Philipines Daily Inquirer*, March 18, 2001; *Manila Bulletin*, March 18, 2005; and *Manila Bulletin*, March 30, 2005. For novels, see Ricardo Octaviano, *Sabah of the Philippines* (Manila: Central Book Supply Inc., 2004).
36. Arnold Molina Azurin, *Beyond the Cult of Dissidence in Southern Philippines and Wartorn Zones in the Global Village* (Quezon City: UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies & University of the Philippines Press, 1996), p. 20.
37. Jibin testified during the reinvestigation of the Jabidah massacre in 1986, but because it was carried out behind closed doors, there was no media coverage. Perhaps it was also on account of this injunction that Jibin was not allowed a media interview on that occasion.
38. Rommel Curaming and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, "Social Memory and State-Civil Society Relations in the Philippines: 89–103.
39. Accessible through http://www.filipino-tv.info/2010/04/i-survived-04152010-jibin-arula-sundalo.html, last accessed October 24, 2012.
40. The insinuation here is that the money that was supposed to be for their allowance and for better food for the trainees was spent instead on hiring young women, apparently sex workers.

41. For a good overview of this model, see Scott Brown and Fergus Craik, "Encoding and Retrieval of Information," in *The Oxford Handbook of Memory,* ed. Endel Tulving & Fergus Craik (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 93–108.
42. J. L. McClelland and A. Cleeremans, "Connectionist Models," in *Oxford Companion to Consciousness*, ed. T. Byrne, A. Cleeremans, and P. Wilken (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 177–81.

CHAPTER 6

Narratives of the "Red Barrel" Incident: Collective and Individual Memories in Lamsin, Southern Thailand

*Julara Damrongviteetham**

Introduction

In Thailand, the years spanning 1971 to 1973 were characterized by the violent suppression of the communist movement through state policies, policies most harshly imposed on the so-called stronghold areas of the Red insurgency. The Lamsin community, of Srinagarindra District in the southern province of Phatthalung, was one such area.[1] The main actors implementing suppressive policies in Lamsin are believed to have been state officials working under the Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC). In Lamsin alone, these officials incinerated over 200 "communist suspects" in red petrol barrels, an example of what later became known as the "Red Barrel" Incident. The total number of victims in all districts and provinces involved, was 3,008. Out of fear of state oppression, a large number of villagers from affected areas joined the insurgency led by the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). Conversely, CPT members also attacked state officials, as well as local office-bearers like village heads or *Kannan* (heads of subdistricts). Only with a change in Thai state policy in 1980 did the villagers of Lamsin return to their former way of life.[2]

But villagers in Lamsin still live with the past; the traumatic and nightmarish experiences have not disappeared over time. Villagers inhabit what Jeffrey Olick has called a "community of memory" forged by a shared experience.[3] The better-known massacre of October 1976 in Bangkok, as Thongchai Winichakul has pointed out, was a traumatic event, in that it was both deeply disturbing and remains unresolved. It has had a lasting impact on individuals and on society. The Red Barrel incident has traumatized Thai society for 35 years, but it remains the subject of official silence. Decades on, neither ex-communists nor other villagers have been provided with details of the incident.[4]

At the community level, the collective memory of the massacre manifests itself in the form of Lamsin's Red Barrel Monument. Its association with death makes this monument a "place of pain," regarded as having historical value in its ability to arouse memories that contest official narratives of the past.[5] Lamsin's villagers hold a ceremony of commemoration every April. Its organizers include former members of the CPT from different southern provinces. Some of them are involved in the Sinpraetong Network, the main actor in memory production in Lamsin.

The network has several missions: maintaining a memorial to the victims of the Red Barrel Incident, other projects relating to the Red Barrel incident, participating in other local affairs, and empowering the community. In its construction of social memories through commemoration of the Red Barrel incident, the network seeks to explain that the Thai government has been and still is a major perpetrator of violent acts against its own citizens. This effort relates to one of the network's most important stated aims: to reduce the power of the local administration through development projects independent of the Thai state.

The Sinpraetong Network has been successful in giving the collective memory for Lamsin a cohesive form, what I refer to as a "core" memory. But its narratives exclude the accounts of some members of the community. Observation of how people have variously framed their memories allows us to consider the classification of the memories in Lamsin as belonging to one of six categories:

1. Memories as lessons
2. Memories as reminders of survival
3. Haunting memories
4. Recriminating memories
5. Officially suppressed memories
6. Self-inhibiting memories.

These memories not only reflect people's differentiated narratives, but they also reveal memories that do not correspond to the constructed "core" memories. These memories nevertheless endure and coexist with other memory fragments in the community.

This chapter poses the question of how people in local communities manage their memories in response to constructed historical narratives. It illustrates the interpretation and manipulation of historical events to serve particular objectives and demonstrates the ways in which events are transformed into memories. Additionally, it points out how memories of the past, which often seem irrelevant to Thai society as a whole, both create people's perceptions of and make meanings of the present context. The chapter has four parts. A brief overview of the historical context of the Red Barrel incident and introduction of the research questions and methodology are followed by a section that outlines the role of the Sinpraetong Network in the production of a dominant "core" memory for the Lamsin community. The politics of this "core" memory is analyzed in the third part of the chapter, which also addresses how individuals within the community position their personal memories within the framework of the "core" narrative or in defiance of it. A final section draws conclusions about the role of traumatic memories in the context of the Thai state's own production of a collective national memory.

The "Red Barrel" Incident

The "Red Barrel" incident has come to refer to acts of state violence in southern Thailand during the early 1970s that included the incineration of suspected communists in red petrol barrels. Usually, these acts began with the arrest and interrogation of suspected communists or people accused of providing assistance to members of the CPT. Knocked unconscious after their interrogation, victims were burnt in petrol barrels, which were usually red in color. Some victims were killed before incineration, which was a comparatively merciful end. Others woke up while being burnt alive and screamed in agony. Officials then started their trucks' engines to drown out the sounds of the victims' cries. They later threw the victims' ashes into a canal near a military camp. One participating soldier told the television program *Yon Roy* (Tracing) that

> a container, a 200-litre red petrol barrel was used for burning people. It was pertinent for this objective because the victim's body could be burnt in the barrel and the barrel could be re-used several times. The strong scent of flamed fuel could cover up the smell of dead bodies. What was worst was that some victims were murdered without any interrogation.[6]

Killings of this sort came to the Lamsin community in late 1971, after the establishment of a military camp. Such extrajudicial killings gradually ended after the victory of the student uprising of October 1973. State officials then changed their method of killing from incineration to shooting. While the Red Barrel incident was known among local people, its occurrence in remote areas that were under CPT influence, like Lamsin, meant that few outsiders knew about it.

Victims of the incident fell into two groups. The first group included friends and families of suspected communists, who were detained and interrogated in an effort to find the suspects. The second group comprised people blacklisted by state officials, whether for personal conflicts with officials or as cases of mistaken identity. The term "Red Barrel" incident actually has an extended meaning for the people of Lamsin. They apply it not only to cases of state-sponsored killings that concluded in the burning of the victims but rather to any form of extrajudicial action by the state, including forced disappearances, torture, detention, shootings, or victims being kicked out of helicopters. Many victims of such atrocities did not die, but were left disabled or became mentally ill.

Lamsin is not only a location in which the Red Barrel incident occurred, but also a place in which people traumatized by the incident continue to live, and in which people have systematically and continuously constructed discourses on the Red Barrel incident. The principal question asked in this chapter is this: How have these people constructed and interpreted their experiences, which have been transformed into both social and individual memories? They have diverse memories because they perceive the incident differently. This range of memories leads to the construction of a variety of narratives. Some explain only the acts of state officials, while others stand in opposition to those narratives. The process of construction and manipulation of memories raises two important and related questions. First, do Lamsin villagers share the same collective memory? If so, how was that memory constructed? And second, how do different/fragmented memories coexist with the collective memory in the Lamsin community?

Collective memory is not something that is simply given or prescribed, nor does it remain static. Instead, it has to be continually constructed through processes that entrench this collective remembrance of the past. This chapter thus also asks: How do the interpretations of the Red Barrel incident affect the community development process in Lamsin? It addresses these questions through the concepts of *memory* and *narrative*. Narrative serves as an instrument to explain and understand each kind of memory. In addition, the types

of narratives constructed by either a community or individuals indicate different points of view in their memories. This chapter applies hermeneutics to the interpretation of individual memories in order to see when local people relate to the structure of the "core" narrative and collective memory, and how they interpret and understand their own narratives.

In my fieldwork, I studied several kinds of memories by observation, formal and informal interviews, and by listening to narratives in the community. While I could not confirm the veracity of those narratives, that was not always the point: this study did not set out to discover any objective "truth" in the stories recounted. Rather, its purpose was to study the importance of the memories that appeared in the narratives. The most important lesson gleaned from a study of memory narratives is not only to know the memories, but also to listen to what the memories tell us.[7]

I found that my status as a listener greatly influenced the narratives recounted. At the beginning, I was considered a stranger, and conversations with me were often characterized by trepidation. Sometime after my arrival, however, the Sinpraetong Network announced my presence and the nature of my work to the villagers through community radio. This created another status, which helped me collect information more conveniently. Simultaneously, it meant that I was perceived as being on the network's side. But because I started by obtaining information from the network, staying at its office, and having good relations with its leaders, I was hindered in collecting information from those opposed to the network. Furthermore, by asking interviewees to talk about traumatic experiences, I was perceived as a threat to some people. My seeking information about the past made them feel uncomfortable. Consequently, I may have been exposed to narratives that the narrators wanted the listener to hear rather than genuine accounts. In addition, interviews that took place while villagers felt willing, trusting, and secure led to smoothly told narratives. When the narrators did not feel that way, or when other people were present, they felt pressured and uncomfortable.

Core Structure, Collective Memory, and Community Development

There are three "core" memorial elements in Lamsin, all constructed by the Sinpraetong Network: the Red Barrel Memorial, the annual commemoration ceremony, and the Sinpraetong Network's foundation and work in the community. These three elements are seen as concrete forms of the "core"

memory, which possess the same narrative structure. They express the contention that the Red Barrel incident was an episode of violent suppression by the Thai state that needs to be remembered as a lesson for the community.

The Red Barrel Memorial was erected in 1980, after the reconciliation process started by Prime Ministerial Order No. 66/2523 that year. This change in national policy led to the rehabilitation and the return home of many CPT members. Red Barrel victims' relatives initially requested a merit-making ceremony for the dead, and this request was met with great interest. Consequently, construction of a monument was proposed, with the support of former CPT members both from inside and outside the Lamsin community. The memorial was erected near the location of the burning, in an area where a temporary military camp had been located. Comprising a 200-liter red petrol barrel as a symbol of the incinerations, the monument stands on an elevated base, raising the body of the monument up to the level of visitors' eyes to draw their attention. Also, the monument's designers engraved victims' names upon the monument and included an array of tools used by the state for killing suspects to arouse people's curiosity. The Red Barrel story was written and displayed in an exhibition beneath the monument. On the wall the memorial's objectives are stated: that the Red Barrel Incident should be a lesson to the community and that these forms of extrajudicial violence should no longer happen in Thai society.

However, the monument implies more than that. It is ideologically unique in Thailand, where, as Thongchai observes, the dominant culture privileges harmony and state crime is "politically unspeakable."[8] Most monuments in Thailand consist of heroic statues, which express either respectability or a victory for the Thai state. On the contrary, the Red Barrel Monument offers a public condemnation of the state and opens the door to a critical perception of the state's actions.

Awareness of the monument's meaning has been reinforced by means of the Red Barrel ceremony. This commemoration is held annually in Lamsin, in the area of the Red Barrel Memorial. It consists of several rituals, aimed at what is a diverse group of participants. First, there is a religious ritual for the dead. Second, water is poured on the hands of comrades' senior family members and other relatives who were arrested in the incident, in a rite to pay respect to them and to ask for their blessings. Third, other activities are organized, such as laying wreaths at the monument, seminars related to political issues, and a concert. The organizers of the ceremony use it to motivate participants to acknowledge the violence perpetrated by the state. The master of ceremonies repeatedly narrates the brutal and cruel details of the killings during the water-pouring rite, emphasizing the state's role in the

violence. In Thai tradition, such a rite is generally aimed at paying respect to the elders, and to ask for either blessings or apologies. So, the story narrated by the master of ceremonies in this ritual with its shifted meaning is exemplified by the fact that local state officials are invited to attend this ritual. Their pouring water on the hands of ex-CPT-comrades' relatives or of survivors transforms water into a metaphor for apologies from state officials to the victims' relatives. On a larger scale, the ritual becomes a condemnation of the state's violence, instead of merely a remembrance of the dead. Consequently, the Red Barrel Ceremony helps keep alive the villagers' memory. It puts the incident into a particular perspective, emphasizing the fact that state violence actually occurred in Lamsin and should not be accepted, forgiven, or allowed to recur (figure 6.1).

Neither the Red Barrel ceremony nor the memorial could exist without the Sinpraetong Network.[9] Founded in 2000, the network works with all nine villages in the Lamsin subdistrict. It organizes money-saving groups, career-building groups, and other related projects. Governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have recognized it, and it serves as a

Figure 6.1 Former members of the Communist Party of Thailand and relatives of the victims of the Red Barrel incident participate in commemorating the event at the Red Barrel Monument in Lamsin. Photograph by Julara Damrongviteetham.

model for similar initiatives in other communities. The number of members of this network increases every year. Its current budget for economic and development activities exceeds 40 million baht. Its initiatives receive no funding from state agencies, a situation that in fact reflects one of the network's main goals. Although only about 1 percent of the network's members are former CPT members, many from this group hold positions in the network. The network's criticism of capitalism—as well as its structure, organization, and strategies—also bespeak the influence of the party's legacy. More importantly, the network has written its own version of the community's history, which it divides into four periods.[10] It places the Red Barrel incident into what is labeled as Lamsin's "Suffering and Crisis period," which is central to the efforts of the network's leaders to build a form of social distrust. The network explains that Lamsin villagers should not trust external organizations, outsiders, and particularly state officials, and propose that the best way to solve the community's problem is an approach based on self-sufficiency and the creation of checks and balances to keep watch over the various functions of the state. These two concepts are applied in the network's community development projects.

Community history is also deployed to guide the management of the network. The experiences of former CPT members who fled suppression by the state to live in the jungle, represented as "lessons from the jungle," are drawn upon in educating the villagers in small groups. The network teaches local people about differences between capitalism and socialism in order to highlight the unfair treatment of the community. It cultivates the leadership skills of selected individuals. It emphasizes the slogan "happy community," which refers to an idealized notion of community whose members are not infatuated with materialism. The network's leaders see themselves as continuing their fight against capitalism by other means. In this view, the Thai state's officials exercise their authority and gain influence over the citizens through the capitalist system. The network therefore stresses the need to check the state's power.

The self-sufficiency strategy advocated by the network is part of a common discourse in Thai society, one that is also supported by the government. The image of the Sinpraetong Network as a public interest organization is thus readily accepted by NGOs. On the one hand, government officials in Bangkok perceive the network as a model for strengthening community organizations, because its members are able to manage their projects without help from the government. On the other hand, the network promotes political decentralization as part of its agenda, which is explicitly aimed at weakening the administrative power of the Thai state. It uses various tactics for checking local administrators and balancing local power.

The Red Barrel Memorial, the commemoration ritual, and the Sinpraetong Network's other activities are produced not only to construct a collective memory of the past, but also to revive an older political discourse that was previously eliminated in a way that is relevant to contemporary Thai society. These three elements are continually adjusted and sustained in correspondence with the community's culture. The network has gradually expanded and infiltrated its version of community memory into villagers' everyday lives through its projects. For instance, projects always begin by surveying villagers' needs, drawing them into participation, talking about the traumatic history of community, particularly the memory of the Red Barrel incident, then making them aware of the fight against capitalism, and telling them how to live happily in the community without resorting to materialism. This is despite the fact that, while the annual commemoration ceremony arouses interest for its open narration of past violence, it lasts only one day and draws only a small number of participants.

Different Narratives and Dissociated Memories

Despite the efforts at memory production through community development, not all villagers agree with the network's version of events. Collective memory here becomes a misnomer. Some villagers refuse to participate in the Red Barrel ceremony. This refusal means not only that they object to the ceremony's content but also that they do not consent to being part of the "core" narrative. This situation points to a twofold process of memory generation. As a fragment of Thai history, the "core" memory is important in challenging the state's construction of history.[11] At the same time, the villagers who possess different narratives disagree with and challenge the Sinpraetong Network's account. Also, while the memorial is the symbol of the narrative, the rite has kept alive the memory of both the memorial and the narrative. Each is continuously reproduced.

There are two groups within the community that oppose the Sinpraetong Network's version of history. One group comprises local administrators who oppose the network and reject the Red Barrel Memorial, the ceremony, and other related acts of collective memory construction. They ground their opposition in the strong influence on the network of ex-CPT members and of their ideology. They believe that communist ideology was a major enemy of democracy in Thailand. Thus, the influence of the network might be a propagation of communist ideology. Second, some villagers do not accept the Red Barrel narrative of the Sinpraetong Network, because their individual

narratives differ from the collective one. The collective narrative was focused on those who are victims of state officials, but it neglected the narrative of those who are victims of the CPT comrades. They thus both oppose the network's activities and reject the memory that it promotes. There is, then, political contestation over the form and content of the history and memory of the Red Barrel incident.

The Politics of Collective Memory

Thai textbooks, along with monuments and rituals, have placed great emphasis on national history. They expand the space of memory through many kinds of representation. The memory promoted by the Sinpraetong Network's leadership is the result of a similar attempt at creating a dominant collective memory. It is the narrative of people who believe that their memory has a valuable lesson, as a former CPT member said:

> We not only received from the CPT but also had learnt a great deal from it. They made us know that the lower class still was oppressed by the upper class. Now, we must resist the state officials.[12]

As far as the network's leaders are concerned, the suffering and crisis of the community in the Red Barrel period must always be recognized. The group that has constructed this narrative mainly comprises those who fled to the jungles. They absorbed the CPT's culture and operated according to it in their daily lives. This strand of "core" memory, derived mainly from former CPT members, serves first and foremost as a lesson to the community. Their memories are rooted in unjust, painful experiences at the hands of the Thai state. They believe that the state still oppresses the citizens. Although it does not use weapons, it has refined a form of structural violence.

The network's narratives are deeply teleological in nature. A major cause for the violence, the story goes, is the inequality of power, which leads to oppression. The reaction, or effect, is for people to oppose the state's power. This narrative is related to the narrators' role as victims in the story. Their victimhood then becomes an element in legitimizing their opposition to the state. The state is identified as a criminal, whereas ordinary villagers are cast as victims who are always oppressed by the state. The binary opposition is very clear in this narrative, and it is repeatedly reproduced. Feelings, emotions, and reactions are made manifest in two ways: anger at the state's actions and pride in the lessons from the jungle.

The memory produced by the Sinpraetong Network is embedded in the daily work of the network. They believe that they have to control the local administration and reduce their dependence on state power. These ideas stem from CPT goals and have transformed into the "core" memory of the community. The nature of the constructed memory suggests a particular relationship between the people and state officials. The villagers are pessimistic about the state. However, they do not expressly demonstrate dissatisfaction. Instead, in order to attain the network's goals, they have to build relationships with the state, and show some kind of meaningful cooperation. For example, the network initiated many projects to monitor and control local administrators. In contrast, when the network held a meeting, they chose to invite the head of the local administrative office to preside over the meeting, to show respect and honor and build a good relationship with the authorities.

The Red Barrel Memorial, the annual commemoration ceremony, the various activities of the Sinpraetong Network, and the group's narratives all reflect political struggles within the space of memory. Both individual narratives and the establishment of a community organization play roles in contextualizing state violence and promoting the value of CPT culture. Because a memory can change over time, the collective memory has to be constantly reproduced, transformed, and applied in everyday life. In this way, the narrative of the Sinpraetong Network may not differ in many respects from the national memory in Thai history, which is repeatedly retold.

There is a difference between the national and Lamsin memories. The latter serves not only as a lesson to the community but also as a reminder of the survival and personal interests of the narrators. The community's narrative is constructed by the CPT ex-comrades, who were seen as the state's enemies. On the one hand, they were victims of state repression. On the other hand, they are the central protagonists in the construction of the community's "core" memory.

Today, although some network members have consciously rejected the ideas of the CPT, they have unconsciously absorbed some of the party culture in language and thinking. They use some terms such as, "integrative thinking" "mass possession," which are used among ex-CPT members or those who trained in the jungle. Their memory has also absorbed some parts of the "core" memory. This type of memory can be adjusted to be in line with the circumstances, and allow for good relations with other people. People can live together with different memories. The opportunity for memory adjustment maintains the "core" memory without any overt objection from this group of dissenters. Even though they do not completely agree with the "core" memory, their inaction implies consent and thereby helps maintain

the "core" memory. Accordingly, the construction of the memory of former CPT members has been sustained. But how are the other types of memories kept alive among the collective memories? How are the historical fragments narrated in the community?

The Spaces of Traumatic Memories

According to my fieldwork, villagers' individual memories are traumatic, and are managed and positioned in various ways. There are four categories of individual memories in the Lamsin community: haunting memories, recriminating memories, officially suppressed memories, and self-inhibiting memories.

In the case of haunting memories, narrators recognize that both state officials and the CPT were responsible for the violence that affected them and their relatives. This view is recounted by narrators who had been charged and arrested by state officials, and by the wives of incinerated victims. They explain that the villagers were victimized by both CPT comrades and officials of the Thai state.

For instance, a wife whose husband was killed in the incident said, "Someone told me that they chopped at his hands, fingers and body, spilled him with petrol and burnt him in that barrel." She added,

> Many people were killed. Neither old people nor children, neither women nor men, were spared. After he had died, I had only one opportunity to make a merit for him. That is because I could not find his bone ash.

When asked if she was angry at state officers, she said:

> Yes, I am. They killed the innocents. How did they do? I feel very sad, but I can do nothing. I expect those perpetrators are dead by now [forced laugh].

She then murmured, "I do not know why Thai people kill each other, why?"[13]

People with haunting memories start their narratives by saying that they remember being harmed, and the results are still buried in their mind. They are afraid and suspicious of, sad and angry at, and confused about their memories. These traumatic feelings are reflected in their language, manner, and actions in the present day. Haunting memories are situated in-between the state and the CPT. People who have these memories do not want to acknowledge their stories; they try to distance themselves from those with whom contact might make them recall the past.

At the same time, those villagers who have recriminating memories, which are also officially suppressed memories, believe that they are victims of history, that their memories are neglected and are not always supported by those who produce the "core" narrative. Another woman whose husband was a local official who was shot by a CPT comrade said,

> I feel very bad about all things happened. When there was the Red Barrel Ceremony, I never wanted to participate in it. [The monument] should not be erected. I have asked Lamom [pseudonym, an ex-communist], why did the comrade shoot at my husband? He said they missed the target, but I never believe in that.

Her eyes filled with tears, she continued, "If my husband was still alive, our family would have been better than now, my daughters had to work hard to support the family."[14]

In another instance of a man whose father was a village head, who was shot by an ex-CPT member in front of him, insisted that he hates the CPT because the party killed his father. He said, "If my father were alive, his life would had been better than this." Every time he got drunk, he stated that his life is now very bad because CPT killed his father.[15]

The plot of these recriminating narratives focuses on traumas resulting from unfairness in the past that have had repercussions into the present. Failures in life, troubles, and impoverishment are the results of that history. Repeated sentences and words suggest narrators' passive natures. In this way, the narrators' roles are reversed in binary opposition to the "core" memory. These recriminating memories are not only subordinate to the Sinpraetong Network's memory, but they are also invisible in the public sphere of the community. The community has limited space for the articulation of these traumatic memories.

Third, state officials linked to violent incidents during the period of communist suppression have self-inhibiting memories. They refused to grant interviews, and their reactions show that they did not want to talk about the past again. The officer-narrators tried to block out the past and escape the shadow of the Red Barrel incident by focusing solely on their identities in the present day. The silence of the officers could be interpreted in two ways. First, they might believe that the Red Barrel incident was an act carried out to excess by the state that they would now like to forget. Memories of the incident have a profound impact on their feelings, and blocking them out might be a means of emotional self-preservation. Second, they might not want their memories to have an effect on the institutions for which they now work.

For the most part, the people with self-inhibiting memories deal with the "core" memory by refusing to participate in the Red Barrel ceremony. Neither would they go into the area of the memorial. They feel that these rituals intensify their traumatic experiences and relive uncomfortable feelings toward the past, since the "core" memory emphasizes the misdeeds of the state, in which they and their relatives once participated. In reality, they doubt the "truths" of the "core" narrative. Yet, their skepticism does not receive any acknowledgment.

On these four types of memories, an important question arises: If the traumatic memories survive but are not clarified, and disagree with the "core" memory constructed by the Sinpraetong Network, how can villagers nevertheless live together in the same community?

The answer lies in the fact that people with various kinds of memories have kin-like relationships in the community. Although they have had different experiences, kinship and close relations of friendship gradually dissolve the past into invisibility.[16] The contradictory past is not dwelt on and the villagers have compromised over the events and interpretations of the past. They do not live in the context of binary oppositions but possess positive relationships with other people in the community. These relationships make their lives more meaningful than if constant emphasis was laid on the past. In daily coexistence, they do not seek answers to the past, but rather employ different methods in their own ways to deal with their traumatic memories. Besides, other cultural relations and acts—kinship relations, relations of close friendship, mutual interest, and assistance—foster the coexistence of contradictory memories.

Memory and Lessons to Thai Society

In the service of the nation, the construction of a collective memory is essential and useful. The critical role of the collective memory is to unify citizens by means of a shared understanding of the past. Collective memory also acts as a force against the nation's enemies. A single, common memory and a shared history offer lessons for the present and future. But the worrisome political and cultural facts are that if we do not work toward creating a personal or communal version of the past, there will remain only one memory that might cover up other different memories. This is a scary political fact. The struggle of people against power is the struggle of memory against being forgotten.

At present, Thai society is dominated by a single version of history and of "Thai-ness." The same history, culture, and memory have caused conflicts,

wars, and massacres without any humanitarian considerations. At the national level, opposing alternative histories and memories have meant that wars continue to be fought: wars against Communism, the violence of October 6, 1976, and programs of ethnic assimilation in several areas, such as the deep south of Thailand. All this has happened because "one" national memory has been constructed and continues to be promoted and imposed, and because powerful forces in society benefit from that memory. But there are also rejections of this memory, resulting in turn in the memories of those accused of rebellion. In this sense, the power of the collective memory is dangerous.

In the relationship between collective and individual memories, no matter how much the "core" memory is reinforced, not all individuals will necessarily yield to it. Individual memory will survive when it fits into a structure defined by the community. We remember our own story because we relate to other people in society. At the same time, we remember our stories by relating them to others. The community's memory is also constructed from individuals' memories.[17] In Lamsin, the community did not yield to the national memory, in which communists are viewed as criminals. The Sinpraetong Network has attempted to write its own history and construct a local community memory that differs from that of the Thai state. However, the network continually reproduces its memory in the same way that the state does. This memory provides the community the possibility of overriding the national memory. The Lamsin memory is an attempt to construct a "core" narrative based on the memories of the majority in the community. It embodies, too, the Sinpraetong Network's challenge to national history.

While the network's memory acts as the collective memory, it at the same time overshadows some individuals' memories. Nonetheless, members of the community try to manage their personal memories and maintain good relations with those who construct the collective memory. Lamsin's memory of the Red Barrel incident is a traumatic memory in the context of the dominant memory production of the Thai state, which is usually silent regarding such traumatic incidences. At the same time, the Lamsin memory, promoted by ex-CPT comrades, stands as the "core" memory of the community. But the memories or oral histories that contradict, and consequently scar, this "core" memory are also traumatic. Trauma is the unifying basis of the various collective and individual memories and narratives of the Red Barrel incident.

The important question is, how does one deal with past traumas such as the Red Barrel incident? How does one find a way for healing and clarifying the past? I would argue that a first step needs to be to allow the divergent or fragmented haunting, recriminating, officially suppressed, and self-inhibiting memories to be heard. We need to take seriously the victims of violence,

regardless of the side that they were on, and enable them to voice their memories, over and above the construction of memorials and the institutionalization of rituals. As Degung Santikarma stated about reconciling with violent death in Bali:

> Remembering violence does not require an elaborate tomb, a guarded gravesite or a lavish ceremony, much less a monument. What is needed is a space to speak freely and communicate freely and without fear, and a language that can encompass both those who would speak and those who would listen for wisdom.[18]

This study not only indicates how a community and its individuals manipulate and manage their memories, but also attempts to reflect on people whose lives and memories have been severely affected by violence. It is grounded in the hope that Thai society could learn from the violence and feelings of the victims. It pays to remember that violence offers no solutions.

Notes

* The author acknowledges Dr. Suwanna Satha-Anand and Dr. Kasian Tejapira for their early encouragement to write this paper. She would like to thank Professor Chaiwat Satha-Anand, Busarin Lertchavalitsakul, Chayanit Poonyarat, and Max Groemping for their support and assistance in the writing and revision of the paper, Loh Kah Seng for his patience, and Michael Montesano for his help in editing the paper.

1. Phatthalung, along with adjacent areas of the shores of the Songkhla Lakes, has historically had a culture of "banditry." This banditry has been understood by scholars as, in part, an expression of resistance to the tightening of Bangkok's rule over remote provinces of Siam and then Thailand; see Saroob Ritchoo, *Local Politics in the Songkhla Lake Areas in 1896–1991* (Thailand Research Fund, 2003); and Craig J. Reynolds, "Rural Male Leadership, Religion and the Environment in Thailand's Mid-south, 1920s–1960s," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 42.1 (February 2011): 39–57.
2. From August 7 1965 through to March 1985, the conflict between the Thai state and the CPT became more violent. State officials arrested anyone they suspected of being a communist, including innocent people. In the conflict, at least 10,504 people were killed, among whom 4,588 were communist guerrillas and 5,916 were government officials, while 17,771 people were injured (1,830 communist guerrillas and 15,941 government officials). Kasian Tejapira, "Reform and Counter-Reform: Democratization and Its Discontents in Post-May 1992 Thai Politics," documentation of a workshop organized by the Heinrich Boll Foundation, October 26–27, 2004, Berlin, p. 126.

3. Jeffrey K. Olick, "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures," *Sociological Theory* 17.3 (November 1999): 343–45.
4. Thongchai Winichakul makes a similar point regarding the massacre of October 1976 in Bangkok: "Remembering/Silencing the Traumatic Past," in *Cultural Crisis and Social Memory: Modernity and Identity in Thailand and Laos,* ed. Shigeharu Tanabe and Charles F. Keyes (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), p. 247.
5. William Logan and Keir Reeves, eds., *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with "Difficult Heritage"* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2008).
6. *Yon Roy*, ITV Station, 2004.
7. Patricia Hampl, "Memory and Imagination," in *The Anatomy of Memory,* ed. James McConkey (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 209.
8. Thongchai, "Remembering/Silencing the Traumatic Past," p. 247.
9. The network takes the "sin" in its name from the name of Lamsin subdistrict, while "Praetong" is the name of a waterfall in the village.
10. The leaders of the Sinpraetong Network leaders have divided the community's history into four periods: settlement period; suffering and crisis, restoration and learning period; learning (from the outside) period; and the Foundation of the Sinpraetong Network.
11. Gyanendra Pandey, "Voices from the Edge: The Struggle to Write Subaltern Histories," in *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial,* ed. Vinayak Chaturvedi (London: Verso, 2000).
12. Author's interview in August 2007. For reasons of confidentiality, the interviewees are not named in this paper.
13. Author's interview in August 2007.
14. Author's interview in January 2008.
15. Author's interview in October 2006.
16. Such relations of close friendship are captured in the term "เกลอ" (*kleu*), which has a deep and particular meaning in the cultures of rural Phatthalung and of Thailand's upper South more generally. The term refers to those who are like brothers and sisters and can be counted upon to help one another over a period of years or even decades. People may have more than one *kleu*, and it is not uncommon for southern Thais to recall, with notably positive implications, kleu relationships between their fathers/mothers or grandfathers/mothers and those of people whom they encounter.
17. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 36.
18. Degung Santikarma, "Monument, Document and Mass Grave: The Politics of Representing Violence in Bali," in *Beginning to Remember: The Past in the Indonesian Present,* ed. Mary S. Zurbuchen (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), p. 322.

CHAPTER 7

Memory, Trauma, and Nation: Contestation over the Batang Kali Massacre in Malaysia

Leong Kar Yen

Approaching Malaysia's capital city, one is struck by the sight of the verdant trees lining the wide avenues leading to the many memorials dotting Kuala Lumpur. One such artifice is the National Monument, which depicts government troops sacrificing themselves but heroically emerging triumphant over communist insurgents. Much like the monument immortalizing soldiers raising the US flag in Iwo Jima, Malaysia's very own National Monument features government troops standing victorious over the nations' greatest threat, the communist insurgency. These monuments seek to sear into the memories of citizens, the precarious nature of independence and national being. The edifices of stone and marble also seek to put into physical form the "enemy," which in turn defines the nation-state by identifying its adversaries. Therefore, the materials used in the construction of these monuments are to ensure that they will remain in perpetuity binding citizens together, forging a common memory. Malaysia's National Monument also works in consonant with other such symbols of its nationhood. For instance, half a kilometer down the road stands the court of the highest lawmaking body in the land. Adjacent to it, is the federal police headquarters and a stone's throw away is the National Mosque. If each of these bodies were to be read in sequence, one can discern

a narrative where through the defeat of the enemy, the nation is made whole. These officially sanctioned, triumphalist memorials and monuments to a nation's memories define the contours and boundaries of the nation and how its past should be remembered, with anything outside the approved narrative to be forgotten.

What lies beyond these managed borders of national memory? If officially sanctioned memories demarcate the existence of the nation, it is important to know what has been officially forgotten and how and why forgetting takes place? Forgetting, as Paul Connerton states, is a consequence of modernity.[1] He adds that physical alterations to place and space will ultimately decide what is to be remembered and forgotten. Therefore memory and forgetting act consonantly, like dancers in a never-ending waltz. Malaysia continues to pursue progress as a "developing" nation, placing emphasis on economic growth and large iconic projects such as its international airport and Kuala Lumpur's ever-growing skyline. What is important in the Malaysian context is that the forgetting caused by the headlong rush to modernity aids state-sanctioned efforts to promote a single narrative of the past and grey out contentious historical events. Beyond the borders of Kuala Lumpur and its surrounding affluent neighborhoods, though, lie various *loci* that remain untouched by modernity and national history despite the nation's obsession with tall buildings and palatial government offices. It is in these places beyond the official places of remembrance that memories continue to challenge state narratives about the nation's founding.

Given the growing popularity of oral historical methodology in Malaysia, these forgotten places are beginning to regain form. Underlying this archaeology of knowledge is the growth of a younger and more critical cabal of scholars who are peeling away the layers hidden underneath official history. In the endeavor to retrieve these forgotten places, it is important to understand why forgetting takes place. By investigating this, we can gain glimpses into how forgotten communities are silenced as development-obsessed regimes seek a new modernity while sacrificing the less sanguine aspects of the nation-building process. Where do we begin?

This chapter does not engage directly with conventional oral history sources, but analyzes statements by survivors who are interviewed by journalists, documentary filmmakers, and independent researchers such as Ian Ward and Norma Miraflor.[2] Such an approach highlights the marginal status of the deeply controversial episodes in Malaysian history, like the 1948 Batang Kali incident. While such statements might not appear to possess the authoritative primary source status of oral history recordings, narrators speaking through these mediums still possess a "shared authority" and are just as capable of exerting influence over the

themes and content of the interview.[3] As such, these materials are just as useful as conventional oral history in contesting the dominant discourses and official accounts of history.

Social theory ideas such as marginality and stigmatization feature prominently throughout my paper. I attempt to theoretically enrich our knowledge of oral history through different prisms. There is an urgent need to theoretically place into perspective the Malayan Emergency and the fragment that is Batang Kali.

The Beginning

I remember the long journey as I traveled to Batang Kali in 2004 as part of a news assignment.[4] From my briefing at the office, I was told it was located in the deep enclaves of Selangor, a state more well known for its industrial wealth than agricultural hinterlands. The press conference was set in a small house in a little town surrounded by palm tree plantations. As the details of the incident in Batang Kali were slowly revealed to me during the press conference, I was surprised and shocked that in 1948, several innocent villagers were allegedly shot by a group of British soldiers looking for "communist bandits" in a botched military operation. As the aged witnesses began retelling their stories, I was amazed by the clarity of the memories they recounted to the large group of journalists who had congregated at the place. As several witnesses came forward to speak, it soon became clear that their stories demanded voice and, more importantly, justice.[5] What was more disorientating for me was the fact that I was never aware that such an event had ever occurred. When the Malayan Emergency erupted in 1948, it was cast in history texts as the beginning of a major struggle between the disruption and chaos brought about by communist insurgents and the order the government bravely struggled for. The silence surrounding the Batang Kali story, or incident, however, mirrored its remote geographical presence within the state of Selangor. It is an out-of-the-way place located at the interstices not only of modern Malaysia's creation but also of the historical understanding of the nation as a whole. No doubt it is this sense of marginality that has caused these witnesses to history and atrocity to belatedly claim their place in Malaysian history.

Official accounts have muted the echoes of the incident, and the voices of those affected by the incident have remained largely in silence. Therefore, I aim to critically analyze the form and structure of the Malaysian narrative, as a way of explaining the silences that occur in many of its aspects. The chapter also looks at the pursuit of historical truth and justice through the

eyes of those affected by the incident. In the process, I will also touch on the trauma brought about by such violent events, described by scholars Degung Santikarma and Leslie Dwyer as an element that, "soaks into the ground of the present, saturating it with meaning and shifting the landscape with its cultural and emotional weight. It can be buried or even burned but its ashes change the composition of the soil."[6] For the small community of Batang Kali survivors and their families, attempts have been made to exhume the body of the past, I believe, through rituals of remembrance that include gravesites and death rituals. These rituals, I argue are capable of building and retaining the cohesiveness of this "community of trauma" and yet at the same time appease the restless spirits of Batang Kali still seeking historical restitution.

Interstices

Between December 11 and 12, 1948, a group of British soldiers from the Scots Guards battalion were alleged to have rounded up a group of agricultural workers from the Sungai Remok estate in the district of the Batang Kali, an area situated at a 90-minute car ride from the capital, Kuala Lumpur. The Malayan Emergency had just been declared, and the conflict would continue till the armistice between the Malaysian government and the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) in 1989. The period of the Malayan Emergency was the crucible for Malaysian nation building. However, the emergency was both an aberration as well as a necessity in Malaysia's nation-building narrative. The struggle claimed many lives both among government forces as well as the communist guerrillas. Repressive legislation was put in place to counter the rising tide of communists and other subversive types. The young nation during its early days lived in the shadow of fear as huge swaths of its population were virtually put under lock and key in fenced-up New Villages to cut off possible support to guerrillas in the jungle. At the same time, the struggle against communism gave the Malaysian nation an opportunity to imagine itself. While made up of differing "nations-of-intent," a phrase used by Malaysian anthropologist A. B. Shamsul to describe Malaysia's multiculturalism, the communist threat gave the young nation the capacity to unite in opposition to the "Other." In Shamsul's analysis, Malaysia was home to several tribes or nations seeking to chart out different routes in achieving their idea of the Malaysian nation.[7] Francis Loh Kok Wah, a political scientist, attributes the fragmented nature of the Malaysia polity to the presence of these nations, which are particularistic and exclusive in nature rather than universal.[8]

The Malayan/Malaysian Emergency was perhaps that one episode in the course of Malaysian history that was able to bind the nation together beyond the exclusivity of its different tribes. The law-abiding inhabitants of Malaysia were awarded their status as citizens with the distribution of identity cards as the dangerous, violent Other continued to live as shadowy phantoms in the jungle.

Thus much of the postcolonial Malaysian narrative was built on the experience of combating communist insurgents. The Batang Kali incident represented a "fragment," broken from the grand Malaysian national narrative. Beneath the larger stream of the nation-building theme, Batang Kali and many other fragments represent the less than ideal consequences of the nation-building process. In highlighting the need for analyzing fragments, Indian scholar Gyanendra Pandey suggests that when national narratives avoid or overlook these fragments, it leads to an avoidance of deeper discussions of ethnicity. In the Indian context, this has blinded the country to understanding the present ethnic unrest as anything more than minor glitches in its national narrative.[9] Similar blinkers to such fragments and consequences plague Malaysia.

As the surviving family members and witnesses of the Batang Kali incident continue to campaign, their account and recounts of the events present multiple fragments in Malaysian history. Their stories represent undercurrents that flow alongside the grander Malaysian narrative stream. In analyzing the statements and understanding the dynamics of the ongoing campaign for justice and restitution in this group, I am attempting to show their agency and the efforts made to "remake the world." Anthropologists Arthur Kleinman and Veena Das speak of the ability of many communities suffering from collective trauma to create their own narrative fragments in order to survive.[10] I believe the attempts by the relatives of the victims and the witnesses to seek redemption and justice is such an effort.

Historically, the CPM drew its membership mainly from the Chinese ethnic community when Japanese meted out especially harsh measures against the community during the Second World War. The different levels of treatment among the groups caused a great deal of tension between the ethnic groups that came to the fore during the interregnum, immediately after Japanese surrender and before the return of the British forces. Members of the British-sponsored (but primarily pro-communist ethnic Chinese) Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) exacted vengeance on collaborators who had cooperated with the Japanese. The MPAJA's heavy-handed tactics earned the ire of the Malay community, who in turn retaliated and attacked neighboring Chinese communities. According to historian Cheah Boon Kheng, atrocities committed

during this period would later color the perceptions of Malaya's ethnic communities, though all of them suffered equally during the war and the postwar period.[11]

Blighted Landscapes

The escalation of armed struggle between the British, the local government, and the communists successfully created "hostages" amounting to over a million people at the height of the emergency in 1951 consisting mainly of ethnic Chinese. Held in large camps, some communities were forcibly relocated and had to readapt themselves to unfamiliar environs.

Most were squatters who during the war period were forced to move into the jungle to survive. They of course came into close contact with the MPAJA, feeding its soldiers with food and information as a way of resisting the Japanese Imperial Army. The symbiotic relationship continued to a certain extent until the Briggs Plan from 1950 to 1952, which moved about one million two hundred thousand people into 600 New Villages. Living in prison-like conditions, the massive program was designed to cut off the CPM from its lifeline.[12] The programs and physical amenities provided to these New Villages were of course lauded by the colonial government but caused unhappiness among other communities. According to anthropologist Judith Strauch, "Many Malays tended to resent the amenities . . . given to suspected traitors."[13] The new villagers were literally caught in the middle. The conditions in the camps were oppressive as they lived constantly under guard and with curfew. Communist operatives were also known to terrorize them by forcefully taking supplies or threatening them. And to compound this, the land on which they lived was not theirs but subject to short-term leases.

However, according to new villager Sim Chee Jia, "We were really innocent victims back then. The British just assumed that as long as we were Chinese, we were helping the Communists!"[14] In a newspaper interview, Sim recounted how his family and life were put into a state of flux, being forcibly moved from one area to another. He adds, "When you went out they would check your belongings. You were not allowed to bring food outside. If they saw you outside the gates after 6 pm they would just shoot you—no questions asked." Sim stated, "In the past, people only saw things from the British point of view that the communists were dangerous and killing people. However the British were just as bad in some ways, especially in their disregard for civilians." Sim's voice offers a counterbalance to the depiction

of how the emergency was needed to flush out a dangerous foe. In reality, at least according to Sim, everyone was at some point or another equally culpable.

These New Villages were physically, geographically, and psychologically sequestered from the nation-state. They existed in a peripheral space where inhabitants had to be cleansed of "undesirable" influences before rejoining the general population or being accepted into the nation-state. According to anthropologist Ray Nyce, "A common attitude has been that the new villages were places of comparative lawlessness and hotbeds of communism. Many have viewed the villagers as country cousins, a little backward and awkward."[15] Their liminality created gaps with little space for their narratives to surface. Reports in the media at the time about these places were about encounters with communists and not an actual representation of their reality. Military lingo described the New Villages as "black areas," rife with communist activity in need of cleansing to become "white areas." Malaya/Malaysia at the time was a "mapped geo-body." If we were to reflect on the nature of military maps of colonial Malaya, we can think of "surgical" strikes performed by the military authorities to cleanse and "neutralize" the dangers to the Malayan geo-body in the form of communist insurgents. Upon successful sterilization, these areas would then return to a clean state of being, becoming white again.[16]

An emergency-era British propaganda pamphlet shows how Malaya progressed from 1951 when the entire country was "infested" with communist insurgents to 1957 when the geo-body was nearly 50 percent free of the communist disease. Mapping creates boundaries and margins, defining an area or space that needs to be defended. But who or what was it to be defended against? The answer is of course the communists. According to propaganda, given that nearly the entirety of Malaya was a black area in 1951, does it suggest that all of Malaya had "gone" communist? However, with enough "attention and effort," Malaya was cured, purged of "dark" impurities. The borders between black and white are distinct, but within these spaces "othering" happens. For the security forces, the map reinforced the idea that all within the dark area, places like Batang Kali, were suspect.

In Batang Kali

In histories of the emergency, many facets of life under the wire in the New Villages remain hidden. This is where oral history is needed to complement an already copious amount of scholarship on the strategic and military aspects of

the Malayan Emergency. In the small community of Batang Kali in Selangor, the spirits of their memories still linger:

> The next day I tried to go back up, but some people from the nearby Malay village said, don't—they had seen two truckloads of soldiers go up to our village. A week later, I went back again. The manager of the estate gave us some cloth and sticks to make stretchers so we could collect the bodies. They were still all lying where they had fallen.[17]

When Tham Yong uttered these words to a British reporter in December 2009, she was already 78. By then she was the last remaining witness of an alleged massacre on December 11, 1948, which took the lives of 24 people in the Sungai Remok estate in Selangor's Batang Kali district. Five months after the interview was published, Tham Yong passed away without ever seeing justice.

Tham Yong's plight and that of the families whose loved ones died on that fateful day has fueled an ongoing campaign to seek compensation and restitution from the British government. It began in 1993 after the BBC produced a television program on the complicity of British troops from the elite Scots Guard regiment in the massacre at Batang Kali. The program, which was part of the "Inside Story" series, was entitled "In Cold Blood" and contained damning accusations that successive governments in Britain had covered up the murder of innocent civilians. The British however maintained that their troops did no wrong and the casualties were in fact communists. A month later in 1948, the colonial secretary stated "that had the troops not opened fire, the suspect Chinese would have made an attempt at escape."[18] Investigations into incident were stonewalled at every turn.

For instance, in the early 1970s, a shift of government in Britain, from Labor to Conservative, halted a Scotland Yard investigation. In 1993, the Royal Malaysian Police initiated investigations, but in 2004, the then prime minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi made an announcement that, "no evidence was found to charge anyone in the matter."[19] In 2009, while indicating that it would initiate an inquiry into the matter, the British High Commission reneged, stating provisionally that no inquiry would be held. To date, there have been no further updates on the issue from the British government.

Nonetheless, the campaign continues and retains a presence in cyberspace, run by spokesperson-cum-lawyer Quek Ee Meng.[20] During an interview with an Australian news program, he was asked what his motivations were since he was not directly related to any of those who were involved in the incident. He states that the campaign was necessary to counter stereotypical notions that Chinese Malaysians are always seen as "communist fifth columnists." He hoped that their campaign would show that the ethnic Chinese

worked as hard as everyone else and that, "the official history records must accurately portray all their contributions."[21]

In a press conference in 2004, jointly organized by a political party and the campaign group, witness Foo Mooi, whose husband and brother-in-law died in the incident, described the events in great clarity. According to her, the group consisting of men, women, and children had been detained in their *kongsi* or longhouses by British troops. The troops then rounded up a group of 24 men and in the early morning of December 12 shot them. Not only was Foo Mooi humiliated and harassed by the troops, she lost her husband and close members of her family. It is not surprising that despite being the oldest at the time of the press conference, she could recall the events clearly, including that of another young man who also "disappeared":

> The soldiers took him out of the hostel, handcuffed him, and told him to look straight. They shot him. He was only a teenager… they treated us like dogs. They asked if we knew of any communists, and we replied that we did not.[22]

Foo Mooi was also one of those interviewed in the in the BBC program "In Cold Blood." In it she described her experience when the troops arrived at the estate:

> I was about to cook when the troops arrived. I was surprised to be surrounded by these British Troops. They then ordered us to go outside for questioning. We have lived here for so long there have never been any problems. It has always been peaceful here. For all those years that we have been here we have only been working. We have never done anything illegal. We are just workers. We are just working people.[23]

Through the interview, she described what the counterinsurgency meant to squatters like her. The arrival of the troops spelt the real danger of the emergency and signified an end to normality for Foo Mooi. For her, the estate was a peaceful place and everyone living in the area was merely doing an honest day's work. They were certainly not bandits.

Tham Yong, another witness interviewed in the program, vehemently denied that there was any communist activity in the area, thus challenging the official version of history. Relating the incident to another British media outlet, she explained:

> Before the soldiers came, we had led a very simple life in our village. We worked on the rubber plantation, would use bamboo poles to catch fish in

> the river and had about two dishes that we would always cook. We didn't see any fighting, although we heard from other villagers about some in the hills nearby. As for the communists, we didn't know what one was and they didn't come to the village—if they had, we would have reported them to the police.
>
> Some soldiers came to our village once or twice though. When we were burning bamboo, it would sometimes explode, like a gun going off, so they came to investigate. On December 11th though, when the soldiers came, they were with a [ethnic] Chinese detective and very fierce. They ordered the women to stop cooking the rice and the men to stop tapping the rubber trees.[24]

She then charts the sequence of events closer to the alleged massacre when the women and children were separated from the men. The terror of counterinsurgency and the fear of the villagers became clear:

> By this time, as there was no food, the children were crying. Then the detective said we must keep the children quiet or they would burn down the *kongsi* (company). All night long we could see outside that the soldiers were lighting fires, which made us very frightened that they would burn down our house. They told us to separate, with the women and children going into one side of the *kongsi* and the men into the other. We stayed there as it grew dark. There was no food for us and no explanation of what was happening. Then the Chinese detective said to us: "You saw communists, they came here." I said I didn't know anything, but he kept shouting, he didn't believe me.[25]

The next morning, the women and children were bundled into lorries and as they were being driven away, they were greeted with the sight of their *Kongsi* being burnt to the ground and the sound of gunfire. This, explained Tham Yong, would also be last time they would ever see of their male companions:

> The soldiers then took us to a lorry and we got on the back. When I was on the lorry, I saw the men coming down from the *kongsi*. There was a ladder, which could only take two people at a time. The men were then put into three or four groups and then led off towards the rubber plantation by the soldiers. Then I heard the gunshots. I thought that the men were gone. I heard shots from five different places. Then the soldiers fired shots at the *kongsi*, which set it on fire.

As a parting shot, Tham Yong threw a challenge to the British authorities, letting loose the pent up emotions of the past:

> The soldiers were not right to do what they did. We were not communists, we were innocent people. I want them to pay compensation. I want the British government to apologize and to pay some compensation. Of course I am still angry about this. We also want to have the truth finally. They owe us that much.[26]

Through oral history, survivors like Tham are able to speak truth to power and demand justice.

The narrative within Tham Yong's story is a struggle to make sense of what happened in December 1948. At the beginning, she paints a picture of peace and stability within the estate. But the apparently simple lives of the villagers understate the uncertain and often harsh conditions typical of agricultural settings like that of Batang Kali. Rubber tappers like Tham Yong and Foo Mooi eked out a hand-to-mouth living, which was dependent on the elements. If they worked they had wages. If it rained, they would receive nothing from the estate management. The practice continues even now. Moreover, if the insurgents were to damage the rubber trees, this would also mean a loss of income.

The other contentious issue facing them was that of land ownership. Judith Strauch states, "The lots on which settlers built houses over . . . do not belong to the people outright . . . but are held on . . . renewable temporary occupation licenses. The most basic problem however, was the continued vulnerability of the Chinese workers. Chinese were not permitted to be neutral."[27] The estate workers lived in twilight conditions where within the confines of the estate they were subject to harassment by security forces. Strauch further adds, "Once outside the fence for a day's work, however, the Chinese rubber tapper or tin miner was an easy target for the guerrilla assassin."[28] Life in the estates during this period was a series of daily struggles to survive. Tham Yong's call for compensation is not surprising given that many of them continued to live in poverty even as Malaysia's economy grew. Psychologically, her narrative demonstrates how the massacre disrupted the expectations and the direction her life was expected to take. Roxana Waterson states, "The self . . . is situated both in place and time, at a particular historical moment. The individual as narrator maybe engaged in a struggle to make sense of that moment, so that as well as self-consciousness, a historical consciousness simultaneously emerges from the telling."[29] Tham Yong's story, as told to the journalist was

in part about achieving self-consciousness. However, for people like Tham Yong, questions remain over the savagery of the military operations then. The suffering at the hands of the authorities did not make sense, for after all, the workers at Sungai Remok estate were merely trying to make a living. Therefore in seeking an apology from the British authorities and perhaps in receiving one, Tham Yong could finally give meaning to the randomness that has permeated her life since that day in 1948. An apology would also be for Foo Mooi and Tham Young, an acknowledgment of their innocence. Living in a well-known "black area" and later on being moved into New Villages was a form of distrust. Both the government and the colonial authorities were not able to place their trust in a population that could turn either way. An apology would be an acknowledgment that they were not bandits, merely innocent bystanders in a war beyond their control. The distrust of those who had lived in "black areas" was unfounded, and the stereotypes should not persist. Those who had suffered historical injustice in the past should be allowed to share in the history of the nation.

Stigma

In a recent news article, a BBC journalist interviewed Firoz Hussein, a lawyer representing the community in their campaign for reparation. Firoz noted that a public inquiry would not only provide them with reparations and redress, it would also take away the stain, "that the families are still tainted with the stigma that those executed were communist terrorists."[30]

Justice ultimately for the families means being absolved of the stain and the stigma of being suspected communists. Reparations would then be a way in which they could remove the taint that had been placed on them. As I have explained earlier in the article, being referred to as communist is tantamount to being outside of the Malaysian nation-state, to be alien. In the same way that Thongchai argues that all non-Siamese were to be kept outside the boundaries of the Siamese geo-body, non-Malaysians and violent communist insurgents are similarly seen as alien to the Malaysian geo-body. In analyzing the community of Batang Kali, I was especially fascinated by the use of the word "stigma" by their lawyer. Stigma includes "the tribal stigma of race, nation and religion, these being the stigma that can be transmitted through lineages and can equally contaminate all members of a family," or even a community.[31] Many of these places, which in the past were deemed "black areas" continue to exist in the popular Malaysian imagination as liminal places that are still "backward" and "lawless." Similarly, in Indonesia, many individuals

and communities continue to live the stigma of having been branded as "radicals," or even communists, after the abortive 1965 coup attempt. Up until the fall of Suharto in 1998, many generations of Indonesians had to suffer the stigma of being communist tainted on their identity cards. A telling example of this stigma was recounted by puppet master Ki Tristuti Rachmadi during his years as a prisoner in the penal colony of Buru Island.[32] However, within any society, individuals interact among themselves and are constantly ordering, reordering, making, and remaking the world they live in. People are not mere prisoners of society but actively reinvent their worlds.

Remains of the Day

In a book chapter written on the Batang Kali incident, Ian Ward offers fascinating insights into the lives of those who were directly affected by the incident. According to Ward in, "the aftermath of the raid—what the women and children had to confront following the deaths of the husbands, fathers and brothers—was part of the whole Batang Kali equation. With each passing year, their hardships multiplied. The legacy of that particular 1948 Scots Guard weekend mission was a collection of marginalized lives, scarred by recollections of mindless butchery."[33] The horror of the event did not end that day and the repercussions of the event followed the people of Sungai Remok estate in Batang Kali throughout their lives. Wong Mook Sang was 11 when his father Wong Yan was killed. He states, "My father's death caused us much suffering and misery, my life has been a tough one." Ward also tells the story of a widow who had to take on the burden of her dead husband in earning a living to support her two children. One child died while she was still at work and the other grew up with deep-set psychological issues. It would seem that the, "Batang Kali killings have left an attitude of wariness towards the working of the system and the fairness of authority. The fear of undeserved recriminations was learnt fast and only too well. It stayed, seared in the minds of those left behind."[34] Ward however notes that despite the painful memories, most of the families regularly visited the graves of those who died in the event. As ancestor remembrance and worship is an important aspect of Chinese culture, scholars contend that such commemorative acts can fulfill several very important functions for traumatized communities. Halbwachs adds that, "participation in commemorative meetings with group members of the current generation, they can recreate through imaginatively re-enacting a past that would otherwise slowly disappear in the haze of time."[35] Despite the psychological anguish, these visits provide an important continuum with

the present. Such commemorations allow the group to become "conscious of itself"[36] and aware, in the case of Batang Kali, of the marginality of being forced to live through the traumatic events of that fateful day. Therefore the event for many of the family members represents injustice; and injustices must be rectified. Similar strategies of remembrance/resistance, studied by anthropologist Jun Jin, have also been employed by marginal groups in China as a reaction toward state-sponsored terror during the Cultural Revolution.[37] These groups responded by utilizing ancestor worship, spirit tablets, and temples as mnemonic devices linking them to their past (these villagers claim to be direct descendants of Confucius). Jun Jing claims that their strategy was not so much to resist but rather to cope, bringing the villagers together in a time of uncertainty.

For the people of Batang Kali, these graves are a constant reminder to push ahead in the ongoing campaign for justice. At the same time, the graves and death rituals are markers of a traumatic event, which nonetheless binds the community ever closer. Some scholars have further pushed the definition of "trauma" calling it a recurring event that at the same time disrupts or disables narrativity, making it impossible to tell a comprehensible story with a beginning and an end.[38] Yet if we were to look at the experience of trauma collectively, scholar Kai Erikson states that "trauma that is has a social dimension . . . trauma can create community."[39] Utilizing the individual/community organic metaphor greatly expands our ability to understand the blighted landscape that a community like the survivors of the Batang Kali inhabits. These acts of remembrance are embodied within the community as they pray and prostrate before the tombstones of their long-deceased relatives. As Erikson puts it, "The point to be made here is not that calamity serves to strengthen bonds linking people together—it does not most of the time—but that shared experience becomes almost like a common culture, a source of kinship."[40]

In the Shadow of History

The community in Batang Kali is only one among many such communities of trauma, held together by the trauma of the past but blighted by stigma. The other articles written by various authors in this volume also amply describe and discuss other communities of trauma. This brings us back to the issue of fragments as we seek to understand their impact on Malaysian history. Pandey states that these fragments are substories that have been glossed over by the larger and grander necessities of the national narrative.[41] In the

colonial history of Malaysia, even the narrative of independence and nation building is considered a fragment. Therefore Malaysia should be understood as a place where several different fragments are all vying for attention. There is no need to place the Batang Kali story into an arena where it is contesting or struggling against the greater narrative. It should however been seen as another facet of Malaysian history that needs to be told. In that sense, perhaps the justice that the community seeks is recognition of its place in the Malaysian narrative. However, this begs the question of how Batang Kali should be acknowledged as part of Malaysian history.

So the question remains: What are some of the lessons we can learn from Batang Kali? We can see that these communities of trauma will continue to haunt us even as the nation continues to search for its modern soul and identity. If we were to shift the emphasis to an analysis of these many subaltern spaces, perhaps an all-encompassing language bridging the many groups and communities in Malaysia can emerge. By using oral history to reach out to individuals and communities, and ultimately linking it (as opposed to "reconciling") to Malaysian history, perhaps the plural society of Malaysia can find common ground in which to understand trauma and memory. Perhaps then the fractious nature of Malaysian society can be repaired. However, we must also be wary that the voices of the individual communities are not subsumed by the drive to create a supposedly more harmonious nation. The contentious issue of historical justice still remains for that small community in Batang Kali. Ultimately, Batang Kali will serve as a reminder through its oral history that while Malaysia has a grand narrative, it can only be made whole if it acknowledges the many other fragments of its history.

Postscript

While the sun has finally set over the British colonialism, much of its legacy remains. For those who were both directly and indirectly affected by the events of 1948 in Batang Kali, the ripples in time continue to reverberate through their lives. In September of 2011, the families of those who had perished on that day were allowed by the English law courts to argue for a new inquiry into the alleged massacre. It was also because of this that classified colonial records on the event, which were thought to be lost, resurfaced. However, their hopes for an inquiry, and possibly some form of restitution from the UK authorities, were dashed when a decision was passed down by the English high court in September 2012 stating that there was no need to reopen the case given that the passage of time had eroded any opportunity for definitive

answers. The ruling in itself was ambiguous, stating that while the 24 men were clearly shot by the British soldiers, it was difficult to prove that their actions had been deliberate. The Batang Kali families will appeal the case.[42] The case is similar to one brought forth by Kenyans alleged to have been tortured by the colonial forces during the Mau Mau rebellion in the 1950s.[43] If successful, the Kenyan case may influence how the United Kingdom comes to deal with its past not only in Kenya but, perhaps, even in Batang Kali.

Notes

1. Paul Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
2. Ian Ward and Norma Miraflor, *Slaughter and Deception at Batang Kali* (Singapore: Media Masters, 2009).
3. Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York, 1990).
4. I was a journalist at the time with the independent news portal *Malaysiakini.com*. Not knowing the way, I was chauffeured there by members of an opposition party. Later, the next day, I attempted a follow-up with the British High Commission in Kuala Lumpur hoping to get a response. The spokesperson never returned any of my requests for an interview.
5. One interesting point I pondered was that the issue of Batang Kali was more a concern for the Chinese vernacular press than other media. Up until today, the newspapers that have been vociferously following this story have been the Chinese language press. The English and Malay language newspapers have largely remained silent. Nonetheless, more independent English-language news portals such as *Malaysiakini* have explored the issue.
6. Degung Santikarma and Leslie Dwyer, "Landscapes of Emotion, Embodiment and Ritual: Post-1965 Balinese Culture," paper presented at the Conference of the Society for Balinese Studies, Denpasar, Indonesia, July 11–13, 2000. Quoted in Mary S. Zurbuchen, "History, Memory and the '1965 Incident' in Indonesia," *Asian Survey* 62.4 (July/August 2002): 678.
7. A. B. Shamsul, "Nations-of-Intent in Malaysia," in *Asian Forms of the Nation,* ed. Stein Tonneson and Hans Antlov (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1997), pp. 323–47.
8. Francis Loh Kok Wah, "Introduction," *Fragmented Vision: Culture and Politics in Contemporary Malaysia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), pp. 1–20.
9. Gyanendra Pandey, "In Defense of the Fragment: Writing about Hindu-Muslim Riots in India today," *Representations*, Special issue on Imperial Fantasies and Postcolonial Histories 37 (Winter 1992): 27–55.
10. Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman, "Introduction," in *Remaking a World: Violence, Social Suffering and Recovery,* ed. Veena Das et al. (Los Angeles: UCLA Press, 2001), pp. 1–30.

11. Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red Star over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict after the Japanese Occupation, 1941–1946* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003).
12. Ray Nyce, *Chinese New Villages in Malaya: A Community Study* (Singapore: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1971).
13. Judith Strauch, *Chinese New Village Politics in the Malaysian State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 163.
14. *The Star*, "Barbed Past," November 30, 2009.
15. Nyce, *Chinese New Villages in Malaya*, p. 188.
16. For more on the concept of the "geo-body," see Winnichakul Thongchai, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).
17. Jonathan Gorvett, "I Survived Batang Kali," *The Guardian Weekly*, December 9, 2009.
18. Ward and Miraflor, *Slaughter and Deception at Batang Kali*, p. 75.
19. *The New Straits Times*, "AG Closes File on Batang Kali Massacre due to Lack of Evidence," September 16, 2004.
20. Quek's family moved to Batang Kali and his father later became an active member of the group seeking redress.
21. Australian Broadcasting Corporation, *Connect Asia*, interview with Quek Ngee Meng, December 15, 2008.
22. Leong Kar Yen, "Batang Kali: The Search for Justice Continues," *Malaysiakini.com*, July 14, 2004, http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/28416, last accessed October 6, 2012.
23. British Broadcasting Corporation, "Inside Story: In Cold Blood," 1992.
24. Gorvett, "I Survived Batang Kali."
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Strauch, *Chinese New Village Politics in the Malaysian State*, p. 65.
28. Ibid.
29. Roxana Waterson, "Introduction: Analyzing Personal Narratives," in *Southeast Asian Lives: Personal Narratives and Historical Experience*, ed. Roxana Waterson (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2007), p. 7.
30. Alistair Leithead, "Justice South in UK over Malaysian Deaths," British Broadcasting Corporation, December 11, 2010.
31. Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoilt Identity* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1963), p. 5.
32. Ki Tristuti Rachmadi, "My Life as a Shadow Master under Suharto," in *Beginning to Remember: The Past in the Indonesian Present*, ed. Mary S. Zurbuchen (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2005), pp. 38–46.
33. Ward and Miraflor, *Slaughter and Deception at Batang Kali*, p. 179.
34. Ibid., p.181.
35. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 24.
36. Ibid.
37. Jun Jing, *The Temple of Memories: History, Power and Morality in a Chinese Village* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

38. Cathy Caruth, "Introduction," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory,* ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 3–11.
39. Kai Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," in Caruth, *Trauma*, p. 185.
40. Ibid., p. 190.
41. Pandey, "In Defense of the Fragment."
42. For more information, see BBC's report, "Malaysian Lose Fight for 1948 'Massacre' Inquiry," http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-19473258, last accessed September 5, 2012.
43. See Gabriel Gatehouse, "Mau Mau Struggle for Recognition at Home and Abroad," http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-19852463, last accessed October 6, 2012.

PART III

Oral Tradition and Heritage

CHAPTER 8

The Anthropologist as Heroine: Contemporary Interpretations of Memory and Heritage in an Indonesian Valley*

Emilie Wellfelt

Introduction

In 1937 the Swiss American anthropologist Cora Du Bois (1903–91) traveled by sea from New York, via the Netherlands, to the Dutch East Indies. She was a self-conscious social scientist, or as she writes in a letter: a "lady-explorer" on her way to an isolated part of the Indonesian archipelago. Du Bois was intentionally looking for a remote place, as her research within the fashionable culture and personality school required investigations into a society little affected by Western influences.[1] Du Bois set out on a pioneering mission; she was the first to try out methods from psychoanalysis in a non-Western setting and had been advised to choose the island of Alor for the study.[2]

Cora Du Bois' book, *The People of Alor*, published in 1944, is an important work within the field of psychological anthropology. The author would later become the first woman to teach anthropology at Harvard University. What is less well known is that Du Bois is a celebrity outside the academic world. She has become a heroine in the Abui community she studied, and is quite famous across the whole of Alor. Since Du Bois left the island in 1939, never to return, she has lived on in collective memory as a vivid figure

to which hopes for the future are attached. Following her departure, a cult emerged around the anthropologist, and it is still evolving. Du Bois was incorporated into existing beliefs in benevolent magical beings.

The main question here is, how and why an American woman, who appeared—and disappeared—in the late 1930s, has reached cult status in Alor. Theoretically, the discussion is informed by the concept of contact zones, as presented by Mary Louise Pratt in her analysis of travel-writing during colonial times. Pratt argues, "A contact perspective emphasizes how subjects get constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relation among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and 'travelees,' not in terms of separateness, but of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, and often within radically asymmetrical relations of power."[3] I will deal with contact zones in two time layers: when Du Bois stayed on Alor, and the present in which her stay is being historicized. Empirical data from several periods of fieldwork in the area, starting in 2002, point to an ongoing process in which the Du Bois era is interpreted and reinterpreted in oral narratives. When I first visited the valley where Du Bois worked some 60 years earlier, the local spokesmen were old people who had personal memories of the anthropologist in the late 1930s. In 2009, the younger generation had become dominant among those giving voice to stories about Du Bois. What I witnessed was an incipient transition from oral history to oral tradition, as defined by Jan Vansina. According to Vansina, oral history involves accounts based on personal recollections of actual events, while oral tradition is made up of "oral messages based on previous oral messages, at least a generation old."[4] As will be discussed later, the transition from oral history to oral tradition has altered the content and significance of the stories told. I argue that a generational shift, parallel to political changes in Indonesia, and to developments of heritage discourses, all influence oral narratives and practices pertaining to the Du Bois era in Alor.

Sources and Methods

There is an abundance of stories about Du Bois in Alor. Here I will concentrate on narratives that I have recorded in the villages where she worked as well as on written accounts by Du Bois. Two Harvard University institutions hold material from Du Bois's time in Alor: the Tozzer library and the Peabody museum. Tozzer has an extensive archive donated by Du Bois before her death in 1991. This includes field notes and other related material. At Peabody are her photographs from 1937 to 1939.[5] To give voice to Du Bois's

experiences in Alor, I use not only her published work, but also her letters, which she sent to her parents during her sojourn in the Dutch East Indies. In these personal records the anthropologist reflects on experiences and events during her fieldwork.

Du Bois stayed in a valley with about 600 inhabitants from five villages with numerous offspring hamlets. Since then, the people in the valley have resettled, and the population has grown. Today, approximately 1200 villagers inhabit two adjacent settlements. The first time I visited the valley I stayed the day and spent most of the time interviewing four individuals, three men and one woman, all over the age of 70. When I came back in 2007, I worked in the village for two weeks. At that time, one of the men I had originally interviewed had died. Still, I had the possibility to continue working with the other three who I already knew had memories from the period I was interested in. Included in the material I brought with me were copies of photographs that Du Bois had published. These images attracted a great deal of attention, especially among relatives of those depicted. Several informal gatherings took place at which Du Bois and her stay in the valley was the focal point of conversation. I was repeatedly asked to translate the captions where Du Bois informs about the name of those portrayed as well as the occasion. All kinds of scattered memories and stories were shared by participants, from those aged around 20 to those who reportedly were over 80 years of age. The spokespersons, those who were commonly perceived as knowledgeable, were those who had personal memories of the time. In all, there were six Abui villagers belonging to this category. They contributed substantially to my corpus of Abui narratives about Du Bois; this includes the surviving three from 2002. Only one of these consultants is a woman; however, there are other women who have shared more limited portions of oral history and tradition pertaining to the period. In 2002 and 2007, I was mainly investigating material culture, but as I found the stories about the anthropologist interesting, I took notes.[6] In 2009, I went back with the intention of collecting oral narratives related to Du Bois. For this purpose, most interviews were recorded using a video camera. However, there were also casual conversations of which I either took notes at the time or later during the same day. In this corpus there are 12 interviewees who can be separated into three groups: Four individuals, one woman and three men, are aged people having personal memories of Du Bois. Six persons, two women, four men, are middle-aged people with special interest in the subject either because they are descendants of key figures in the stories about Du Bois, or because they have a general interest in local history and traditions; two persons, both middle-aged men, speak mainly as authorities in the community, that is, the village head and the school headmaster.

I argue that the ongoing shift from oral history to oral tradition, with inherited rather than experienced narratives, changes the character of the stories. It is not self-evident to what extent this affects their validity. Memories around which oral histories are built are not always accurate, and memories are often combined with hearsay; on the other hand, oral traditions are not necessarily less faithful in describing the truth than other oral or written accounts. However, drawing from the case presented here, I claim that there is a qualitative difference between personal experience and memories of oral narratives.

Colonial Encounters in the 1930s

Investigating contact zones between an American anthropologist and the people she studied, the letters of Du Bois give us the opportunity to follow in her steps. Traveling from the United States to the Indies, Du Bois first went to Europe and spent at least a week at the ethnographical museum in Leiden. She was presented with their collections from Alor and met with experts on the East Indies who gave advice on all kinds of matters, including down-to earth instructions on how she should adapt to life conditions in the tropics. Based on first experiences, Du Bois's early views on Dutch colonialists and colonialism were positive. Loaded with letters of recommendation from Holland, equipment bought in Amsterdam, and lots of new books, she went by boat via Suez. When the ship reached Medan on Sumatra's east coast she wrote: "I should digress here to rave about the really enlightened colonial policy of the Dutch. Highways, sanitation, schools, markets and enlightened agrarian policies added to far seeing preservation of natural resources make a colonial empire an admirable enterprise instead of pure exploitation."[7]

Judging from the correspondence, Du Bois was less impressed after some time in Batavia (Jakarta), which was the capital of the Dutch East Indies. She became increasingly critical after experiencing colonialism as practiced in the periphery of the Dutch colonial territory. Du Bois conducted her studies on an island characterized by ethnic and linguistic diversity, of which the Abui speakers studied by Du Bois are one of the larger groups. Du Bois presents the cultural diversity of Alor in the late 1930s as gradual shifts: "Culturally too, changes grade from one into the other as one passes from village to village. The only sharp demarcations are between the ten thousand coastal Mohammedans and the pagan mountain peoples of the interior. These two groups hold each other in mutual distrust and fear."[8]

As Alor lacked resources of interest to European markets, the impact of colonial power remained limited for a long time.[9] Only in the early 1900s

did the Dutch attempt to exercise far-reaching control over the island. Du Bois explains the political situation where Dutch officials designated Malay-speaking coastal men as rajas. These collected taxes and were in charge of extracting corvée labor from the reluctant peoples of the interior. "Prior to the Hollanders' arrival no such areas of political organization existed; social control centered about kin and village groups. Certainly the coastal people exercised no power over the mountain population, despite brisk trade contacts at stipulated market places."[10]

From her letters it is clear that Du Bois often disagreed with the attitudes of the colonial officers toward the native population. She was less averse to local potentates; as expressed by certain remarks in her letters, such as the one describing Nampira, the most powerful Alorese at the time, as "the mild sweet little radjah."[11] Du Bois was accompanied by the raja on a survey trip when she decided to settle in Atimelang.[12] The valley was situated a six-hour horse ride from the only town, Kalabahi. Du Bois arranged to have a house built for her. When it was ready, the village chief, or *tumukun*, insisted on an inauguration feast and naming ceremony. After thorough considerations he decided on calling the house "Hamerica." This choice was based on "a peculiar linguistic feature," as Du Bois puts it. When asked about the name of her lineage, she answered that she came from America, which the Abui analyzed in their language as *a-merica* meaning "your Merica." This was perceived as a token of politeness from the side of Du Bois. In response the chief called the house "her Merica," Abui *Hamerica*. Du Bois concludes: "My nation and their lineage concepts were all satisfactorily blended, unfortunately through sheer misunderstanding."[13]

Du Bois consistently had a sympathetic attitude toward the population she studied, but however enlightened, she sometimes gave expression to views that today seem racist. She never leveled with the "natives." Of Fantan, her interpreter, she wrote "he is slowly working up into no mere interpreter but A no 1 assistant. It's pretty low when you stop to think about it that 'us ethnologists' get so much credit for picking native brains."[14] In another letter she again wrote appreciatively of Fantan and concluded that "I only wish it were practicable and humane to bring him home back to the States as a house boy."[15] It is apparent that she felt increasingly intimate with the villagers. In an early letter she described a group of "almost completely naked savages with hair as woolly as that of the proverbial Fiji islanders. No Indonesian beauties I can assure you."[16] The natives were "dwarf like," and lack of water caused "a minimum of washing and a maximum of diseases following on filth." Still she held positive, if paternalistic, views: "I watched the natives carefully and although they are shy ugly souls, I had the impression of a thoroughly gentle

and rather sweet lot who will take some winning over but who will be most devoted when they accept you."[17] After some time in the Abui community, the tone changed. In a letter to her parents she writes that she is "very touched by their confidence even though I know they are a bunch of hard boiled cut-throats." And reflected that: "They are as nice to me as their life experience and philosophy permits. I feel they are an essentially nice people with nasty institutions."[18]

2002: The Wonders of *Nona* Cora

My own interest in Alor and Du Bois started off with a museum collection that today is held by the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg, Sweden. A friend at the museum suggested that I should look into the material, as it lacked documentation. The collection originated from Alor, and was compiled by the well-known anthropologist Cora Du Bois. What my friend remembered as remarkable about the collection was the number of rat traps thatwere included. In 2002 we went to Alor. One aim was to visit Atimelang where Du Bois had conducted her study; in addition this was the reported provenance of most objects in the museum collection. We were curious to see if there still were people around who remembered Du Bois and who also could assist in retrospective ethnographic documentation of artefacts acquired more than sixty years earlier. Having stated our business, we were introduced to two old men who claimed to have been in their 20s when "Kora Duboys" alias *nona* (Miss) Cora or *nona* America lived in the valley. Sitting in a small hut, I spent a good part of the day making conversation with the two men and other villagers who came and went.

From the stories it was evident that Du Bois had engaged in participant observations: when there were feasts in the village she would wear *adat* clothes and take part in all activities. The abundance of rat traps in the museum collection had its explanation: In the mountains of Alor some kinds of rats are eaten and regarded as a delicacy. All rodents pose threats to harvests in fields and during storage. The variety of traps that Du Bois included in the collection reflected the importance of such devices. My new friends asserted that Du Bois had been a great rat hunter and that she had enjoyed eating rat meat.

"She spoke the language here, Abui, and knew our songs," they added. Du Bois had learnt the language from the children in the village, said the two old men—who were young at the time—and carried on with their story. "First," the men said, "she came and stayed three months. Then she went

to Kalabahi and bought cement which was taken here so she could build a stone house. People were paid to carry her things."[19] From such rather prosaic recollections, the conversation eventually changed direction. To me the new theme, the wonders of Du Bois, was a bit surprising. It started off in a credible way but seemed to become increasingly fantastic: Some villagers who had been imprisoned by the Dutch were released by *nona* Cora; No Dutch came to Atimelang during the three-and-a-half years she stayed; She had powerful weapons so the Dutch did not dare come. Once a week she went up on a hill where she could make contact with her parents in America and speak to them; And, while she lived in the valley no one died and nobody was sick. The last information, that death and illness was absent in the valley during Du Bois's stay, is a statement I have heard many times since then.

In her book, Du Bois describes the elaborate death feasts and funeral ceremonies that used to be focal points in social life in Atimelang. In 2002, when I first visited, such feasts had long been abolished by Protestant churches working in the area, but apparently not without a sense of loss among some members of the older generation. In her letters, Du Bois often expresses critical attitudes toward local missionaries and *gurus* who were busy converting the heathen by means of "smashing wood carvings, cutting men's hair short, teaching women to pull something over their breast if strangers come."[20] The changes that have followed conversion in Atimelang are much more far-reaching than this. In the afternoon I was taken on a walk to see the remnants of Du Bois's house and to meet other friends of hers. When asked about Du Bois, one old woman started singing a song beginning with "Datang datang dari Amerika/ Ingatlah Atengmelang…"—"arriving from America, please remember Atengmelang…" It was a plain melody to which Du Bois had given lyrics and taught the children who visited her house. I took a picture of the foundation of Du Bois's house; it looked rather unexciting. In the photograph a man is sitting on the foundation. He also poses in a photograph showing how to set a rat trap. He was about five when Du Bois lived in the village, and he knew the song the old woman had sung for me.

Before we left, I was informed in an official manner that the villagers wanted to build a monument on the remains of the house: A monument commemorating Cora Du Bois. After this first short scouting mission I was convinced that Du Bois was not forgotten by the people she had studied. Probably our visit, as well as that of tourists looking for the place where *The people of Alor* was written, helped refresh their memory.[21] Returning home to Sweden, I reread Du Bois's book. This time my own impressions worked as a sounding board. One thing which struck me was that some accounts about Du Bois seemed to coincide with her descriptions of some kind of

magical beings, which she labels "Good Beings" (in local language, Abui, it is *nala kang* which literally means "something good").[22] Du Bois makes several comments on the subject of *nala kang* in *The People of Alor*. In one passage she writes: "Good Beings are thought of as human in every respect except for their miraculous powers, among which is their ability to revive the dead and to travel through air and water. Human beings who disappear are often suspected of having become supernaturals of this sort."[23] To me there seemed to be similarities between what the villagers had told me about Du Bois's era in the valley, when reportedly no one was sick and no one died, and the *nala kang*, which, according to Du Bois, put an end to death and illness.[24] The anthropologist had appeared and disappeared in a manner typical of Good Beings. And she was said to have protected the people in the valley from the Dutch.

In her book, Du Bois recounts two notable occasions when Good Beings were associated with resistance against the colonial power: In 1918 there was a well-known incident when a woman called Malielehi, who was believed to be a *nala kang*, headed the uprising at which the raja Nampira of Alor was killed.[25] Du Bois terms the clashes between the mountain peoples and the colonial troops, which followed the murder, as "Alor's most serious war of pacification."[26] In 1929, Malelaka the Prophet, a visionary man from the Atimelang valley predicted the imminent arrival of Good Beings who would put an end to death and illness: "The people were very much excited by his prophecies and were willing to build special houses in which to lodge the supernatural guests. The government was suspicious of these activities and sent troops to demolish the houses and arrest Malelaka."[27] This man, "Malelaka the Prophet," was one of eight persons about whom Du Bois recorded and published autobiographies. In one (anachronistic) version of Du Bois lore that I have recorded, she was the one who released him from prison, as one of her *nala kang* deeds.[28]

Belief in *nala kang* was widespread. Du Bois noted: "that such wishful thinking was not limited to Malelaka and his fellow prophets is evinced by the co-operation they received in preparing for these supernaturals. People from many surrounding villages were sufficiently credulous to bring their sick to the expected advent."[29] While Du Bois stayed in the valley from 1938 to 1939 she experienced how a young girl could start a *nala kang* movement. Still at that time, experiences from the Malielehi war in 1918 and the intervention by troops in 1929 had led to skepticism toward talk of Good Beings.[30] Nevertheless, in an early passage of the book she predicts that *nala kang* frenzies would be part of the future for the people she studied: "This whole concept will undoubtedly become the center of revivalistic cults when

Alorese culture crumbles as it inevitably will under the impact of foreign colonization."[31]

2007: Du Bois, a Magical Being

In 2007 I went back to Atimelang to record information on material culture, more specifically about the collection Du Bois had made in Alor. For two weeks I was hosted by the village secretary. Of primary importance to my project were photos and drawings of all objects in the Swedish museum collection. I also had a photocopy of *The People of Alor* and as people in general liked seeing pictures of family and friends, the illustrations drew much attention (figure 8.1). I was introduced to relatives of main characters in the book, such as Fanseni Longhair and Malelaka the Prophet. There were many fragments of information like: "Fanseni, the younger brother of the *tumukun*, was given a knife by *nona* Amerika, and this knife is still kept in the house, it is no longer used."[32] As a matter of course, comments about the collector

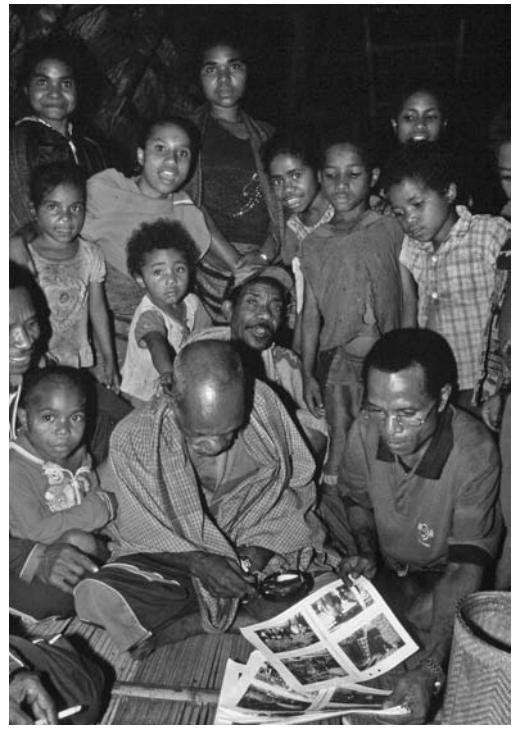


Figure 8.1 People looking at photocopies of Du Bois's book. Courtesy of Emilie Wellfelt.

emerged. Again I was struck by similarities between her supposed magical qualities and the descriptions of Good Beings or *nala kang*. At one point I discreetly mentioned this and was met with astonishment—"but of course there are similarities, she was a *nala kang*!" Not only was she perceived to be a *nala kang*, she was believed to be the daughter of Malielehi, the woman who led the Abui uprising in 1918.

A strong theme in the Du Bois stories is the "general knowledge" that nobody was sick and nobody died during her stay. This is paralleled with stories about the people she cured. (Nobody seems to bother about the inconsistency—why cure people if nobody is sick?). A popular healing story that is still told in Atimelang is also mentioned by Du Bois in her book and in letters.[33] It concerns children who were playing and, to show off, were jumping over a fire. By accident two boys bumped into each other and fell into flames and glowing coals. "They just lay there fighting each other in their panic and before we could pull them out both were nastily burnt (I don't think I'll ever forget the smell). One boy's nose was bleeding all over the place and Kolseni knelt down, took his head in her arms and began the death wail whereupon the boy had true convulsions."[34] Du Bois was quite distressed by the incident. The boys were taken to her house and the wounds were cleaned with oil-soaked cotton. The following days she spent hours "changing dressings and peeling off burned skin . . . The kids are standing up like Trojans and I'm getting pretty fond of them. There's nothing like an experience of this sort to produce warmth of heart."[35]

By running a daily clinic, Du Bois provided health services to the community where she lived. As medicine and religion were closely related in local perceptions of health, Du Bois gained status by curing people who according to divination would not survive their illness. She also adjusted to local religion by hosting her house feast and other smaller rituals. Du Bois concludes in one letter:

> As far as I can judge I have been pretty thoroughly accepted as a "safe" person and discussions of religious matters is perfectly open. Having a monster carving made for my house was the crowning stroke. Today I was solemnly told by one gent I should be sure to give a feast to feed my monster carving. I guess he'd enjoy a bit of pork and rice himself.[36]

Going on fieldwork, Du Bois brought equipment most people in Alor had never encountered before, including a camera. There was a Chinese shopkeeper in Kalabahi who could develop film for the Dutch.[37] However, among the Abui, photography seems to have been a novelty introduced by the anthropologist. Du Bois had invested in a small Leica. She took photos in

Atimelang and sent off film rolls to have them developed in Surabaya, from where they were forwarded to the United States. Her stepfather would then make copies and send these back to Alor. When Du Bois handed out the first of these photographs, she realized that most people had no idea of what they looked like. They could easily pick out everyone else on the picture, but did not recognize themselves. Exceptions to this were men who had bought mirrors in Kalabahi to use when picking out their whiskers.[38]

Du Bois made a lasting impression, not least on the children. The man who in 2002 had posed for a photo showing how to set a rat trap, came to chat with me about Du Bois:

> She brought raingear: jacket, hat and gloves as well as rubber boots. When she got home she took off her jacket and her sweater was dry! . . . When people were building a house, whether dragging logs for house posts or carrying other building materials, she would be there to take photographs . . . When there was a *lego-lego* dance, she had *adat* clothes: a sarong and two bands of beads over the shoulders . . . She had money, Dutch coins.[39]

Du Bois herself writes about this money in a letter: "I have a strong box up here with tons of small change. One and five cent pieces are punched in the middle and strung on cord like Chinese cash—until I feel as though I was dealing in sausages instead of money."[40]

The woman who sang *nona* America's song to me the first time I visited became one of my main consultants. We spent many hours going through the collection. I remember how we would take a break, and as usual the old woman would immediately start to prepare betel in her pestle: thump-thump-thump and then start chewing. What were left of her teeth were black stumps against betel-red lips. She was in her eighties, with bad eyesight but very vital and with a great sense of humor. When talking about Du Bois she usually did it with great passion:

> . . . *Nona* Cora promised she would return, but she has not yet come. We are still waiting.
>
> . . . When we see white people we think they are American, *orang* America, and feel very happy.
>
> . . . When I was small, *nona* America liked to send us of off to look for vegetables. We were then taught songs. I was very happy when I was given songs from *nona* America.
>
> . . . Sometime in the 1970s people from America came here. The villagers thought they were the children of *nona* Cora and slaughtered a pig and arranged a *lego-lego* and told them to come back again.

In a letter just before leaving, Du Bois has a long passage where she praises the children of Atimelang:

> Every morning when I get up, there is an array of produce spread out on the verandah which they have brought for the day—oranges, corn, cucumber, squash—or whatever is in season . . . They have a remarkable gift for understanding me, no matter how I garble with language, and a great delight in setting me straight . . . At night as they scamper off home they take the keenest delight in one standard joke "Good night, mother" to which I must answer, "Good night, my child." Always a titter producer.[41]

The children's considerate affection and all the little gifts delivered every morning were reciprocated by Du Bois with attention and sometimes a candy. This was not normal adult behavior, "the general attitude here is to chivvy kids."[42]

When it was time to leave, Du Bois had to decide what to do with her house "Hamerica," the first building with a cement foundation ever to be raised in Atimelang. The raja wanted it as a bivouac, the *tumukun* as residence, and the missionary as a school. "My own inclinations are to tear it down to avoid conflict."[43] A missionary from Kalabahi paid a visit, and offered to outbid the others, but Du Bois declined: "Since I have no desire to wish a native missionary on my nice Atimelangers—or even let a 'goeroe' [guru, religious teacher] profit from the prestige my house carries in the community, I just said that was out of the question."[44] Based on Du Bois's accounts it seems that in the end she sold her house to the government for 50 Florins and split the money among *tumukuns* and village chiefs. However, this is not the version that has lived on in Atengmelang.

The old woman whom I had befriended at my first visit told me one version, which I later heard repeated by others. According to this, the people were disobedient when Du Bois left and thus suffered dire consequences: "She told the people in Atengmelang that when she could no longer be seen from the ridge the villagers should burn her house. But the people thought it was a shame to destroy the house and abstained from burning it. Soon the Japanese came and moved into the house . . . "[45]

Du Bois left Alor on June 10, 1939 never to return. It was wartime and the US government engaged her as an Asia specialist. She would spend a number of years working for government and international organizations, but then returned to academia. By 1954 Du Bois became Zemurray Professor of Anthropology at Harvard University, where she remained until her retirement in 1969. From 1971 to 1976 she was professor-at-large at Cornell

University, and in 1974 she taught at the University of California at San Diego.[46] During these years she met numerous students. Du Bois, who was mainly famous for *The People of Alor*, was often asked if she ever went back to Alor. On those occasions she would tell the story of Alor during the Second World War, and of the grief she felt, which contributed to her decision never to return to Atimelang. The story seems to have made a deep impression on many American anthropologists who heard it, or heard of it. It is also included in later editions of *The People of Alor*. On March 8, 1942 the Dutch capitulated on Java. It would take four more months before the Japanese took possession of Alor. After the war the Dutch tried to regain their colony. A young man who was posted in Alor sent Du Bois a letter:

> He told me quite casually the story of Atimelang and the house called Hamerica. The Japanese had used it as a patrol station, for the Japanese, like the Dutch, sent small groups of troops to crisscross the island at irregular intervals to maintain order and prevent uprisings. Word reached the Japanese command in Kalabahi that the village leaders in Atimelang were claiming that Hamerica would win the war. This could have been nothing but the most innocent fantasy to my friends in Atimelang since they had never even heard of the United States prior to my arrival.[47]

These rumors had dire consequences. According to the letter sent to Du Bois, five of her friends from Atimelang were taken to Kalabahi to be "... publicly decapitated as a warning to the populace."[48] This information differs a bit from oral sources I have recorded. According to these, two men were killed in the village, three were executed in Kalabahi. The general opinion is that these deaths were caused by envious neighbors who regretted that Du Bois did not choose to stay with them. The disaster is also seen as a consequence of not following Du Bois's instruction to destroy the house Hamerica when she had left.

2009: Inherited Stories

I returned to the valley in 2009. At that time I brought a video camera as I wanted to document oral history and tradition regarding Du Bois, and ended up with five hours of interviews. On two occasions, notions of *nala kang* were contested as pagan and not befitting for Christians. Also, it seems that the *nala kang* concept is, or has become, more inclusive than the Good Beings described by Du Bois. It is not restricted to humans. In Atengmelang, a specific stone is believed to have the power to reveal the identity of thieves.

This stone is perceived as a *nala kang*, as was my computer when I on a later occasion replayed some shootings from the village.

Recording old men and women in 2009, I found the accounts less precise than before. Some of the detail seemed lost. What is more, there were new spokesmen. The next generation was taking over the local corpus of Du Bois stories, which had its consequences: On one hand, things were getting blurred. Who was it that killed the five men during the Second World War? The Japanese? Most now seemed convinced that the Dutch were guilty; they were the bad colonizers, were they not? On the other hand the narratives were getting more outlined—or should I say more stereotyped; there is a set of stories that are common knowledge. Some are of the mythological kind, such as the information that "Nona America was a child when she came to Atimelang. She stayed for three years, and during that time she became a woman: she got breasts and started to have her periods."

In the postcolonial context, Indonesian institutional strategies for historiography and heritage management relates to the Du Bois phenomenon. Cogent ideas pour out from Jakarta. When they have reached peripheral places like Alor, it is just a trickle, but still enough for people to be reached by the nationalistic New Order ideas about national heroes and monuments for freedom fighters. In Atengmelang the heroine is Cora Du Bois, thus the idea in 2002 to build a monument in her honor. More recent heritage trends are also reaching the island. An increasing number of sites and objects are sponsored by district authorities.[49] Since 2003 there is a museum in Kalabahi. It is ironic that the things and buildings that are pinpointed as heritage in many cases seem to overlap with those which missionaries from colonial times onward have taken an active part in destroying.

In response to recent heritage discourses, rather than erecting a statue of Du Bois, the new idea in Atengmelanag is to build a traditional house over the remnants of Du Bois's house and maybe make this new construction into a museum. For religious reasons, wood carving has been abandoned in the valley, but in 2009 there were discussions about reviving the craft without the original religious purposes. Intangible heritage has gained a footing in the heritage discourse of the early twenty-first century.[50] Whether inspired by UNESCO and other heritage institutions or not, in Atengmelang claims are made of Atengmelang as the place of origin for traditional Alorese dances. Instead of, or rather parallel to, hoping for the arrival of *nala kang*, the people are waiting for tourists, and there is competition for the few who actually reach Alor. If they want dance, they should go to the original place. So far Du Bois is the only effective tourist magnet in Atengmelang. According to the village head she attracts an average of one foreigner a month, sometimes they

come in groups. To make the most of this, in 2009 the recently elected village chief was intent on restoring not the house, but the cement toilet made for Du Bois's needs. He seemed convinced that this remarkable lady's loo has the potential to become a tourist attraction. However, to build on *nona* Cora's land is controversial. Back in 1938 when she first came together with the raja, she paid six silver coins. In Atimelang this was (maybe retrospectively?) perceived as payment, not for the standing crop that Du Bois intended, but for the plot. When leaving in 1939 she promised to come back, and if she does not, her children will and when they come, their land should there for them. Maybe they will build a city, one old man proposed. "It could be called Atengmelang-America, or America-Atengmelang."

Good Beings from the West

Several researchers have, for better or for worse, become reputable among the people they studied, but I am not aware of any other anthropologists who in retrospect became heroes or heroines like Du Bois in Alor. One possible framework for interpretation of the Du Bois case is millenarian movements, or "cargo cults," which occurred in Melanesia during and after the Second World War.[51] Philip D. Curtin states, "The millennial expectations of many of these movements included the hope and belief that expensive gifts of European goods would arrive by sea or air, though the identity of the expected donors varied from one movement to another."[52] These kinds of movements still occur, as is discussed by Harvey Whitehouse in his book on religious modes in Papua New Guinea. Whitehouse and his wife were perceived as ancestors when they settled in a village in Papua in the late 1980s.[53] In addition, I have myself been associated with both Du Bois and Malielehi, the woman who led the uprising in 1918, when I have conducted research in some villages on Alor.[54] While Du Bois has not been deified, parallel to the Melanesian and Papuan examples, she turned up at a critical time and brought with her ideas and belongings that instilled a sense of wonder among those who met her. Perhaps most important of all, her memory personified hopes for a better future.

Another conceivable parallel to Du Bois is Alfred Russel Wallace who in 1857 stayed two months in a remote village in the Aru islands. Wallace was quite convinced that he would soon be mythologized, as this was consistent with existing narratives about strangers and disappearing relatives: "I have no doubt that to the next generation, or even before, I myself shall be transformed into a magician or a demigod, a worker of miracles, and a being

of supernatural knowledge."[55] The accuracy of Wallace's prediction remains unproved, though it might be interesting to investigate if such oral traditions did emerge. The above examples refer to Western people unexpectedly turning up in relatively isolated communities. Basically they deal with perceptions of good beings, humans, or deities, arriving, or often coming back, bringing prosperity. In a sense, the concept of arriving Good Beings can be interpreted as a need for empowerment in situations of distress.

During the time when Du Bois became part of a contact zone on Alor, asymmetrical relations of power were constituent parts of the colonial political system. While staying in the Atimelang valley, Du Bois observed and interacted with the people living there and was simultaneously observed by the people she studied. Interlocking understandings and practices were formed in this meeting place. Contact zones are formative to all involved—moreover, as Anna Karlström puts it, "Something new is created in this space, which can be found neither within the dominating domain itself, nor within the dominated domain."[56]

As shown here, the perceptions of Du Bois are changing over time. Although she is not physically present, her memory is still part of a contact zone. The context has changed from colonial to postcolonial. Still, there is no equality between the anthropologist and the people of Alor. Poverty may not be a political system, but it certainly creates asymmetrical relations in the present where I meet the people who tell me about their hopes concerning the return of Cora Du Bois to the village of Atengmelang.

The question is what accounts about ancestors, or *nala kang* or Good Beings contribute to a historical understanding of the colonial past and postcolonial present in Alor. A similar issue is faced by Luise White in her research into vampire stories in colonial Africa. White concludes that while vampires might be categorized as "stories," the belief in them is a fact, and that kind of fact adds to a deeper understanding of history; in her words, "The imaginary makes the real, just as it makes more imaginings: it is the inclusion of both that gives depth to historical analyses, and, if not some certainty, at least solid grounds on which to assess motivations, causes, and ideas."[57]

Returning to the main questions posed in the introduction, how and why did Du Bois become such a celebrity in Alor? Being a remarkable woman—which I gather she was—is not enough. Even if there were ready perceptions of *nala kang* into which Du Bois could be incorporated, that does not answer why she was perceived as such. Probably the timing was crucial. Colonial intrusion is one thing. It was only in the first decades of the twentieth century that the Dutch attempted to get full control over Alor.[58] This included demands for tax payments in cash, which was something the Abui

farmers lacked. In my interviews there are stories about how those who could not pay were brutally beaten by locals working for the government. It seems that during Du Bois's presence in the village, such abuse did not take place. Du Bois recorded life stories and dreams. The year 1918 frequently occurs in these accounts. The year 1918 was remembered both for a smallpox epidemic, which claimed many victims, and the Abui uprising led by Malielehi. The uprising was brutally crushed by the colonial forces and Malielehi was arrested and expelled, never to return. In Atimelang, Malielehi was perceived as a *nala kang*—a Good Being. When Du Bois had left, it dawned on the villagers that Du Bois was the daughter of Malielehi.

It is possible that the persistence of narratives told about Du Bois is supported by her relation to children in the village. While other adults seem to have enjoyed pestering them, Du Bois was attentive and interested. This was both due to her research interest and to a genuinely felt empathy. Part of her research was aimed at studying children and childhood in relation to adult personality.[59] Both positive and traumatic events have lived on through childhood memories. The old woman I worked with in Atimelang still looks happy when she is singing the songs taught by Du Bois. Some 60 years after the Second World War, a man told me how he as a small child was hiding in the forest while Fantan, Du Bois's assistant, was screaming for mercy as he was burnt at the stake by Japanese soldiers. It is sad that the memory of Du Bois and her powers brought her Alorese friends into the struggles of the war. In a sense, her power, unwittingly, brought ill consequences, a fact that suggests that no place is left outside global entanglements. This also seems to be the conclusion Du Bois made. In the passage where she writes about the tragic events in Alor during the Second World War, she concluded: "There is no end to the intricate chain of responsibility and guilt that the pursuit of even the most arcane social research involves. 'No man is an island.'"[60]

Notes

* I wish to thank the editors, two anonymous reviewers, as well as the participants of the Conference on Historical Fragments in Southeast Asia held in Singapore 2010, together with Professor Gunlög Fur, Dr. Hans Hägerdal, D.r Antoinette Schapper, and Stina Tegnhed for insightful comments on earlier versions of this text. The essay is based on archival studies and fieldwork mostly undertaken during my time as a PhD student at the Linnaeus University in Sweden, where the Linnaeus University Centre Concurrences in Colonial and Postcolonial Studies has proven to be a conducive research environment. Helge Ax:son Johnsons stiftelse founded fieldwork in Alor in 2007 and archival studies in the US in 2008. The same Foundation also enabled me to spend one month working on the

archival material in 2010. Additional periods of fieldwork in Alor were funded by SSAAPS/STINT (The Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education, 2009); Birgit och Gad Rausings stiftelse för humanistisk forskning (2010); and SSAG (Svenska sällskapet för Antropologi och Geografi, 2010–11).

1. Culture and Personality Studies tries to establish interrelations between culture and individual psychology in a given society. The general idea is to find out if, or rather how, cultural traits especially regarding the bringing up of children created typical personalities. This venture engaged anthropologists, psychologists, and psychiatrists, mainly in America, especially during the 1930s and 1940s (Robert LeVine, "Culture and Personality Studies, 1918–60: Myth and History," *Journal of Personality* 69.6 [December 2001]).
2. Cora Du Bois, *The People of Alor, A Social-Psychological Study of an East Indian Island* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1944), p. vi.
3. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes, Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 2008 [reworked second edition, first edition 1992]).
4. Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Oxford: James Currey, 1997 [1985]).
5. The correspondence is held by Tozzer Library, Harvard College Library, in *Special Collection Ethnography*, D 852 c. Du Bois, Cora Alice. Box 7, "Bicknell, Mattie and Richard: Letters (correspondence) from Cora Du Bois' Alor Trip." In the following, this correspondence is referred to simply as "Letter."Approximately 1,200 photographs are held by the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University. Collection: "C. Du Bois. 1938–1939. Photographs and related documentation." Accession number 972–29 PA-IN, 70–1: 1–6.
6. I made research into a collection compiled by Du Bois in 1939 and held by the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg, Sweden. See: Emilie Wellfelt, "Returning to Alor," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 37 (2009): 108,183–202; Wellfelt Research report concerning collection 39.49.1–237 from Alor, Indonesia, held by the Museum of World Culture, Göteborg, Sweden," unpublished manuscript.
7. Letter November 8, 1937.
8. Du Bois, *People of Alor,* p. 16.
9. Hans Hägerdal, "Cannibals and Pedlars: Economic Opportunities and Political Alliance in Alor, 1600–1850," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 38 (2010): 217–26.
10. Du Bois 1944: 16.
11. Letter February 10, 1938.
12. Du Bois uses the name Atimelang for the valley. This is a convention from colonial times and is probably based on a mishearing. Today the villages and hamlets of "Atimelang" are resettled in the two villages Atengmelang and Fuimelang (Wellfelt 2009:190 footnote 5). In this text I have chosen to use both Atimelang (which in Abui means "Salt village") and Atengmelang (meaning "Old village").
13. Du Bois, *People of Alor,* p. xi; the name confusion is mentioned in letter March 6, 1938 (passage dated March 17).
14. Letter June 17, 1938.
15. Letter September 24, 1938.

16. Letter January 10, 1938.
17. Letter January 10, 1938.
18. Letter August 23, 1938.
19. Author's interview 2002. Interviews in this paper are anonymous.
20. Letter January 4, 1939.
21. In one popular guidebook, the author writing about Alor explicitly states that he chose to visit Atimelang as this was the site of Du Bois's research for her book *The People of Alor* (Kal Muller, "Alor—Island of Bronze Drums and Tradition," in *East of Bali: From Lombok to Timor*, ed. David Pickell (Singapore: Periplus editions, 1995), pp. 162–63.
22. Du Bois, *People of Alor,* p. 25.
23. Ibid., p. 166.
24. Ibid., p. 292.
25. Ibid., p. 294.
26. Ibid., p. 17.
27. Ibid., p. 292.
28. Author's interview, June 27, 2007.
29. Du Bois, *People of Alor,* p. 165.
30. Ibid., p. 165.
31. Ibid., p. 25.
32. Author's interview, June 22, 2007.
33. Du Bois, *People of Alor,* p. 284.
34. Letter September 30, 1938.
35. Letter September 30, 1938.
36. Letter May 19, 1938, passage dated 25 May.
37. Letter September 24, 1938.
38. Letter June 17, 1938.
39. Author's interview, June 23, 2007.
40. Letter March 6, 1938.
41. Letter May 1, 1939.
42. Letter May 1, 1939.
43. Letter February 22, 1939.
44. Letter April 17, 1939.
45. Author's interview, June 22, 2007.
46. "Du Bois, Cora Alice, 1903-. Papers: Guide." Harvard University Library. Inventory created by Elizabeth Sandager and Erica B. L. Lindamood, April 1, 1996. Completed by Janet Steins, September 12, 2003.
47. Du Bois, *People of Alor,* 1961, pp. xiv–xv (new preface added to Du Bois 1944).
48. Ibid..
49. P. V. Ndjurumana (ed.), *Mengenal Obyek Situs dan Benda, Sejarah Purbakala di Kabupaten Alor, Seri I* (Kalabahi: Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata Kabupaten Alor, 2008).
50. Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa, eds., *Intangible Heritage* (London: Routledge 2006).
51. Cargo cults is a disputable term that has been rather overused as discussed in Holger Jebens, ed., *Cargo, Cult, and Culture Critique* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004).

52. Philip D. Curtin, The World and the West: The European Challenge and the Overseas Response in the Age of Empire (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009 [2000]), p. 226.
53. Harvey Whitehouse, *Inside the Cult: Religious Innovation and Transmission in Papua New Guinea* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003 [1995]), pp. 6–7, 89–122.
54. Emilie Wellfelt, "Malielehi—Freedom Fighter or Mad Murderess?" in *Tradition, Identity and Historymaking in Eastern Indonesia,* ed. Hans Hägerdal (Växjö & Kalmar: Linnaeus University Press, 2011).
55. Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago* (Singapore: Periplus editions, 2008 [1869]), p. 357.
56. Anna Karlström, "Preserving Impermanence: The Creation of Heritage in Vientiane, Laos," *Studies in Global Archaeology* 13, Uppsala University, diss. 2009, p. 51.
57. Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 308.
58. Hans Hägerdal,"Van Galen's memorandum on the Alor Islands in 1946. An annotated translation with an introduction. Part 1," Linnaeus university, Humanetten Nr. 25, 2010, pp. 14–44.
59. Du Bois, *People of Alor,* 1944, 28ff.
60. Ibid., 1961[1944], p. xv.

CHAPTER 9

Oral History, Heritage Conservation, and the Leprosy Settlement: The Sungai Buloh Community in Malaysia

Chou Wen Loong and Ho Sok Fong

Introduction

Compulsory segregation defines the self-identity of the ex-patient residents of Sungai Buloh Leprosy Settlement in Malaysia. For them, living for many years in the settlement, hailed as a modern feat of engineering when it was first built, the experience has largely been shaped by their exclusion from society as a frightful health threat and the spatial pursuit of social order within a confinement institution. On October 20, 1926, the colonial government of the British-controlled Federated Malay States, comprising Perak, Selangor, Pahang, and Negri Sembilan approved the Lepers Enactment, endorsing the segregation of leprosy sufferers. Four years later, on March 15, 1930, Sungai Buloh came into existence. The settlement has received many patients from the peninsula since its inception.

What is so special about the memories of Sungai Buloh that motivated us to preserve them through oral history? This paper discusses how our oral history project collects story fragments that have been left out of the historical record. These fragments show that the lives of the patients did not improve, as officially portrayed, but were filled with hardship and poverty during

some particularly trying times. Even after leprosy became curable, the negative public perception of the disease was so strong and pervasive that cured patients continued to be stigmatized and treated as unwelcome by members of society.[1] As society in its pursuit of social order excluded them to a confinement institution, leprosy sufferers were rendered as the "Other."[2] Recording the voices of the ex-patients enables us to penetrate the label of the "Other" and to map out their unique mental and social worlds. In particular, oral history provides a glimpse into the traumatic social history of leprosy sufferers, which is little known. Without oral history, ex-patients may continue to exist as an ill-defined and unknown collective.

The paper discusses five aspects of the oral history of Sungai Buloh: the conservation of the settlement as a heritage site, the formation of identity, the nature of community life, experiences of change, and the nature of the deformed body.

Oral History and "Save Valley of Hope"

It was partly with the aim of conducting oral history that the "Save Valley of Hope Solidarity Group" was formed in 2007. The Solidarity Group is a voluntary organization formed with the support of the Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall (KLSCAH), a nongovernmental organization, and comprises members of the KLSCH, lecturers, students, media practitioners, and the present authors.[3] It was formed in response to the threat of demolition of the settlement, since the Malaysian government has only nominally agreed to gazette the settlement as a national heritage site in early 2011 (discussed in the following section). Group members were deeply concerned about the question of heritage and the desire to conserve Sungai Buloh from redevelopment. The group has organized activities for the settlement community and sponsored the production of a documentary called *The Everlasting Valley of Hope* (2007–2009), directed by Joshua Wong, who worked with a group of students from New Era College in Kajang, Selangor.

The threat of redevelopment gave our oral history project added impetus. Initiated in 2008, the project sought to record the life experiences and self-perceptions of the residents. The project is ongoing, and we hope that the oral recordings can act as an important primary source for future research on the history of leprosy in Malaysia. Few Malaysians are aware that Sungai Buloh is facing the threat of demolition or know about life in the settlement. There are only two books that provide a partial history of the community: *Leprosy in Malaysia: Past, Present and Future* (1983) by A. Joshua-Raghavar,

and *Valley of Hope—The Sungai Buloh National Leprosy Control Centre* by Phang Siew Sia and Wong Chau Yin (2006).[4] The former describes in detail the planning of the settlement, and the culture and economy of the community from the prewar years to the present period. The book also provided useful statistics on population, death rates, forms of disease control, and the moving of patients, etc. Of the latter work, where one of the authors was the daughter of ex-patients, the focus is on the residents' perspectives (although Joshua-Raghavar was also a former sufferer).[5]

We interviewed our participants four or five times, for about an hour each. The main reason for this was that they were old and needed frequent rest. Another reason was to give them time to recall other memories. The interim also gave the interviewer time to look over the content of the interviews and review the questions, particularly where the interviewees may not have been able to express their memories clearly. Sometimes, there were cracks in the accounts. However, we believe that this is where the value of oral history lies.[6] When stories emerge in shattered fragments and pieces, they tell us how people dealt with their memories.

Our oral history project also deals with experiences of pain and shame. Besides the content, the voices of the patients, the tone in which they speak, and the questions posed by the interviewers are all significant.[7] The emotions displayed in the interviews, the hesitation in responding, and the guiding purpose of the interviewers also leave their indelible mark on the recordings.

Oral histories of leprosy show that history does not exist in totality. For subaltern groups, such as leprosy sufferers, history exists in the patenting of "fragments" that are not recorded officially, at least not without a discursive interpretation. As noted by Gyanendra Pandey, "What the historian of subaltern groups has to work with, then, are precisely, fragments, traces, (in Gramsci's phrase) that survive in available narratives to tell of other suppressed narratives and perspectives."[8] These fragments destabilize the grand narrative. Pandey emphasizes that the term "fragments" is not a substitute for "evidence," but it works as "the articulation of another subject position arising from a certain experience," which "provides a commentary on the limits of the form of the historiographical discourse and its search for omniscience."[9] Fragments can provide a "counter memory" against the prevailing grand narrative, but this requires some sort of interpretation or subversive reading of history.[10]

At the conference on "Historical Fragments in Southeast Asia: At the Interfaces of Oral History, Memory and Heritage," held at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in June 2010, Loh Kah Seng, who has also worked on the history of leprosy in Singapore and Malaysia, asked if the "Valley

of Hope" rhetoric used by the Solidarity Group romanticizes the history of Sungai Buloh, and whether it would affect the integrity or validity of the oral history content. To answer this question requires an analysis of the news statements, flyers, and slogans used by the Solidarity Group. Their descriptions of the settlement as a "Valley of Hope" do tend to stress the beauty of the landscape and the generosity of the medical personnel, especially the contributions of its founder, Ernest. Travers. Emphasis is also placed on the uniqueness of the institution in its ability to help the patients settle and provide "completely harmonious" living conditions "for multiple races."[11] The above rhetoric is used to draw the public's attention to the issue of conservation, as well as to remove the prevailing societal stigma of leprosy. The purpose of the discourse is to bestow a more hopeful and positive representation of the settlement. This is important as the activists, in their role as discursive subjects, strive to establish an authentic voice on the issue of redevelopment.

However, would this approach lead to the distortion of oral history documentation? There is no clear answer. Does the interviewer, in framing the questions and discourse, always play the dominant role in the dialogue? Does this not underestimate the power of self-interpretation possessed by the narrator? Previous oral history studies have argued that the power relations intertwined in the interview are complicated and may involve a reversal of the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee.[12] Power in such situations is not constant or frozen, but fluid. There is admittedly a gap between the discursive rhetoric employed by the Solidarity Group, especially in their publicity materials, and the private narrations of the residents, especially their unhappy memories of the experience of segregation.

Historical Background

At its founding, Sungai Buloh was the largest and the best-equipped leprosy settlement throughout the British Commonwealth. It was also the second largest leprosy settlement in the world. Most significantly, it was born out of the concept of a "self-supporting community," as proposed by Dr. E. A. O. Travers in 1923 at the 5th Biennial Congress of Tropical Medicine in Singapore. According to Dr. Gordon A. Ryrie, in his brochure *The Leper Settlement at Sungai Buloh In The Federated Malay States* (1932), there were three problems that needed to be addressed at the time: "housing, control and medical treatment, both physical and mental of the individuals."[13] The settlement would therefore have to meet three requirements, namely, it needed to have a water source, a colder temperature, and it would have to provide

confinement within a naturalistic environment. The location of Sungai Buloh fulfilled these requirements. It was located in a valley between two rivers, and was surrounded by a forest reserve and a hill slope, which together provided a source of natural confinement.

The settlement covered 562 acres of land and had an integrated hospital, patients' living quarters, farms, and forested areas. It provided an ideal sanatorium with a pleasant environment for the patients. Living quarters were built inside the settlement, along with other facilities such as a police station, post office, fire station, assembly halls (such as the Hokkien Assembly Hall), rehabilitation center, recreation club, sewing factory, mosque, church, Chinese temple, primary and secondary schools, and even a jail to punish unruly residents. In a nutshell, this was indeed a self-supporting community that had all the necessary physical facilities. It was henceforth dubbed "the Valley of Hope." The residents were to have a full social life, engage in religious practices, obtain a modern education, and receive opportunities to work in the settlement and become financially independent. They could also have medical treatment within the settlement. Self-sufficiency was the other face of segregation.

The settlement was renamed Sungai Buloh Leprosarium in 1965 and later the National Leprosy Control Centre (Pusat Kawalan Kusta Negara) in 1969. Medical collaboration with the England Medical Research Centre began in 1964, and in a space of 14 years, much progress was made in research on the disease. In 1981, the problem of drug resistance was solved by using a combination of three drugs: dapsone, rifampicin, and clofazimine. Since 1981, leprosy has become curable, and the number of leprosy patients has declined every year.

Today, there are only about 280 residents left in the settlement, and consequently many vacant buildings. The construction of an advanced integrated hospital in Sungai Buloh in 2000 resulted in the demolition of the main gate and the loss of farmland. In 2007, 40 acres of land in the east compound were further reallocated to build a medical school for the Mara Hospital. The community will soon vanish and leave us with many unanswered questions, such as how community life was like and how the patients' self-perceptions evolved after they had been segregated. The aim of our oral history project is to set up a basic historical archive that would provide some insight into these questions.

Threat of Demolition

Between 2007 and 2011, the fate of Sungai Buloh hung in the balance as the threat of redevelopment loomed large. Plans in 2007 to build a hospital

over part of the settlement sparked off discussion for its preservation. In July, the KLSCAH organized a forum, "Save the Valley of Hope to Preserve the Sungai Buloh Leprosarium." In the same month, Elizabeth Cardosa, the executive director of Badan Warisan Malaysia, a nongovernmental organization involved in the preservation of heritage sites in Malaysia, expressed her support for the idea in an article published in the national daily the *New Straits Times*, entitled "There Is Hope for the Valley of Hope." She spelt out her expectations for the site, such as that "original dwellings be preserved and converted into accommodation, the wards turned into care center for the surrounding communities, the existing religious facilities maintained and used by the local population," stressing that "the Leprosy Centre have to retain its authenticity and its heritage values."[14] But both Badan Warisan Malaysia and the Ministry of Culture, Arts, and Heritage also suggested some form of redevelopment to the settlement itself: that it be turned into a tourist attraction.

However, the day after Malaysia's National Day, toward the end of August 2007, the developer, Tuan Selatan Consortium, abruptly demolished almost a third of the buildings in the east compound of the settlement, including the Green Club, the community's most important social center.[15] In November, the Ministry of Culture, Arts, and Heritage finally responded to a call from concerned members of the public to persuade other government agencies involved in the redevelopment plans to preserve the existing buildings in Sungai Buloh, which included the residential buildings, assembly hall, and post office, as a national heritage site.[16]

The Solidarity Group's aim is to help ensure that Sungai Buloh's fate would not mirror that of the Losheng Sanitarium in Taipei, which was demolished to make way for a train depot system. We hoped to persuade the government of the immense heritage value of the world's second largest leprosy settlement, and to recognize the threats it faced from both developers and a serious lack of resources for maintenance. Located along the North-South highway, the settlement is only 25 kilometers away from Kuala Lumpur, the capital city. In the 1990s, changes to land titles turned the area from protected land to developable land, meaning that the buildings within the settlement were no longer protected from redevelopment. The buildings already demolished by then included the former patients' quarters, the marketplace, laundry rooms, the jail, and some unused buildings. The remaining buildings are now empty and overgrown with weeds. The houses are shabby and in need of repair. These buildings are remarkable for their colonial architecture and the simplicity and practicality of their design, which the British colonial government had deemed suitable for serving the daily needs of the patients.[17] The area

was designed for the purpose of providing good living conditions for leprosy patients, with ventilation, hygiene facilities, and other purpose-built facilities to maintain social order and unity in the community. It is a successful example of town planning based on the Garden City concept.[18]

Local activists emphasize that heritage buildings are valuable for both historical research and conservation purposes. Tang Ah Chai, the chief executive officer of KLSCAH, has underlined the importance of the settlement's local and medical history.[19] Lim Yong Long, an architecture lecturer who plays a leading role in the Solidarity Group, has argued that the settlement ought to be preserved due to its unique architecture and social organization, which embody the characteristics of a multicultural and multiethnic society.[20]

Oral Histories of Change and Disturbance

There are rising concerns among social activists and residents of the settlement that the living environment within the settlement is deteriorating, and that the remaining historical buildings remain at risk of demolition. The residents, ranging in age from 65 to 95 years, and having experienced an unwelcoming outside world in their younger days, simply wish to live through their old age peacefully in the settlement. However, the settlement is now afflicted by many problems, from the intrusion of developers to the lack of maintenance of existing facilities. Residents have complained that construction work on the new hospital has introduced hazards and inconveniences to their living environment.[21] Some also worry that the authorities will force them to spend the rest of their lives inside the hospital building.[22]

These concerns about conservation and security surfaced in our interviews, but they also emphasized other local factors and developments. Wong Yoke Onn said of the problem of "intruders" into the settlement, "The foreign laborers are getting more and more in number, and they always steal." Burglars had broken into his house three times.[23] Another respondent, Sim Ah Ma, stated, "The public security was satisfactory before the independent years. We can even leave the door open and go out for a movie."[24] According to Sim, this has changed since Malaysia became independent in 1957, as many Indonesians have entered the settlement to work on the lawn grass plantations. These remarks reflect the negative side of the desegregation of Sungai Buloh since the 1990s. Numerous Indonesian migrant workers have been employed in the lawn gardens in the area, and increasing numbers of them have taken up residence in the settlement. At the same time, the physical condition of the residential housing has generally deteriorated. These changes

have had the effect of making the settlement feel less safe, at least from the viewpoint of the residents.

Telling the Past and Forming One's Identity

One finds that oral history rebuilds one's identity. Every instance of recounting the past reconstructs the relationship between events in the narrative. Alessandro Portelli has explained how the past helps construct one's identity:

> To tell a story is to take arms against the threat of time, to resist time, or to harness time. The telling of a story preserves the teller from oblivion. The story builds the identity of the teller and the legacy which she or he leaves for the future.[25]

For our interviewees, the account often begins from the day they were separated from their families, indicating how their identities have been defined and truncated as a leprosy patient. Lee Chor Seng clearly remembered the time when he moved into the settlement. He could recall every detail of the separation, including the person who brought him in, and even the weather conditions on that day. He told us, "Of course I can remember it clearly. I felt heavy-hearted to leave my family."[26] Sim Ah Ma also described the memory of her first day on the settlement as though it was happening in the present:

> I remember everything. I remember that I want to run away. At that time I were a little child, I had given 5 cents to the guard, wished that he will take me run away from the settlement . . . I was only nine years old at that time . . . I even needing others to help me taking bath at that time, but I already thought of running away . . . At that time I felt very sad. I missed my mother. That's why I gave five cents to the guard, asked him to let me out to look for my mum. He told an *ang mo* [Caucasian] nurse about this. Then the nurse told me, if I want to leave, she can take me to leave. So I followed her to her office. In her office, there are lots of sweets. She asked me to pick the sweet that I like.[27]

Khoo Ah Guat is another similar case. She could only remember back when she was seven or eight years old, when she was diagnosed with leprosy and was sent to Sungai Buloh (figure 9.1). In our interview, she could only provide us with a vague sketch of her earlier childhood experiences. Her biological parents

Figure 9.1 Khoo Ah Guat in her house in the central section of Sungai Buloh, 2010.

had sent her away because of poverty, and she had then been transferred from one family to another throughout her childhood. Her first foster-mother had maltreated her. Her second foster-mother bought her for 200 ringgit and treated her much better. She stayed with this family until she contracted the symptoms of leprosy. She described all these details in the interview, but when we asked her the names of her biological and foster-mothers, she could not recall them. She could only mention them sequentially, that is, first, second, and third mother. She remembered that her third mother had a daughter and a son, but that she still treated Khoo as her own child. For this reason, Khoo considered her third mother as her biological mother, and still misses her very much.[28]

By narrating the past, people rearrange their position in relation to it. There are scars in one's mind that are examined and that underline the value of one's existence. Our interviewees' accounts are full of trifling bits and pieces, ranging from memories of school to those of friendships. Sometimes there are stories of others, such as the one about an unlucky nurse from the settlement who perished in a shipwreck. There was a more poignant story about a child who was tortured miserably by foster-parents (also leprosy sufferers) in the settlement. The case, when revealed, shocked the management, who proceeded to construct a building in the settlement exclusively for children. The stories are not always warm or happy. Sometimes they are cruel or sad,

sometimes annoying, or even impermanent. Some stories recall pleasurable moments, such as creating craftwork of decorative flowers with paraffin.[29] But they all center around the identity of a leprosy patient.

The stories also reveal the impact of stigmatization by society: there was also reluctance among the narrators about revealing family details. Lee Chor Seng insisted that he would not disclose his family members' names to outsiders.[30] Similarly, Sim Ah Ma, who passed away on February 15, 2010, was married to a fellow resident in the settlement, and had a son and a daughter. Her son is now the headmaster of a school in Terengganu and is a Muslim. Her daughter has migrated to Italy, where she married, and has a child. Sim was willing to share with us her daughter's family photograph, which was hung on the wall, but did not mention the names of her family members. She reminded us many times to keep the details of her family from outsiders. Both she and Lee worried that their families would also face discrimination from outsiders if their relationship was revealed.

Our oral histories say much about the identities of subaltern groups like former leprosy sufferers. When Franz Fanon studied the oppressive experience of colonization, he found that the identity of the suppressed ethnic group arises through retelling the past.[31] Stuart Hall has also maintained that identification is "a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination not a subsumption."[32] He also pointed out that "in the late modern times, the identification is not unified," but "fragmented" and "fractured."[33] Identification is inevitably constructed within the narrative process and is therefore also constructed through language discursively,[34] including through oral history.

Modernity and Community Life in the Settlement

Oral history provides a window into life in the settlement as experienced by its residents, revolving around the planned concept of a self-supporting community. The residents did not begin to form community life immediately after their admission. Initially, they lived in the western compound where diagnoses and medical treatments were conducted and administered. Only when this process was completed were the new patients allowed to live in the community.

The residents were then allocated to houses, where one to three housemates usually shared accommodation, depending on the size of each house. Each house had a leader, and the housemates shared responsibilities for daily household chores.[35] They also engaged in other forms of productive work, included planting, farming, and rearing domestic animals. Residents below

the age of 18 could attend the Travers School in the settlement, which offered modern education from primary to junior high school level. They could then take up the examination to obtain their "Sijil Rendah Pelajaran" (SRP) or Lower Certificate of Education (LCE). During an interview with Lee Chor Seng, he showed us his 1996 November SRP certificate.[36]

To maintain order within the community, a police force was formed from among the male patients. Wong Yoke Onn was once a member of this team. He told us that if any patients were found to be stealing, gambling or disobeying the rules, they would be placed in the local prison, also called the "lockup." Those who had committed minor infractions had to pay a fine, but those who were guilty of more or engaged in serious offenses were imprisoned for a period of time.[37]

In our conversations with residents, their memories of the settlement were not always narrated in the frame of an organized community, but in relation to things that had a more immediate relevance. For instance, Sim Ah Ma remembered the "colors" associated with the practice of isolation:

> Outsiders were not allowed to enter the settlement. The visitors were only allowed to stand outside the gate. There was a house near to the gate. Inside the house there were two rows of chairs. The chairs were painted with different colors. The patients will sit on one color, and the outsider will sit on the chair with another color. The *mata* [police in Malay, but actually a guard] will bring the patients from the hospital to the house. The patients will chat with the visitor there.[38]

From the 1970s, conditions in the leprosy settlement gradually became less isolating. Visitors were allowed to enter the compounds to visit the residents or simply to look around.

The community was and remains fairly diverse. During the British colonial period, the settlement accepted patients who had arrived illegally from Indonesia. According to Lee Chor Seng, although the management had informed the police about the many Indonesian Chinese patients who had illegally immigrated to the settlement, the dean insisted on allowing them to stay in the settlement for medical treatment if they were leprosy patients. There are still patients in the settlement today who do not possess a Malaysian identification certificate.[39]

The twentieth-century leprosarium, as an organized medical system introduced by the colonial power, was a symbol and artefact of modernity. Just as Zygmunt Bauman wrote, "Modernity is the production of order." This order was produced and maintained through classification and segregation.[40]

Writing on medieval practices, Michel Foucault argued that "the leper gave rise to rituals of exclusion, which to a certain extent provided the model for and general form of the great Confinement."[41] The modern era witnessed the formalization and expansion of these earlier forms of segregation.

Remembering the Past, Positioning the Present

The political landscape of Malaysia changed when the country became independent. This affected the experiences of the residents of Sungai Buloh. Some of the interviewees expressed disappointment toward the Malaysian government, who they said did not take as good care of them as the British did. Sim Ah Ma stated that she missed the better living conditions that prevailed during the colonial period.[42] According to Sim, the residents had not had to work during the British period, but had to do so after independence. Although the residents have aged, the management only provides them food and has cancelled their living allowance. Sim was primarily dependent on the money that her children sent her.[43]

Faced with difficult circumstances, the director of the settlement has asked the residents to be independent. Since the 1970s, the community has enthusiastically developed a floral nursery to supply the market located outside the settlement. When Sungai Buloh was fully open to the public in the 1990s, the community had been providing a supply of greensward and floral gardening for the entire state of Selangor.[44] The residents worked hard on the venture and succeeded through mutual cooperation, although there have been the inevitable disputes over profits. These are positive signs that the community is becoming more economically independent. However, the repercussion of the floral nursery, as mass media academic Por Heong Hong pointed out, is that commercial development of the nursery may be at odds with the preservation of structures within the settlement pursued by heritage activists. This alludes to a more basic tension between the practical needs of the residents and the advocacy for conservation by the activists.[45] The conflict may even lead to the residents being blamed for lacking an awareness of the value of heritage, although activists should recognize that commercial gardening is a response to the government's cancellation of their allowance.

Oral History and the Body

Before leprosy became curable, medical treatments in the settlement were experimental, and painful. The authorities extracted oil from the *hydnocarpus*

fruit (locally called Tai Fong Chee) and injected it into the bodies of the patients. This was believed to prevent permanent deformities of the hands and/or legs, resulting in the characteristic "clawed hand" and "foot drop" suffered by many patients.[46] Such bodily experiences, both of deformity and treatment, may shape one's perception of the world. This raises questions about the impact of physical deformity. Do the sufferers of leprosy accept the interpretations that society imposes upon them? Are there outcomes other than defensiveness and self-stigmatization by the patient? Or do patients respond to others' interpretations and construct their own identities?

Sim Ah Ma lived in Sungai Buloh since she was nine. The most obvious characteristic on her body was her sunken nose. A painter who drew a sketch of her in her middle age focused emphatically on "recovering" the proportions of her facial features.[47] Conversely, the residents show different degrees of sensitivity toward their physical deformities. Khoo Ah Guat repeatedly emphasized that she did not want her disabled leg photographed, while Lee Chor Seng, although his physical condition was the most serious among our interviewees, simply dismissed it, saying that he had "already gotten used to it." Sometimes, he added, the hospital would amputate patients' limbs considered to be "damaged."[48]

Not all residents display the expected impression of passivity, sorrow, or retreat within oneself and one's body. For instance, as the acting president of the Sungai Buloh Settlement Council, the community's elected self-managing body, Lee Chor Seng has appeared in the media to express his views opposing the planned demolition of part of the settlement.[49] A close examination of his argument reveals his criticism tempered by his use of the sympathetic tone of a victim. He stated:

> No matter whether it is Tunas Selatan (the developer) or Government, what they see of patients as though they are all useless people. What had they done at here does not show any respect to us. We are patients, we are old, and we are not going to rebel anyway. So that we hope government show sympathy to us. Don't torture us.

The act of "voicing out" Lee's view is in fact more subtle than overtly radical. His statement combines the gesture of a victim and an effort to articulate his needs and interests.

Theories of the body developed after Nietzsche advocate that the impact of the body cannot be thought to be less significant than that of the spirit or the mind.[50] It has also been widely argued that the body is not merely a physical entity but also a container of our identity, which is at the same time

determined by society's discourses.[51] The deformed body may preoccupy the identity of an individual or a person. Oral histories of leprosy suggest, however, that individuals respond to physical disabilities in different ways.

Sungai Buloh is the space within which the bodies and minds of the patients reside. It is the space in which they obtain rest and survival. They have lived here since their childhood or adolescence, and have spent most of their lives in the settlement. Even though some of them have been punished with jail terms for such acts like stealing, they would not leave the settlement. They have found it difficult to make a living outside the settlement. As Wong Yoke Onn surmised, "Even if you want to run away, you also don't know where to run."[52] Thus, although the name "Valley of Hope" paints a rosy picture of the institution, the awareness of having "nowhere to run" also reveals that the residents are fully aware of their lives and "hopes" being circumscribed within the boundaries of the settlement. Sungai Buloh is a Valley of Hope because hope exists nowhere else.

Conclusion

Loh noted in a recent article that heritage discourses on leprosy contain the entangled, even discordant, voices of different parties such as the state, social activists, and leprosy sufferers over the value of the leprosarium.[53] To add to his point, hope and fear, isolation and protection, coexist along the boundary that separates the ill from the fit. This boundary demarcates a complicated situation, containing the discourses and development of modernity in Malaysia and creating a strong stigma toward leprosy. The boundary is one that the elderly residents of Sungai Buloh find difficult to traverse. By drawing upon the name "Valley of Hope" and through its oral history advocacy, the Solidarity Group seeks to invoke the need for heritage conservation and underline the fact that society remains afraid to linger on the body of the leprosy sufferer.

Notes

1. Loh Kah Seng, *Making and Unmaking the Asylum: Leprosy and Modernity in Singapore and Malaysia* (Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2009), pp. 81–95.
2. Slavoj Žižek and Glyn Daly, *Conversation with Zizek* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), pp. 68–70.
3. The Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall (in Malay, *Dewan Perhimpunan Cina Kuala Lumpur dan Selangor* or DPCKLS) is a

nongovernmental organization set up in 1923 with the original purpose of protecting the interests of the Chinese community in Malaya. However, since the 1990s, the organization has been actively cooperating with social activists to educate the community on broader issues such as freedom of speech, heritage conservation, and the rights of marginal groups like the indigenous people (*Orang Penan*) of Sarawak.

4. Pang Siew Sia and Wong Chau Yin, *Valley of Hope—The Sungai Buloh National Leprosy Control Centre* (Petaling Jaya: MCA Subang Division, 2006).
5. Wong left her job temporarily for about two years in order to write the book.
6. There are disputes over the accuracy of oral history, but oral historians argue that the value of oral history departs from the notion of "historical truth." Barbara Allen and William Lynwood, *From Memory to History: Using Oral Sources in Local Historical Research* (Nashville: The American Association for State and Local History, 1981), p. 89.
7. Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes the Oral History Different?" in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 71.
8. Gyanendra Pandey, "Voices from the Edge: The Struggle to Write Subaltern Histories," in *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*, ed. Vinayak Chaturvedi (London: Verso, 2000), p. 285.
9. Gyanendra Pandey, "In Defense of the Fragment: Writing about Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today," *Representations*, Special Issue: Imperial Fantasies and Postcolonial Histories 37 (Winter 1992): 27–55.
10. Ibid.
11. Tang Ah Chai, "A Trip to the Valley of Hope," *Berita DPCKLS* (December 2007): 118–30; Lim Yong Long, "Preserve the Sungai Buloh Leprosy Settlement," *Berita DPCKLS* (December 2007): 129.
12. Portelli, "What Makes the Oral History Different", p. 67; Portelli, "A Dialogical Relationship: An Approach to Oral History," in *Expressions Annual 2005*, ed. Manish Jain p. 2, http://www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/expressions_toc.htm, last accessed October 25, 2012.
13. Pang and Wong, *Valley of Hope*, pp. 13; Dr. Gordon A. Ryrie, *The Leper Settlement at Sungai Buloh in The Federated Malay States* (Singapore: The Malaya Publishing House, 1933).
14. Elizaberth Cardosa, "There Is Hope for the Valley of Hope," *New Straits Times*, July 22, 2007.
15. Yang Kai Bing, editorial, *Malaysiakini*, September 1, 2007, http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/71871, last accessed October 25, 2012.
16. Chan Hui Shi, "Ministry of Culture set up Committee Temporary to Persuade Units, There Is Intention to List the Leprosarium as Cultural Heritage," *Merdeka Review*, November 2, 2007, http://www.merdekareview.com/news/n/5269.html, last accessed October 25, 2012.
17. This comment is the view of Teoh Chee Keong, one of the organizers of the Solidarity Group.
18. Lim Yong Long, "Preservation of The Sungai Buloh Leprosy Settlement," September 21, 2009, http://valleyofhope.blogspot.com/2007/09/lim-yong-long-preservation-of-sungai.html, last accessed October 25, 2012.

19. Tang Ah Chai, "Farewell to the Old Curse, Start for New Hope—An Introduction for the Community in The Sungai Buloh Leprosy Settlement," *Berita DPCKLS* (December 2007): 112.
20. Lim, "Preserve the Sungai Buloh Leprosy Settlement," 130.
21. Wang De Qi, "Suspect the Developer: Intrude the Leprosy Settlement Former Patient Said the Government Keep It Secret," *Malaysiakini*, October 8, 2007, http://www.malaysiakini.com, last accessed October 25, 2012.
22. "Construction Start in December to Build New Building," *Sin Chew Daily*, January 28, 2010, http://www.msiatalk.com/archiver/?tid-2856.html and http://mykampung.sinchew.com.my/node/91294, last accessed October 25, 2012.
23. Authors' interview with Wong Yoke Onn, recording code 009:002, December 22, 2007.
24. Authors' interview with Sim Ah Ma (pseudonym), recording code 005:001, June 20, 2009.
25. Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 59.
26. Authors' interview with Lee Chor Seng, recording code 001: V01, December 7, 2007.
27. Authors' interview with Sim Ah Ma, recording code 005:V01, July 16, 2009.
28. Authors' interview with Khoo Ah Guat, recording code 007: V01, June 24, 2009.
29. Authors' interview with Sim Ah Ma, recording code 005:V01, July 16, 2009.
30. Authors' interview with Lee Chor Seng, recording code 001: V01, December 7, 2007.
31. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. J. Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wirhat, 1990), pp. 222–37.
32. Stuart Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity'?" in *Question of Cultural Identity,* ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gau (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore: Saga Publication, 1996), p. 3.
33. Ibid., p. 4.
34. Ibid.
35. Authors' interview with Lee Chor Seng, recording code 001: V01, December 7, 2007.
36. Authors' interview with Lee Chor Seng, recording code 001: V07, April 19, 2010.
37. Authors' interview with Wong Yoke Onn, recording code 009: V03, January 12, 2008.
38. Authors' interview with Sim Ah Ma, recording code 005: V03, June 20, 2009.
39. Authors' interview with Lee Chor Seng, recording code 001:V05, March 15, 2010.
40. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), pp. 1–17.
41. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), p. 198.

42. Authors' interview with Sim Ah Ma, recording code 005: V03, June 20, 2010.
43. Authors' interview with Sim Ah Ma, recording code 005: V03, June 20, 2009.
44. Authors' interview with Lee Chor Seng, recording code 001: V06, March 20, 2010.
45. Chen Shaua Fui, "Developer Has Demolished Settlement Three times, Two Empty Houses of Eastern Compound were Ruined," *Merdeka Review*, September 2, 2007, http://www.merdekareview.com, last accessed October 25, 2012.
46. Pang and Wong, *Valley of Hope*, pp. 3, 35.
47. Authors' interview with Sim Ah Ma, recording code 005: V01, November 29, 2007.
48. Authors' interview with Lee Chor Seng, recording code 001: V03, July 16, 2009.
49. The Settlement Council was set up in 1946 as the "patient council" before changing to its present name in 1966 when it was registered under the Societies Ordinance in 1966. In the early days, the role of the council was to act as the settlement's "disciplinary body with quasi-magisterial power." It continues to be a self-managing mechanism for the community. Members of the council are elected from among the residents. Also refer to Pang and Wong, *Valley of Hope*, pp. 63–64.
50. Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (London and Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 1–17.
51. Anthony Synnott, *The Body Social: Symbolism, Self and Society* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
52. Authors' interview with Wong Yoke Onn, recording code 009: V03, January 12, 2008.
53. Loh Kah Seng, "'No More Road to Walk': Cultures of Heritage and Leprosariums in Singapore and Malaysia," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 17.3 (2011): 230–44.

CHAPTER 10

Memory, Heritage, and the Singapore River: "It Is Like a Dead Snake"

Stephen Dobbs

The Singapore River and its environs have seemingly gone through a constant process of change since 1983, when the river ceased to have any further role in the port activities of Singapore. In September of that year, the ubiquitous lighters that since the time of Raffles had plied the waters of the river and harbor left the heart of the city for the last time. Their departure marked the end of an important epoch for the river in Singapore's modern history. For more than 150 years, the lighterage industry had been an integral part of the port and riverine activities. The industry's removal from the river was a result of wider changes that were taking place in Singapore and which were completely transforming the economic, urban, and social environments of the island state. Ten years after the removal of the lighterage industry from the Singapore River, while researching a history of the waterway and its role in Singapore's past, I was able to meet some of the few remaining river lightermen and lighter owners, then based at facilities in Pasir Panjang, on the southwest shore of the island. Over a period of approximately six months, I was able to conduct oral history interviews with owners of lighters and some of their employees. I also had the opportunity to venture out into the harbor and observe the nature of the work lightermen were engaged in firsthand. The contacts I established provided me with visits to Pulau Retan Laut, now absorbed by the enormous Pasir Panjang Container Terminal, where lighters

were taken for repair. I was also invited for a "test" cruise on one of the first "water taxis" when Clarke Quay opened to the public in early 1994. It was in all respects a particularly interesting moment to be conducting this research as the Singapore River was reopening to a new era after more than a decade of restorations both of the waterway and its environs.

The removal of the lighterage industry from the Singapore River marked a major turning point in the waterway's physical and social environment and a traumatic moment for people whose lives were affected. This paper will discuss some of the recollections of the men I interviewed and their impressions of the transition their industry had gone through in the decade prior to my research. It will also discuss the views expressed to me about the early transformations that were taking place along the Singapore River by 1993–94. Many interviewees described the river to me as a "dead snake," devoid of its former role, life, and vibrancy. This analogy was, I realized, a statement about the death of connection between past and present in terms of the future of the river and its refurbishment as an entertainment hub and living space in the modern city. Their collective and social memory of the river had little in common with the changes they were witnessing. The conversations with and observations of lightermen at work were crucial to understanding how they saw and constructed their place in Singapore's past and present. In analyzing his own work, Alessandro Portelli highlighted the use of place, the importance of location to the interviewee, and its necessity within the narrative framework as a means of self-verification.[1] Further, Portelli observes that oral accounts help give meaning to life events, "They tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, what they now think they did."[2] The lightermen's recollections and stories show areas of convergence between their own telling of the past and aspects of official state accounts, as well as provide a subjective source for understanding their own sense of identity, relationship to the state, and how they viewed the processes of development and modernity. Roseman notes such recollections "are particularly useful sources of the meaning the past has in the present and of the complex subjective motives of historical actors who enact events."[3]

The act of recalling and talking about the past provided these men with an opportunity to affirm their place and importance in Singapore's modern history. Speaking up is a challenging undertaking in Singapore where the official narratives of the past have for almost half a century been developed and fiercely defended by the state. The official "Singapore Story," Koh notes, is "a triumphal narrative of deliverance from political, economic, and social despair."[4] Its power and pervasiveness, Blackburn shows, is woven into the fabric of people's memories, particularly in relation to oral history accounts of

potentially contentious issues such as riots and urban resettlement,[5] or alternatively, people are reluctant to speak of counter (official) versions of events. Conversations with the lightermen gave voice to their sense of "identity and involvement in . . . Singapore history,"[6] and were a mix of personal recollections, sometimes counter to the official Singapore Story and at times a synthesis of the personal and official. Such recollections are all the more valuable because of the way, as Loh describes, the "shadow of the present," looms over areas of possible contestation in the official accounts of Singapore's recent past.[7]

The River: Its Port Role and Demise

The lighterage industry along the Singapore River was one of the island's oldest industries dating back to the arrival of Raffles in 1819. At the founding of the port, the river provided the best and most reliable ground upon which to establish wharves for the loading and unloading of goods. While Keppel Harbor attracted ocean-going vessels, smaller coastal ships and various other craft such as large prows and junks preferred to anchor near the river. The demand for regional produce generated by the port's expanding role in the global trading networks of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries caused a significant increase in the number of regional craft calling at Singapore. Marine Department reports between the 1880s and 1920s show a fourfold increase in the number of "native" and small coastal steamers arriving at the port, many of which utilized the services of the lighters. As of 1959, the total tonnage of goods handled in the river was greater than the amount using the wharves of the Singapore Harbor Board.[8] In the 1960s and early 1970s, there was continued growth in the river's role in the port as "China ships" started arriving and for a time utilized the river and lighterage industry. However, by the 1970s there were changes sweeping Singapore, which were going to transform forever the role of the river and its identification with the port and maritime trade. Particularly important were technological changes, such as containerization, which was set to radically alter the way in which goods were transported on the world's seas. The Port of Singapore Authority (PSA) enthusiastically embraced the new technology rightly identifying that the trend toward using containers would increase significantly in the years to come.[9] This technological shift the lighterage industry would not be able to compete with in the longer term.

The waning importance of the river in maritime trade was convenient for the state and city planners as it coincided with plans for urban renewal around the river. Beginning in the 1960s and picking up momentum following

independence in 1965 the Singapore government embarked upon a massive program of redevelopment linked with modernization of its economy, developing an industrial base and positioning itself to become a major global financial center. Singapore had much to prove and many obstacles to overcome as an independent nation-state, which even the United Nations had seen as not "viable" outside of the Malaysian union.[10] One of the most notable aspects of the post-1965 changes that took place in Singapore was rapid urban redevelopment. Urban overcrowding[11] and a lack of basic amenities such as piped water and a sewerage system were pressing issues of major public concern, especially near the city-state's heart around the Singapore River. The government recognized that it could not, like earlier colonial administrations, procrastinate over issues such as serious overcrowding and slum-like conditions for its citizens. From the mid-1960s, urban redevelopment focused on creating infrastructure such as transport, water supply, power, telecommunications, and port facilities, which would create an environment conducive to foreign investment and industrialization.[12] All of this future economic planning and development was coupled to a massive program of rehousing, which would see the most demographically dense areas of Singapore depopulated as people were moved to the new housing blocks being constructed by the state-run Housing Development Board.[13] By the 1970s, the redevelopment and beautification of the city had reached the densely populated environs and banks of the Singapore River.

The fact that the lighterage industry no longer played the key role it once had in Singapore's port commerce gave the government the whip hand in its drive to clear lighters from the river as part of the ongoing redevelopment of the city. The moribund state of the lighterage industry was becoming apparent to all. Newspaper articles described the river as a "graveyard for derelict lighters" and pointed to the downturn in river trade as the cause of the industry's demise.[14] It was estimated that only 40 percent of the river fleet was still utilized in 1975.[15] Between 1977 and 1983 the industry campaigned vigorously to be allowed to continue working along the river.[16] They were told in the course of difficult negotiations, where they came to see the authorities as bullying, their "time was up" and that they had to make a "sacrifice for the good of the country."[17] The Ministry of the Environment summed up the government's position:

> Rundown urban areas in the Singapore and Kallang river catchments will also be redeveloped. It is important that the two rivers be kept clean . . . one of the main sources [of pollution] being lighterage and related activities. The only practical and economical solution is to resite the lighters.[18]

As time ran out, the industry focused on getting the best deal possible under the circumstances to relocate the lighters to Pasir Panjang. The authorities did make concessions to ease the process of relocation. Additional works were carried out to improve the facilities at Pasir Panjang for the lighterage activity, including extensions to wharves, a hundred-meter breakwater to shelter lighters, 160 mooring buoys, a lighter repair site on nearby reclaimed Terumbu Retan Laut, and supporting amenities such as offices, toilets, canteens, and rest areas.[19] The new facilities were also provided at lower rents and fees than might have otherwise been the case.[20] In September 1983, the last of the lighters left the Singapore River. Their presence in the heart of the city since the founding of modern Singapore came to an end as some 270 vessels belonging to 30 companies left the river for the last time.[21]

Moving and Its Meaning:

Memories of the river and the once important economic place of the lighterage industry in Singapore were still fresh in the minds of lightermen and vessel owners in the early 1990s as they watched over the decline of lighterage services at Pasir Panjang. However, their telling of the move and changes that had occurred in the industry and their lives in the previous decade highlighted the fluidity of their memories over time as they had been forced to adapt to new realities. As noted by Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, memory unlike history is not built on "immutable facts" but "evolves and is being constantly reconstructed."[22] The transfer of lighterage operations to Pasir Panjang from the Singapore River and the subsequent decline was recalled by those people I interviewed in various, though often shared, ways. Once the struggle against relocation had been lost and moving become inevitable, the interviewees recalled there was some hope that perhaps it would not be as bad as had been thought, sentiments that were bolstered by upbeat news reports and government investment in lighterage facilities at Pasir Panjang.[23] The moving of the industry from the point of view of the state was simply part of its broader and "necessary" modernization/development agenda for Singapore; for the people involved in lighterage the move introduced a period of great personal transformation. The oral accounts of these changes in fortune highlight not only the way in which the past is remembered but also the way in which the past is reconstructed in the process of recalling over time.[24] The industry people I interviewed and spent time with were clearly, as Roseman suggests, "making do" as political and economic subordinates in the face of strong state power.[25] Their accounts of the relocation show both

surrender and resistance to the dominant historical narrative of Singapore's past and present highlighting their own agency in reconstructing the past as well as its meaning in the present.

The lightermen's accounts of relocation and decline of the industry provide some interesting examples of fluidity in how the past is remembered. By 1993/94 the lighter wharves at Pasir Panjang were devoid of any level of optimism about the state of the industry or what its longer-term future would be. As one owner told me, "In five to ten years I do not think the industry will be here we will all be gone by then. There are already fewer and fewer companies and lighters. We are not needed now like before."[26] This sentiment was expressed to me in every interview I conducted. Yet only a decade earlier, some of the same people I interviewed were promoting a very different view. The head of the Lighter Owner's Association barely two weeks after the move made the following positive points about the transition:

> Since the move from the Singapore River to the Pasir Panjang coastal anchorage, association members have not experienced any difficulty in their operations…The advantage of shifting their operations to Pasir Panjang is that lighters can work 24 hours a day, unlike at the Singapore River where they had to wait for the tides.[27]

While it would be easy to attribute this optimism simply to the fact that there had been no choice and it did not make sense for the industry's leading body to contest at this point the official view of what was happening, my interviews showed that this optimism was widely held. The period immediately following relocation was described by a number of my interviewees in optimistic terms, and the Pasir Panjang wharves compared favorably with the river location.[28]

The change and decline in the industry was clearly a product of a variety of factors though one would have to conclude that developments in technology relating to maritime trade such as the growing use of shipping containers coupled with growth and modernization of Singapore's port facilities more generally were critical elements. From the state's point of view, these changes were simply part of the modernization process, and many industry people had come to accept this view (discussed further in next section). One owner summed this sentiment up telling me that "the industry should be remembered" for the part it had played in Singapore's history but that its time had passed.[29] I found this sentiment of resignation and acceptance widely held among those people I interviewed. However, coupled with this sense of acceptance was another series of narratives that expressed an oppositional view

about the reasons for the industry's rapid decline. These alternative narratives demonstrate the "negotiable" nature of personal and collective histories even as people come to accommodate themselves to dominant interpretations of the past.[30]

One common element of the recollections was the changed nature of the social and employment environment at Pasir Panjang. According to this account the entire environment of the workplace at Pasir Panjang was not conducive to the type of life that had been had along the river, and this had a significant impact on how they viewed the waning of lighterage. Having the lighters based at Pasir Panjang changed dramatically the day-to-day routines of the industry and introduced all kinds of additional costs and problems. Lightermen commented at length on the changed social nature of the workplace location. The new environment, unlike the river, meant that the men were no longer daily on their boats, and instead found themselves sitting around in the new government-provided canteen facilities, with none of the usual day-to-day routine of lighter life as it had been along the river. Ultimately, what they remembered of the social context of the industry was completely transformed, and individuals no longer felt the personal connection they once had with the work they were doing. As a result, fewer and fewer men ventured to the wharves unless guaranteed work for the day. The trade was declining, they told me, but the changed physical environment and what that meant for social and workplace interaction helped to hasten the decline as one individual put it, "Everything seemed to work against the old way of doing things at Pasir Panjang."[31]

While seeming to acknowledge the idea of inevitable decline for lighterage in the process of Singapore's modernization, most of my interviewees were quick to point out that additional running costs associated with the new location were a contributing factor. They noted additional upkeep costs associated with having vessels moored in the cleaner salt water, where various kinds of sea growth accumulated at a much faster rate than in the river. Added to this were various port charges that were levied for the use of facilities such as wharves and the maintaining of mooring buoys, all costs that owners believed had driven their charges up and pushed more and more of them into unprofitability and eventual closure. Owners of lighters were adamant that their rising costs, which had to be passed onto customers after an initial period of official subsidization ended, pushed many of their clients to accept alternative arrangements with the port authority.[32] One owner noted as we traveled across the narrow strait from Pasir Panjang to Pulau Retan Laut (a small island where lighters were taken for repairs), "now we have to pay someone to take us to our own lighters [as we passed through moored *twakow* on a small boat ferrying

Figure 10.1 *Swaylo* (ordinary lighter crewman), 63, with more than 30 years experience working along the Singapore River and Pasir Panjang wharves. Photograph by Stephen Dobbs.

us to the island (figure 10.1)].[33] For some of the people I interviewed, this was seen as part of an official strategy by the port authority to eventually bring this era of the industry to an end in Singapore.

The seeming public acquiescence of people in the industry to the modernizing narrative that portrayed the industry as outdated and out of place in the modern port and city belied the fact that most privately held strongly to a counterview about what had caused the decline (or at the very least hastened it). One interviewee expressed to me in the strongest terms his view that the industry's decline was directly connected with the move, and that this move had taken place entirely for motives other than the changing nature of lighterage activities in the port. Some businesses, he told me, which had utilized the river and the lighters for reasons of convenience and cost had made decisions to relocate after 1983. He noted, "several and one very large business which moved" their operations to Batam, and he was quick to point out that this was directly connected to the changed "relationship between the shore and shipping [that] was lost at Pasir Panjang."[34]

The lightermen's accounts of removal from the Singapore River and its consequences highlight the fluidity of memory over time as individuals adjust to changing social, political, and economic realities. Most notable in this instance was the way in which elements of Singapore's dominant

modernization narrative and how it related to the lighterage industry's relocation were seemingly accepted. Yet individual accounts contained fragments of counternarratives. Taken collectively, they suggest an alternative "story."

Pollution and the River

The pollution problems of the river can be seen as dating back in one form or another to the first establishment of a settlement and port along its banks.[35] As already noted, one of the major issues cited by the state when the decision was made to resite lighterage activities away from the river was pollution. In this regard the lighterage industry was specifically singled out. The Ministry of the Environment, when they turned down an appeal by lighter owners to be allowed to continue their work along the river in 1980s, used pollution as a key fact in their rejection of the appeal. The press reported the ministry as saying that there were many contributors to catchment pollution, but one of the "main sources" was "lighterage and related activities."[36] The lightermen interviewed in the course of my research demonstrated again the way in which "the recounting of historical memories is a form of . . . making do" when it came to the issue of pollution and state development policies relating to the river.[37] They accepted the obvious polluted nature of the waterway, but did not acquiesce to the state position that they had been major contributors to the river's poor state. To most observers, the Singapore River had indeed become, as Chang and Huang describe it, a "river of death."[38] A scientific study of pollution in the river in 1969 found that pollution levels were so high as to prohibit even the natural breakdown of waste matter occurring, so the river was indeed a dead waterway.[39] However the lightermen who worked the waters of the river had their own discourse about the river and for them it was a discourse that focused on the life that the river had sustained and indeed the life it had generated for Singapore.

The official discourse dominant in the lead-up to the removal of the lighterage industry from the river was one focused on the broader development strategies of the state, strongly underpinned by an ideology of progress and modernity. In the same way that squatter housing (as well as a range of specific occupations—hawking for example) was identified as unhygienic and earmarked for clearance, so also the river became an arena that in the state discourse focused on the need for cleaner waters as central to a modern cityscape. This discourse relating to clean water began more than a decade before lighters were removed from the river. Prime Minister Lee began calling for clean rivers in 1969, clearly and genuinely concerned about the amount

of pollutants finding their way into the island's waterways. He also wanted a program of beautification to "keep these rivers and canals with more or less clean, translucent water, where fish, water lilies, and other water plants can grow, and both sides of the waterway be planted with trees, like willow."[40] Lee had a vision, which in its detail, one might suggest, was more heavily influenced by his time as a student in the picturesque surrounds of Cambridge University than any environmental reality in Singapore.

Industry insiders were well aware of the poor environmental state of the waterway. One older interviewee noted:

> I really only remember the river being quite smelly and dirty. I think it was always this way. The bottom of the river was very polluted and most of the smells people remember were because this mud was exposed at low tides. At other times the water covered the mud and the smell was much less.[41]

The impact of pollution affected significantly the day-to-day work of the industry as noted by all informants. In particular, the sediment that built up on the riverbed caused considerable problems for lighters and was a constant issue dating back more than one hundred years. An interviewee recalled:

> The river was very difficult to work in at low tide because of all the buildup of rubbish and mud. If lighters were out of the river when the tide went out they would have to stay out until the tide was in again. It took a great deal of skill to take lighters out and bring them back into the river. The smell was always there as long as I can remember. It was always very bad when the tide was out. You could smell it a long way away when the water in the river was low.[42]

The lightermen though did not accept that they were the main or even significant contributors to the pollution of the river. When asked directly about the role of lighterage activities in river pollution, most were quick to note what they said was the minor part they had played in regard to pollution. For example, one owner of lighters noted, "There was of course some pollution and accidents that resulted in pollution but mostly the pollution was from other industries near the river or from drains and those people who lived along the river [referring to squatters]."[43] Another similarly pointed to what he regarded as the rather benign impact of the industry, "I do not think the lighters caused much pollution. They did not put anything in the water the pollution came from other places."[44] The dominant transmitted social memory of the lightermen, a decade after being removed from the

river, with respect to the question of responsibility for its polluted state, continued to run counter to the official discourse.[45] A decade after the removal, the people I interviewed universally had appropriated the official position regarding the need to address the river's polluted condition. They were, as Roseman suggests, "partially accommodating themselves" to, in this case, the powerful Singapore Story narrative while maintaining agency in the account by rebutting the claim that they were major contributors to the pollution of the river.[46] This was a point of "fair game for debate" and a telling of the past that provided them an opportunity to speak with the authority of personal experience (literally having worked in the river with it smells and filth) and express their continued sense of grievance at having been removed and blamed for the pollution.[47]

The River: Restoration and Heritage

By 1993–94, conservation and restoration activities along the river were well underway with Boat Quay and Clarke Quay both reopening as entertainment precincts. The changes that had taken place in the process of recreating these areas as heritage sites were viewed with mixed feelings at the time by those people who had once worked the waters of the river and occupied its banks as a port. The responses of lightermen to the changes reflect both acceptance and resignation with respect to the official narrative regarding the need for development and modernity. One elderly interviewee noted, "All over Singapore changes have happened, many good things have happened."[48] Another noted, "Now the river is cleaner and there are many new developments going on. It is hard to say now that this industry should have been allowed to stay."[49] He added, "The new developments and clean river will be good for Singapore and young people . . . These new businesses will mean more opportunities for some people."[50] However, with regard to the issue of heritage, there was a clear sense that they felt there was little connection between the beautified river and its past. They recognized there were new commercial and recreational opportunities opening up, but the changes they saw seemed to do little to connect the river's present with its past as they remembered it.

For the state, the Singapore River, along with other designated areas, became a focal point for efforts in linking culture, history, physical landscapes, and national identity. The various urban development and renovation projects along the river have reflected the government's vision of the city-state, as a "tropical city of excellence," a "gracious"[51] city, and more recently a

"renaissance city,"[52] a cultured "global city for the arts."[53] The post-port river, as an urban landscape, reflects the government's concern to build a sense of the nation's heritage through selective preservation of buildings and historical landmarks. These sites are deemed to "show Singapore's rich, multi-ethnic origins,"[54] and it is hoped that their preservation as part of the nation's heritage will foster a sense of national place and pride among citizens[55] as a counter to what the state perceived as elements of cultural contamination introduced by globalization. The "material cultural heritage," the state hopes, will provide what McDonald calls a "material testimony of identity" linking citizens to a shared past.[56] As noted in a report by the Urban Redevelopment Authority toward the beginning of an era of concern regarding Westernization and the loss of culture and heritage, "...for our city to be truly great, we cannot rely only on modern architecture, which is restrained by...the pervasive international architectural style of the 20th Century...The only way that gives our city a distinct personality is our historic past through the selective conservation of old districts and buildings."[57]

While the state has promoted its conservation and preservation of selected landscapes along the river for domestic nation-building purposes, there has always been another powerful factor driving these developments, namely tourism. Singapore has embraced modernity and globalization and with this a willingness to open up to the economic forces of global tourism. Devoid of archaeological ruins on the scale of some of it neighbors, official conservation and preservation nonetheless has turned selected areas such as the river into "tourist landscape(s)."[58] Commercial tourism interests were center stage when state planners undertook the task of determining what should be preserved and restored. Consideration of an area's potential commercial value following conservation was at least as important as its inherited historical value.[59] As noted by Teo and Huang, the state has controlled the processes and ideology surrounding decisions about what was, from a conservation and heritage point of view, to be retained and what destroyed.[60] The process driven by ideological and economic imperatives suggests a view of heritage and conservation underpinned by elite notions of "masterpieces," where "'heritage' is 'identified' and 'assessed' against predefined 'criteria,'" which privilege national interests and agendas over local and less tangible cultural heritage expressions.[61]

While interviewees acknowledged there were impressive changes being made in the process of restoring buildings along both Boat Quay and Clarke Quay, one insider, when asked about these transformations, expressed clearly the widely held perception that there was a lack of authenticity in the new-look river quays. Of the physical changes he noted, "...They look better and they suit the new bars and shops that have opened. They are clean now

like the water. Boat Quay looks very colorful. Most lightermen I think would not recognize it. It is not the same anymore."[62] There was a sense among lightermen that the restorations, while matching the broader transformations in Singapore's urban landscape, had little to do with the river as a historical or heritage area the lightermen would or could relate to. Amid the privileging of heritage elements (mainly material) for state purposes, most local knowledge (local history) or intangible cultural heritage associated with the river had been lost. An interesting and telling example of what this meant related to the nomenclature of the riverine community. Lightermen and those in associated industries were familiar with place names along the river related to specific businesses or river bank activities such as dealing in charcoal or timber. Other areas were named after specific buildings such as a warehouse or government offices or by the number of warehouses/businesses along specific sections of the river. While no one could tell me when particular names had come into use, they could identify sections of the river that had been named after trades or activities that had disappeared in the more distant past suggesting the local nomenclature had a long history of its own.[63] Many of these physical spaces by 1993 had completely disappeared or been transformed beyond recognition, and others were now only known by their official names. These accounts demonstrate a consciousness of the history "embedded in the transformations of the landscape that young people cannot perceive."[64]

The "museumization" and "gentrification" of the river quays, whether intended or not, was more about "creating a historic ambience for tourist enjoyment than for representing a true picture of the past and for increasing understanding of what is historically significant and valued in the environment."[65] The lightermen understood that no amount of colorful decorating could compensate for what Byrne calls the "deformation of place" as the "excision of the material past from its social context, past and present, hollows it out and deforms it."[66] The restoration and redevelopment work in this instance is an excellent example of the material cultural heritage remaining "minus feeling."[67] The views of the lightermen highlight the extent to which selective preservation of elements of the material culture of the riverscape could not bridge the "loss of connection" people felt with the locality between the past and present.[68]

Conclusion

There is always a danger when looking to the past in getting caught up in a sense of nostalgia. The past seems to be almost invariably better than the

present. The people I met and interviewed in the process of writing about the river were like all of us, remembering and interpreting events from their own particular perspectives and histories. There certainly were elements of nostalgic sentiment in the way in which the stories they told reflected on the past and their previous connections to the Singapore River. I heard many positive stories about the convenience (both for business and personal reasons) of the river and of what seemed like a relatively ideal social and employment environment, which of course it often was not. As Lowenthal notes, "We constantly reform historical scenes, as we do our memories, to fit present stereotypes."[69] In this case, it was perhaps not so much to fit contemporary stereotypes as looking for that moment in the past when they felt their way of life had significance and meaning. These accounts of the past, as Fritzsche notes, provide "a critique of the claims and pieties of the present."[70] It is not only individuals of course who choose to represent the past in particular ways. States have the biggest monopoly in this regard when it comes to constructing national histories.

In the context of Singapore, this monopoly has been largely dominated by the story of the nation's success from 1965. In the microstate that is Singapore, where the dominant institutions do "sing" in harmony and state control of the media is almost absolute, it is the success story of Singapore that has achieved centrality and "marginalized or excluded" other versions of the past.[71] While this state-driven success history does not always deny the stories of individuals and groups such as the lightermen, it has become the "dominant memory"[72] able to simply ignore other histories and memories or relegate them to some sort of secondary status via their inclusion in coffee table–type publications.[73] The lightermen's accounts highlight the struggle of individuals to adjust and accommodate to the forces of modernity. They demonstrate the nonlinear flow of history where accommodation, convergence, and dissonance collide in the individual and collective histories of groups like the lightermen. The lightermen's own telling of their history certainly demonstrated elements of appropriation of the official Singapore Story with respect to the river; however, they interpreted the meaning of these appropriations in such a way as to stamp their own mark on the past. Their telling and interpretation of the past was a form of making do in the face of a powerful state modernization agenda. The strength of the state limited what they could do through other actions to stop the changes thrust upon them in the 1980s; however, their recalling of events a decade later shows a "partial accommodation" coupled with an active, discursive resistance to the power of the state to tell the story of the river in one way.[74]

Notes

1. Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997).
2. Alessandro Portelli, "The Peculiarities of Oral History," *History Workshop Journal* 12.1 (1981): 99–100.
3. Sharon Roseman, "'How We Built the Road': The Politics of Memory in Rural Galacia," *American Ethnologist* 23.4 (1996): 839.
4. Ernest Wee Song Koh, *Singapore Stories: Language, Class and the Chinese of Singapore 1945 to 2000* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2010), p. 1.
5. Kevin Blackburn, "Oral History as a Product of Malleable and Shifting Memories in Singapore," in *The Makers and Keepers of Singapore History,* ed. Loh Kah Seng and Liew Kai Khiun (Singapore: Ethos Books, 2010), p. 207.
6. Kah Seng Loh, "Seeking the Bukit Ho Swee Fire," in *The Makers and Keepers,* p. 87.
7. Ibid.
8. Goh Keng Swee, minister for finance, *Singapore Legislative Assembly Debates*, December 14, 1959, p. 1174.
9. *The Straits Times,* February 18, 1972.
10. C. Mary Turnbull, *A History of Singapore, 1819–1988*, 2nd edition (Singapore; New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 288.
11. R. Neville, "The Areal Distribution of Population in Singapore," *The Journal of Tropical Geography,* 20 (June 1965); R. Wikkramatileke, "Focus on Singapore," *The Journal of Tropical Geography* 20 (June 1965).
12. Peggy Teo and Shirlena Huang, "Tourism and Heritage Conservation in Singapore," *Annals of Tourism Research* 22.3 (1995): 593.
13. For a fuller discussion of these processes see Brian Field, "Singapore's New Town Prototype: A Textbook Prescription?" *Habitat International* 16.3 (1992); Foo Tuan Seik, "Urban Environmental Policy—The Use of Regulatory and Economic Instruments in Singapore," *Habitat International* 20.1 (1996). Also, Kah Seng Loh, *The 1961 Kampong Bukit Ho Swee Fire and the Making of Modern Singapore,* PhD diss., Murdoch University, 2009.
14. *The Straits Times,* "The Dying Lighters Down by the Riverside," May 14, 1975.
15. Ibid.
16. Author's interview with Interviewee (1). Interviewees are not named in this paper.
17. Author's interview with Interviewee (2).
18. *The Straits Times,* August 9, 1980.
19. *The Straits Times,* "That's My Buoy Lightermen Get New Home and a Pat on the Back," August 5, 1983. See also Poon Im Hung, "PSA's Role in the Cleaning up Program," *Action Plan for the Seas of East Asia: COBSEA Workshop on Cleaning Up of Urban Rivers* (Singapore, 14–16 January, 1986), Annex 10E.
20. Poon, "PSA's Role in the Cleaning up Program."
21. *The Straits Times,* September 1, 1983.

22. Cited in Blackburn, "Oral History," p. 205.
23. *The Straits Times,* "That's My Buoy Lightermen Get New Home and a Pat on the Back," August 5, 1983.
24. Blackburn, "Oral History," p. 207.
25. Roseman, "How We Built the Road," p. 837.
26. Author's interview with Interviewee (3).
27. *The Straits Times,* "Cleaner Water and Better Facilities," September 18, 1983.
28. Author's interview with Interviewee (4).
29. Author's interview with Interviewee (3).
30. Roseman, "How We Built the Road," p. 837, 838.
31. Author's interview with Interviewee (2).
32. Author's interview with Interviewee (3). Also present was Interviewee (1).
33. Author's interview with Interviewee (3).
34. Author's interview with Interviewee (2).
35. See extended discussion in Stephen Dobbs, *The Singapore River: A Social History, 1819–2002* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003).
36. *The Straits Times,* August 9, 1980.
37. Roseman, "How We Built the Road," p. 837.
38. T. C. Chang and Shirlena Huang, "Recreating Place, Replacing Memory: Creative Destruction at the Singapore River," *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 46.3 (2005): 272.
39. Public Works Department, *Report on the River Pollution of Singapore River, Atmospheric and Effluent Pollution Study Group*, July 23, 1969, 223/53, Vol. IV.
40. Public Works Department, *Copy of Minute from the Prime Minister to Wong Chooi Sen*, March 26, 1969, 223/53, Vol. V.
41. Author's interview with Interviewee (6).
42. Author's interview with Interviewee (7).
43. Author's interview with Interviewee (4).
44. Author's interview with Interviewee (1).
45. Shigeharu Tanabe and Charles F. Keyes, "Introduction," in *Cultural Crisis and Social Memory: Modernity and Identity in Thailand and Laos,* ed. Shigeharu Tanabe and Charles F. Keyes (Anthropology of Asia series; London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), pp. 2–6.
46. Roseman, "How We Built the Road" p. 838.
47. Ibid.
48. Author's interview with Interviewee (5).
49. Author's interview with Interviewee (3).
50. Ibid.
51. *The Straits Times,* June 10, 1999.
52. Ministry of Information and the Arts, *The Renaissance City Report* (Singapore: Ministry of Information and the Arts, 2000).
53. Brenda S. A. Yeoh, "Cosmopolitanism and Its Exclusions in Singapore," *Urban Studies* 41.12 (2004): 2434.
54. Urban Redevelopment Authority, *Living the Next Lap: Towards a Tropical City of Excellence* (Singapore: Urban Redevelopment Authority, 1991), p. 25.
55. Brenda S. A. Yeoh and Lily Kong, "Reading Landscape Meanings: State Constructions and Lived Experiences in Singapore's Chinatown," *Habitat International* 18.4 (1994): 29.

56. Sharon MacDonald, "Undesirable Heritage: Fascist Material Culture and Historical Consciousness in Nuremberg," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 12.1 (2006): 11.
57. Urban Redevelopment Authority, *Annual Report*, 1985, p. 1.
58. Tim Winter, *Post-Conflict Heritage, Postcolonial Tourism: Culture, Politics and Development at Angkor* (Routledge studies in Asia's transformation; Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2007), p. 40.
59. Teo and Huang, "Tourism and Heritage Conservation in Singapore," p. 599.
60. Ibid.
61. Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa, eds., *Intangible Heritage* (London, New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 3–4.
62. Author's interview with Interviewee (3).
63. Author's interview with Interviewees (2) and (4).
64. Roseman, "How We Built the Road" p. 844.
65. Teo and Huang, "Tourism and Heritage Conservation in Singapore," p. 594.
66. Denis Byrne, "A Critique of Unfeeling Heritage," *Intangible Heritage*, p. 231.
67. Ibid., p. 231.
68. Ahmed Skounti, "The Authentic Illusion; Humanity's Intangible Cultural Heritage, the Moroccan Experience," *Intangible Heritage*, p. 74.
69. David Lowenthal, "Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory," *Geographical Review* 65.1 (1975): 30.
70. Peter Fritzsche, "Specters of History: On Nostalgia, Exile, and Modernity," *The American Historical Review* 106.5 (2001): 1617.
71. Popular Memory Group, "Popular Memory Theory, Politics, Method," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson, 2nd edition (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 44–45.
72. Ibid. p. 44.
73. See for example, *Singapore Lifeline: The River and Its People* (Times Books International in Conjunction with the Oral History Department. Singapore, 1986). While filled with interesting photographs, short commentaries, and quotes from people associated with the river, such texts hardly qualify as "good history."
74. Roseman, "How We Built the Road," p. 837.

Contributors

Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied is assistant professor at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore. He is the author and editor of six books, namely, *Rethinking Raffles* (2005), *Muslims as Minorities* (2009), *Reframing Singapore* (2009), *Colonialism, Violence and Muslims in Southeast Asia* (2009), *Singapore in Global History* (2011), and *Melayu: The Politics, Poetics and Paradoxes of Malayness* (2011). He has published more than 30 refereed articles, including those in international-refereed journals such as the *Journal of Social History*, *Critical Asian Studies*, *Time and Society*, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, and *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*. His research interests include decolonization, social identities, ethnic minorities, history of ideas, with a special focus on Muslim Southeast Asia.

Kevin Blackburn is an associate professor in History at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He publishes on and teaches the areas of oral history, heritage, the prisoner of war experience, and war memory. He co-wrote with Karl Hack *Did Singapore Have to Fall?* (2004) and *War Memory and the Making of Modern Malaysia and Singapore* (2012), and co-edited with Karl Hack *Forgotten Captives in Japanese Occupied Asia* (2008). He also authored, *The Sportsmen of Changi* (2012).

Chou Wen Loong is currently a PhD candidate at Xiamen University, China, and a lecturer at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia. He researches on Chinese studies and Malaysian Chinese literature. His publications include "Criticism and Wayfinding: The Commentary Writing of Malaysian Chinese Society in the 1990s (2011)," and *A Valley Where Birds and Insects Sing for Hope: Stories of Sungai Buloh Leprosy Settlement* (2012, with Loh Choy Mun). Chou is a member of the Save Valley of Hope Solidarity Group.

Rommel A. Curaming is a lecturer in History and Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Brunei Darusallam (UBD). Before joining UBD, he was a postdoctoral fellow at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and a postdoctoral researcher under the Endeavour Award Australia at La Trobe University. He completed his PhD at the Australian National University

(ANU) with a thesis on the dynamics of state-historian relations in Indonesia and the Philippines. He has published on a range of areas including the history and memory of political violence, state-historian relations, the politics of knowledge production and consumption, and the comparative history and historiography of Island Southeast Asia.

Stephen Dobbs is a lecturer in Asian Studies at the University of Western Australia, Perth. He has a long-standing interest in social history, Southeast Asian maritime history, environmental history, and colonialism in Asia. He has authored two books, *The Singapore River: A Social History 1819–2002* (2002); and *Tuan Djeck: A Biography* (2003). He is currently researching and publishing on issues relating to water and social justice issues in various parts of Southeast Asia as well as schemes from the mid-nineteenth century for the construction of a shipping canal through the Kra Isthmus of Thailand.

Julara Damrongviteetham has a BA in Political Science from Thammasat University, an MA in Anthropology from Chiang Mai University and is currently preparing to undertake her PhD. She works as a project officer for Berghof Foundation. Based in Bangkok, Thailand, she implements a range of activities related to peace support, especially in the area of dialogue and mediation. Prior to joining Berghof, she was program officer at the Asia Foundation and had worked at the Peace Information Center for organizing and facilitating dialogue and cultural fluency workshops.

Ho Sok Fong is currently a PhD student in Human Science and Society at the Chinese Studies Department of Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Previously, she was a lecturer at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia. Her main research areas are Chinese studies and Chinese literature. Her publications include *The Study of Milou: Detour and Fantasy* (2008) and a collection of short stories, *Mi Gong Tan Zhi* (The Labyrinth of Weave, 2012). She is a member of the Save Valley of Hope Solidarity Group.

Ernest Koh is a senior lecturer in the School of Philosophical, Historical and International Studies at Monash University. His area of research includes twentieth-century overseas Chinese history, oral history, and memory in Asia, and nationalism and the end of empire in Southeast Asia. He is author of *Singapore Stories: Language, Class, and the Chinese of Singapore* (2010) and *Diaspora at War: The Chinese of Malaya between Empire and Nation 1937–1945* (forthcoming in 2013).

Leong Kar Yen is an assistant professor with the Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman in Malaysia. He is also a graduate of the National University of Singapore's Southeast Asian Studies Department. He is interested in, among

other things, the culture, history, and politics of Southeast Asia and writes on the relationship between the state and the individual. He is currently conducting research on memory, ideology, and human rights in the region.

Kah Seng Loh is an assistant professor at the Institute for East Asian Studies, Sogang University. He works on little-studied subjects in the history of modern Southeast Asia. His present research investigates the transnational and social history of the making of modern Southeast Asia after the Second World War. Loh is author of three books, *The University Socialist Club and the Contest for Malaya: Tangled Strands of Modernity* (coauthored 2012); *The Makers and Keepers of Singapore History* (coedited 2010); and *Making and Unmaking the Asylum: Leprosy and Modernity in Singapore and Malaysia* (2009). Two more books of his are forthcoming: *Squatters into Citizens: The 1961 Bukit Ho Swee Fire and the Making of Modern Singapore* and *Controversial History Education in Asian Contexts* (coedited). He was previously a school teacher and still speaks to students and teachers about the joys and challenges of studying the past.

Alistair Thomson is professor of History at Monash University in Melbourne and was previously professor of Oral History at the University of Sussex in England. Al's research and teaching explores the ways in which different kinds of life story evidence can illuminate the past and its meanings in the present lives of individuals and society. His books include: *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (1994), *The Oral History Reader* (1998 and 2006, with Rob Perks), *Ten Pound Poms: Australia's Invisible Migrants* (2005, with Jim Hammerton), *Moving Stories: An Intimate History of Four Women across Two Countries* (2011), and *Oral History and Photography* (2011, with Alexander Freund). Website: http://arts.monash.edu.au/history/staff/athomson.php

Emilie Wellfelt is a PhD student at Linnaeus University, Sweden. Her main topic is the changing uses of history in modern Indonesia, focusing on the Alor islands. Wellfelt has extensive fieldwork experience, mainly in Eastern Indonesia, and has during the last decade conducted research within the academic fields of history, social anthropology, and ethnography. She has published "Returning to Alor: Retrospective Documentation of the Cora Du Bois Collection at the Museum of World Culture, Gothenburg, Sweden," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 37.108 (2009), and "Malielehi—Freedom Fighter or Mad Murderess?" in Tradition, Identity, and History-Making in Eastern Indonesia, ed. Hans Hägerdal (2011). In fall 2011, Wellfelt was a visiting scholar at the Australian National University in Canberra. Starting in 2013, she will be part of the research team for a new project financed by Volkswagen Stiftung called "Roos and Ruins: A Project to Document the Ujir Language of the Aru Islands."

Index