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**‘TENSE PASTS,
PRESENT TENSIONS’:**

**POSTCOLONIAL MEMORYSCAPES
AND THE MEMORIALISATION OF
THE SECOND WORLD WAR
IN PERAK, MALAYSIA**

HAMZAH MUZAINI

**THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**Department of Geography
University of Durham
June 2009**

ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with how the Second World War is memorialised in Perak, Malaysia. It considers memoryscapes (or memory practices and sites) within the state dedicated to the war, established not only by state agencies but also grassroots actors. In terms of findings, the thesis first highlights how the Perak state has sought to ‘postcolonialise’ (read: ‘nationalise’) public representations of what was an event that took place when Malaysia was still part of ‘colonial’ Malaya, and the issues associated with it, particularly how, despite efforts to make the war (and its attendant memoryscapes) something its people could identify with, the state has been criticised as exclusionary of ‘local’ war stories and partial to a ‘foreign’ audience, thus alienating its population and *reproducing* much of how war commemoration in Perak was when Malaysia was under British rule before. Generally, the thesis demonstrates the fraught nature of memoryscapes and how there can be fundamental limits to which such ‘postcolonialising’ projects may be successfully realised on the ground.

The second concern of the thesis is on the ways in which war narratives of the war that are marginalised within official representations may still survive in other forms and on other sub-national scales. In interrogating these memoryscapes ‘from below’, the thesis reveals that, while some locals prefer to mark the war in a more private fashion so as to covertly resist state tendencies to be exclusionary, or out of fear of reprisals from the state (due to remembering controversial aspects of the war past), the most widely-cited reason is still the simple desire to remember according to local customs, religious beliefs and socio-cultural norms. In doing so, it showcases alternative forms of memory-making that problematises traditional understandings of

war commemoration common within prevailing literature, and highlights ways in which contestations against elite memory and heritage practices may not always emerge in oppositional fashion or enacted in clearly overt and public ways but also through the absence of voice. Additionally, the thesis also challenges the tendency to celebrate grassroots practices of memory-making as necessarily ‘recuperative’ of official exclusions of the past. As the situation in Perak exemplifies, these too can be just as political and exclusionary, where, in many cases, the locals themselves may represent barriers to emergent war memories as much as they can be the champions.

Lastly, the thesis touches upon the ways in which ‘the material’ may be appropriated towards forgetting the war, not only officially by the state but also by those who went through the war as ordinary civilians. It then illustrates how, despite efforts ‘to put the past behind them’, sometimes memories of war can still ‘emerge unbidden’ to involuntarily force individuals to confront the war past even when they would rather not recall it. In doing so, the thesis demonstrates how material legacies of the war can be utilised not only to *presence*, but also to *absence*, the war, although at times ‘the material’ too can undermine efforts to render the past passé. More broadly, the thesis thus contributes not only to debates about postcolonial memory-making and politics, and the complex nature of grassroots remembrances, but also the role of materiality within processes of forgetting, specifically in showing how ‘the material’ can at times exercise agency on humans as much as the reverse is possible. The thesis is based on data collected via textual analysis, participant observation and interviews.

Keywords: Postcolonial Memoryscapes, Memory, Scale, Grassroots Resistance, Public Silences, Materiality, Forgetting, Immanent Past, WWII, Perak

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HAMZAH MUZAINI, June 2009

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CHAPTER ONE

An Introduction

1.1 Prologue



Fig. 1.1: 74 Main Street, Papan (Source: Author)

‘On the outside, this house did not look any different from the row of houses across the street. When Law Siak Hong opened the door and invited us in, we were captivated, not by what we saw but more of what we felt when we stepped in. It felt like we had actually stepped into the house of legendary World War Two heroine Sybil Kathigasu’. (Tan Ju-Eng 2007)

In 2003, without much pomp and fanfare, Law Siak Hong, President of the Perak Heritage Society, inaugurated no. 74 Main Street (**Fig. 1.1**), an unassuming little shophouse in Papan, a town 16 km out of Ipoh, the capital of Perak, Malaysia, into Sybil’s Clinic @ Papan, a museum to honour Sybil Kathigasu (**Fig. 1.2**), a local who contributed much towards efforts to resist the Japanese during the Second World War in Malaysia (then British Malaya) (1941-45), particularly in providing medical treatment and supplies to anti-Japanese resistance fighters operating in the jungles

surrounding Papan then and sustaining a secret transmitter radio to keep abreast of war developments, with which she updated the resistance. For these activities, she was later arrested by the Japanese and tortured, which resulted in injuries from which she never recovered despite being sent to England for urgent treatment after the war. She died on 4 June 1949 but not before she completed her autobiography, *No Dram of Mercy*, was awarded the George Medal by the British government and became known by some as Malaya's foremost *local* war heroine (Chin 2006; Ho T.M. 2006).



Fig. 1.2: Sybil Kathigasu

The impetus that led Law to embark on his labour was the fact that, for a long time since British Malaya became postcolonial Malaysia in 1957, there were no attempts to officially memorialise Sybil Kathigasu or, in actual fact, even the war as it happened within its geoborders more generally (see Cheah 2007). Even when this changed in the late 1980s, when the war, including Sybil's role within it, was tentatively introduced as part of national heritage in Malaysia, Law felt more should be done to counter the state's selective tendencies in remembering some aspects of the war (and Sybil's story) and not others. Thus, Law went on to convert the ground floor of the Papan shophouse into a gallery of items from the 1940s, photographs of Sybil and her family, and anecdotes of Sybil's story drawn from her autobiography.

The physical structures of the building were carefully maintained, and the interior recreated as faithfully as possible to the original so as to enable its visitors to get a true glimpse of what it was like during the war, and ‘to allow them to be transported back in time to when Sybil was actually there’ (Law, pers comm. 2007) (**Fig. 1.3**).



Fig. 1.3: Law Siak Hong at Sybil's Clinic (source: author)

This ploy seemed to have worked for some of its visitors, such as Tan Ju-Eng and his friends (see quote at head of section, and comments in the museum's visitors' books), where entering the museum, located where Sybil accomplished much of her anti-Japanese resistance work, was compared to stepping into the past and imagining what the place was like when Sybil Kathigasu lived there. When I first visited the museum in 2007, I too could feel the extent to which the contents of the shophouse, in fact the whole town itself, transported me to a time past, to an old and quaint Malaysia I have only read about in books, to a moment far removed from the present, an ambience that was further accentuated by the many abandoned ruins surrounding Sybil's clinic – that have, on many occasions, earned Papan the status of being ‘a ghost town’ (see *New Straits Times* 24 February 2006) (**Fig. 1.4**) – the friendly residents and ‘echoes’ of what Malaysia must have been like when it was Malaya.



Fig. 1.4: Dilapidated buildings at Papan earning it a ‘ghost town’ status (source: author)

Still, Law intimated that ‘it has not been easy’ (pers. comm. 2007), sharing how the museum has faced many challenges, from the lack of state funding and public recognition which have prevented him from developing and promoting the site further to the need for more infrastructural developments in Papan. Indeed, Papan today is a stark contrast to what it was like in its heydays – a bustling mining town in the early twentieth century (Khoo and Lubis 2005) – since many of its residents have moved away leaving Papan to become only a shadow of its former self. While this has in some ways contributed much to the quaintness of the town as it stands, it also means there is no critical mass to qualify Papan as in need of public buses – despite Law’s best efforts to counter this – which has in turn made the town (and museum) difficult to access. These factors have thus led to, as Law puts it, ‘many local Malaysians not knowing about Sybil or the museum, and visitors to the site being mainly foreign visitors on coaches and heritage enthusiasts with their own transport’.

1.2 Key Research Objectives

The example of Sybil’s Clinic @ Papan, as briefly recounted above, ‘speaks’ to many concerns in which scholars on war commemoration have dabbled, and this thesis is interested in taking forward. Three of these are of particular relevance here:

(1) the theme of postcolonial memory-making and its politics; (2) issues to do with grassroots remembrances (over multiple scales and formats) and public reception (and resistance) of official memoryscapes; and (3) the role of materiality in practices associated with remembering and forgetting. Based on the empirical example of how the Second World War is memorialised in Malaysia generally (and Perak more specifically), the three concerns as they are considered within the thesis, along with the key research objectives that have guided it, are briefly elaborated in this section.

1.2.1 Postcolonial Politics of Memory-Making

First, as exemplified in how the Sybil story has been marginalised by the state (as well as the federal) government within Malaysia's official historiography (see Chin Peng 2006; Khoo and Lubis 2005), the above example reflects upon how elite and dominant groups, particularly the nation-state, are often highly political and selective when remembering the (war) past, privileging particular aspects of history that are perceived as palatable to present constructions of identity and projections of an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991), and discarding or downplaying those that are irrelevant or potentially threatening to these current endeavours (see Ashplant et al 2000; Gillis 1994; Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983). The selective nature of national remembrances is particularly pertinent to consider where the event itself was part of an Imperial past, such that nations may desire to forget such a past so as to concentrate on only crafting an identity that could intimate a more 'postcolonial' present or future, free from 'colonial' associations (see Yeoh 2003; Bunnell 2004b).

Many geographers, particularly, have centred their attention on how such selectivity of memory practices – to remember or not to remember the (war) past – can be

officially exercised through the (re)appropriation of space (Hoelscher and Alderman 2004; Johnson 1995). The premise here is how, through the establishment (as well as its corollary, the iconoclastic destruction) of museums, monuments and other forms of memorialisation (via material objects and embodied ceremonies) – collectively referred to here as ‘memoryscapes’ – nations attempt to project a particular, highly specific narrative of its history, without warts and all, and one that works towards the realisation of an officially-moulded collective identity and a shared past (see Forty 1999). As much as this endeavour is targeted towards gelling the people together as well as, in a postcolonial context, to distinguish the nation from what it may have been like under colonialism before (see Lahiri 2003), it is also to be projected to the world as a means of promulgating a very unique version of the nation, as one people, different from other nations – this is ‘us’, different from ‘you’ (see Anderson 1991).

Yet, while these studies have contributed much towards understanding how tense or violent pasts are officially memorialised within today’s contexts, as well as the present tensions that may come along with them, they have tended to concentrate on case studies drawn from the West (for exceptions, see Muzaini and Yeoh 2007; Legg 2005b; Simon 2003; Kusno 2003). Within studies on Second World War remembrance, particularly, there has also been a certain partiality towards the event mainly as it took place in Europe, most evident in the burgeoning literature on Holocaust remembrance (Fujitani et al 2001; Olick 2007). As for studies on the Asia-Pacific theatre of the war, these have largely been the preserve of historians rather than geographers (see Ahmad 2006, 2007; Blackburn and Hack 2003; Cheah 2007). Given the dearth of geographical studies on the commemoration of the Second World War outside the sphere of the ‘West’, the current thesis thus seeks to address a

clear gap within the literature by considering how the Second World War is officially memorialised within the (non-Western) context of postcolonial Malaysia (**Map 1.1**).



Map 1.1: Location of West Malaysia

Previously a British colony, Malaysia gained its independence in 1957. Yet, while the Second World War played a significant role in liberating it ‘from the White colonial yoke [and] the predatory fangs of Western colonialism’ (Wong 2001: 223), for a long time, it was not something Malaysia, or many of the newly-appointed postcolonial nations in Southeast Asia then, were keen on marking (Lunn 2007). In Malaysia, Cheah (2007) refers to this as the ‘Black-out Syndrome’ of official war commemoration within the nation (see also Harper 2001, 2007). This changed in the late 1980s when the government changed its stance towards acknowledging the war as a salient watershed in the nation’s history. In such a light, this thesis is thus firstly interested in exploring how this turnaround in the Malaysian federal government’s

official stance and attitude towards the Second World War – from disavowal to acceptance as part of postcolonial identity-building – was translated on the ground.

With regards the issue of elite memory-making and politics in Malaysia, the thesis particularly considers the ways in which the federal (and state) government has sought to ‘postcolonialise’ (or ‘nationalise’) memories of what was essentially a ‘colonial’ event when the nation was still part of British Imperialism, albeit one that took place on ‘local’ soil. To ‘postcolonialise’ here is taken on two levels: by inserting it within ‘national’ perspectives and narratives so as to allow Malaysians to identify with what has frequently been referred to as ‘the war between [foreign] empires’ (Wong 2001b); and to highlight the plight and experiences of Malay(si)an locals during the war, experiences that have largely been marginalised, if not forgotten, within the commemorative practices of the British government after the war right up till Malaysia’s independence (or *Merdeka*). In that light, the thesis primarily seeks to examine the extent to which the postcolonial government has been successful in making the Second World War resonate with its local population, and whether it has managed to represent local war experiences as specifically intended.

1.2.2 Grassroots Response, Resistance and Remembrances

Prevailing studies on war commemoration have generally been prone to emphasise the ways in which conflicts of the past have been officially memorialised within the present towards the promulgation of national identities and how, in the process, distinct aspects of history are blanketed over and put aside (see Cooke 2000). Yet, what may be elided within public representations of the war does not necessarily mean that it slips into oblivion, where it may still be remembered elsewhere, as

Law's attempt to remember the Sybil story through his very own grassroots museum in Papan has exemplified. Two particular aspects of this are noteworthy here. First, the fact that, although Law's efforts can be seen as a means of countering official forgetting by the state, it has not emerged in any antithetical way but via the establishment of an alternative site of remembrance on other more grassroots scales (see Young 1993). Second, it would also seem that his project has been impeded not only 'from above', in terms of state non-support, financially and infrastructurally, but also 'from below', especially considering its generally diminished local visitorship.

This speaks to the second main theme of the thesis, that of grassroots remembrance and resistance. Forster (2004) once highlighted the fact that scholars on memory and commemoration have emphasised too much how memoryscapes are produced, usually by elite practitioners ('place-made'), at the expense of analysis of how individuals and groups on the ground ('place-user') have responded to them. Indeed, while it is important to expose and reveal the ways in which memoryscapes are formed – through spatial, material and 'embodied' practices (see Connerton 1989) – it is just as important to examine grassroots perceptions of these, and whether officially crafted meanings and intentions are accepted or resisted 'from below'. This scholarly oversight is indeed something that has changed given how scholars are now beginning to consider both the manufacturing of elite memoryscapes as well as local or public acceptance or contestations of them (see for examples, Starrett 2003; Simon 2003; Gough 2004; Charlesworth et al 2006; Ashplant et al 2000 and Lahiri 2003).

Yet, in almost all these examples, there is often still the tendency to restrict evaluations to highly visible and *vocalised* contestations against official

remembrances, such that the lack of public criticism may be easily misconstrued as complicity on the part of locals with regards to how a war should be memorialised (Muzaini and Yeoh 2007). This thesis intends to consider how elite and official memoryscapes can also be resisted through public ‘silences’, where individuals and groups on the ground exercise their agency and resistance not on the public stage, or through public displays of disapproval, but in producing their own alternative grassroots memoryscapes (as Law did with Sybil’s Clinic @ Papan), criticising public representations of the war in private, or enacting their own strategies for remembering the (war) past in their own ways according to their own personal preferences and cultural conventions. In that regard, the thesis does not assume public silences to official war commemoration as complicity but to excavate resistances that may not be discerned publicly but only via conversations with locals.

More than that, the thesis also examines grassroots remembrances that are not direct responses per se to official memoryscapes. This is to consider how memories of the war in Malaysia are also remembered on multiple scales other than, and separate to, the official, including those within communal circles, institutional levels as well as on an individual capacity. In doing so, the thesis adds to the literature on war commemoration in two ways. First, it counters the tendency of prevailing works on the subject to focus mainly on memoryscapes to do with nation-building (see Mitchell 1999; Raivo 2000; Kapferer 1996) and tourism (Delyser 1999; Lennon and Foley 2000; Muzaini et al 2007), towards also reflecting on memoryscapes produced for purposes of mourning and other less obvious purposes (Winter 1995; Winter and Sivan 1999; Ashplant et al 2000). This is not to say though that the thesis does not consider elite-driven memoryscapes. Rather, it considers both elite as well as

grassroots memoryscapes, but particularly how they also interact and/or intersect with one another towards eventually breaking down the dichotomies between individual and collective forms of remembrance (see Radstone 2005; Olick 2008).

Second, the thesis seeks to analyse memoryscapes that are not necessarily found within bounded and high profile sites – such as museums, battlefield memorials, and spectacular monuments – that are more typical of studies on war commemorations currently. Instead, it picks up on the call for studies on memoryscapes that are less orthodox and not necessarily public (or even collective) (see Atkinson 2007; Simpson and Corbridge 2008) particularly within the localised context of Malaysia. Within the literature on memory more generally, scholars have indeed begun to consider more nomadic and dispersed forms of remembrances, such as through street names (see Azaryahu 1996; Alderman 2003), and those found on other scales that are more personal, such as those evident within the realms of the home (see Anderson B. 2004; Tolia-Kelly 2004a). In the context of the war remembrance, however, this has not been as clearly flagged up (see Saunders 2003 for exception). As such, the thesis brings the literature on war remembrance to par with works on memory writ large.

In addition, the thesis also questions the nature of non-elite representations of the war to be ‘recuperative’, understood here as having the ability to restore memories that have been obscured within public memoryscapes manufactured by dominant agencies such as the state (for a similar critique, see Confino 1999). In this regard, it examines whether grassroots agents of commemoration, such as Law Siak Hong (and his efforts to revive memories of Sybil in Malaysia), can indeed be ‘romanticised’, as genuinely non-political, ‘recuperative’ and capable of salvaging officially sidelined

memories of (the experiences of) the people. As the thesis shows, to accept this is to render too much to grassroots remembrances. Rather, grassroots remembrances can also be driven by ulterior motives (aside from memory recuperation) and can at times be *as political* and *as exclusive* as the state in their attempts to mark the past. Further, the thesis also demonstrates how instances of memorialisation of and by the people too may be the stumbling blocks to particular memories of the past from emerging.

1.2.3 Materiality, Remembering, Forgetting

Central to the thesis generally is also the question of how the material world is appropriated not only towards processes of remembering but also to forget (see Forty 1999; Kuchler 1999). In the above example of the memorialisation of Sybil, it has been highlighted how her experiences have been officially marginalised not only by her not being inserted into national narratives on the war, but also through *non-markers* (or the paucity of physical traces) on Malaysia's memoryscapes. In this case, some would argue that, by erasing any material or spatial evidence of Sybil and her war escapades, over time, her memories would be rendered obsolete and eventually forgotten (Bell 1997; Saunders 2003a, b, 2002). This is premised on the assumption that memories (read: 'ghosts') frequently attach themselves to the material – in places, objects or bodies as triggers of what happened in the past within the present – such that the disposal, removal or unmarking of these materials could eventually render the memories attached to them relegated to the past (Forty 1999).

The idea that there is something inherent in the material which can be appropriated towards remembering – as triggers for particular war narratives (and not others), and to assist in *presencing* the past for capitalistic purposes – is one that many scholars

have picked up on (see Raivo 2000a, 2000b; Seaton 1999; Williams 2007). Yet, there has not been much interrogation of how the material may also be appropriated and manipulated to forget (Forty 1999). Even when scholars demonstrate how memories are at times rendered obscured through selective remembrances and the processes of abstraction and generalisation, it has been largely centred on how this is done on the scale of collective memorialisation as accomplished by elites. In this regard, the thesis plugs into the growing academic interests in issues of ‘materiality’ (see Jackson 2000; Hoskins 2007) and also contributes to the growing literature on memory by considering how the material may be manipulated towards rendering aspects of the past forgotten altogether, both on the scale of elites and non-elites.

More than that, the thesis also examines the temporal relationship between the present and the past (Crang and Travlou 2001). This pertains particularly to the premise that processes of *intentional* forgetting (when one seeks to consciously render the past passé vis-à-vis natural forgetting) are not always successful given that memories of what happened before may erupt within the present unpredictably as ‘the immanent past’ (Birth 2006). This is already exemplified in the case of Sybil’s remembrance above, where the official desire to forget her story was hampered by Law’s grassroots efforts. This thesis provides many other manifestations of the ‘immanent’ (war) past in Malaysia, not only on the level of the collective but also on the scale of the personal, particularly by way of cases of ‘involuntary remembering’ (see Anderson B. 2004; Stanley 2000). In doing so, it demonstrates how the material can be capitalised upon to forget, but also how it can also be the very impediment that prevents the past from being rendered completely passé and relegated to the past.

1.3 Researching War Memorialisation in Malaysia

To summarise the discussion thus far, this thesis considers the plural ways in which the Second World War has been commemorated (or not) within the particular non-Western context of Malaysia, especially since the late 1980s when the postcolonial government shifted its attitude towards the war from disavowal to embracing it as part of its nation-building machinery. The main focus of empirical study is on the nation's official memoryscapes as well as those that are found on more grassroots scales. The key research objectives of the thesis may be summarised as follows:

- I. To examine how the Second World War is officially commemorated through public memoryscapes in Malaysia; how the government has sought to 'postcolonialise' (read: 'nationalise') memories of what was essentially a 'colonial' war; and the extent to which it has been successful in doing so;
- II. To excavate alternative spatialisations of war memories in Malaysia on scales other than the national; to highlight how official memoryscapes are popularly interpreted; as well as, in the lack of publicly vocal criticisms, to find out the extent to which such 'silences' are indicative of complicity with the national government with regards to the best way to remember (or forget) the war;
- III. To explore the role of the material in war remembrance, with a specific focus on how it may be manipulated towards *presencing*/ transmitting/ forgetting war memories in Malaysia; and to investigate how, given the capacity for the past to return unbidden by way of involuntary remembering, the extent to which material strategies to forget the (war) past may be rendered ineffective.

In achieving these objectives, the thesis aims to provide an empirical case study of Second World War commemoration not only in a non-Western context, but one that is also set against a *multiracial* postcolonial Asian society. As such, it differs from much of the prevailing (geographical) literature on the subject which tends to emphasise processes of, and issues to do with, the remembrance of the war in and by Western societies and where the bulk of which are tied to the memorialisation of events as they took place in the European (vis-à-vis the Asia-Pacific) war theatre. The thesis shows how non-Western societies have much to offer in terms of geographically distinct, culturally-specific and non-conventional modes of remembrance that could contribute towards a much more nuanced understanding of how memories of the (war) past may be brought to bear upon the present, manifested over myriad scales and in various (physical and embodied) permutations, as well as the (postcolonial) politics that are tied to and associated with these memoryscapes.

On a less conceptual note, the thesis also contributes towards providing a voice to Malaysians who have, for a long time, been disenfranchised by their positions as marginalised subjects – first by the British Empire and later by the Malaysian government – and whose war experiences have frequently been relegated to play second fiddle to those belonging to Imperial combatants. In addressing the concerns and practices, particularly of those who themselves went through the Second World War as ordinary civilians (or war civilians), the thesis thus explores war remembrance on a more everyday scale not necessarily made visible through grand gestures and spectacular memorials. The urgency for this to be undertaken is further underscored by the fact that many of these war civilians are in their advanced years now such that their stories are already at risk of being completely forgotten if nothing

is done to analyse them now. This is especially critical in the specific case of Malaysia where the state has not been keen on harvesting these stories themselves.

Given the size of Malaysia, it is of course not possible to study how the war is commemorated within the whole nation. Thus, the thesis draws from the specific case of Perak in West Malaysia (**Map 1.2**). With a population of 2, 315, 000, comprising *bumiputeras* (literally ‘sons of the soil’: Malays and the indigenous peoples) and *non-bumiputeras* (Chinese, Indians, others), Perak was selected for two reasons. First, the state saw much of the military action that took place during the war in terms of battles and the high level of ‘local resistance’ against the Japanese, thus making the war an extremely ‘tense past’ that had inevitably left an impression on its people (Akashi 1995). Second, Perak is also now the location of much of the recent ‘buzz’ in local war remembrance in Malaysia (including its federal capital of Kuala Lumpur), spearheaded by state authorities as well as Perakians anxious to prevent their war histories from being forgotten, thus providing much fodder to explore some of the ‘present tensions’ in war memorialisations in Malaysia today.



Map 1.2: Location of Perak in Malaysia

In the light of the thesis seeking to examine *both* memorialisation practices that are state-led (usually visible, open to the public and high profile) as well as those that are accomplished on a more private, personal scale, the thesis considers both ‘sites of memory’ (Nora 1989), such as museum, monuments and memorials, which have been the main empirical staple behind many prevailing studies on war commemoration (see Johson 1995; Gough 2000; Charlesworth et al 2006; Simpson and Corbridge 2008), but also war civilians or those who went through the war first-hand, as objects of enquiry and crucial sources of data. The war civilians particularly then become my way of learning about and examining modes of war remembrance to be found on other scales and within realms that are not necessarily publicly visible, openly vocalised and easily detectible, traditional memory practices that are, particularly in the case of Malaysia, fast disappearing given the extent to which the younger generation has not been enthusiastic in taking on or carrying them forward.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis follows the following structure. **Chapter TWO** positions the study within the larger context of studies on (war) memory and memorialisation more generally. At the same time, it also introduces some of the key concepts that are predominantly used within the thesis. In **Chapter THREE**, the focus then turns to the research process itself, particularly the different methods that were adopted to achieve the research objectives that were highlighted earlier (see above); the ethical issues and problems encountered during fieldwork; and how these were (largely) mitigated. This is then followed by **Chapter FOUR** which seeks to give a broad historical background to the Second World War as it took place in Malaysia and the genesis of its official commemoration by the nation since securing its independence from the

British in 1957. It also examines some of the major discourses and debates that have emerged on the war. As such, it contextualises the case studies that are to follow, drawn from Perak, within the frame of remembrance by the nation more generally.

The next two chapters proceed to explore two different examples of war remembrance in Perak that are spearheaded by the Perak state and how locals have responded to these. **Chapter FIVE** considers the case of how the war is marked within two of Perak's major cities of Ipoh and Taiping, primarily the historic markers established within the cities by local authorities in the early 1990s. Specifically, the chapter argues that while the state has attempted to 'postcolonialise' the war (through these markers) to salvage local stories and forward the 'colonial' war as nationally relevant, Perakians have still not been able to internalise the war (and the state's efforts to remember it) as being locally significant to them. From physical markers, **Chapter SIX** moves towards a more embodied commemorative practice, in the form of the Cenotaph Remembrance, a recent memorial ceremony organised by the state to remember and honour the memories of those who contributed towards the war within the state of Perak. In analysing the event, the chapter first highlights how the state attempted to produce a memoryscape that is inclusive and locally resonant. Yet, as the chapter then shows, the extent to which the state was able to do so was limited which has in turn led to many Perakians eventually staying away from the event.

This is then followed by an analysis of grassroots remembrances. **Chapter SEVEN** considers how, even in the light of the selective nature of official war memoryscapes, war memories have survived on other more personal, community and institutional scales and not necessarily in antithetical reaction to state remembrances, many

content to keep their criticisms to themselves and maintain ‘public silences’. Far from this indicating state-people complicity on how the war is to be remembered, the chapter argues these ‘silences’ as multivocal of a variety of motivations. **Chapter EIGHT** then focuses on the efforts of Chye Kooi Loong in preserving the Green Ridge battlefield in Kampar. After outlining the ‘re-scaling’ strategies Chye has adopted to pressure the Perak state to mark the battlefield as heritage, it shows how, even after getting the state involved in the project, he still faces challenges in terms of canvassing for local support, thus providing an example of how the grassroots can be an impediment to emerging memories as much as they can also be recuperative.

The last empirical **Chapter NINE** moves away from those who desire to remember the war towards examining individuals who chose to forget the event. Specifically, it touches on the (material) strategies that locals have adopted to forget the event, and how at times this fails due to the propensity for some of these memories to emerge unbidden and unexpectedly via the mechanisms of the immanent war past. In doing so, it first puts particular purchase on the role of the material within these adopted strategies to forget (as much as remember) the war past. Subsequently, the chapter provides examples of how this is not always successful, especially when the past refuses to be forgotten, at times ironically through the very ability of the material to trigger war memories when one least expects it. **Chapter TEN** finally concludes the thesis by tying up the case studies and summarizing the arguments presented. At the same time, it also revisits the example of Sybil’s Clinic @ Papan that started the thesis, particularly in terms of how the findings of the thesis may be applied to it.

CHAPTER TWO

Framing the Thesis: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Memory, ‘Scale’ and Temporality

According to Alon Confino (1997: 1386), the study of ‘memory’ may be defined essentially as a study of the ‘ways in which people construct a sense of the past’. While this may be understood, first, as the exploration into the *contents* of a past, traditionally the preserve of historians, other disciplines, like geography, have also put in much to memory studies, but in terms of the analysis of the tools used by societies to give *form* to these contents. Far from reviewing all the debates within the vast literature (Fentress and Wickham 1992),¹ this chapter unravels three strands: (1) materiality and memorial practices; (2) the cultural politics of postcolonial memory; and (3) the relationship between forgetting and ‘the immanent past’ (Birth 2006). This is followed by how the concepts introduced here are then applied within the context of the thesis, particularly in light of the research objectives posed earlier. Before that, though, this section first conceptualises ‘memory’, as adopted here, as a social and individual construct, and the role of ‘scale’ and time on its formulations.

2.1.1 Memory as a Social *and* Personal Construct

Rather than *a priori* in nature, memory has been widely perceived as a phenomenon that is the product of externalised social processes operating within societies (see Hutton 1993; Schwartz 1982). Maurice Halbwachs was one of the first to propound this view that steers away from more Freudian conceptualisations where memory is seen as nothing more than the internal properties of a subjective mind. According to

¹ While the focus of the review is on geographical works on war commemoration, ideas from other fields on the subject are also elicited as they shed insights and ‘speak’ to the current research project.

Halbwachs (1992: 38), 'It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories'. This points to how it is groups, of which one is a part, that give rise to, and impact upon, recollections. Facilitated by societal traditions and customs, common languages and communicative strategies, individuals are then conditioned to remember only what society has allowed. Shared representations of the past as held by 'memory communities' thus provide frameworks around which individual memories are regulated towards conformity (Klein 2000; Zerubavel 2003, 1996; Jedlowski 2001).

It has been criticised, though, that such a conception of memory has ceded way too much to the ability of 'the social' to determine individual recollections, particularly when they are premised on traumatic events in the past that usually impact upon 'the personal self' beyond the ability of 'the social' to influence them (Winter and Sivan 1999). While there is currency in thinking that memories are socially contextualised, and that structural pressures do play both a facilitative as well as constraining role to memory-making, it is salient to note that collectivised memories can never be truly homogeneous, able to include personally manufactured pasts even if these may go against what collective societal rules prescribe. As Olick (1999: 338) highlights:

'[S]ocial frameworks shape what individuals remember, but ultimately it is only individuals who do the remembering. And shared symbols and deep structures are only real insofar as individuals (albeit sometimes organized as members of groups) treat them as such or instantiate them in practice.'

This presents a counter perspective, where individuals have the ability to articulate their own recollections even if they run against societal representations of the past, and capable, within boundaries, of suppressing/ resuscitating memories of unwanted

(even collective) histories, regardless of what groups dictate (Olick 2007). The fact that individuals are usually members of many groups at any time, each with varying (sometimes antagonistic) shared memories of the same historical event, also shows how the idea of the individual as *just* a passive receptor only of memory ‘collectively framed’ can no longer hold water (see Berliner 2005; Fentress and Wickham 1992).

Thus, ‘memory’ here is a function of both the psychological self, influenced by personal experiences and one’s mental and emotional state of mind, as well as of social forces (see Murakami and Middleton 2006; Radstone 2005; Kenny 1999). To suggest otherwise is to commit what Birth (2006: 175) refers to as ‘psychological’ or ‘cultural’ reductionism that oversimplifies the complexity of memory within societies. Any memory cannot be attributed wholly to individual agency or structural determinants; both are important. This suggests a midpoint where the extent that memory is constituted by the individual or group is only a matter of degree, where ‘the *articulation* of personal experience and larger social histories has systematic effects on recall as well as the personal meanings of historical events’ (White N. 2006: 327). Taking ‘memory’ as personal *and* social, and examining how they interact, it would thus break dichotomies and ‘talk about the process of social remembering in time and the variety of retrospective practices in such a way that does not oppose individual and collective memory to each other’ (Olick 2007: 10).

2.1.2 Memory and ‘Scale’

There can be as many recollections of the past as there are remembering individuals and groups, or ‘memory communities’ (see Berliner 2005; Marshall 2004). One way in which these recollections may be framed is around the notion of ‘scale’. The

premise here is that any activity, remembering included, presides over a variety of ‘hierarchically’ nested scales (Smith, N. 1993; Marston 2000), from the ‘personal’ to the ‘communal’, the ‘national’, and the ‘transnational’ (see Muzaini and Yeoh 2007; Zerubavel 1996; Irwin Zarecka 1994). Within war commemoration, these could range from *individuated* war veterans remembering the war, through to more *group* remembrances by the mnemonic communities such as veterans’ associations, families, the nation and the international population. In so doing, individual and collective memories are thus not placed in opposition to each other, but on a wide spectrum of nested remembrances on a variety of scales, a better reflection of the individuals and groups engaging in memory-making practices within societies today.

Each scale may entail different perspectives of history, determined by what each, the individual or group, seeks to achieve from bringing forth the past and, for collective memory-making, on agreed posited rules by which the individual, as a part of a group, may be bounded (see Hughes 2003; Kong 1999). Each scale also differs in terms of the resources open to them which impact upon the reach of the memory to the public. Yet, even within a collective on a particular scale, composed as it necessarily is by *individual* rememberers, there can be myriad memories, refracted via multiple subject positions and differences constituting the individuals (see McDowell 2004). Even within groups, such as the state, Forest et al (2004) has highlighted how it usually consists of many institutions, each with their own agendas and motives, such that any so-called ‘national memory’ is already a mediated form of the past negotiated by multiple rememberers even before it is projected to the general public (see also Muzaini 2007). Therefore, the assumption of homogeneity and complete consensus in remembrances within certain scales (and groups) is fictitious.

The notion of ‘scale’ in memory practices may be applied not only to mnemonic communities but also to memory narratives. An example would be how memories of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, or the Holocaust, have emerged from being events with ‘local’ (or ‘individual’) saliences, to international ‘global’ phenomena, where their significances have been juxtaposed onto other inhumane perpetrations, and its lessons made relevant to a transnational audience (Yoneyama 1999). As such, when one speaks of memory scales of remembering, it might be in reference to either the ‘scale’ on which an act of recalling the past takes place or it might be the ‘scalar’ lens through which the event is viewed. Thus, an individual may remember the past via the lens of ‘global’ narratives, as much as an individual’s story may be recounted by an ‘international’ group. This way it takes into account how an individual too can be a ‘site of multiple scales’ (see Cidell 2006; Matsuda and Crooks 2007), where *one* is able to use narrative ‘scales’ (of memory) to achieve something, even if this goes against groups located higher up the hierarchical scale, for example, the state.

Regardless, what is most important to note here is how remembering at each ‘scale’ can give rise to conflicting pasts, an indication of how memory varies over space (see Legg 2007), as well as how, even within a certain group, a memory of a particular past may be viewed on a variety of ‘scalar’ lenses depending on who is remembering and to what ends. While formulations of narratives of the past, concocted by individuals on different scales, and within specific groups, may coincide, such as to provide the foundation for the promulgation of a shared memory and collective identity of the group (Gillis 1994; Legg 2007), this is not always the case (see Kansteiner 2002). More often than not, ‘collective’ memories are also often contested and negotiated among members of the group rather than something that

comes together naturally. Thus, to use Olick's (2007: 23) terms, individuals within a group can constitute 'collected memories', or the 'aggregated individual memories of members of a group', as much as it can be 'collective' as when individual memories can give way to a more encompassing singular narrative of an event in the past.

While memories operating within, or at different, scales, those imposed 'from above' or on the grassroots level, do interact with one another, they are also able to exist on their own. The relationship between individuals and groups remembering at one scale, and the 'scalar' lens through which a past is viewed, is rather fluid. By 'rescaling' – 'up-scaling' or 'down-scaling' memory (practices) – perspectives may be manipulated to suit circumstances. An individual may thus decide to switch from remembering as a 'national' subject to remembering as a member of a 'global' community (i.e. 'rescaling' of memory communities), or one can switch from interpreting the past from an 'individual' perspective to considering that same past as also a 'national' event (i.e. 'rescaling' of memory narratives) (Muzaini and Yeoh 2007). Thus, while remembering practices and narratives may be nested within certain scales, they may also be (re)shifted from one scale to another – 'rescaled' – so as to achieve particular objectives and priorities, similar to what Smith N. (1993) would refer to as the process of 'jumping scales' (see Marston 2000; Cidell 2006).

2.1.3 Memory, Temporality and 'the Immanent Past'

Memory here is also conceptualised as being a function of time. Integral to understanding the shape of memory within the present is the question of why there is the need to remember in the first place. In the context of memory communities organized around the remembrance of wars, scholars have demonstrated how

individuals and memory communities remember for a multiplicity of vested interests, such as to perpetuate identities (Gillis 1994), facilitate mourning (Theriault 2003; Patraha 2001), as ballasts to nation-building (Evans 1998), the promotion of tourism (Shackley 2001; Chronis 2005), or for critical reappraisals of the past (Jedlowski 2001; Murakami and Middleton 2006). Despite the reasons for which the past is used within the present, these represent examples of how remembrances are influenced by how it serves current needs (Schwartz 1982). As Jelin and Kaufman (2000: 106) puts it, 'Memory is, in fact, part of the symbolic and political struggle of each time, of each 'present''. Indeed, such a 'presentist' view has formed the backbone of much scholarship on memory, especially within sociology (see Lowenthal 1997, 1985; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Trouillot 1995). A view that may also be traced back to Halbwachs (1992), the premise adopted within this paradigm is that: '*why* remember' influences, mediates and impacts upon the *what* – shape, colour and interpretation – of the past as it is ultimately and contemporarily manifested today.

Accepting that memory is a function of the present, 'presents', in terms of socio-political, cultural and technological climates, do change – today's 'present' may be tomorrow's 'past' – and when this happens, memories too are bound to change. This points towards how acts of remembering are malleable over time such that what is recalled of the past at any one time may differ from others. In Samuel's words (1994: x), memory is 'constantly changing colour and shape according to the emergencies of the moment; that so far from being handed down in the timeless form of 'tradition' it is progressively altered from generation to generation' (see Hutton 1993). Factors that contribute to individual memory changes also include changes in age, thought-beliefs, and personal identities (Legg 2007). More collectively, memory is

challenged by changes in the group's composition, its philosophies and objectives, evolving memberships, socio-political changes, and the existence of other groups (that may hold competing versions of a memory) (Jezernik 1998; Yoneyama 2001).

The 'presentist' view of memory has, however, been criticised as limiting inquiry into how the past that does not serve present needs can affect present action. The argument here is that, while such a present-oriented understanding of memory makes sense, it may be seen as ignoring how the past may also sometimes impose upon the present even when they are not bidden (see Anderson B. 2004). In the context of war remembrances, there have been cases, recorded within the literature on post-traumatic disorders (Stanley 2000) and the Holocaust (Wieviorka and Stark 2006; Kofman 1998; LaCapra 1994) where one cannot help *but* remember the past, where the unspeakable nature of the past makes it, for some individuals, very difficult to forget, even if, socially, the event has been rendered lost to history. These not only represent cases where sometimes 'the social' can fail to contain individual memories, but also how the 'presentist' view does not pay due attention to how memory can at times work its effects onto the present by its own accord (Crang and Travlou 2001).

Birth (2006: 186) refers to this as the 'immanent past', where 'the conspicuous nature of vestiges from the past demand attention; in other cases, such vestiges haunt and subtly structure intersubjective relations; and in still other cases, present experiences unwanted, anxiety-provoking flashbacks'. In some other cases, the past resides within us, exerting itself sometimes beyond our own consciousness, a view that is overlooked by the 'presentist' perspective, such that 'we have come to speak of the uses rather than the influence of the past, and its mementos are often little

more than signatures employed to underscore our present concerns' (Hutton 1993: xxi). In the light of this, therefore, Kansteiner (2002: 195) stipulates that memory studies should 'acknowledge that historical representations are negotiated, selective, present-oriented, and relative, while insisting that the experiences they reflect cannot [always] be manipulated at will'. This stance is adopted by the thesis in considering how processes of 'wanting to forget' may sometimes be impeded particularly via the operational mechanisms of 'memoryscapes' or the materialities of war memory.

2.2 Conceptualising 'Memoryscapes'

Remembering entails recalling a time in history – its people, its geographies, its significance. Yet, as Hussyen (2000) reminds us, where there is remembering, there is also the tendency to forget, always threatening to undermine memory-work (see also Norquay 1999). How then does one avert forgetting? Yates (1966: 12) cites how, during the Renaissance, memory was sustained by classical orators through the humanist tradition of *ars memoria*, or 'arts of memory', of picturing an imaginary space filled with places (*loci*) and images in their minds which helped them to remember speeches, and Nora (1989: 13) avers how 'true memory' used to reside in *milieux de memoire* where the past is perpetuated through 'unspoken traditions, in the individual body's inherent self knowledge, in unstudied reflexes and ingrained memories'. Both show how memory is internalised within mind and body, produced *without* external triggers, and each with the capacity to act as storehouses of memory.

Given factors such as the decline in historical consciousness, the acceleration of time, and increased mediatisation, that has made it burdensome to remember all, however, external aids to memory have increasingly been 'enlisted as bulwarks

against obsolescence, to counter our deep anxiety about the speed of change and the ever shrinking horizons of time and space' (Huysen 2000: 28), which have rendered obsolete the need to remember naturally. Gillis (1994: 17) claims that remembrance is now difficult to achieve 'without access to mementos, images, and physical sites to objectify their memory', and Hess (2007) shows how the rise of the computer memory chip has made it redundant for individuals or groups to remember through more bodily means. Nora (1989) also argues how *milieux of memoire* have given way to *lieux de memoire*, or 'sites of memory' to mitigate memory loss, where 'true memory' is replaced by 'modern memory' which 'relies entirely on the materiality of trace, the immediacy of the recording and visibility of the image'. This suggests a physical and temporal 'distanciation' between individuals and history, such that 'we have all become the alienated tourists of our pasts' (Lambek and Antze 1996: xiii).

The notion of 'sites of memory' has formed the bread and butter of many scholars working on issues of war remembrance. Yet, while research on these 'sites' have produced much insight into how the past is represented, it has still focused too much on bounded and high-profile 'sites' at the expense of others located on other scales and within less public realms (Atkinson 2007). Some scholars have highlighted that Nora (1989) was too quick to dismiss memory practices bound to 'the body' – conceptualised as *milieu de memoire* (or 'environments of memory') – as passé (see Legg 2005b), and that 'bodily' forms of memory making still exist, and have remained a big part of non-Western societies (Cole 2006; Simpson and Corbridge 2008). This thesis considers both 'sites' and 'environments' of memory as highly relevant aspects of memory-making. This section discusses this, particularly the specific role of *materiality* within what I would like to refer to as 'memoriscapes'

(after Yoneyama 1999) – referring to the various modes adopted to ensure personal and collective experiences of the past are not forgotten – particularly what it is about the material that enables it to impact upon and affect, sometimes unpredictably (see below) and how this is at times capitalised upon to project interpretations of the past.

Generally, this plugs into general interests within the social sciences in considering ‘the material’ as more than just the background or pliable resource for human agency, but as also possessing its own ‘agency’ (Gell 1988), enabled by its ‘being’ – its physical constitution and ‘material affordances’ (see Gibson 1977; MacDonald 2006) – and roles that it has played within social circulations throughout its life, or its ‘biography’ (Kopytoff 1986; Appadurai 1986), such that they are able to affect humans even when they have not been asked to do so (Kearnes 2003; Jackson 2000). This is not though to accord the material an ontological life beyond human appropriation, since, as Hoskins (2007: 441) cites, ‘despite being sensitive to the material ...its agency beyond which is endowed by humans, is a conceptual leap not easily made’. Rather, it suggests the material has a ‘life’ beyond language and the need to reveal ‘when and where the materiality of material culture makes a difference rather than just assume its importance in an a priori manner’ (Jackson 2000: 13).

2.2.1 The Spatialisation of War Memories

Within the literature on war and commemoration, many scholars have turned to, and taken on board, Nora’s (1989) conception of ‘sites of memory’ as a way into understanding how memories of wars and other conflicts are brought into the present. These have taken various permutations of ‘sites’, ranging from battlefields (Raivo 2000b), museums (Crampton 2003; Muzaini and Yeoh 2005a; Kapferer 1996;

Yoneyama 2001), monuments (Johnson 1995; Gough and Morgan 2004; Cooke 2000; Young 1993; Stephens 2007), statuarities (Johnson 1994), gardens (Gough 2000); war cemeteries and other ‘deathscapes’ (Azaryahu 1996; Raivo 2000a; 2003; Heffernan 1995; Morris 1998; Muzaini and Yeoh 2007; Foster 2004) and more ‘dispersed’ forms of memory-making practices, such as through street/place names (Alderman 2003; Azaryahu 1996) and commemorative markers and plaques (see Burk 2003). In these instances, types of *place*-related memory-making practices are considered towards understanding how individuals and societies remember conflict.

A central theme within these studies has been the particularities of place as a spatial medium for ‘visually speaking’ a war memory to the present. Many are highlighted for their ability to allow individuals to *imagine* what the war past was like, ‘transporting’ them to when the event happened, where places like battlefields, given their position as ‘witnesses’ to real wars, are seen as effective for ‘triggering’ war memories (Raivo 2000a, b). Saunders (2003b: 8) calls them ‘visceral monuments which speak directly to those whose fighting and suffering created them [where] each crater, trench, and feature of the land was packed with sedimented meanings of unrecorded bravery, relief and tragedy’. According to Raivo (2000a, b), even when a place looks different now, as time and efforts have cleared out the debris of what had happened before, its ‘aura’ still persists, reduced in clarity but never effaced, such that visiting a battlefield today may be seen as synonymous to travelling to the space and time of the war that happened *in that place* in the past (see Saunders 2003a, b).

Bell (1997: 815) refers to this inherent specificity of sites where something happened that has the ability to hold and invoke special meanings as the ‘ghosts of place... a

felt *presence* – an *anima*, *geist*, or *genius* – that possesses and gives a sense of social aliveness to a place’. These ‘ghosts’ can derive from personal experience – this is where I did this or that – or it may be socially inculcated, as when you know that, or hear of, something about a particular place that are then able to allow individuals to imagine what occurred before, through the workings of the ‘spirited and live quality of [the ghosts’] presence, and their stubborn rootedness in particular places’ (Bell 1997: 816; see also Delyser 1999). At war sites, these ‘ghosts’ (of what happened in situ) are what makes sites of atrocity and battlefields ‘mystical places where it is still possible to experience imagined visions and sounds of the past’, and give them ‘a special aura or sense of place [where] the cruelty of war, death, fear, pain and hopelessness is made powerfully present’ (Raivo 2000a: 159, b; Saunders 2003a, b).

Places are seen as not only holding on to the ‘essence’ of a time past, but also souls of those who died there (see Stephens 2007; Winter 1995). An example is the remembrance practices conducted within war cemeteries, where the bodies (and, for some, the souls) of the dead are congregated (Heffernan 1995), or when pilgrims make their way to the Western Front or other battlefields where loved ones may have been sacrificed (Lloyd 1998). In such cases, places are ‘sacralised’ (Azaryahu 1996) where individuals can still come together to mourn the dead, as a way ‘to forge the experience of ‘being in’ a landscape – of simultaneously ‘creating and living the commemorative act’ as an acknowledgement of the sacrifices made by the living as well as the dead’ (Saunders 2003b: 19). These show the importance of ‘place’ in remembering, as ‘surrogates’ of events that occurred there, and people who were also involved in them. Thus, when a particular site is appropriated towards the materialisation of a war past, be it for commemorative purposes or as attractions for

‘dark tourists’ (or those who travel for the sole or partial aim of encountering with death (see Lennon and Foley 2000; Seaton 1999), it is to these ‘ghosts’, as ‘memoried’ by and through these places, which are often capitalised upon to affect.

Yet, in appropriating places or landscapes as spaces of memory, sometimes the originality or ‘authenticity’ of the place itself may not even be of utmost importance (see Delyser 1999, 2003). Some scholars have commented on architecture and urban design to ensure high visibility and depth of attachment for target audiences, regardless of whether actual wars did take place in situ (see MacDonald 2006; Kusno 2000; Young 1993). Others have also pointed to the importance of the centrality of the location as a means of increasing the prominence of a site and allow for easy access (especially where a war took place beyond one’s national borders), thus better able to link the people to ‘familiar landscapes, times and selective memories in an inextricable embrace’ (Mitchell 2003: 445; see also Kapferer 1996). Regardless of the authenticity of the site, it is apparent how space functions in public memory-making, not only as a passive incidental material background to social processes and practices, but are also able to inscribe significance to them (see Johnson 1995: 51).

2.2.2 Less Orthodox ‘Sites’ of War Memories

While studies highlighted above have contributed much towards our understanding of how (war) memories are ‘spatialised’, it has to be said though that there has been a general tendency to focus on fixed, bounded sites of commemoration at the expense of other forms that acts of war remembrance may also take. This could be put down to the influence many early thinkers on remembrance, such as Halbwachs (1992) and Nora (1989), ‘whose emphasis upon *places* and *sites* of memory provided a

convenient *entrée* for geographical studies' (Atkinson 2007: 522), given their visibility and legibility in terms of their location on urban space and the ease in obtaining information on and about them. Focusing on 'sites' also allows for a form of scholarly 'boundary-marking', where analysis is focused within a specific space, which also makes for a contained focus of study, and less messy methodologies. Yet, speaking on the 'spatialisation' of memory, Atkinson (2007: 523) says 'the excessive focus on bounded *sites* of memory risks fetishising place and space too much [thus] threatening to obscure the wider production of social memory *throughout* society'.

Specifically, Atkinson (2007) was pushing for the need to move from *place*-centred analysis of memory towards those that lie within less orthodox materialities. Scholars of memory-making more generally have indeed moved away from high profile and bounded commemorative sites towards those that are less visual and 'stickier' to access, given their less obvious locations and 'nomadic' nature. These would include the role of the material in remembrance practices within domestic realms of the home (Tolia-Kelly 2004a, b; Anderson B. 2004), mundane urban and street aesthetics (Atkinson 2007), and those not specifically designated for 'commemorative purposes' but are still able to secrete secrets of the past, at times unexpectedly, such as via unmarked everyday landscapes and 'forgotten sites' (Hebbert 2007). Kusno (2003), for one, showed how products of remembrance may also take the form of changes in social and cultural activities not, in themselves, spatially fixed, but are still useful in tracing how memories of conflicts may change over time and space.

Similarly, Kuchler (1993: 103, 104) reminds us that, in some non-Western cultures, the land itself may be seen as memory in itself, an idea she refers to as 'landscapes *as*

memory' vis-à-vis 'landscapes of memory' which refer to 'the capture of memories on the land in the form of architectural or other visual landscapes'. This is to say how, rather than something to be appreciated in visual terms, the land itself may *be* the past, where clues to this lie less on what is there but how it is perceived through memory practices (see also Curtoni et al 2003). The implication here is scholars should be mindful that, within such cultures, memory practices are not centred on placing a marker on site, but where what is remembered is etched on the landscape, unmarked but significant to rememberers nevertheless. As such, 'by concentrating on the encoding of memories instead of on the process of remembering in itself, the historical and political importance of non-Western forms of representation is missed' (Kuchler 1993: 104), thus the need to consider memory-making practices that may not be visually apparent but are still *presenced* by their absences (Sturken 2001),

Working towards less orthodox memory materialities, some scholars have analysed how war memories are triggered not only via places, but objects within museums (Crampton 2003; Hoskins 2003; Hughes 2003) and private collections (see Schwenkel 2006; van der Hoorn 2003; Harrison 2006). In these, scholars pointed out how objects can often function not only as items used in exhibitions to represent the past, but also, more personally, as an intermediary onto which people can project their life – memories, frustrations, significant experiences – as visually silent expressions of the self or to communicate the self to others (see Mehta and Belk 1991). The latter is clear in cases where former combatants collect or retain items they took from the battlefield as prompts of personal memory, not only of what they experienced during the war experiences, but also, in communicating their stories to others, as a means of making their stories interesting and 'proving' that they were

‘there’ (Garton 2001; Harrison 2006; Saunders 2003b). These demonstrate how objects may preserve ‘data’ about identity to also be revealed to the self and others.

Objects too, like places, are engorged with memories of what has passed, not only of places where it was taken from, persons or groups bearing it now, but also those who owned them prior (see van der Hoorn 2003; Schwenkel 2006). In that respect, as places have their ‘ghosts’, so do objects (Bell 1997: 819), such as personal effects retained to remember others who may have perished during wars. These objects serve not only as ‘surrogates’ to remind us of the dead but also provide the ‘visual focus for countless private acts of commemoration’ (Saunders 2003b: 18). He cited how a piece of jewellery left by Sabini, a soldier who died at war, was able to affect members of his family, who kept it as an heirloom, in ‘eliciting emotional reactions in ways in which the grand narratives of military history fail to do’ (Saunders 2003b: 15). This clearly portrays ‘the capacity of material objects to bind the living and the dead, to hold the fragile connection across temporal distance and preserve a material presence in the face of an embodied absence’ (Hallam and Hockey 2001: 18).

Objects may also be seen as the bearers of circumstances in the past external to the self. According to Tolia-Kelly (2004a: 315), material cultures are not ‘simply situated as mementoes of a bounded past, but are precipitates of syncretized textures of remembered ecologies and landscapes’, in the past as well as the present. The example used is how photographs permit rememberers not only to visualize what the past was like, but also to connect them, beyond what is necessarily imprinted on the photo-paper, to that time when and where it was taken, the person who took them and even what the socio-political and environmental situation resembled then (see

also Hughes 2003). For former combatants, due to the metaphorical, mimetic and iterative qualities of objects, these may bring to mind not only the war and all its atrocities but also of friends who have not made it alive as well as places that they may have visited during their tours of duty, thus making them extremely useful, for individuals and groups, as *aide memoires* of the war past (see Schwenkel 2006).

Given the portability of these objects, as opposed to the locationally-fixed sites mentioned earlier, the ways in which these prosthetic objects as prompts to memory are spatialised or arranged is also an important consideration (Ben-Ze'ev and Ben Ari 1999). Generally, scholars have remarked upon how visual objects are symbolically and ideologically chosen and strategically arranged to impose order and forward a narrative of history out of the 'chaos' instigated by the vested memories of the objects themselves (see Sherman 1995; Crampton 2001). The need to manage memories is also exhibited within the home, where these objects serve to fabricate 'the past through [the] re-ordering [of] the material world of domestic space' (see Saunders 2003b: 18; see also Harrison 2006). Thus objects that form, for individuals, the loci for commemoration and important prompts to aspects of the past, are usually highly regarded and exhibited whilst those that are marginal to one's sense of self-worth, esteem and identity are relegated to less prominent locations domestically.

2.2.3 'Body Memories' and Corporeal Commemorations

While Nora's (1989) conception of *lieux de memoire* captures well current preoccupations of societies with 'sites of memory', it has been criticised for ignoring how the past may yet 'survive' in acts that bring forth the past but in ways that still intimately and directly involve 'the body' (see Legg 2005a). Speaking on trauma,

Lambek and Antze (1996: xiii) claim that ‘as index of the past, and hence guarantor of the reality of the present, the body is [still very much] called upon to provide signs of import’. Indeed, as Legg (2005a) puts it, *milieu de memoire*, where the past resides unselfconsciously as enacted by bodies are still around, suggesting how Nora was too quick to proclaim ‘modern’ forms of commemoration as the dominant way in which communities today recall. Far from being replaced, *milieu de memoire* are still relevant when considering current memory-making practices, especially in non-Western contexts, as Kuchler (1993) has already alerted us earlier in considering memories that are only revealed not through physical ‘sites’ per se but through the memory-making practices of rememberers (see also Legg 2005a; 2007).

Within social theory, the increased focus on ‘the body’ came following ‘the corporeal turn’ (Butler 1993; Haraway 1991), where the appeal relies on the premise that ‘the body’ plays a critical role in the production of ‘the social’ as well as the cultural. While it is not the purpose of this thesis to enter into the many debates that have plagued the entry of ‘the body’ into academic discourse (see Turner 1996), it has to be noted that, moving away from any danger of essentializing it, ‘the body’ is envisioned here as being itself a social and material construction, always contested and always in the process of ‘becoming’ (Butler 1993). In comprehending how ‘the body’ operates in preserving, reviving and transmitting individual and collective memories, it is discussed here in two ways: as ‘inscribed’ by, and potentially ‘inscribing’, memory. While the former points towards the ‘body’ itself as a material canvass on which memories of the past may be attached to or inscribed with, where ‘the flesh’ itself is modified due to events that happened in the past (see Schildkrout 2004), the latter refers to the activities of the body that work towards remembrance.

In the context of this thesis, ‘the body’ is considered not only as ‘gendered’ and ‘ethnicized’, but also ‘memoried’, ‘inscribed’ not only by ‘markers of identity’ tied to culture and other social characteristics (Schildkrout 2004), but also of former experiences (Saunders 2003a, b). Notwithstanding the use of ‘dead’ bodies as foci for commemorations, such as within cemeteries, Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz (1991: 390), for example, examined how ‘bodily injury’, such as amputations and scars provide veterans with reminders of the Vietnam War, and Diken and Laustsen (2005) showed how memories of sexual assaults can be triggered by visual and invisible marks on the person, such as unwanted pregnancies and the sense of shame that this wrought (Yoneyama 1999). Muzaini and Yeoh (2007: 12) also showed how the past may be triggered not only by direct encounters with war veterans, but also by observing ‘family members who have lost loved ones in the war’ which allows one a ‘glimpse [of] the personal tragedies spawned by war: wives widowed, mothers deprived of their children, children orphaned, whole families torn apart’.

Yet, of course there can be no memorial ‘sites’ without human agency to establish them, or inscribe them with meanings (Young 1993). Indeed, without individuals to frequent war sites, memories attached to these sites would eventually atrophy and fade away. In this regard, ‘the body’ is conceptualised, within the thesis, as an active participant in remembering, not only in terms of mental recollections, and the symbolic appropriation/ appreciation of memoryscapes, but also in their embodied involvement during ceremonies (Piehler 1994; Marshall 2004), parades (Johnson 1999a; Jarman 1999), pilgrimages (Foster 2004), their ability to talk about the war, as myths, rumours and even ghost stories (Denning 1996) or relate it through other mediums like memoirs, films and ‘cyber memorials’ (Hess 2007; see also Blum-Reid

2003; Charlesworth 2004; Sturken 2001). As such, taking ‘the body’ as a material canvass and communicator of the past, as ‘inscribed’ (by memories of the war) and ‘inscribing’, it too acts as a ‘site of memory’ in its own right, as triggers for the past, and the vehicle to carry the past forward to the future (Simpson and Corbridge 2008).

2.3 ‘Memoryscapes’ and the Postcolonial Politics of Commemoration

This section elaborates upon some of the major themes that have emerged within studies that consider the ‘politics’ involved in processes of memory-making within the postcolonial context. The emphasis is on how different types of remembrances (and their attendant memoryscapes) on various scales, their *contents*, by way of discourse, as well as their forms and materialities, engage with and encounter each and one another, sometimes antagonistically. In addition, the section highlights limitations associated with these prevailing studies, as they have been conceptualised, and how there is a need to revisit the way in which memory politics should be envisaged and approached that accounts for the different modalities – public and private, vocal as well as the less vocal – in which memory (and politics of remembering) works within the domains of postcolonial social life. Before getting into that, however, there is first the need to conceptualise what is meant by ‘the postcolonial’ particularly as it is considered within the context of the thesis at hand.

2.3.1 Conceptualising the ‘Postcolonial’

The postcolonial moment may, in the first instance, refer to the temporal moment *after* (or post-) a particular geopolitical body shifts from being a colonial entity to an independent nation-state. Yet, given the immense difficulties in identifying both the spatial and temporal limits of this moment (see Radcliffe 1997; Yeoh 2001), scholars

have begun to consider it more as a means of critiquing and deconstructing ‘the cultural and broader ideological legacies and presences of imperialism’, particularly within the context of postcolonial (or more appropriately, national) projects (Sidaway 2000: 594; see also Jacobs 1996; O’Hanlon 2000; Loomba 2000). In this regard, a postcolonial moment may be embraced more as a means of exposing and even destabilising myriad forms of Eurocentric domination, control and knowledge production, and contesting a worldview that centres on the ‘absolute superiority of the West over the rest’ (Treacher 2007: 282), yet also revealing the often contradictory projects of decolonising contemporary histories and geographies within the postcolonial world (see also Sidaway 2000; Nash 2002; Simon 1998; Prakash 1994).

Aside from exposing the impacts of ‘colonialism aftereffects’, both in terms of how imperialist tendencies have impinged upon contemporary society, and how these neo-colonial aftereffects and legacies may endure and continue long after the actual period of active colonialism has passed (see Treacher 2007; Sidaway 2000, 2005; Jacobs 1996), the other aim of postcolonial approaches is to champion more local forms of cultural representations, and emancipate ‘subaltern’ voices that may have been formerly submerged under colonialism or even currently sidelined within the national context (Radcliffe 1997). The term ‘subaltern’ refers to the subordinated in terms of class, caste gender, race, language and culture (Prakash 1994: 1477; see also Spivak 2000, 1999). In that sense, the postcolonial critique becomes ‘an effort to recover the experience, the distinctive cultures, traditions, identities and active historical practice of subaltern groups in a wide variety of settings – traditions, cultures and practices which have been lost or hidden by the action of elite historiography’ (O’Hanlon 2000: 78). This paves the way for ‘writing from and

about ‘the margins’, salvaging subaltern voices that may have been erased or marginalised by former colonials or the national bourgeoisie (see also Jacobs 1996).

While the term ‘postcolonial’ originally arose from the literary and feminist traditions (Spivak 1999; Pandey 2000), geographers have often pushed for a means of ‘dissect[ing] postcoloniality as threaded through real spaces, built forms and the material substance of everyday biospheres in the postcolonial world’ (Yeoh 2003: 370; see also McEwan 2003). Thus, towards exploring what Nash (2002: 223) refers to as ‘real geographies’ of the times, the thesis considers postcoloniality through the lens of memory-making practices as a means to understand how postcolonial nations provide spaces not only where ‘claims of an identity different from the colonial past [may be] expressed and indexed’ (Yeoh 2001: 458), but also how sidelined voices are championed (see Sidaway 2000). In this respect, it seeks to examine within the postcolonial context of Malaysia to see the extent its memoryscapes may indeed be seen as ‘chisel[ing] at the edges of this epistemological empire and carry the ground away from the current western-centric loci ... of its imagining’ (Yeoh 2003: 370).

2.3.2 Memoryscapes and Postcolonial Identity

Within the literature on war commemoration, scholars have touched on how representations of the past have been capitalised upon, through ‘memoryscapes’, as platforms ‘on which the national past is inscribed and the genius of national life and character [can be] revealed’ towards the imagining of a collective identity (Samuel 1994: 158; Gordon and Osborne 2004; Foster 2004). This is when ruling elites invest symbolic capital onto memoryscapes towards forging a national consciousness, as ‘rhetorical *topoi* ... compositions that teach us about our national heritage and our

public responsibilities' (Boyer, cited in Till 1999: 254; Piehler 1994). Within these, 'memoriscapes' are often provided with a leading role of carving and concretising (national) ideologies in ways that would seem to appear natural(ised), as well as giving a material manifestation to ideas – 'nationhood', 'heroism', 'patriotism', 'glory' – that might otherwise remain in the less commanding form of the abstract.

In these works, the focus is on how the past is spatially appropriated – through discourse, spectacular national ceremonies, public representations within museums and urban designs, such as in architecture, toponymics and heritage markers (Kusno 2000) – to highlight traces of history palatable to the present and erasing those that impede the work of an ideology. In postcolonial memory-making, this may constitute privileging elements of the past that feed into a national identity and forgetting those that 'speak' to the colonial past, although colonial traces are at times capitalised upon, albeit reworked, towards sustaining these identities (see Radcliffe 1996; Yeoh 2003). These are then forwarded, through the manipulations of memoriscapes, as natural and appealing to the commonsense. As such, memoriscapes function as 'hegemony' that 'do not involve controls which are recognizable as constraints in the traditional sense', but 'a set of ideas and values which the majority are persuaded to adopt as their own' (Kong and Yeoh 2003: 11-12). In doing so, only dominant versions of history, those of elites' formulations, are projected as appropriate ones.

However, in these attempts to 'homogenize' narratives about the past, as encapsulated through materialised memories, to forward a single national story by 'compacting polyphonic memories into the dominant war story paradigm' (Theidon 2003: 67), other memories often fall on the wayside. As Charlesworth (1994: 579)

puts it, ‘the very act of memorialisation [through memoryscapes], of [spatially] capturing memory so that we do not forget, can by its exclusivity push aside the claims of others for their own collective rights and identities’. This identifies narratives and practices of national remembering as political and selective ‘screens’ on which a dominant (postcolonially rendered) narrative of a (war) past may be forwarded and projected to the citizenry at large, and towards the accomplishment of a new identity but usually at the expense of other identities. Consequently, then, as Mitchell (2003: 443) has already reminded us before, ‘memory is bound up with power, and and memory, and its corollary, forgetting, are hegemonically produced ... never seamlessly or completely, but still formidably and powerfully nonetheless’.

Woven, as it is, around ‘the politics of inclusion and exclusion, of remembering and forgetting’, trademarks of colonial practices to be sure (Yeoh 2001: 461), it could be said that the strategy of remembering selectively so as to manage diverse cultures and amalgamating them as *one* nation seems to replicate the same hegemonic tools colonial governments used towards the creation of Empire (Stoler 2002; Bissell 2005). As such, colonialist ideologies could still survive within postcolonial memory-making processes although disguised under the rubric of nationalism, such that, as Wenzel (2006: 17) says, ‘the project of decolonization [remains] incomplete’. This gives rise to the emergence of ‘new imperial geographies’ (Sidaway 2005: 64) that are still present, representing ‘crossovers’ of ideas and identities generated by colonialism (see Loomba 2000; Jacobs 1996), despite being applied in innovative new ways by the state (see also Dirks 1992). As such, while there may be rhetoric about abandoning the colonial past towards the formation of a new identity, it is important to still acknowledge that the project usually ‘inhabits the structures of

Western domination that it seeks to undo' (Prakash 1994: 1476), a contradiction that led Homi Bhabha to consider the postcolonial moment more as a 'hybrid' position, a co-presence of both the 'colonial' as well as the 'postcolonial' (see Loomba 2000).

The marginalisation of memories also diminishes the potency to emancipate subaltern histories (Stoler 2002). Rather, in what Cameron (2008: 383) calls 'the ongoing colonial present' (see also Gregory 2004), colonial tendencies – to chart, determine and exclude elements of the past – still prevail, yet another indication of how 'the colonial' is not yet passé (Sidaway 2005). Also, the presence of colonial legacies within postcolonial cities – in architecture, infrastructure and cultural representations (see Peleggi 2005; Jacobs 1996) – and the tendency of national entities to 'erase' (not 'emancipate') memories of its people, shows how the colonial and the postcolonial mix in 'indissoluble ways, making it difficult to sieve out what belongs to the pure non-colonised 'self', and troubling attempts to break from, or draw on, the colonial past as 'Other' (Yeoh 2001: 461), thus leading Kapferer (1996: 12) to ask: 'How then can the 'postcolonial' be truly '*post*-colonial' if the colonial is still alive and kicking although entrenched within formations of national culture?'

2.3.3 Postcolonial Responses and Resistance

Despite attempts by postcolonial nations to project a particular version of the past as the dominant one, however, as Mitchell (2003: 450) reminds us, 'the hegemony over memory is never complete, as memory remains multiple and mobile, with fragments that are not subsumable in a holistic logic'. This brings us to the other theme within studies on war remembrance, which is that of 'resistance' against elite memory makings (see Nash 2002), where individuals at the grassroots level do not always

accept the significance of wars as postulated by dominant groups, preferring to defer to their own accounts of what happened in the past, and what these personally mean to them (see Crampton 2001; Muzaini and Yeoh 2005a, b, 2006). Indeed, scholars working on issues of grassroots reception of official memoryscapes, which shifts the attention from the 'place-made' (or the production of memoryscapes) to the 'place-user' (their popular interpretation and consumption) have pointed out how individuals and communities may not necessarily agree with how the dominant group, usually that of the nation, has represented the past, especially when this is done at the huge expense of alternative forms of the same memory (see also Johnson 1999a, b; Charlesworth 2004; Muzaini and Yeoh 2006, 2007, 2004; Foster 2004).

Resistance against elite formulations of (postcolonial or national) memories may be based upon discursively rejecting partial representations of gender (Heffernan and Medlicott 2003; Morris 1997; Kong 1999), ethnicity (Muzaini and Yeoh 2005b; Dwyer 2000; Curthoys 2001) or over *who* should be commemorated and *how* (see Heffernan 1995; Piehler 1994; Gough 2004; Hughes 2003). The fragility of elite memory-making practices may also be challenged transnationally, particularly when an event involved more than one player, such as the Second World War, which then may possibly lead to multiple claims over the event, which Yoneyama (2001: 324) refers to as the 'transnational warping of political positions' (Raivo 2000a; Yoneyama 2001: 324; 2003; Muzaini and Yeoh 2005c). As such, memoryscapes, as produced by nations, are often contested – from within and without – making them fraught with multiple interpretations which pose limits to state hegemonic projects, thus 'reflect[ing] postcolonialism's far-reaching challenge to deeply enshrined colonial and Eurocentric ways of categorizing the world' (Nash 2000: 222).

As much as resistance to dominant memories may be played out on the level of discourse, they can also see individuals ‘speaking back’ to elite versions of the past via the destruction, removal or vandalism of official memoryscapes (Starrett 2003; Osborne 2001), or by establishing grassroots memoryscapes, where groups rendered invisible in the official landscapes before, or have been marginalized in mainstream memorialisation, may oppose normative or ‘historicised’ readings by materialising their own sites of public memory according to their own perspectives of what happened in the past (see Burk 2003). The extent to which these are successful, however, depends on the degree to which these groups have access to resources such as money and space on which to visualise their version of an excluded, elided or marginalized memory. Yet another way is through less retaliatory, although no less public, forms, such as through protest marches. These serve to demonstrate the fragility of elite discourses, where the authority of meanings supposedly naturalized by visible concretisations may still stand to be seriously undermined (Young 1993).

These studies have contributed much to our understanding of memory-making as highly fraught, and how postcolonial (national) memory-making may be contested, showing how ‘achieving mnemonic consensus is thus rarely easy, charged as it is with transcending the infinity of differences that constitute and are constituted by it’ (Olick and Robbins 1998: 127). Despite attempts to contain memories, they always spill out, threatening the task of ‘controlling’ memories through memoryscapes (Mitchell 2003; Forest and Johnson 2002). More importantly, the presence of resistance restores some degree of the subjectivity of the subaltern individual or group as a ‘human subject agent’ able to exercise agency in the light of hegemony rather than the ‘helpless victim of impersonal forces, or the blind followers of others’

(O'Hanlon 2000: 80). While this does not mean that every subaltern voice is liberated this way, it does however reveal 'a group of people who are highly conscious of the ambivalence of their subaltern subjectivities; people who are aware that they are fully colonised by the field of domination in which they are situated, and who develop a politics of oppositional practice accordingly' (Butz 2002: 23).

While the existence of a grassroots public have the potential to excavate memories that have been marginalised from elite narratives and remembering practices (and memoryscapes), it is not to say that these are themselves void of political intentions. Confino (1999: 1401-2) warns us that one should not assume, as some scholars do (see Bodnar 1992), there is a binary between elite and grassroots remembrances, where the former is 'large, impersonal, power hungry' associated with 'alienation, distrust and ulterior motivation', and the latter is protective of values and able to convey 'what social reality feels like rather than what it should be like', a romanticised corrective to the selectivity of official memories (see Radcliffe 1997). Rather, even vernacular memories can be selective and may be framed by motives that are driven by alternative (some political) agendas. In that regard, 'there [can be] no neat binary opposition between the coloniser and the colonised [or dominant and the dominated]; both are caught up in a complex reciprocity' (Loomba 2000: 232).

The colonial may also be reproduced on a more grassroots level in terms of the emergence of 'nostalgia' where the colonial past is harked upon 'as a means of critiquing the present, calling to judgement the failures of the [postcolonial] state' (Bissell 2005: 239; see also Radcliffe 1996). Thus while postcolonial elites may hope to erase memories they were once imperially subjugated, there may be times when

locals themselves seek to revive memories of colonialism such as when the present brought about by decolonisation has not led to much improvement for the people (see also Wenzel 2006). In these cases, there is again another way in which memories of 'the colonial' may still survive within the postcolonial context, even despite elite attempts to render them marginalised. This warns of the dangers of simply pitting the vernacular as ultimately being more recuperative of various marginalised memories, or less political in their motivation, than elite remembrances, since, as Confino (1997: 1401-2) puts it, 'in the real world, things are not as neat. Not only is vernacular memory not as saintly and official memory not as brutal, but they constantly co-mingle'.

2.3.4 Considering 'Silences' in Postcolonial Memory-Making

It is clear, thus, how the 'political' angle many scholars on war memory and memoryscapes have adopted does present 'an effective way to understand power, not as some abstraction, but as a mode by which certain forms or people become realised, often at the expense of others' (Miller 2005: 19). It also showcases the means through which dominant forms of memory-making are resisted by way of grassroots strategies and practices of resistance, both discursive as well as in more material(ised) forms. Scholars should not, however, consider the 'politics' of postcolonial memory-making as just being the preserve of dominant agents of commemoration. As the preceding discussion as well highlights, the 'political' may rear its head in a variety of ways and on a myriad of scales, that is, through elite practices *as well as* through vernacular remembrances. Therefore, just as there is a need to question the homogeneity of elite practitioners of memory (Forest et al 2004), grassroots remembrances too are encompassed by a diverse cast of rememberers with multiple motives for remembering, some of which are political.

However, it may be said that adopting this approach also conceals other face(t)s of responses to memoryscapes (see Legg 2005a; Young 1993). While the preceding discussion has indeed highlighted the ways in which dominant memories have been politically resisted more popularly, there is still the sense that such an approach seems to neglect processes that may not feature within the public realm, expressed as it were through ‘silences’. In such cases where there has not been any kind of overt criticism of official memoryscapes, does this mean elite powers have achieved consensus in how the past is to be represented, and there is complicity between them and their populaces on the matter? Or, to put it another way, does it signify that the state has successfully rendered subaltern voices forgotten? It is the contention here that to assume so would be to severely blunt our understanding of memory politics. Rather, it could be that ‘silences’ are themselves a form of resistance, where the absence of voice may in itself be seen as empowering, rather than merely another symptom through which the former colonised have continued to be disempowered.

During memorial ceremonies, such as the ones organised for Armistice Day in the United Kingdom, for instance, it is not uncommon for individuals to enact a ‘two-minute’ silence in commemoration usually of the lives that were sacrificed during wars, where they stand (or sit) in contemplation and quiet prayer to the souls of those who had passed (see Gregory 1994). Yet, while this may indicate consensus, between organisers and participants, in the ways that the dead of the two world wars are commemorated, King (1999) demonstrated how such an impression is an illusion that conceals how they can be highly contested, such that it was a negotiated unity, the result of extended discussions prior to the affair primarily centred around who should be commemorated and how. He also added how these people coming together

for a commemorative act does not necessarily mean that they believe in the same values; they may not agree on what to remember although this has not prevented any of them from still attending for their own reasons of remembering. As such, while at some level there is convergence in their *co*-memoration of the war dead, 'to act together did not presume a common interpretation of this action' (King 1999: 148).

'Silences' too may not be assumed to be a measure of state hegemony since public non-reaction to official practices may be enacted for various reasons, such as structural limitations, where 'speaking out' may invite harm to self and family (Seidler 2007; Edkins 2003; Kee 2007), as a means of re-appropriating meanings not according to what has been suggested to them, but according to their own agendas (Irwin-Zarecka 1994), or as resistance against streamlining tendencies of official narratives, where the desire is to just do things 'our own way'. In the last case, far from surrendering the subaltern voice to (those of) the state, 'silence' is enacted as resistance against hegemonic practices of elite memory-making but where the energy for conflict is diffused such that it never plateaus, sometimes never reaching its climactic orgasm in the shape of overt protests, but through 'hidden geographies' (Agnew 1993), neither an overt expression of antithetical challenges to, nor an indication of consent to, dominant narratives (Sheriff 2000; Kee 2006). They are, more appropriately, and for varied factors, 'a space of withholding' (Spivak 1999: 190), of subversion in the shadows, away from being scrutinised as being subversive.

Also, individuals on the ground may simply be indifferent to dominant forms of memory making. In a study of Cu Chi Tunnels in Vietnam, for instance, Schwenkel (2006: 17) cited that, while transnational visitors may marvel at these remnants as a

memorial to the Vietnam War, the locals reinvented it as ‘spaces of love, desire and pleasure’, reflecting more mundane uses of the space. Sheriff (2000) also exemplified how ‘silences’ may be the result of cultural forces that have led Brazilians he studied to keep quiet about racial violence through what he refers to as ‘cultural censorship’. Some also keep silent ‘as an adaptive strategy for survival’, where remembering provokes adverse reactions in rememberers, and ‘not talking’ about wars also means not having to deal with the emotion (see Choi 2001; Lim 1995). Thus, ‘silences’ may not necessarily mean complicity with ‘hegemonised memory’; rather, they are ‘meaning-full’ indicators of a multiplicity of motivations – as resistance, cultural imperatives, structural limitations, desire to forget, of indifference – as much as complicity, which should be investigated rather than ‘(dis)missed’ (see Hyams 2004; Sheriff 2000; Kee 2006, 2007; Beristain et al 2000).

From the discussion here, two things are pertinent. First, it highlights the need to keep in mind that while it is important to consider the ‘political’ within processes and practices of memory-making, it should not be done at the expense of other memory making processes that are not as political or even concerned with the ways the past is politically crafted by the postcolonial nation. According to Forest et al (2004: 374), ‘the category of ‘counter-memory’ as ‘resistance’ is too simplistic [since] a range of actors and groups may act in ways not necessarily structured by opposition to state or elite domination’. Second, it argues for the need to consider commemorative practices that are not as politically evident or that have emerged as overt flashpoints to official commemorations but are potentially ‘subversive’ all the same. In so doing, we ensure we do not miss the ‘whole world of human activities that cannot be

immediately recognised (and categorised) as political, although they are decisive to the way people construct and contest images of the past' (Confino 1997: 1394-5).

2.4 Materiality, 'Forgetting' and the Return of 'the Immanent Past'

'Many scholars ... have focused on the importance and uses of individual and collective memory.... But what about forgetting?' (Pitcher 2006: 88)

It is clear from the discussion thus far how the material world is frequently called upon to *presence* and disseminate the past, and how, often times, such a process is a heavily contested one. Yet, there has been scant attention paid towards the limits that the material poses towards memory-making practices (Anderson and Tolia-Kelly 2004). In fact, as much as they may represent the raw materials, usually as encapsulated by and within memoryscapes, with which individuals and other mnemonic groups may usefully draw upon as *aide memoire* to remembering, the material may also present problems when individuals seek to forget the past, when they become the vehicles on which 'the immanent past' (Birth 2006) may return. This thesis thus seeks to also address this situation when the material world fails human agency in their attempts, not so much to remember but essentially when they want to forget the past, given their ability to allow memories to 'emerge unbidden'.

2.4.1 Materiality and Forgetting

'Acts of remembrance are necessarily coupled with processes of forgetting, and any landscape of memory also exists with a shadow landscape of forgetting' (Jordan 2005: 61)

As much as this thesis is about remembering, it is also about ‘forgetting’, or the conscious process of rendering the past passé, with the intention of shifting it away from present consciousness (see Pitcher 2006). While ‘forgetting’ may be seen as nothing more than a natural biological tendency (see Lowenthal 1999; Legg 2007), at times, it may also be consciously enacted as a means of coping with the present, such as in terms of overcoming trauma or to realise an ideal self and identity (see Norquay 1999; Passerini 1983, 2003). Yet some have recognised how it may also be the most difficult thing to accomplish, especially when one’s experience of the past left such an indelible impact on the self that it takes more than a conscious effort to erase it, as much of the literature on trauma has demonstrated (see Stanley 2000; Langer 1991), where ‘forgetting’ may be seen as ‘a mercy rather than a malady’ (Lowenthal 1999: xii). In the light of these works, this thesis seeks to also examine the role of ‘the material’ in practices of forgetting, and how at times, such practices may also be impeded by the materiality that has been capitalised upon to forget (see Forty 1999).

Central to processes of forgetting is usually associated with the material (Forty 1999). It is already clear how elite groups, such as nations, may eliminate unsavoury memories that do not step in line with its nation-building objective, by manipulating the material in memoryscapes, such as through the design of monuments, the selection of objects within museums (see Morris 1997; Crampton 2003), or through the choice of where a memoryscape is to be located (Alderman 2002) – to not only project desired memories but also marginalise others. Lahiri (2003: 194) also pointed out how, in India, the process of material manipulation to realise a postcolonial Indian identity was marked by the destruction of colonial monuments, while van der Hoorn (2003) shows the hacking away of the Berlin Wall as symbolic of the

destruction of Germany's totalitarianism era and of 'the wall's dividing role'. Such cases of 'organised forgetting' seek thus not only to expunge history but rather, as Cohen (1999: 39) puts it, 'works by constructing a new history that leaves out, distorts and, moreover, shifts in what is left out and distorted' (see Pitcher 2007).

Such processes of materialised forgetting in terms of memory-work are also practiced on scales other than the national. As already discussed above, in resistance to dominant state narratives and state-sanctioned public representations or simply in deference to traditional beliefs and customs, grassroots memory communities have sometimes also sought to remove or even destroy memoryscapes, what Forty (1999) refers to as 'iconoclasm', where the elimination of a memory marker also constitutes the liquidation of the meanings attached to it, to facilitate the erasure of unwanted memories from present consciousness (see Starrett 2003; Hong and Huang 2003; Kuchler 1999; Forty 1999). In other cases, groups may choose to disregard official memoryscapes so that over time these, and what they represent, would eventually be forgotten. Since 'no monument can resist the effects of time and nature, [where] the effectiveness of a memorial demands not only investment in its structure but also a commitment to its upkeep' (King 1999: 151), if it is not supported or patronised by the general populace, the death warrant for the monument is thus as good as signed.

Within the literature on 'trauma' particularly that associated with the Holocaust, much has also been written about the inability of 'witnesses' to speak of the past. This may be due to the pain and the horrors that bringing up the past may inflict upon the rememberer (Stanley 2000), the impossibility of 'telling it right... in a way that does not lose their impacts, that does not reduce them to clichés or turn them all into

versions of the same story' (Caruth 1995: vii; Harrison 2007; Douglass and Vogler 2003). Others feel 'guilt' for having survived something others have not, or for not being able to do more or out of the conviction that one will not be believed (Seidler 2007; Culbertson 1995). In these respects, memories may be seen as having occurred within what Edkins (2003: xiv) refer to as 'trauma time': 'Something happens that doesn't fit... the story we already have...it doesn't fit the script' as we would like to remember it towards any positive outcome, which individuals or groups would rather see forgotten than brought to mind (see Seidler 2007; Langer 1991; Stanley 2000).

The desire to sometimes forget traumatic experiences is applicable not only to survivors of traumatic events but also others, such as carers of those with post-traumatic stress disorders or PTSD (themselves sufferers of secondary PTSD) (Stanley 2000); those who identify very closely with collective trauma of ancestors as reflected in literature on 'transgenerational trauma' (see Douglass and Vogler 2003; Hirsch 2001; Sturken 2001); and those who are closely related to trauma survivors such that they too feel intensely about the past, perhaps even as intensely as those who have gone through the traumatic experiences themselves (see the literature on 'postmemory', Hirsch 2001; Sturken 1997, 2001). Regardless of direct or indirect encounters with the trauma, there is often the desire to 'forget' so as to move on and sustain a feeling of 'being normal' (Seidler 2007: 144; see also Caruth 1995), to encircle, sidestep or avoid the 'real' (in a Lacanian sense) or 'which cannot be symbolised or [rendered] surplus by attempts at symbolisation' (Edkins 2003: 14).

As the material is most times used to render collective representations of the past forgotten, it is also similarly the case on a more personal level, such as by staying

away from public forms of commemoration or any other situations where the topic of war may emerge, such as in interactions with others who may have gone through the same event in the past (Stanley 2000), ‘hiding’, ‘throwing away’ or ‘re-arranging’ portable items associated with the war so that they may not be reminded of what happened (Saunders 2003b; Harrison 2006; Bell 1997) or simply choosing not to ‘speak’ of the event in any situation (Langer 1991; Wieworska 2001; Lomsky-Feder 2004). Through these acts, the material – as in things, places and the body – are thus manipulated towards ‘exorcising’ or ‘managing’ troubling memories (see van der Hoorn 2003; Patraka 1996). It is the main premise here that, given the ability of the material to contain, collect and project the past, as well as affect individuals and groups in particular ways, their removal, reinterpretation or destruction is thus a way of rendering memories attached to them into oblivion – ‘out of sight, out of mind’.

These are just some of the ways in which individuals too have capitalised upon ‘the material’ as a means of forgetting, thus showing how despite the usually taken-for-granted assumption that ‘memories, formed in the mind, can be transferred to solid material objects, which can come to stand for memories and, by virtue of their durability, either prolong or preserve them indefinitely beyond their purely mental existence’ (Forty 1999: 4), the material – sites, objects, even bodies – may also be manipulated, such as through their destruction (or iconoclasm), selective arrangements and exclusion, removals from sight, state of being discarded, ignored and not spoken of, by both individuals as well as collective groups, towards rendering (aspects of) the past into oblivion (see Pitcher 2006). Yet, this thesis intends to show how such appropriations of the material towards forgetting are not

always successful, given how the material can at times also strike back, by being the vehicles through which ‘the immanent past’ may sometimes also ‘emerge unbidden’.

2.4.2 (Im)materiality and ‘the Immanent Past’

‘It is a matter of wonder: the moment that is here and gone, that was nothing before and nothing after, returns like a spectre to trouble the quiet of a later moment’ (Nietzsche 1957, cited in Birth 2006: 169)

The material plays a crucial role in memory practices, both in terms of remembering and forgetting. On the one hand, it is often the raw ingredients that are appropriated by human agency towards concretising memory, over time and space, *used* by mnemonic communities to mobilise external cues to help them remember, or as canvasses on which their meanings are imposed socially. On the other, the material is also capitalised upon, and often becomes the target of, those who seek to forget, where its destruction, removal or concealment serves purposes of rendering the past into oblivion. Yet, as much as the material may be appropriated and affected by individuals and collective groups to fulfil the current demands of societies, it is also the case that the material world may at times work against human agency, such that ‘while understanding the cultural and social shaping of the imaginative reconstruction of the past is crucial’, the reduction of ‘the presence of the past to this idea elides other ways in which the past impinges on the present’ (Birth 2006: 179).

Such a realisation has led to a number of works on memory that have begun to engage the material, along the lines of studies that have formed the vanguard of the materiality movement generally, as being more than the clay moulded to shape by

humans, but also possessive of the agency to affect others as much as they too may be affected (Saunders 2003a, b, 2002; Hallam and Hockey 2001). These represent situations where ‘the immanent past’ (Birth 2006) returns to ‘haunt’ the present, and influence human behaviour and thoughts, through the ‘trajectories’ of components of the material world, even when they have not specifically been called for to do so (see Bell 1997). This section reviews current studies on memoryscapes to excavate insights that help us understand the ‘agency’ of the material, and how it is through the material that we are sometimes able to see how ‘the immanent past’ works. It focuses particularly on how, while the material may be used towards the desire to forget the past, it too may sometimes prevent some individuals from forgetting.

It has already been discussed how the ‘essences’ of actual places of war, such as battlefields, have the potential to affect the way people experience events in the past (see Raivo 2000a). Their affective prowess is evident where people feel anger, disappointment or sadness at having to see these material traces destroyed or redeveloped into something else. In the context of possessions as an extended self, and how the loss of objects often results in the lessening of the self (Belk 1988; Mehta and Belk 1991), the potential disappearance or destruction of a place may occasion the most profound anxiety. The loss of a place thus may be seen as akin to actually losing a part of self. While this would explain why some commemorate through these places, so as to make these ‘essences’ work for them, these sites and places can also be a bane to those seeking to forget. Kusno (2003), for instance, has shown how, the intentions of those who seek to forget the traumatic May riots in 1998 in Jakarta have been hampered by the continuing presence of buildings that were burnt and vandalised during the riots. Places may also affect via the

supernatural such as when individuals claim to be haunted with past memories (see Bell 1997). In the same way, objects too can ‘trigger memories in Proustian ways, which is to say unpredictably’ (Sherman 1995: 52). As much as they may serve as reminders of wars, of where they took place, and the people who participated, they may also bring to mind events individuals may prefer to forget.

Sometimes, the body also reacts in unexpected ways, where memory erupts on it even when they have not been called for, or when the body (and the memory that it holds) serves to continuously haunt individuals, in undesirable ways, by the ways they have been treated by other individuals. An example of this is clear in the case of how women raped during war may be forced to remember the horrible act, sometimes against their wishes, by how they may have been ‘inscribed’ by wounds, mutilations and pains (see Diken and Laustsen 2005). Stanley (2000: 240) also alluded to the persistence of the immanent past in how sufferers of combat fatigue and shell-shock sometimes have their horrific experiences of the war chronically replayed for them via ‘involuntary rememberings’ that are ‘neither chosen, nor gracious, but imposed upon them [often] with all its nightmarish force’. In such cases, the legacy of past conflicts is so ‘inscribed’ on the individuals that they are forced to relive past episodes against their wishes not to (see Anderson B. 2004).

Beyond considering how the material sometimes foils attempts by individuals and societies to forget by way of the *metaphorical* ‘haunting’ of the present, the past may also impinge upon individuals through the more *literal* ‘hauntings’ of the supernatural and the otherworldly. Scholars have begun to consider this and there is now a whole swathe of studies on what Maddern and Adey (2008: 292) refer to as

‘spectro-geographies’, or ‘concern for the just perceptible, the barely there, the nagging presence of an absence in a variety of spaces’. Indeed, despite the taunts of those who would prefer geography to be concerned with the ‘rational’, the ‘ordered’ and the ‘sane’, there has been a growing fascination with the more ‘spectral aspects of space... of irregular, unexpected and (un)anticipated events that appear to be ‘beyond the real’ (Maddern and Adey 2008: 291), as manifested within cities, homes, tourist attractions, streets, publications and oral stories, as urban phantasmagorias and enchantments (see Pile 2005; Marcus 1999; McEwan 2008).

The way ‘hauntings’ are conceptualised here, while they may take the form of the *immaterial*, they are perceived as usually attached to *material* geographies – locations, things and the body in the case of dreams and corporeal possessions – especially those with a deep history and speak of loss and trauma, such that, as Bell (1997: 813) puts it, ‘we, moderns, despite our mechanistic and rationalistic ethos, live in landscapes filled with ghosts [or] spirits we cannot see but whose presence we nevertheless experience’. A ghost thus represents a temporal rupture originating from the past, but spatially able to (dis)enchant the present (Pile 2005). Regardless of their authenticity, ghostly *presences* are real to those experiencing it. As McEwan (2008: 29) puts it, although ghost stories are ‘inventions, often about things that never happened, or metaphors for otherwise inexplicable presences, feelings, or events, their meaning, power, and the passion with which they are told or withheld are significant’, especially if these ghosts have religious beliefs and customs as backing.

Scholars have tried to provide explanations for the existence of these ghosts or why they sometimes make their usually invisible forms and nature visible. Cameron

(2008) reflects upon 'haunting' as a 'postcolonial trope', where spirits are invoked primarily as a means of making visible economic and social injustices – 'presences of that which has been excluded, marginalised or expelled' – towards inverting and seeking redress for them (see also Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Radcliffe 1996). McEwan (2008: 34) also highlighted haunting as a response against socio-political and economic uncertainties such that it tends to 'proliferate at times of social upheaval', where people may turn to the supernatural not only as a means of explaining current state of affairs but also to hope for a better future. Hauntings may represent reactions against the unknown, the irrational and the 'uncanny', defined by Pile (2005: 140) 'as a feeling of horror and dread evoked when something familiar becomes disturbingly strange, creepy, fearful, scary', which then translates into cautionary ghosts tales for children or adults alike (see Gordon 1997; Marcus 1999).

Despite these attempts to explain (away) ghosts, however, the focus has been on how they are *humanly* appropriated to cope with the present – fears, injustices, concerns. While these are valid arguments, they do ignore the possibility of 'ghosts', particularly those borne out of wars, may represent the spirits of those who have died (unjustly) reneging against forgetting and returning as a way of reminding people not to forget them *and* evoking within the living a sense of guilt for having forgotten the (war) dead. Considered in this way, the agency is shifted from the present to the past, where historical entities work through the material to exert itself, and its influences, on the present, sometimes against human will, a perspective that has been much elided in our current conceptions of the past where 'we have come to speak of the uses rather than the influence of the past, and its mementos are often little more than signatures employed to underscore our present concerns' (Hutton 1993: xxi). The

thesis thus recognises that while the material may be capitalised upon to forget, it too can be the very stumbling block that prevents this from happening anytime soon.

2.5 Summary: Conceptually Framing the Thesis

This chapter has, thus far, provided an overview of some of the issues and debates that have emerged within the burgeoning literature on ‘memory’ and commemoration. First, it focused on ‘memory’, as it is conceptualised within the thesis, as both social and individual constructions, and a function of ‘scale’ and temporality. Second, the discussion elucidated on ‘memoryscapes’ over various scales and in different forms, and the role of the material within them towards *presencing* the past. Third, the chapter highlighted the cultural politics framework of studying processes of postcolonial remembering, and the limits of such an approach, especially in drawing out memory practices and processes of resistance that are not as visually perceived, staged in less spectacular fashions, or those not borne out of antithetical reactions against elite remembrances. Lastly it examined works that consider how the material is capitalised upon not to remember but to forget, and how this may fail given how the (im)material may sometimes enact ‘the immanent past’ (Birth 2006), where it possesses the ability to affect human agency as much as it may be manipulated by individuals and mnemonic communities as memory matter.

Throughout the thesis, the concepts that have been discussed here are used to help provide an understanding of the processes and politics of how the Second World War is commemorated in Perak, Malaysia. Specifically, through the case studies presented here, three main themes are subsequently attended to and interrogated. First, through an examination of memoryscapes in Perak, the thesis examines how

the war, essentially an event that took place while Malaysia was still a British colonial subject, is commemorated within the state – first via ‘collective amnesia’ and then by the selective practices of remembrance – and how this relates to the federal overarching project to create a national identity that steers away from its colonial past, and able to bind its populace, by way of a shared history, as one. In doing so, it exposes the contradictions of the postcolonial (read: national) aims in two inter-related ways: by reproducing colonial tendencies to ‘control’ memories, and ensuring the continued marginalisation of the voices of its formerly colonised.

Second, the case studies highlight the ways in which partial narratives attached to official memoryscapes in Perak are received by its people. It does this by revealing the fraught and contested nature of these memoryscapes, specifically by highlighting how they have been popularly criticised in a number of ways, both vocal expressions of contention as well as through ‘silences’. Often these ‘silences’ translates into subtle resistances against official memory-making practices that are not necessarily structured by overt opposition to elite domination (see Forest et al 2004: 374) but private and personal subversions of dominant meanings and space to ensure the survival of memories that may be elided by the state more publicly. Yet, at the same time, it remains wary of the romanticised notion of vernacular memory-making as recuperative of subaltern voices. Rather, the thesis highlights various cases where grassroots remembrances can themselves be political and selective and how they too can be just as responsible as the state for rendering elements of the past forgotten.

Third, the thesis considers more deeply the role of the material in practices of remembering and forgetting. For one, it shows how it is crucial to include the

material within practices of remembering so as to fully appreciate how it, by virtue of its physical and symbolic durability, visibility, and historical biography, serve to not only *presence* the past but also preserving it for future generations. Then, it demonstrates how, as much as this may be the case, sometimes, the material is also capitalised upon as a means of forgetting. Yet, the thesis also highlights how sometimes material culture fails human agency – both in its appropriation as tools of remembrance or forgetting – in the ways that the (im)material, through its ‘trajectory’ (see Appadurai 1986), can also affect human agency and influence thoughts and behaviours, most significantly as vehicles of ‘the immanent past’ (Birth 2006), where ‘the past does not evaporate, but persists in multiple ways’, even among those who would seek to suspend or abolish them (Berliner 2005: 201).

CHAPTER THREE

Researching the Thesis: Methodological Roots/ Routes

3.1 Identifying Methodological Roots/ Routes

The aim of this chapter is to outline and examine the methodological roots/routes that have informed, and were taken on board, the thesis in terms of its conceptualisation, data collection and analysis. The first part highlights the (primarily) qualitative tools that have been adopted in the light of the research trajectories that were posed earlier, and why these were chosen vis-à-vis others that may seem, at first glance, more appropriate. It then goes on to discuss some of the ethical and practical issues, concerns and problems plaguing the project, at various stages, and how these were mitigated through choices that were made during the course of the research process itself, each with varying levels of success, thus giving rise to some of the limitations of the thesis as a result. The last section presents a more reflexive and positional consideration of what I brought to the project – my biography, background and baggage – and how these have both served my cause as well as impeded it at times.

The thesis is primarily based on tools that are of a more qualitative nature. The decision to go this way was based not only on the mere recognition that such tools (vis-à-vis quantitative ones) have come a long way to contributing towards the growth of meaningful scholarship within human geography (see Crang 2002, 2003, 2005; Hay 2000) but, more particularly, as they were seen to be the best ways to providing means of attaining the research objectives highlighted before. More importantly, these were considered to be effective in providing (especially) war civilians in Perak, who are advanced in age, illiterate, and whose stories have largely been erased, if not forgotten, within Malaysian historiography, a platform on which

to relate their stories and opinions more comfortably and ‘on their own terms’, rather than constrain them within the parameters of closed-ended questions and statistical certainties. Finally, qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews, were preferred for their ability to gain (more than verbal) insights from what Kopijn (1998: 148) calls ‘paralinguistic features’ of research data, including emotional reactions and physical gestures, that would not have been manifest through, for instance, surveys or polls. The rest of this section identifies the main methods adopted for the thesis.

3.1.1 Site Mapping and Participant Observation

After identifying my empirical focus of study, the first task was to visit Perak, and orientate myself to sites of war and commemoration encountered through reading about them beforehand. Whilst, in cases, I found that some of these sites were no longer around, either destroyed or redeveloped, an example of how, regardless of one’s preparations before embarking on ‘messy’ fieldwork, things do not always go according to plan (see Marshall and Rossman 1999), in other cases, I discovered sites of war commemoration that I did not know about prior to fieldwork, thus highlighting the sometimes serendipitous benefits of informally talking with the locals and ‘walking the ground’ (see Pink 2008). Each site was then ‘mapped’ and documented, which is to say, photographed (for posterity and to later serve as visual aids), textually described in detail within notebooks, and contextualised in terms of whatever information I could find on them by trawling through the Internet, the archives of local newspapers, and casually talking to those living in the areas nearby.

Aside from mapping these sites, I also adopted, especially during the early stages, the persona of a ‘tourist’ on site. This allowed me to observe what visitors do or say

when they visit these sites without letting on that I was a researcher and then possibly causing others to change their behaviours because of this (see England 1994; Katz 1994). As a participant observer, I was also able to take (part) in ceremonies, such as the Cenotaph Remembrance and the *Tambun* ceremony, in the same way, a method which has provided me with some interesting insights that I might not have been able to get if I were to expose myself as being there for the reason of scrutinising them and potentially criticising the ways in which the war is being remembered in those instances. These initial efforts of engaging in participant observation paid off as I was then able to record detailed ethnographical notes of how people behave at these particular sites (see also Gans 1999). Aside from merely taking down notes, I was also able to freely take as many photographs of these ceremonies as they took place.

3.1.2 In-Depth Interviews

The main methodology used within the thesis, as a means of gathering data, is that of in-depth interviews usually conducted in a semi-structured fashion. Through this particular route, I intended to extract the views, opinions and complaints of both elites and ordinary citizens of Perak, with specific regards to the ways in which the war is (publicly and privately) commemorated within the state. Three groups of people were involved in this particular aspect of the project, key (elite) figures of commemoration within Perak, war civilians or those who went through the war first-hand, and lastly, those who have no direct experience of the war, representing the post-war generation. Altogether, a sample of 70 respondents were interviewed (for a complete list of the respondents who were interviewed, see Appendix A). Given the specificity of the different groups, the types of questions that were asked, and the responses to be expected, different interviewing techniques were made necessary.

The first group pertains to elite figures of local war commemoration, particularly those of the Perak State Government. While reading about, and physically exploring and textually analysing, the sites of war and remembrance within the state provided much historical background to these sites, much of these did not provide the contexts, from the viewpoint of the state: of why they were set up, established as such, or for whom they were targeted. Towards rectifying this, I read up on documents produced by both the Perak state (and federal) governments and official speeches available on the Internet. Given that without an official permit to conduct research in Malaysia (see below), I was unable to directly approach government officials, I was lucky to still secure interviews, through other contacts (see below), with representatives of the Perak State Government, the Ipoh City Council, and Taiping Municipal Council Tourism Board, the only requirement they had for speaking to me being that they were able to maintain their anonymity in the project.

Key figures also include those who have been involved in, or (in)directly associated with, commemorative efforts in Perak, such as grassroots heritage activists and proprietors of sites that were used by the Japanese during the war (even if they no longer bore any traces of this in their current form). The former include Law Siak Hong, president of the Perak Heritage Society, an organisation that has been at the forefront of movements to preserve local (war) heritage; Datuk R. Thambipillay, author and the person most responsible for the organisation of many of the state's memorial ceremonies; and Mr. Chye Kooi Loong, a military historian at the centre of efforts to conserve Green Ridge battlefield and convert it into a memorial museum. As for the proprietors of war sites, these are represented mainly by owners of shops and hotels, most of whom did not have any problems talking to me. Although it was

not the intention of the thesis to focus on more transnational modes of commemoration in Perak, on several occasions, I also spoke to individuals associated with these, such as foreign veterans of war and the manager of the Taiping War Cemetery, the only Commonwealth War Graves Commission site located in Perak.

Through these grassroots contacts, particularly the heritage activists, I was able to get initial introductions to representatives of state bodies and agencies, and also learn about events that are held at places not very well-known or not open to public access. For state representatives, they were asked about issues to do with the importance they attached to war remembrance, the rationale for projects they spearheaded, and if they have plans to do more. I had greater leeway with the heritage activists since, given their vested interest in promoting war commemoration within Perak, they were more prepared to share with me their experiences of personal remembrance and heritage activism. They were also questioned at length about their own commemorative projects, their opinions on how the state has sought to mark the war, and what more they felt could be done. While I was careful not to accept what they said wholesale, given their personal agendas (see below), it is through their willingness to be candid that I was able to gain much information on the subject.

The next group of respondents is that of war civilians, or those who themselves went through the war in Perak. This was a difficult group to access given many are no longer around – either passed on or have moved away – and the rest are usually so advanced in age they no longer get out of their homes. The lack of a local equivalent of veterans' associations, and much data about local experiences of war, also made it hard to identify the respondents for this group. Some who participated ($n = 34$ out of

70) were those who were introduced to me by the Perak Heritage Society and other key individuals. The others were recruited through ‘snowballing’ from these original contacts or by ‘hijacking’ potential participants on the streets or in establishments like barber shops and hawker centres. Indeed, there were times when I would just approach strangers who ‘looked old enough’ to have been in the war, asking them if they were and, if yes, whether they were willing to take part in my research project.

For these war civilians, the main *modus operandi* was to first establish rapport and inspire trust with them through casual introductions, ‘small talk’ (see Silverman 2001), as well as what England (1994: 82), paraphrasing Susan J. Smith, calls ‘supplication’ which ‘involves exposing and exploiting weaknesses regarding dependence on whoever is being researched for information and guidance’. Thus, typically and unabashedly, I would introduce myself and explain to them what I was doing, the ‘urgency’ of the project in terms of preserving the experiences of war civilians given the ‘thinning’ of such groups (Gilchrist 2003) and the lack of writings about them in Malaysia (see Lim 1995), and how it would be very useful if they could participate. For the most part, this worked. As for those who were reluctant, strategies to persuade them further – such as by ensuring their anonymity or by the removal of the tape recorder – usually did the trick and they were then willing to talk.

The importance of talking to these war civilians is crucial to the thesis not only because this may be the last chance to collect their stories, and learn about their experiences of the war, but also in extricating accounts of war generally left out from official narratives. This therefore follows the route of Linda McDowell (2004) in her use of oral accounts of Latvian women and their experiences of wartime Europe to

examine narratives and processes of memory making that are embedded in personal narratives and contexts (see also Andrews et al 2006) Given that one of the objectives of the thesis was to analyse memory-making practices ‘from below’ as much as those by Perak elites, within private as well as public spaces, this route was extremely pertinent since, as Hallam and Hockey (2001: 24-5) put it, it is only by following the stories of war civilians can scholars ‘attend to memory as generated by marginalized social groups’ and memories that, by virtue of their forms or content, are regarded as problematic, disturbing or dangerous from dominant viewpoints.

While there are various ways in which my research into the lives and remembering practices of these war civilians could have been accomplished by methods such as focus groups, not only as a way of letting their ideas bounce off each other, as well as providing peer support to them, given the project’s potential to evoke painful flashbacks and emotional outbursts (see Meth and Malaza 2003), various reasons forced me to choose a more intimate means of interviewing them. These include the immobility of many of them which restricted their ability to come together (such that some of the interviews necessarily had to be conducted in their homes), the (ethnic and national) sensitivity of the subjects discussed, and also my desire to gain a more personal perspective of the war as much as one that is framed by the groups more collectively. Thus, it was essentially physical constraints, the nature of the subject as well as the imperatives of the thesis’s objectives that made it more preferable for me to have one-to-one interviews with my respondents rather than through focus groups.

Where possible, the war civilians were interviewed at their own homes. In most cases, I explained how my research also pertained to how they remembered the war

‘more privately’ which prompted a few to invite me home. In deference to the salience of ‘place’ during interviews (see Elwood and Martin 2000), this first provided a safe location for respondents to share their stories. Second, given my interest in the material cultures of remembrance found within the home not only as ‘our appropriation of the larger world and often as the representation of that world within our private domains’ (Miller 2001: 3), but also in terms of how objects may trigger memories (see Tolia-Kelly 2004a, b), conducting the interviews ‘at home’ also allowed them easier proximity to the things at home they could easily pick up, and relate to me stories through these visual items vis-à-vis merely talking about them in the abstract. Being at their homes also allowed me to notice things around me and asking my respondents about them as and when there was a need to do so.

While a semi-structured method was chosen for interviewing the elites, a different tact was needed for my conversations with the war civilians. First, for many of them, this was the first time that they were able or willing to share their stories with someone else, especially in the climate of non-commemoration that had been the stance the Perak state government had taken since the end of the war till the late 1980s. Second, I was interested not only in their personal experiences of war, but also how these have the potential capability of affecting them in an ‘involuntary’ manner. Thus, adopting something akin to a ‘nondirected’ (Birth 2006b) or ‘oral history-type’ interview (Perks and Thompson 1998), I chose to let the war civilians decide what they wanted to tell me based on three themes: biographical information, how they would like to remember the war (or not), and what they thought of how the state has accomplished the task. It was only when I realised that the respondents were going too far on a tangent that I sometimes interceded with more directed questions.

Aside from interviewing key elites and war civilians, I also went on to interview ordinary Perakians from the post-war generation. The decision to do this was driven by two things. First, it was due to the desire to supplement voices of the war civilians, especially in the light of their thinning numbers. What I discovered early on was that war civilians do tend to pass their stories on to the next generation, such that I could also gain insights into how war civilians remember through talking to their off-springs and relatives. Second, it afforded me the ability to inquire on other aspects of local remembrance, such as the level of interest that the younger generation has on remembering the war in Perak, the extent to which they remembered what their parents or others might have told them, and lastly if they were at all interested in continuing the practice of passing down these stories to the next generation. This route provided insight to not only how war civilians remember, but whether war memories are indeed preserved through the postwar generation.

While I could have ‘gone quantitative’ here, by adopting a questionnaire survey to examine the extent to which these individuals (from the postwar generation) considered war remembrance as necessary, or particular (official and grassroots) war memoryscapes as personally meaningful, I was able to gain more information from the casual conversations I had with these individuals. Further, by this time, I had also made the decision to focus less on being able to generalise my findings, to making an effort to comprehensively understand how each and every respondent engages in war commemoration on their own merits. These factors made me discard the questionnaire survey option and continue with just interviewing them based on a simple *aide memoire* (see Appendix B). Also, it was through these interviews that I was able to learn more about war civilians no longer around, specifically via the

information that individuals from the postwar generation were able to provide me about their fathers, mothers and other families who had gone through the war years.

3.1.3 ‘Walking Interviews’

Individual ‘walking interviews’ were also conducted with a selection of the participants, who were essentially asked to take me on a walking tour of their hometowns, particularly those who were willing, and were mobile enough to do so. The onus of deciding where we should go, the routes we were to take and the places to visit were largely left to them, armed with only the directive that they should show me places within their areas of habitat which they remembered as being prominent and significant – both personally and socially – to their experiences of the Second World War in Perak. The time taken to do the walking interviews varied from 30 minutes to right up to 2 hours depending on how much time the participants had, the size of the towns where they lived, or the routes they finally chose. During each ‘walking interview’, I would take note of what they said at each place they took me to, but also observed them throughout the whole process, and asking specific directed questions, many of which were triggered by what they themselves were showing me.

The adoption of this method, similar to what Kusenbach (2003) refers to as the ‘go-along’ approach, or the ‘talking-while-walking’ method (Anderson, J. 2004) was valuable in helping me gain insights into how respondents ‘remember’, particularly as these were constituted through interactions with, and embodied experiences of, war-related places we visited. First, this led me to sites I would have missed on my own, since they were not visually apparent or marked as such. I was also able to learn about these places beyond what was related through sanctioned narratives of

official memoryscapes. Further, I also learnt much, in terms of how they would personally identify with war, from sites they showed me not directly associated with the war but were significant because of other events that happened to them then. Through this, I was thus given access not only to ‘subaltern histories’ that may have been excluded from elite remembering, but also harness the relationships between humans and place to uncover understandings of the ‘lifeworlds’ of my respondents.

By being with my respondents as we visited these places that may have personal meanings for them, it sometimes evoked emotions and reactions that researchers are not privy to under normal fieldwork conditions, sometimes unexpectedly (see Crang and Travlou 2001; Kusenbach 2003). I would then observe changes in moods and behaviours as we passed by these sites which, after careful probing, respondents would explain how a site may have reminded them of something (of the war) they had long forgotten or wanted to forget. Thus, this (as I predicted or rather hoped) gave me ‘front row seats’ to witnessing ‘the immanent past’ at work, where I could witness some of the embodied and reflexive aspects of lived experiences and memory-making instances grounded in, and triggered by, places that would not be possible just through participant observation or interviews, even as a ‘privileged insider’ (Kusenbach 2003). The ‘breaks’ that we had during these walks – for food or to take a breather – also helped in terms of ‘rapport-building’ (see Anderson J. 2004).

3.2 Problems and Ethics/ Mitigations and Limitations

With every research, it is rare that everything goes smoothly. Here, I highlight some of the problems, ethical issues and considerations faced during the course of the research process and how I have attempted to address and mitigate these to a certain

extent. This is followed by how my positionality has played a role in the research, both in facilitating it and, at times, also contributing to the limitations of the project.

3.2.1 Interview Response

The first issue was the difficulty in getting war civilians as respondents. As mentioned, this was tackled either by ‘hijacking’ them off the streets or ‘snowballing’ from initial contacts. Yet, while I was able to get a stratified sampling of respondents in terms of ethnicity, I was less successful with regards to gender (see Table 3.1), due to many of the (Muslim) women encountered not willing to talk to a *male* researcher. This may be contrasted to Tolia-Kelly’s (2004a, b) and Mohammad’s (R. 2001) experiences of working with Asian women, where their positionality as Asian women themselves made it easier for them to establish rapport with respondents. This was addressed by speaking with the wives of the men I spoke to, and at times arranging for the meetings to be in public so that they could be more comfortable talking to me. This way, I was able to talk to a few of them, ensuring the voices of this particular group of the demographics, usually marginalised within national historiographies (see Khoo, A. 2007), are not totally excluded in the project.

Table 3.1 Breakdown (%) of Respondents According to Ethnicity/ Gender

<i>ETHNICITY</i>	*Population (%)	**Total Sample (%)
***<i>Bumiputeras</i>	56.6	57.1
<i>Chinese</i>	30.3	32.9
<i>Indians</i>	12.7	10.0
****<i>Others</i>	0.4	0.0
<i>GENDER</i>		
<i>Male</i>	49.9	71.4
<i>Female</i>	50.1	28.6
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>

* Population ($n = 2,251, 600$); ** Total sample ($n = 70$)

**** This refers to Eurasians and other mix races; *** This refers to Malays and the *Orang Aslis*
(Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2007)

3.2.2 Reliability of Interview Data

Another issue that confronted me was with respect to the reliability of the data that were gathered through the interviews. First, it pertained to the seniority of my respondents, which got me worried as to whether they would be able to recall something that happened more than sixty years ago. Borstein (1995) reminds us that people's ability to remember generally declines with age, and how this may be accentuated by the long hiatus after the event being recalled had taken place, especially if it was a difficult past that individuals and groups would rather forget about in order to move on with, and attain normalcy in their lives (see also Langer 1991). This was compounded by the fact that many of my respondents were young when they went through the war, which questioned their ability to talk about what happened during the war then, and how, given the tendency within the nation, as well as in Perak, to not mark the war within its more public landscapes, this might mean that the war years were just a distant memory that people do not talk about anymore.

Surprisingly, however, this did not pose a problem at all. Once I was able to persuade them to participate, many were vivid with their recollections. While the researcher's task of bringing up aspects of the past, especially traumatic ones, may still be a very thorny endeavour for respondents (see Portelli 1998), particularly when their memories are tied to issues that are still frowned upon within the nation – in Malaysia, these might pertain to local-Japanese collaborations (Ahmad, A.T. 2003), ethnic rivalries, issues of treachery and betrayal (Kratoska 1995, 1998) and the highly contentious memories of the communist insurgencies during the Emergency immediately after the war (Ban and Yap 2002) – individuals were still very willing to share their stories given, as one respondent put it: 'We are old and this may be our

last chance to talk. If we do not, then our stories will just go with us to our graves'. As such, my concerns were ungrounded, although the issues of risks to respondents, and their reactions when talking about a tense past remain a problem (see below).

A related issue is with regard to how reliable their responses were given that many of them may have their own agendas talking to a researcher (see Thompson 2000; Bornat 2001). In the context of my respondents, many of them were embroiled in their own form of commemorative activism: e.g. Chye in his efforts to preserve Green Ridge, Thambipillay with his interests in memorial ceremonies, and Law's active lobbying for public funds and support for his private museum on Sybil Kathigasu. Throughout the project, the question of how reliable the responses I was getting really are as historical resources remains a pertinent issue. Whilst in many ways I have come to terms with the fact that the fallibility and the potential biasness of the memories of my respondents, is something over which I had no control and just had to accept (see Gold 2002), where possible, especially when it is to do with data I could get cross-references from elsewhere, I would do that, thus minimising the possibility of the thesis being slanted in any way, or towards someone's interests.

3.2.3 Risks and Reactions

When researching the older generation, there is always the danger of physical risks to take into consideration. For one, I was not able to conduct walking interviews with all of my respondents because many of them were already frail and unable to move much. In such cases, I contented myself with interviewing them at home (while accompanied) or at more public spaces so as to reduce dangers posed to them. In some cases, even when respondents were willing to 'walk' the cities with me, I had

to be sure that they were able to do so and took extreme care to avoid them getting hurt, such as by not forcing them if they were reluctant to do so, or by ensuring that we took a break as and whenever I felt they were getting too tired. Still, on a few occasions, I have had respondents almost fall while taking the stairs or even climbing the hill, as I experienced personally with Chye when he first took me to the Green Ridge battlefield in Kampar. In these instances, I always made myself available to help in any way I could to minimise potential risks or dangers they were exposed to.

The extent of the risk associated with working with war civilians went beyond the physical. As Langer (1991: 8) said, when engaging respondents with potentially difficult memories, there is always the risk of ‘distress haunting the caverns of deep memory’ that might be released when talking about the past (see also Meth and Malazza 2003). He was of course referring to the possibility that talking about a traumatic past and even relating the most mundane of information about that past, there is the chance that this would inadvertently trigger highly disturbing and stressful memories that could cause physical and emotional breakdowns. While my respondents, as civilians during the war, may not have undergone an event that was as traumatic as the survivors of the Holocaust had, there were still some cases where the interview process had to be cut short and postponed to a later date when my respondents started experiencing emotional episodes (as evidenced by crying and, on a few occasions, their bodies shaking) as a result of remembering the traumatic past.

Initially, this had quite an impact on me as I was not, in any way, trained to handle such situations. While, as a researcher, these instances were occasionally useful in terms of helping me identify elements of the material world that potentially have the

effect of allowing memories the respondents have suppressed for so long, to involuntarily resurface, as a human being, it still did not feel right to me. Aside from stopping the interview and postponing it to a later date, all I could offer was tissue and a few comforting words. However, after most of the sessions, even those interspersed with emotional outbursts, many reported that it was ultimately good to 'let everything out'. Indeed, many were appreciative that I was there and wanted to listen to the stories, especially after 'keeping it inside' due to the lack of interest among the younger generations and the dangers that speaking publicly about the war may pose to them (see below). In that sense, 'opening up' to me gave them a therapeutic space in which they could relate their stories within a safe environment.

Another risk was that they might get into trouble if they were to talk publicly about the war, or to be openly critical about the Perak state. This was especially the case with those who have had, or still have, sympathy towards the communist cause even after so long. According to Jiang (80s, Ipoh), 'I was a communist during the Emergency and I killed some people... Of course I am afraid to talk about it. [The government] may arrest me'. Given these concerns, and my responsibility 'not to expose [my] informants to potential injury' (Thompson 1998: 175), I have ensured their identities are not exposed, thus the use of pseudonyms for many, where the focus is on 'what is said' rather than 'who said it' (see Dudley 1998). For many, their statements were not recorded on tape and I was careful not to force them to have their photographs taken when they refused. While this meant more work for me, in terms of manually taking down detailed transcripts (in shorthand) during the interview, it has helped to make respondents more comfortable with their responses.

3.2.4 Research Responsibility

The issue of responsibility of the researcher towards his or her respondents is a crucial one. In at least one way, this has already been highlighted in terms of how I felt responsible for being the one to trigger memories of the war that wrought physical and emotional distress for some of my respondents, given my inadequacy to provide proper support to them. While I accept that such instances represent part and parcel of undertaking such research, and that there is not much that can be done beyond being sensitive to the needs and emotional well-being of respondents (see Meth and Malazza 2003), I also take comfort in being there to console them and also 'bear witness' (see Wieviorska and Stark 2006) to, and recording for posterity, their experiences, given that many of them are already well advanced in age, and that there has not been much effort on the part of the state to document their stories. Still I struggle with the fact that I am but a geographer who is not trained in oral historical work which raises a question of whether I have actually done justice to their stories.

Although it would be ideal to distance myself from the researched, so as to maintain objectivity about the research and avoid compromising the integrity of the work, at times this is harder to accomplish in practice. During some interviews, I encountered respondents who sought help from me and, while I was careful not to allow any of this to cloud my judgment, I still tried to help. For example, for a while now, Lim (83, Kamunting) has been trying to get war reparations from the British Government, to no avail, for what he went through as a combatant with the British Royal Air Force (RAF), and his experiences as a Japanese prisoner of war. When I met him, he not only expressed this predicament of his but also practically 'begged' me to speak to the British Government on his behalf! While I understood his position, I was not

going to embroil myself too much within *his* own politics. Thus, I merely did a bit of reesarch on the issue and passed him some contacts he could pursue the matter with.

3.2.5 Bureaucracy

Another issue that plagued the fieldwork process was whether to make my research project ‘official’. It has to be mentioned at the outset that one may not freely conduct research in Malaysia without first securing a proper permit for it and this was something that I did not consider to do, given the time and necessary paperwork required, and the slim chances of acquiring permits for ‘highly sensitive work’ such as mine. I knew that this would restrict my access to the Malaysian Archives but, after hearing from a few other scholars that there would be nothing much in there for me – there is only a limited amount of material in there on the war – I decided to not pursue ‘the official research route’. However, not acquiring official permission also made it difficult for me to approach state officials in Perak for interviews or have access to sites that are restricted to the public. Although these were partly mitigated through getting to know key gatekeepers (see above), I feel much more could have been done if I had got a permit, which is thus one of the limitations of the project.

3.3 Positioning Myself in the Project

According to McDowell (1992: 409), ‘we must recognise and take account of our own position, as well as that of our research participants, and *write this into our research practice*’. Whilst this may, at times, be difficult to do (see Rose 1997), as much as possible I have done this, within the confines of the project, in terms of including various narratives and observations that I acquired during fieldwork into the thesis itself. In most instances, I have also been clear about my ‘biographical’

position – particularly in terms of my ethnicity, nationality, previous work and ‘worldviews’ (Gold 2002) – with my respondents, particularly when they seemed invaluable in helping me establish rapport with them, or gain insights and access to places I would not have gained otherwise. In doing so, I thus gave up the illusion of maintaining that I, as a researcher, was ‘a mysterious, impartial outsider ...free of personality and bias’ (England 1994: 81; Katz 1994) and tried to embrace my strengths (and weaknesses) with a view to enhancing my ability to carry out research.

One way in which I was able to do this was through my ethnicity. As an ethnically Malay researcher with the ability to speak the Malay language proficiently, I was definitely able to effectively communicate with my Malay respondents, many of whom were illiterate and able to speak Malay and no other languages. Since Malay was the national language, it also made it easier to interact with Malaysians of other ethnic groups. Thus, the interviews I conducted were done essentially in Malay if I felt they were more comfortable with that, or in English, which some of them preferred. My knowledge of a broken smattering of Mandarin and Cantonese also helped to endear me with some of the respondents. My awareness of local Malay(sian) cultures and sensitivities also helped me bypass some of the problems related to cross-cultural research many researchers may encounter when studying a society different from their own (see Gold 2002; Chamberlain and Thompson 1998).

My status as a Singaporeans also contributed towards getting some of the critical views about how the Perak state has memorialised the war within Perak. First, this was due to the general assumption that just because I am not Malaysian, means that, as one respondent said, ‘you are not one of them [the Malaysian government] and

you will not tell on us'. Second, many of them are well aware of how the Singapore government has been extremely active in commemorating the war in its own country which led them to constantly yearn for Malaysia to do the same. My previous experience as a curator at a war memorial museum in Singapore also contributed towards the sentiment that, despite my age, I was a person of authority who could provide them advice towards how to memorialise the war in Perak. While this also led to issues of trying to get me involved in commemorative activism, it also gave me access to information that would not normally be privy to ordinary researchers.

Still, as much as my biography may have been helpful in these terms, it has also provided challenges. First, my ethnicity made some Chinese respondents suspicious of me initially. In their minds, I was a spy sent by the Malaysian government to, according to one respondent, 'seek out communist elements and report on them' (Field notes 2007). This is due to the pervasive climate of fear and suspicion of the community that exists against not only the *Malay-dominated* government, but the Malay community generally. As we have seen, my gender also made it difficult for me to get enough female respondents. As a Singaporean, it also triggered suspicion among some of the elite interviewees about me wanting to 'dish out the dirt' on Malaysia. Thus, my biography has, at times, made me an 'insider' and, at others, posed me as an 'outsider' (see Gold 2002). Therefore, I would either play up (or down) my biography when the situation called for it (Mascia-Lees et al 1989: 33).

3.4 Summary: Methodological Triangulation

The main aim of this chapter was to identify the methodological roots and routes that were adopted towards accomplishing the research process which culminated in the

writing of this thesis. To summarise, the main tools adopted were the qualitative modes of participant observation and interview techniques (semi-structured, pseudo-oral history, and walking interviews). These selections were driven by their being the best ways to fulfil the research objectives at hand, and interrogate the complexities of the issues attached to ‘doing’ fieldwork on (war) memory and remembrance. The use of multiple methods – or ‘methodological triangulation – was also meant to allow the findings acquired from one method to be ‘checked by recourse to other indicators [and methods]’ (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983: 199). In so doing, it is thus hoped ‘the use of several methods at once’ could give rise to a situation where ‘the biases of any one method might be cancelled out by those of the others’ (Seale 1999:473).

CHAPTER FOUR

The Second World War and its Commemoration in Malaysia: Historical Background and Context

4.1 'Malaya at War'

'The Japanese landed at Kota Bharu at 12.25 a.m. on 8th December 1941 and first attacked Pearl Harbour at 8 a.m. on 7th December 1941. Nevertheless the Pacific War started...one and a half hours before the attack on Pearl Harbour. This was due to Malaya and Hawaii being on opposite sides of the International Date Line'. (Wrigglesworth 2006: 1)

As the bombing of Pearl Harbour will, to Americans, symbolise 'a date which will live in infamy', according to President Roosevelt,² the Pacific War, beginning with the Japanese invasion of Malaya – a British colony then comprising Singapore and Malaysia today – was already more than an hour underway. While the bombing was the Japanese attempt to handicap the American forces in the region, the Pacific War may be said to constitute part of their overall strategy to take over the British Naval Base in Singapore and incapacitate the British from defending its Empire when the Japanese launched its all-out war in Southeast Asia (see Farrell 2005). This was something that the British had already anticipated which led them to prepare gun defences in the south of Singapore for a naval attack. Yet, it was a land offensive from the north that the Japanese chose which saw them landing on Malaya on 12 December 1941 (for a discussion of both British and Japanese rationales for this, see Murfett et al 1991). This was to signify Malaya's entry into the Second World War.

² This was made on 8 December 1941 (www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrpearlharbor.htm).

Thus began what was referred to as ‘one of the greatest catastrophes of World World II’ (Thompson 2005). The failure of the British to defend Malaya placed the entity under Japanese rule for over three and a half years until the end of the war in 1945. Subsequent chapters consider how the war is commemorated within Perak, both officially and on a more vernacular level. Prior to that, this chapter provides the broader context by reconstructing the war that took place in colonial Malaya more generally,³ and how this has been remembered (or not) by the postcolonial government of Malaysia since its independence (*Merdeka*) in 1957. Specifically, it highlights the reasons why the government then neglected to mark its involvement during the war in the decades after *Merdeka* and how (and why) this changed in the late 1980s. This is important because federal trends greatly influence state practices. Thus, knowing ‘the big picture’ of war remembrance in Malaysia also helps us to understand the myriad politics of how the event is recalled in Perak on a micro scale.

4.2 The Second World War in Malaya

The war was played out in Malaya – comprising what are today Malaysia and Singapore – in three main phases. The first was the Malayan Campaign when Malaya was plunged into the war with the Japanese invasion of its borders in 1941, and which saw events that led to the fall of Malaya in 1942. The Japanese Occupation phase dovetailed this when Malaya came under the rule of the enemy regime. The third phase is the early post-war years, specifically between 1945 and 1960 (which includes when Malaysia gained its independence from the British in 1957), when the communist insurgency, known as ‘the Emergency’, broke out. While the last phase occurred after the war per se, the events during this period were so significantly tied

³ This chapter does not consider the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak because they went through different experiences of the war, and colonial administration under the British, and, since independence, have pursued very different routes in terms of war remembrance from West Malaysia.

to the war that to exclude it from consideration would be an oversight. Also, as will be clear below, this phase – which may be regarded as ‘the extended war years’ – also played a salient role in subsequent discussions on how the war is later to be recalled within national narratives. These periods are recounted here, followed by lessons learnt from them that made the war a significant event in Malaysian history.

4.2.1 The Malayan Campaign

In December 1941, Malaya became directly embroiled in the Second World War when it was subject to a full scale Japanese campaign – the Malayan Campaign – to fuel the imperialist aims of the Japanese, their need for resources and also cripple British defences by overrunning the Naval Base in Singapore (Thompson 2005). To briefly recapitulate the events of the Campaign, on 8 December 1941, in tandem with aerial bombings of Singapore and other major cities in Malaya, the Japanese Imperial Army led by Lt. General Tomoyuki Yamashita, landed at Singora (what is today Songkhla) and Pattani in southern Thailand, and the Sabak beachheads in Kota Bharu on the eastern Malayan state of Kelantan. Soon after landing and overcoming Allied defences there, the Japanese rapidly made their advance, on foot and bicycles (**Fig. 4.1**), down the main trunk roads of Malaya and, at times, through the dense tropical Malayan jungles as well as via amphibious landings on the east and west peninsula, towards their final destination that is Singapore (Nik Mohd. Salleh 2006) (**Map 4.1**).

Although most accounts of the Malayan Campaign tend to focus on the speed at which the Japanese made their advance down the Peninsula, and their swift execution of the ensuing battle for Singapore (see, for example, Thompson 2005; Kirby 1971; Murfett et al 1991), the Japanese victory in Malaya was by no means a foregone

conclusion. There was much resistance, not only by the formal Allied forces, made up primarily of *foreign* soldiers from Britain, Australia, New Zealand, India as well as British-trained *local* forces, such as the Malay Regiment, but also the more irregular resistance, comprising collaborations, despite prior ideological differences,⁴ between the Allied British and guerrilla members of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), culminating in the formation of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) in December 1941 (**Fig. 4.2**), as well as Chinese nationalists, its leader being Lim Bo Seng, later to be deemed a war hero, forming Force 136. Bitter fighting went on between the Japanese and the (formal and irregular) forces, and casualties inflicted on both sides (see Chapman 2006; Bayly and Harper 2008, 2005).

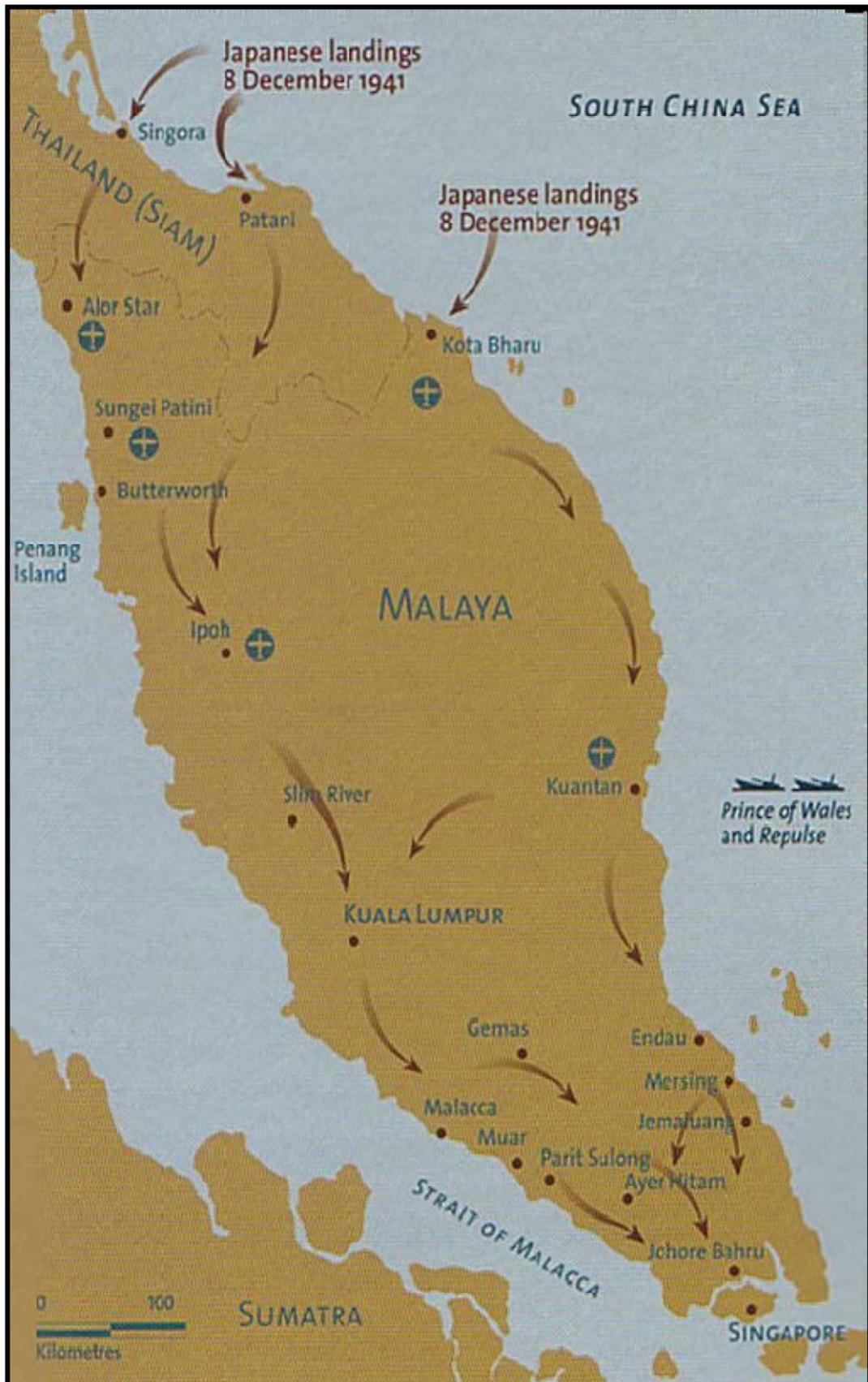


Fig. 4.1: Japanese soldiers on bicycles (source: NAS)



Fig. 4.2: Soldiers of the MPAJA, 1945 (source: NAS)

⁴ The ideological rivalry between the MCP and the British colonials has been richly documented elsewhere. Suffice to say that, influenced by the communist movement in mainland China, the main objective of the MCP before the war has been to rid Malaya of Western presence and establish a communist regime in its place (see Ban and Yap 2002; Barber 1971).



Map 4.1: Japanese landing and progress down the Peninsula, 1941-2
(Adapted from Commonwealth of Australia 2000: 33)

Still, for reasons not within the scope of the current work to explore (see Warren 2002; Farell and Hunter 2002), the Japanese won their victory and the Malayan Peninsula fell into their hands by January 1942. This then marked the beginning of the Battle for Singapore, and the last point of defence in the region for the British during the Campaign. After about a week of entering the island, during which the Naval Base was taken over, rendering Singapore from ‘an impregnable fortress’ (Elphick 1995) to ‘a naked island’ (Braddon 2005), the British were forced to surrender the whole of Malaya on 15 February 1942, marking the end of the Malayan Campaign. While many of the formal forces were incarcerated in POW camps in Malaya and Singapore (Flower 2002), the irregular forces stayed in the jungles to continue anti-Japanese activities during the Occupation. While the perseverance and heroism of the MPAJA were to receive acclaim after the war, their role in the Emergency was to diminish this, rendering them ‘traitors’ of the nation (see below).

4.2.2 The Japanese Occupation Years

After the surrender of Singapore, Malaya entered the period of Japanese Occupation, frequently depicted as ‘demonic, violent, ruthless, arbitrary, and almost devoid of compassion, consideration and benevolence’, as the former colony was administered under the harsh iron-clad rule of the Japanese for over three years (Murfett et al 1991: 248; Kratoska 1995, 1998; Ramasamy 2000). As part of the Japanese plan to establish a ‘Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere’ required the flushing of Western presence in the region, aside from the internment of Allied soldiers, European civilians in Malaya were also imprisoned (Blackburn and Hack 2005). For those who escaped, many ran to the jungles and joined the MPAJA and Force 136 camps (Bayly and Harper 2008). Deep in the jungles, they were not easily detected

and, with the support of locals in the area, with food and other supplies, these armies were able to disrupt the Japanese in many ways, such as through assassinations, sabotage, and intelligence gathering activities (Ban and Yap 2002; Wan Teh 1993).

Setting it apart from the First World War (1914-1919), the Second World War transformed the lives not only of combatants but also civilians, many of whom had already earlier been subjected to bombings and forced to leave their homes for safety during battles in their own backyards (Yeo and Ng 2000). During the Occupation, those in Malaya, renamed 'New Malai' ('New Malaya'), were further exposed to brutalities by the Japanese secret police (*Kempeitai*), in the form of rapes, lootings, massacres and 'executions without trial', particularly of the Chinese, known as *sook ching* ('cleansing by purging') (see Blackburn 2009; Cheah 2003; Michiko 2001). This was key in striking fear in the locals, who realised they could not expect mercy from the Japanese but only terror and violence (Ramdas and Yeoh 2002). It was also what pushed many civilians to join the MPAJA. As Ban and Yap (2002: 108) said, 'the indiscriminate killings, arrogance and brutality of the Japanese drove many young men to join the guerrillas and to support them with supplies and information'.

Even for those spared such horrid tortures, living in Malaya then was still a case of extreme deprivations (Ahmad A.T. 2003). Rigid regulations were implemented in Malaya – as with many other parts of Southeast Asia (see Koh 2007) – to ensure prior traces of Western influences were effaced and more Japanese ways of life introduced. In Malaya, British monuments were destroyed and street names changed. In schools, the usage of English was forbidden and Japanese was taught. The locals were coerced into using the Japanese calendar – the year 1942 became 2602, the

seventeenth year of Showa according to Japan (Wong 2000) – and the people were taught *Nippon* customs, national songs, and culture (Bayly and Harper 2005). By re-appropriating memories (and their physical traces) in the physical landscapes (see Azaryahu 2003), tactics that were to later be repeated by the Malaysian (and Perak) government post-independence (Chapter 5), the Japanese essentially wanted to ideologically and physically transform Malaya into an extension of Japan, reminding the people that the heyday of the Peninsula as part of Western imperialism was over.

The war eventually ended in 1945 with the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan that later saw the surrender of the Japanese forces everywhere in the Asia-Pacific to the Allied powers on 15 August 1945, a few months after the Germans surrendered in Europe, hence the emergence of VJ (or ‘Victory over Japan’) Day as opposed to VE (or ‘Victory’) Day that celebrates Allied victory within the European theatre of the war. This saw the surrender, in Malaya, of as many as 84 000 Japanese soldiers (Ban and Yap 2002), and the return of Western powers back to Southeast Asia, including the British who came to reclaim their colonial territory of Malaya from the Japanese. However, for all intents and purposes, British credibility and the trust that they commanded from the population before the war had dramatically waned and was never to be regained again (see Bayly and Harper 2005). This paved the way for nationalism to take root and for Malaya to subsequently secure independence from the British in 1957 (see below).

4.2.3 Dawning of the Emergency

Prior to the return of British forces, it was the irregular armies, such as the MPAJA and Force 136, who kept law and order in many parts of Malaya. They organised the

Japanese surrender of arms and were tasked with restoring peace in the major towns (Fig. 4.3). As much as 70 per cent of the Peninsula then was under the influence of these armies (Ban and Yap 2002). However, the return of the British was to lead to incidents that were soon to throw Malaya into disarray again. The British, acting on suspicions that with the end of the Japanese threat, the MPAJA – many of them also members of the MCP who were keenly set on creating a communist Malaya that was free from any kind of imperial domination – might (re)turn their attention on them, took steps to divert this. In December 1945, the British thus called for the complete disbandment of MPAJA and put to motion pre-emptive strikes to eliminate possible communist threats. In some cases, as Cheah (2003: 191) cites, the informal ‘guerrillas were immediately disarmed and harassed by [the returning] British troops, who searched their premises and seized printed materials critical of British policies.’



Fig. 4.3: Japanese surrender of arms in Kuala Lumpur (source: NAS)

These moves by the British, and the disappointment at the disrespect shown to the MPAJA for their war efforts, frustrated many guerrillas who saw these ‘as an attempt to rob them of the fruits of Japanese defeat’ (Cheah 2003: 152). The British, however, were not wrong in harbouring suspicions, as the MCP was indeed already planning to resume their anti-British activities post-war. As Ban and Yap (2002: xvi)

write, 'in the MCP's ideological and strategic calculations, the Japanese Occupation was only an interregnum; the real war for the MCP was to be fought after this – the war for political control and the creation of a communist republic'. Ban and Yap (2002: 97) also continued by saying that, 'as the war wound to a close and it became evident that the British would return, the MCP began secret plans to turn the anti-Japanese army into a permanent armed force against the British'. By then, the group had grown to about 10 000 members, and had already begun to hide arms obtained from the British and Japanese. Thus, the guerrillas headed back to the jungles again.

Malaya was then about to be thrust back into darkness again as the MCP – led by Chin Peng, who ironically was earlier awarded a Medal of Honour by the colonial British for his war efforts – began their revolution. During this time, there was much looting and general chaos, and Malaysians (especially the Malays) were constantly harassed by the predominantly Chinese MCP. This escalated on 16 June 1948 with the MCP murders of three European planters in Perak, which led the British to declare a state of Emergency, first in Perak and later in Malaya, when MCP 'lefties' were rendered 'outlaws' and rights were given to the police to imprison suspects without trial. Plantations were left to armed guards, a fifth of the population moved to 'New Villages' to cut access of guerrillas to sources of information, and security forces of local police and British soldiers, were called in to tide the wave of terror enveloping Malaya then. In many ways, the atrocities committed by the guerrillas were said to be as bad if not worse than those inflicted by the Japanese (Sioh 2006).

The Malayan Emergency lasted for 12 years, from 1948 to 1960, the horrors tapering off with Malaya's independence on 31 August 1957 (even though low-level

hostilities did continue right until 1989).⁵ By this time, many of the guerrillas, more interested in getting *Merdeka* (or independence) from the British rather than the more radical motive of establishing a communist regime, were appeased and gave up their fight. With the support for the communist cause steadily depleting, and many of its prime leaders, such as Chin Peng, surrendered, arrested or exiled by this time, the reign of fury and terror that was demonstrated by the MCP communist guerrillas had come to an end (Barber 1971). This was not, however, before the Emergency had proven to be *the* event that had impacted most on the lives of the locals, mainly civilians, more than the actual Second World War did. In terms of civilian casualties, for instance, Rivers (1998: 13) cites how ‘the total casualties of 4668 civilians were even more than the 4425 of the Security Forces from Malaya, Britain and the Commonwealth’ (Thambipillay 2006). In some ways, this fact too was to have repercussions on how the war is to be remembered in Malaysia later (see below).

4.3 Forgetting the Second World War in Malaysia

‘The end of the war triggered the beginning of the end of the European empires in Asia and Africa’. (Tan 2007: ix)

The Second World War was a watershed in the history of Malaysia. For one it was symbolic of how the British had failed to meet their obligations to defend Malaya such that ‘the mandate that underwrote Britain’s Malay Empire was broken’ (Bayly and Harper 2005: 128). This failure also left a sense of shock among the people, of being betrayed by the very leaders there to protect them. As Blackburn and Hack

⁵ At this time, Malaya (excluding Singapore which remained a British possession) became known as the Federation of Malaya that consisted of 11 states. Its territorial boundaries were later expanded in 1963 as the Federation of Malaysia to include the states of Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore. On 9 August 1965, Singapore was expelled, after which Malaysia was born (Kaur and Metcalfe 1999).

(2005: 5) say, in the minds of locals, Malaya ‘never did fall. It was surrendered by a British Empire that chose not to send the necessary resources, and whose commanders chose not to fight to the finish’. Also, the war revealed British weakness for being ‘crushed so swiftly’ by an Asiatic foe, such that ‘the myth of the superior “White Man” evaporated as had the British military presence in Malaya, about as quickly as remnants of a rainstorm when the sun comes out’ (Sardar 2000: 144). This taught locals the need for self-reliance and how Malaysia should never depend on others for defence, giving rise to calls for nationalism and freedom from colonialism.

Scholars have also pointed to how the war contributed to the rise of Malay nationalism in another way. During the Occupation, there was, at least initially, encouragement of local nationalist movements, such as the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (KMM) that called for the liberation of Malaya from British rule. This was part of the Japanese propaganda war cry to establish a ‘Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere’, a region devoid of Western presence and domination, with power to be reverted back to the Asian populations (Blackburn and Hack 2005), directed primarily to the Malays and Indians, which saw Japanese support for rising nationalist groups like the KMM (Young Malays Organisation) (Ahmad A.T. 2003; Ramasamy 2000). Although this Japanese support was revoked in 1943, which saw the disbandment of KMM and other such groups, it had already given rise to Malay (KMM) leaders like Ahmad Boestamam and awakened local desire for a Malaya rid of control by foreign colonial masters (see Ban and Yap 2002; Ahmad A.T. 2003).

The war has also been said to have brought the people of Malaya – then no more than segregated groups of Malays (and *Orang Asli*, ‘original people’), immigrant Chinese

and Indians, and British subjects – together. The experience of having gone through the war together is seen thus as providing the glue binding its inhabitants as one. As Lim (2000: 155) puts it, ‘in a multiracial country like Malaysia where each community carries so much of its own cultural baggage, the memory of the common suffering of war provides an important shared historical experience’. The war was also seen as establishing a bond between its inhabitants with the land, as many of them – such as the Malay Regiment – also participated in battles to defend Malaya against the marauding Japanese enemy, thus not only prefacing the strength, courage and resilience of the people, but also giving birth to a number of individuals, such as Lieutenant Adnan Saidi, officer with the Malay Regiment, and Lim Bo Seng, who fought with Force 136, and later gave his life to the cause, who could be considered ‘national’ heroes (see Chye 2002; Muzaini and Yeoh 2005b; Hack and Rettig 2006).

Given the potential for memories of the war to be mobilised by the government as the raw materials for constituting the plural peoples of post-independent Malaysia into an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1991) – in terms of awakening the national spirit, providing a shared history and identity for its people and producing ‘local’ heroes as national inspirational figures – it is thus interesting that, for a long time after *Merdeka* there was nothing done to insert the war as part of the official discourse in Malaysia (Wong 2001). Not only were there no memorials or monuments that were established towards recalling what happened within the nation during the war years, manifest traces of the event, such as memorials built by former colonials, were abandoned and left neglected if not completely demolished for other modern uses. Examples include the neglect of British battle fortifications in Jitra (**Fig. 4.4**) and, in Kuala Lumpur, the abandonment of Pudu Gaol, what was formerly

a Japanese incarceration camp (**Fig. 4.5**) and the recent destruction of Bok House, or what used to be the Japanese Yokohama Specie Bank during the war (**Fig. 4.6**).



Fig. 4.4: Abandoned fortifications in Jitra (source: author)



Fig. 4.5: Pudu Gaol in the 1970s (left) and now (source: author)



Fig. 4.6: Bok House in 1929 (top) and in 2006 (source: Malaysian Heritage Trust)

The lack of appreciation by the federal government for its material legacies is not a fate only confined to the war. The government's privileging of a 'market-driven' and 'progressive' approach to nation-building, even if this meant the loss of its (war) past, have been commented upon (Bunnell 2002, 2004b; Willford 2003). According to Williamson (2002: 403), there is a propensity for the Malaysian government to gaze to the future for sustenance rather than to the past, where rampant urban development and new 'featureless tabernacles' of modernity replace 'many of the nation's historical landmarks at a cost to the social fabric and collective memory of Malaysians' (Bunnell 2004; Noor 2002). More than that, nationalism discourses have also been seen as highly nature- and culture-centric, particularly in promoting primarily Malay and Islamic cultures, such that it led Baharuddin, S.A. (1993: 40) to say that only three things define Malaysia, 'beruk, gasing and wau' (literally, the monkey, the traditional spinning top, and the local kite). With such blatant disregard for its heritage, and the paucity of legislation protecting it,⁶ much of the nation's past (and traces of it) has given way to modernisation and now been lost (Hussin 1989).

It is clear thus how the government has not been pro-active in ensuring that traces of its past are kept for the next generations (see Baharuddin 1993). Where the war is concerned, aside from not preserving the historical remnants of the event, many (such as Bok's house) now lost forever, the government has also, in the first decades after independence, neglected to memorialise the war such that there is now nothing much to remind the people, and keep within public consciousness, of what happened in Malaysia during those years. Yet, the 'forward-looking' policies of the federal government only provide a partial reason to why there was not much official interest

⁶ Before the introduction of the National Heritage Act in 2005, the only legislation to gazette the nation's material historical legacies was the Antiquities Act (1976) which protects architecturally significant buildings more than 100 years old (see Cartier 1997).

to capitalise upon the event to prop up Malaysia's overarching nation-building project. The next section highlights other specific reasons, arguing how, despite the significance of the war to Malaysia, there was much about it that also works against the Malaysian government's desire to carve out a 'postcolonial' identity for itself.

4.4 The (Colonial) Memory Conundrum

The war saw some of the most traumatic experiences for Malaysians (Kratoska 1995). As such, it has been said that in the early years of *Merdeka*, there was the desire to suppress these experiences since, as Cheah (2000: 35) said, 'people still had memories too unpleasant to be recalled, and did so reluctantly' (see also Lim 1995). In addition, given the need for the nation to recover, socially, economically and politically, notions like 'heritage' and 'commemoration' were seen as luxuries the nation could ill afford. According to Wang (2000: 19), 'so much had to be done all at once that there was little place among the new nationalist leaders for remembrance', suggesting that the lack of intention to remember the war could be attributed to the fact that this was superseded by the urgent imperative of the government then to build the Malaysian nation out of the ashes and rubble of the war (see also Cheah 2003). Yet, it does not really explain why the Malaysian government was still reticent about remembering the war when it was in the position to do so years after.

Another possible reason might be the imperative for Malaysia to maintain amicable ties with Japan. In 1966, Malaysia's first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, accepted a Japanese gift of RM25 million for the purpose of purchasing two ocean-going vessels from Japan, which was also to become the complete settlement of the 'blood debt' owed to Malaysia for what happened (Cheah 2007, 2000). With this,

and the close economic relationship established between the two nations – due to Malaysia’s ‘Look East Policy’, which promotes good diplomatic and economic ties with all the East Asian nations – there is therefore the feeling that ‘politically the Malaysian government would not welcome any criticisms or cause embarrassment to the Japanese’ for fear of jeopardising the status quo (Cheah 2000: 35). This was further symbolised by another Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohammad, telling the Japanese Prime Minister Muruyama (back in 1994) that there was no longer any need for him to apologise for its war conduct (*The Star* 28 August 1994).

This would go some way to account for why the federal government has refrained from remembering the war many years after independence, where it has preferred to keep silent about Malaysia’s involvement in it. More than this, however, it can also be argued that many of the war’s narratives actually do not lend themselves to nation-building purposes, despite the significances that were cited earlier. There are a few reasons to suggest how it is the *very nature of the war itself* that has served to diminish, if not cross out, its usefulness for Malaysian nation-building, particularly in the grand project of promulgating a truly *postcolonial* Malaysian identity that is able to not only steer away from its colonial past but also able to bind its multiracial population together. It is ultimately due to these reasons that Malaysia has elected to proceed forward with a national narrative that focuses, as Ashplant et al (2000: 64) say, on ‘the new state’s continuity with pre-war colonialism rather than any fundamental break from it [that the war] became elided as an unfortunate interlude’.

First, the desire not to remember the war could be due to the perception that the battles fought between the Allied forces and the Japanese were nothing more than a

foreign event. As Fujitani et al (2001: 4) state, ‘the majority of people in the Asia-Pacific region were not ‘people of the warring nations’ that played commanding roles in designing or implementing the course of the war, even though they may have been deeply implicated in the war’s outcome. Datuk Syed Hamid Albar, former Malaysian law minister, also echoed this when he said that, during the war, Malaysia was no more than ‘a party to other people’s war’ (cited in Lim 2000: 139). The historian Wang (2000: 16-7, 18) further drove the point home when he said that:

‘For most people in Malaya, the war was between the British and the Japanese. It was a classic, imperialist war and, one might add, a war where the locals were merely *spectators* [where] there was no real part for the indigenous peoples of Southeast Asia except to be conquered’ (*my emphasis*).

This might explain why the Malaysian federal government was reluctant to remember the war, particularly in the light of the nation’s general disdain for anything ‘Western’ (see Mohamad 2001; Bunnell; 2004b). Not only was the war not perceived as a ‘local’ event, it also served to remind the population of the fact that it was once a ‘colonial’ entity of British Imperialism, one that would not go down very well in a nation that promotes its history playing down aspects of the colonial past.

The possibility that the government was not keen on remembering a ‘colonial’ event could also be due to the fact that, as Ahmad (pers comm. 2005) puts it, ‘it was not the last war to have happened that led to *Merdeka*’, referring to how it was the Emergency that led the British to consider independence for Malaya. Indeed, notwithstanding the fact that *Merdeka* happened right in the midst of the Emergency, and that locals did undergo hardship during this period that arguably surpassed what they underwent during the war (see Sioh 2006), the communist threat was so intense

that independence was seen by the British colonial government as the only way to overturn the Emergency (Barber 1971). As such, it was the Emergency (and not the war) that became *the* event most closely associated with Malaysian independence, which would thus make it more suitable for nation-building than the war preceding it was. This might also explain why, despite the government's reticence about marking the war, it has been more active in marking the Emergency, hence the rise of 'national' sites to that event – the National Monument (1966) in Kuala Lumpur and 'the Emergency monument' in Kedah – and none to the war itself (**Fig. 4.7**).



Fig. 4.7: *Tugu Negara* (left) and Emergency monument, Alor Star (source: author)

Another factor may be the extremely muddy interpretations pertaining to questions of who the enemy really was during the war. Indeed, not everyone in Malaya then identified the Japanese as the evil enemy. According to one individual, 'the Japanese fought our war for us. If they had not done so, we would have had to fight the British ourselves' (cited in Lim 2000: 139). Another local (cited in Ahmad A.T. 2000: 78) wrote that 'if only the Japanese did stay much longer in Yan (Kedah) [in Malaya] they could have taught us more... pity!' Thus there were times when Japanese rule was actually seen in a rather positive light. Also, as Wang (2000: 20) mentioned:

‘Many new nationalist leaders were grateful for the opportunities and help offered to organise themselves for independence, whatever the ultimate purpose that Japan had in mind for them. There were frustrations and disappointments that were remembered, but nothing so negative that could overshadow the prospects of nationhood to which they could look forward.’

Thus, there is not much of a consensus as to who was actually considered as ‘the enemy’ during the war, the British or the Japanese (see also Lim 1995, 2000). In such a light, therefore, the war becomes a subject that might potentially tear the nation apart, particularly with regards to the different ways in which the Japanese are perceived in the minds of some locals, a subject that perhaps was better left unturned.

Then there is also the ‘race-centred subtext’ of the Japanese Occupation, which had served to render the war ‘as an anomaly, an unfortunate hindrance to nationhood because of the communal tensions it incited’, particularly problematic in a multiracial nation like Malaysia (Wong 2001: 229). Central to this is the Japanese differential treatment of the ethnic groups. While they were (initially at least) cordial with the Malays (and Indians), so as to win them over to their ‘Greater Asia’ cause, the Japanese were harsh against the Chinese, many of whom were highly supportive of the anti-Japanese movement in China and in Malaya itself (see Blackburn 2009). What emerges then is a situation where there was much resentment, particularly of the Chinese against the Malays, where the former would constantly be suspicious of the latter. It also did not help that many of the Malays did indeed ‘collaborate’ with the Japanese as ‘spies’ against anti-Japanese activities (many committed by the Chinese albeit in reaction to Japanese brutality), and that most of these collaborators were to hold important positions in Malaysian post war politics (Ahmad A.T. 2003).

Further complicating this already tense racial equation was how, after the British returned, many locals, primarily the Chinese, were inducted into the MCP to fight the British during the Emergency, in a bid to establish a communist Malaya, a fight which would plague the country even after *Merdeka*. This also ‘tainted’ the glory and heroism of many of these men (and women) who earlier fought against the Japanese; from ‘heroes’, they were then to ‘fall from grace’ to become ‘national traitors’ (Ho T.F. 2000a). Thus, as much as officially remembering the war might provide its population with a shared history of common sufferings, it also has the potency to trigger memories of inter-ethnic rivalries that could divide its citizenry. In the light of racial riots like the ones in 1969, and grievances the Chinese already had with the Malay-dominated government, whose policies tend to privilege Malays over non-Malays,⁷ remembering the war, and the memory of racial divisions for which it stood, may be antithetical to national desires to bind its multiracial population as one.

Despite the war in being hailed as a shared event that could bring the diverse peoples in Malaysia together (see above), some have pointed to how the varied war experiences of the ethnic communities, particularly between the Malays and the Chinese, under the Japanese, could potentially also work against the crafting of a national identity centred on Malaysia. As a result of the Japanese atrocities being targeted particularly to the Chinese and not the other communities, Blackburn (2009: 101), for example, highlighted how this has served to strengthen and promote a more communal affiliation, and ‘feeling of victimhood’, among the community that was more based on, and entwined with, nationalism in China itself rather than a deepening sense of place and attachment to Malaya per se (see also Wang 2000).

⁷ One such policy was the National Economic Policy (1971), which translated into special rights for Malays (including the *Orang Asli*) as *bumiputera* (‘sons of the soil’), and the marginalisation of non-*bumiputeras* such as the Chinese and the Indians (Cheah 2003; Williamson 2002; Blackburn 2009).

Thus, by remembering the war in Malaysia, there is also the risk of invoking memories of the atrocities that the Chinese went through as an ethnic community *rather than* as Malaysians, which could thus disrupt the federal Malaysian project of bringing the multiracial people of the nascent nation together regardless of their differences. As such, the war was something that was perhaps seen as best to be kept under the proverbial carpet as opposed to being publicly marked within the nation.

Given these factors – the ‘colonial’ nature of the war, muddy interpretations of who the enemy really was, and the problematic recollections of racial divisions associated with the war – it has thus made memories of the war years not only ‘perilous’, but also ‘multiple, contradictory, unsettled and unsettling’ (Fujitani et al 2001: 4). In the light of this, the federal Malaysian government thus decided it was better to refrain from remembering the war so as not only to sidestep the difficult memories that the war might potentially incite – particularly with respect to its ‘colonial’ connotations and ‘race-centred subtexts’ – but also to avoid bringing memories of the war up only to have them work against the national *postcolonial* project of cultivating a Malaysian identity that is its own, looking forward and not to the ‘colonial’ past. Reminiscent of what the Japanese did during the war, in terms of getting rid of traces as a means of appropriating people’s memories, this then led to the prompt erasure of anything that might point towards the war, thus rendering many traces of the event, and the nation’s colonial British heritage more generally, forgotten or destroyed.

4.5 Grassroots and Transnational Memoryscapes

Despite the lack of official memorialisation, though, this does not mean that the war was totally forgotten in Malaysia given how it is still marked, at other scales, by

Malaysians and transnational agents of war commemoration (Cheah 2007). With regards the former, there are the memoryscapes that were established immediately after the war (1946-48) to pay respects to locals killed by the Japanese that tend to be significant only within small circles among Chinese communities from which the dead originated (see Lim 2000; Blackburn 2009). One example of this is the *Sungai Lui* Memorial, sited on a mass grave of 399 Chinese murdered in a *Sook Ching* massacre and erected by descendants. Another is the *Air Itam* War Memorial in Penang, an obelisk to remember martyrs who died fighting the Japanese during the war, many of whom were MPAJA members (**Fig. 4.8**). Still, it was found that not many know about them generally, aside from that they are war-related and ‘Chinese’ – Blackburn (2009: 101) refers to them as Chinese rather than Malaysian community spaces – where the specifics of the people and event marked by them remain largely the preserve of those who built them and the communities from which they harked.



Fig. 4.8: *Sungai Lui* Memorial (left) and *Air Itam* War Memorial (source: author)

Grassroots memoryscapes may also be found within more institutional domains. This is to say that, even while the Malaysian government has been taciturn about marking and commemorating the war years, there are uniformed organisations that have

sought to recover memories of those years towards developing institutional history and *esprit de corp* among members, such as the Army Museum (Fig. 4.9) and the Police Museum in Kuala Lumpur where war narratives are inserted as part of institutional (rather than national) memories, and homage is paid to those, *from the institutions themselves*, who have served (and died) during the (extended) war years. Sometimes, institutional level ceremonies are also held such as the one by the Royal Malaysian Police in Batu Gajah, Perak (Chapter 6) and elsewhere. Other times, they may remain on the walls of everyday sites such as at the Victoria School in Kuala Lumpur where a plaque on the wall at its main foyer allows for students and visitors to know of the school's former role as a Japanese administrative centre (Fig. 4.10).



Fig. 4.9: The Army Museum in Kuala Lumpur (interior) (source: author)



Fig. 4.10: Plaque at Victoria School, Kuala Lumpur (source: author)

Aside from these grassroots memoryscapes, the former British government was also responsible for setting up their own memoryscapes, a tradition that has carried on even in the present context by foreign High Commissions in Malaysia. The most prominent would be the ones set up by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, whose main task was to establish and maintain war cemeteries in various locations around the world where soldiers died in defence of the British Empire (CWGC 2001). In Malaysia, two of these, both established around 1946, are in Cheras (Kuala Lumpur) and Taiping (Perak), where the bodies of the Allied (primarily British) war dead are interred and annually commemorated. Then, there are the Cenotaphs – literally ‘empty tombs’ – that were established, in various shapes and sizes and located in many major cities around Malaysia, by the former British government to honour their war dead who died on ‘foreign’ soil during the First World War, although their commemorative scope was later widened to also include the Second World War. The main one resides in Kuala Lumpur (near Lake Gardens) (**Fig. 4.11**).



Fig. 4.11: The CWGC cemetery, Cheras (left) and Cenotaph, Kuala Lumpur (source: author)

In addition to these that were erected by the former British colonial administration in Malaya, there are also those that were set up by current foreign governments and

High Commissions. For example, there is the memorial at *Parit Sulong*, Johore. Located in the centre of town, in view of where some 110 Australians and 40 members of the 45th Indian Brigade were massacred in 1942, and erected by Australia's Department of Veteran Affairs, the memorial, in addition to two interpretive panels on the event, was inaugurated on 4 September 2007 to commemorate soldiers who died during the Battle of Muar. Another such memorial is an obelisk at *Sungai Kelamah*, Negeri Sembilan (also known as the Gemencheh Memorial), established also by Australians, dedicated to those who perished during the fighting that took place near the bridge there (*The Star* 7 June 2008) (Fig. 4.12).



Fig. 4.12: Parit Sulong Memorial (left) and Gemencheh Memorial (source: author)

Although located on Malayan 'soil', these memoryscapes remain almost exclusively *foreign-centred*. Notwithstanding that they were set up to honour overseas (as opposed to local soldiers) who fought and died in Malay(si)a, they also tend to be the foci of ceremonies organised by the High Commissions (of Britain, Australia and New Zealand) in celebration of memorial days in their respective countries, such as

Remembrance Sunday and ANZAC Day,⁸ Further affirming the ‘foreignness’ (or rather, the ‘un-Malaysianness’) of these memorial (practices), are their principally foreign visitors and attendees, and also rituals, where there would invariably be the bugler from the military services playing ‘the Last Post’, bagpipers resonating with renditions of ‘Amazing Grace’, the observance of a minute’s silence, the symbolic laying of the wreaths and other paraphernalia, like wooden crosses, fake poppies and (for the ANZAC dawn service) candles (**Fig. 4.13**), elements that are usually representative of those enacted in ceremonies within Western (not local) contexts.



Fig. 4.13: ANZAC Day, Cheras cemetery (source: AHC, Malaysia)

Through these grassroots and transnational memoryscapes, it may then be assumed that memories of the war are not going to be completely forgotten anytime soon (see Tan 2007). The level of high profile transnational remembrances could essentially be due to the already-standing traditions, within the West, of honouring the war dead since the First World War that what they have done in Malaysia is just an extension of this. The degree to which the war is commemorated on the level of the grassroots,

⁸ ANZAC (which stands for the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) Day is a national public holiday in Australia and New Zealand, and is commemorated on 25 April every year to honour those from the two countries who gave their lives during the two world war (see Stephens 2007)

particularly by the Chinese, could largely be attributed to the fact that the war affected them more intensely than it did other communities (Lim 2000; Blackburn 2009). Unlike the transnational memoryscapes, however, grassroots remembrances tend to be within private realms such that, on the level of the public, it might still seem that only foreigners were interested to ensure the war is not forgotten. Given the inclination of transnational memoryscapes to represent ‘colonial’ war narratives, and commemorate the *foreign* war dead (or at least those who fought for Empire), war narratives of the Malaysians themselves, and the memory of locals who died during the war, remained vastly sidelined if not totally flushed out of public consciousness. This continued to be the case after *Merdeka* in 1957 by virtue of the fact that even the new Malaysian government chose to keep the memories of the war under wraps publicly (see above). The practice of the government to disavow the war was, however, to change in the late 1980s and it is to this that the next section turns.

4.6 Towards Postcolonialising the War

‘Make history relevant’. (Minister Seri Datuk Anwar Ibrahim, cited in *New Straits Times* 22 December 1992)

This statement, made by the then Finance Minister in response to the need for the Malaysian government to ‘make history learning interesting and promote interest in the nation’s history’ among the younger population, reflect one of the first times that a prominent politician stepped up to criticise the lack of historical perspective and consciousness among Malaysians (see also *New Straits Times* 23 May 1992, 6 March 1992). In fact, since the late 1980s, there has been an increasing national momentum with regards to remembering the nation’s history and salvaging its heritage. In 1987,

the ‘cultural’ (which also includes ‘history’) component of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports was removed to become the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism. Although it did not become the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage until 2004, its promotion from a department was significant in raising the profile of ‘heritage’ in the nation.⁹ History being made a compulsory subject in secondary schools, the rise of national (and state) museums and writings on Malaysian histories, all point towards a higher official emphasis to reach into the recesses of its past as a means of promoting history and making it an integral part of its overall nation-building machinery (see Haji Ismail and Haji Ismail 2003; Worden 2003; Kamal et al 2007; Sardar 2000).

The official move towards ‘heritage’ was, first, prompted by the realisation that the present generation has become rather ignorant about their own histories such that the federal government felt it was time to make history more relevant for the young to want to learn it (*New Straits Times* 15 February 1989; *New Sunday Times* 26 June 1988). Second, due to the forward-looking policies of the Mahathir administration and rampant urbanization within the country, the previous decade also witnessed many of the nation’s historic buildings and sites (in danger of) being obliterated and left to decay such that it quickly motivated the government to salvage whatever that was left (see Bunnell 2004; Kamal et al 2007; Lee 2005). Third, due to the worldwide recession at the time, and falling visitor numbers, it also gave impetus to position colonial nostalgia as a means of boosting tourism arrivals and receipts (see Teo 2003; Worden 2003; Cartier 1997, 1993; Jenkins and King 2003). These factors contributed largely to the growth of the tourism and heritage industries in Malaysia.

⁹ It has since been renamed the Ministry of Unity, Culture, Arts and Heritage, the addition of the term ‘unity’ an indication of how the work of the Ministry has now also been expanded to the ways in which national history may be utilised towards bringing the population together.

The increased interest in issues of ‘history’ also pertains to the commemoration of its war past. First, there was the establishment of national war museums, such as the *Bank Kerapu War Museum* (Kelantan) in 1994 (**Fig. 4.14**), and the planned development of a WWII military outpost in Tanjung Pengelih (Johore Bahru) (*New Straits Times* 4 January 1988). British machine gun pillboxes, hitherto neglected, have also, in some cases, such as in Jitra (Kedah), not only been conserved, but accompanied with storyboards to outline their significance (**Fig. 4.15**), a sign that the government no longer frowns upon preserving memories of the ‘colonial’ war. Posthumous national awards were also handed out to ‘war heroes’ who sacrificed their lives during the war, such as Lt. Adnan Saidi of the Malay Regiment. Since then, Lt. Adnan has not only had a tank named after him, but also a movie, entitled ‘Leftenan Adnan’, that was commissioned by the Malaysian Defence Ministry, and tells of his war escapades with his men, during the battles in Malaya and Singapore.



Fig. 4.14: Bank Kerapu War Museum (source: author)

In other cases, revisions were made to (state) museums to highlight what happened during the war within the state, as seen in the Alor Setar Museum (in Kedah) and the National Museum in Kuala Lumpur where, in both cases, substantial sections have been allocated to informing visitors about the war and Japanese Occupation years

(see Ahmad A.T. 2007) (Fig. 4.16). While, for a long time, the war never featured in any of the nation's official events, since the 1990s, this too has changed. For example, in 1991, the then Deputy Prime Minister, Ghafar Baba, gave a dinner to a number of veteran Malaysian journalists at the Putra World Trade Centre in Kuala Lumpur, where he spoke 'on the importance of [war] history and asked all the veteran journalists present to "write anything that you could remember" for the archives' (*New Straits Times* 19 June 1991). These, as well as the federal initiative in 1987 to organize Malaysia's first Battlefield Tour experience for foreign war veterans (*Business Times* 21 August 1987), indicate how the war is no longer a taboo subject to be brought up during formal events, and within Malaysia generally.



Fig. 4.15 Conserved British pillbox in Jitra (left) and storyboard (source: author)



Fig. 4.16: War exhibits at Alor Star Museum (left) and National Museum (source: author)

The extent to which the Malaysian (federal and state) government is now comfortable with the war years which were, for a long time, swept under the carpet, is also clear in how foreign and Malaysian state governments have recently also worked together in the remembrance of the event. This is seen, for instance, in the erection of the War Memorial (in Kota Bharu) in 2002, a joint venture between the Kelantan state government and the Australian High Commission, to honour the many Australians who died at the Sabak beachheads during the Japanese landings in 1941 (**Fig. 4.17**). In Pengkalan Chepa, also in Kelantan, a clock tower and a ‘garden of Peace’ were also set up by the state in association with the Japanese Veterans Club, while the Negeri Sembilan state government erected a memorial in the form of an information plaque and a *kris* (traditional Malay weapon)-inspired monument at the Gemencheh War Memorial (**Fig. 4.18**). The *kris*-inspired design is interesting in that it represented a strategy to ‘localise’ the memorial so as to resonate with Malaysians.



Fig. 4.17: The Kelantan War Monument, Kota Bharu (source: author)

It is thus clear that the late 1980s represented a watershed in the Malaysian government starting to take an interest in the war. A few factors may have led to this. First, it could be due to the looming Fiftieth anniversary of the Malayan Campaign (in 1991) and ‘VJ-Day’ (in 1995), truly ‘emotive’ occasions given this was the last

chance for survivors to ‘lay to rest a ghost’ (Reid 2002: 4). Transnational events then ensued, including petitions for Japan to acknowledge past wrongs, which later led to not one but two Japanese Prime Ministers, in 1993 and 1996, to apologise for war atrocities (see Cheah 2000; Murakami and Middleton 2006). While the Malaysian government did not involve itself with these issues – according to Lim (2000: 154), ‘no official statement was issued on the Japanese apologies which was buried on page 22 of the *New Straits Times*’ – it did not stop Malaysians from discussing the war and voicing opinions publicly, thus translocating international debates within the local media as well (see *New Straits Times*, 10 November 1987, 21 January 1989).



Fig. 4.18: The *kris*-inspired monument at Gemencheh Memorial (source: author)

Therefore, aside from the general rise in ‘heritage’ matters within Malaysia (see above), and the opportunity to perhaps also partake in the touristic benefits of jumping onto the commemorative bandwagon, it could be that the federal government felt it could no longer keep quiet about the war. This was further fanned by press calls by locals who wanted war history to be revised according to more local frameworks, and for it to be more inclusive of local narratives and heroes (see *Malay Mail* 25 November 1985; *New Straits Times* 14 April 1983; 8 October 1986; 19

February 1985; 15 March 1985). That period also coincided with grassroots efforts to record oral history, such as via a project initiated by Universiti Sains Malaysia to interview surviving war civilians (*New Straits Times* 25 June 1983), public exhibitions and television programmes on the war, like the dubbed Japanese documentary, 'Hiroshima in my heart' (1987), about the horrors of nuclear war (*New Sunday Times* 22 October 1989) and a public talk by war civilians held as part of the 'Greatness of Malaysia' exhibition in Kuala Lumpur (*Sunday Mail* 8 January 1990).

The final source of pressure from within the country could be the efforts made in 1992 by Mustapha Yaakub who sent out a mass appeal for victims of the cruel deeds of the Japanese 'to speak out', an appeal further supported by the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) (Michiko 2001: 581). Mustapha Yaakub is a state representative who, upon returning from the conference, in Kathmandu, of the International Investigation Committee on the Crimes of War of Japan, was tasked with collecting information on Japanese war crimes against the people of Malaya. Notwithstanding his ties with the ruling government, as leader of UMNO Youth, his appeal received 3500 letters within four months from Malaysians who suffered in the war, perhaps a sign of how enough time has passed, such that war civilians are faced with the reality that this might be their last chance to 'speak' of their war experiences. In any case, the groundswell in support for raking the war past made it impossible for the federal government to ignore the people much longer and keep the war hidden in the closet.

Since the turnaround in the state's position(ing) on matters of the war, there has been a marked increase in popular representations of the war (Cheah 2007). Aside from reports on local broadsheets and published memoirs (Cheah 2007; Haji Ismail bin

Haji Ismail 2003; Lim 2000), there were also films set against the backdrop of the war, such as ‘Embun’ (2002) that tells of Kempeitai cruelty towards the Malays in Penang, and ‘Paloh’ (2003), a love story between a Malay policeman and a Chinese girl involved with the MPAJA, which highlights race relations in Johore. Collective grassroots memorial ceremonies also began to emerge, such as on 1 September 2007, where 350 Chinese individuals gathered at the *Nilai* Memorial Park, in Negeri Sembilan, to publicly honour and salute 18 martyrs of the 1942 Battle of Batu Cave as well as all their fellow anti-fascist fighters of all ethnicities and nationalities, an example of how locals are now beginning to honour the war dead more visibly though these still tended to remain only within the Chinese communities (Fig. 4.19).



Fig. 4.19: The *Nilai* Memorial (left) and ceremony in 2007 (source: James Wong)

Despite these instances that show how Malaysians, both the federal government as well as its people, especially the Chinese, are now extremely comfortable with commemorating the war publicly, there are also other cases indicating how the war is still a controversial subject particularly as seen by the state. These include, for example, the official banning of particular films that were perceived as glorifying the MCP and its leader Chin Peng, such as Amir Muhammad’s ‘The Last Communist’

(2006) and ‘Village People Radio Show (2007) (*The Star* 29 May 2006, 1 March 2007). This demonstrates how there are still limits to what one can do, and that, while the government is now more open in remembering the war, there are topics that are still taboo particularly if they touch upon the Emergency years and the MCP. Many scholars have also shown how, within national museums, representations of the war still tend to be very positive (in largely privileging the role of the event towards inculcating the spirit of nationalism) as well as selective (in not ‘demonising the Japanese’ and avoiding other negative, race-related, aspects) (Ahmad A.T. 2006). Also, it has been highlighted how these narratives also tend to exclude everyday experiences of the locals, which are not seen as pertinent towards capitalising on the war for purposes of nation-building (Ahmad A.T. 2006; Cheah 2007). As such, it is fair to say that stirrings in national commemoration have only been tentative at best.

4.7 To Remember or Not to Remember: Setting the Context

From the preceding discussion, it is clear how there is now a level of national comfort towards war remembrance, where the federal government is now ready to put on record that the nation was indeed part of the Second World War, although this was not without its own boundaries and limits. In doing so, it also appeases war civilians, who may not be around for much longer, that their memories are not to be forgotten. Yet, it could also be argued that it was precisely the fact that there are now lesser witnesses who could (dis)prove what *really* happened, thus making official war narratives less potentially contentious, that the state has decided to be more open to remembering the war. In any case, as war memory gives way to history, the government chose the path of *lieux de memoires*, or ‘sites of memory’ (Nora 1989), where the past accrues not with living recollections, but through memorial places

external to the body, so as not only to work against total oblivion of the war but also in the hope that it might capitalise upon this as pertinent fodder for nation-building.

The chapter has also shown how memories of the event can survive elsewhere and on other scales, most of all in the form of transnational as well as private and communal memory-making practices and memoryscapes that may not be public, thus avoiding the scrutiny of the public and the state. The rest of the thesis now considers issues of war commemoration and its politics in Malaysia, in much greater detail, within the particular context of Perak, a state in the northwest of the Malay Peninsula which saw much of the action during the war. The next chapter, in particular, focuses on how the Perak government has not only sought to officially remember the war as it happened within the state, through public memoryscapes established within its borders, but also to ‘postcolonialise’ (read: ‘nationalise’) the event towards bringing its multiracial population together, especially following the shift in the federal position(ing) on the matter in the late 1980s. It then narrows down to consider war-related heritage projects that have been spearheaded by the state within major cities.

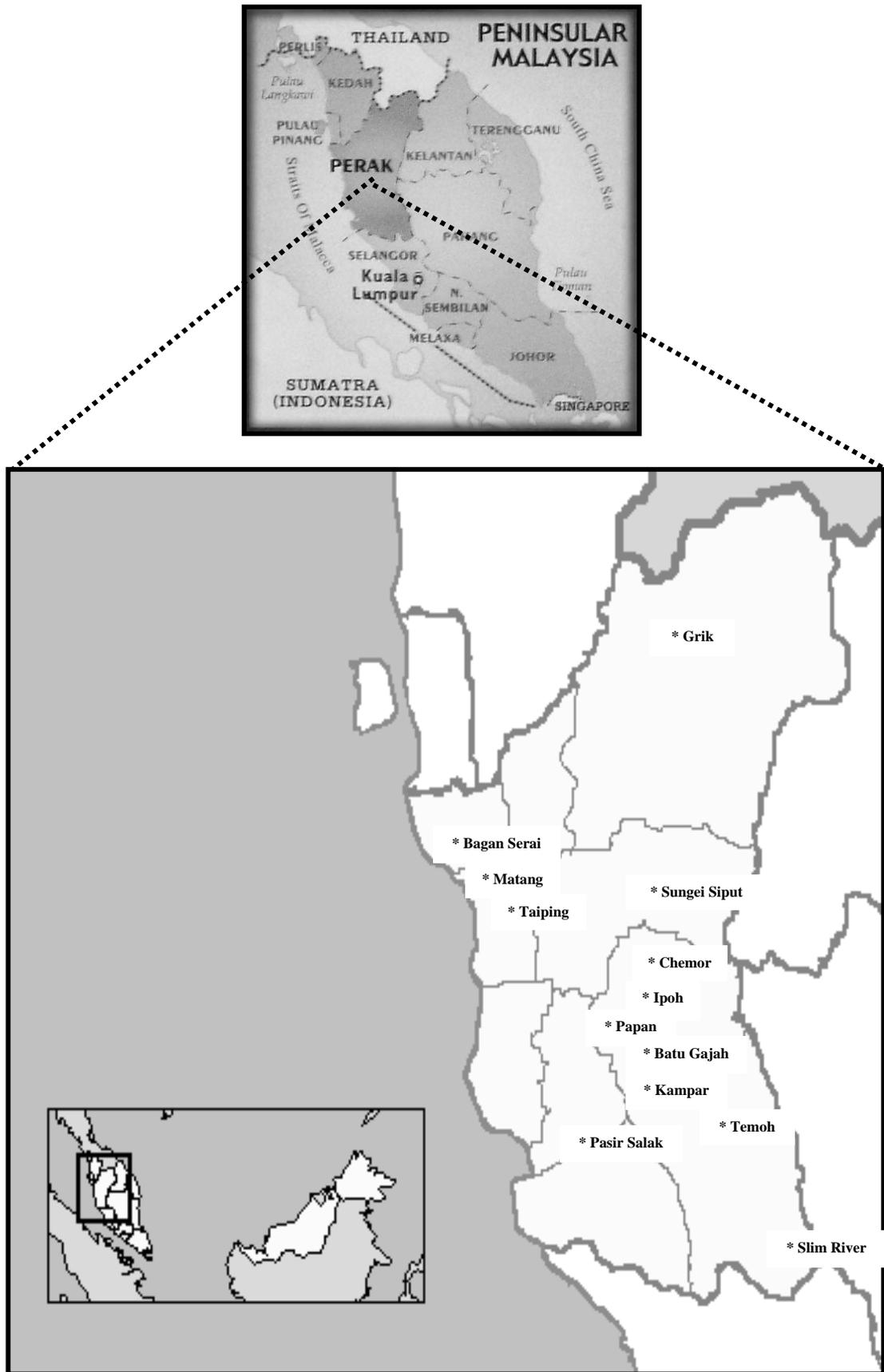
CHAPTER FIVE

Postcolonialising the War through Heritage Markers in Perak: State Initiatives and Popular Responses

5.1 Perak and the Second World War

‘In the northern and eastern parts of the state, mountain ranges covered with dense jungle run northward and southward, dividing the Peninsular and constituting the watershed of the Perak River, the largest river in Malaya, which meanders through the state and flows into the Malacca Straits’.
(Akashi 1995: 83)

Perak is a state on the northwest of Peninsular Malaysia (**Map 5.1**). Meaning ‘silver’ in Malay, it became economically prominent during the British period due to the rich tin-ore deposits found within its borders, which also gave the state its name. As far back as the 1600s, these deposits have been the bread-and-butter, first of the indigenous (*bumiputera*) Malays, before the ‘mining boom’ of the 1900s saw the British opening its doors to a number of European conglomerates, and Chinese and Indian immigrants, who took over the tin-extraction mining operations. The economy grew and the state, particularly Kinta Valley, became known not only as the largest producer of tin-ore in the world at one time, but also for its rubber plantations managed by European planters and run by Indian immigrants (Khoo and Lubis 2005; Chye 2002). Although this is no longer the case today, during the war, it was the concentration of Perak’s resources that caused the Japanese to target it as one of the primary centres of its ‘Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere’ (Harper 2001: 36).



Map 5.1: Map of Perak and sites mentioned in this and subsequent chapters

The extent of immigrants coming into Perak saw its population just before the war favouring non-Malays (56 per cent), which gave rise to its delicate racial arithmetic then, where, unlike much of the rest of Malaya, Perak became a largely non-*bumiputera* state. There was also an urban-rural split to this, drawn on ethnic lines where the Chinese mainly resided in the major cities, like Ipoh and Taiping, and the Malays in the more rural areas (Ban and Yap 2002). These figures were to prove significant for the unique experiences Perak saw during the war, translating into some of the worst atrocities by the Japanese particularly on the Chinese community in Perak (Akashi 1996; Bayly and Harper 2008; see below). Though the configuration of the population today is such that the majority is again with the *bumiputeras* (56.6%) (Malaysian Department of Statistics 2007), the urban-rural split remains. This, as well as the unique war experiences that Perakians underwent, largely influence how war memories are recollected and contested today (see below).

During the Malayan Campaign, some of the fiercest battles were fought here in Perak. This was due to its geography – deserted coastlines, winding rivers with an abundant supply of freshwater, vast and dense virtually impenetrable jungles, and extensive mountain ranges – which made it a strategic location for the British and the Japanese in terms of providing tactical cover and launching ambush attacks (Akashi 1995; Chapman 2006). Given how the state had an almost exclusive monopoly of the trunk roads connecting the northern territories to the south, it became inevitable that the Japanese were to pass through Perak on its way down to Singapore. The British, upon realising this, also built many of their defences in the jungles overlooking these trunk roads, thus setting the scene up for many of the clashes that took place there during the war. These, and the fact that most of the irregular forces were also

operating from the jungles, would lead to Perak becoming the most fought-over state in Malaya and ‘a key expression of the [formal and] underground war between the Japanese and those seeking to oppose their hegemony’ (Ban and Yap 2002: 55-6).

Thrust into the war quite early, the Japanese began bombing Perak’s major cities right at the start of war (Bayly and Harper 2005). Its geography also facilitated some of the fiercest fighting to have taken place in Malaya, and thus witness to the most Allied casualties among the Malayan northern territories, from the battles as well as Japanese-perpetrated massacres (Moffatt and McCormick 2002; Smith 2006). Yet, these battles also gave rise to a few of the major ‘local’ characters who were to play salient roles in the war, such as Sybil Kathigasu (Chapter 1) and Lim Bo Seng (Ban and Yap 2002; Dobree 1994; Tan C.T. 2001). Elphick (1995: 319) believes it was the loss of Perak which finally led to the fall of Malaya to the Japanese months later. During the Occupation, the inhabitants of Perak, particularly the Chinese, were subjected to the harsh realities that were the norm in Malaya then, a reign of terror that was not to end with the war, given the state was also the stage on which the extended war years of the Emergency were also played out (Ban and Yap 2002).

After the war, the returning British government took care of those who died for the Empire particularly the *foreign* combatants sacrificed who did not come from Malaya. First, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) acquired land near Maxwell Hill (*Bukit Larut*) in 1946 to establish (and now continue to maintain) the Taiping War Cemetery, where over 850 individuals of various nationalities, some unidentified, were interred.¹⁰ In some major towns, Cenotaphs originally set up after

¹⁰ Aside from the Taiping War Cemetery, the Commonwealth War Graves also maintains war dead plots in other cemeteries where it was impossible to move them to Taiping (see Corfield 2000).

the First World War to commemorate the dead from that war were updated to also honour those who perished during the most recent conflict (**Fig. 5.1**). The colonial government also held annual ceremonies to ensure memories of the war dead were not forgotten. These instances of commemoration focus mainly on the *foreigners* who died in combat, thus excluding locals whose war experiences were mainly based on everyday struggles and hardships, and not seen as directly contributing to the main Allied objective of defending the Empire then. Their foreign-centricity is also apparent in the Western and ‘Christian’ ways commemorations were carried out.



Fig. 5.1: Taiping War Memorial (left) and Taiping Cenotaph (source: author)

Despite the extensive ways in which the war was commemorated by the British, the newly established Perak government seemed uninterested to emulate these traditions. Not only were there, for a long time after *Merdeka*, a lack of initiatives to mark the war years, ceremonies started by the British were ended, and physical traces of colonial remembrance, such as markers placed at the site of the Slim River battle by British soldiers after the war to honour the battle dead there (related to me by Ahmad 81 Slim River), and the plaques that used to grace the Ipoh Cenotaph, were also removed. It was not only traces of British colonialism that were the target of the new

government's actions to eliminate traces of local colonial domination. *Togo Road* in Ipoh, named after a Japanese Naval Officer after the First World War, and the only road in Malaya named after a Japanese personality, was also renamed, along with others, around the same time (Perak State Government 1999). In these respects, Perak was a microcosm of what was occurring in Malaysia more generally although, as federal attitudes shifted in the 1980s (see Chapter 4), so they did in Perak as well.

This chapter first outlines the efforts of the state government to mark the war, and how, through its official memoryscapes, the state sought 'to postcolonialise' what was really a war between two empires. This was done in two ways: by appropriating memories of the 'colonial' war towards 'national' purposes; and representing more of the war experiences of its local population (as opposed to that of the former colonisers, as was the case with public commemorative activities before [see Chapter 4]). The chapter then shows how locals have been critical of these state efforts. In analysing their reasons for this, it argues that, despite the state's claims to resuscitate 'local' war experiences, it has still resulted in much of its people's war experiences being as submerged as they were per colonial times, and Perakians not able to embrace, as the state intended, these official efforts as 'theirs'. In doing so, it shows the limits of 'postcolonial' projects to totally banish the 'colonial' not only in terms of the continued marginalisation of subaltern war stories but in how state efforts have also tended to reproduce 'colonial' tendencies of memory selectivity and exclusion.

5.2 State Remembrances of the War in Perak

Corresponding with federal trends, the late 1980s saw a rather sudden and marked increase in official interest within Perak to preserve its historical legacy more

generally. Aside from the passing of the Perak Museums Act in 1987, and the establishment of an official department in charge of heritage affairs in 1990, sparked by fears that the young were no longer in touch with their local heritage, local newspapers have also begun to report on the state movement to salvage what is left of Perak's past as a bulwark against the loss of place identity (due to massive urban redevelopments at the time) and falling tourism numbers (*New Straits Times* 29 April 1986). Since this fervour to revive its heritage, the state, working through city and municipal authorities, began to engage in projects to ensure its past was saved from complete oblivion, which gave birth to some of its museums today. Included in these state attempts to revitalise its local past, are also efforts to reinstate its war heritage.

Notwithstanding the most recent Cenotaph Remembrance ceremony in the capital city of Ipoh in 2008, a flagship memorial event that was the first to be held on a state-wide level in Perak, which is discussed in much greater detail later (see Chapter 6), there are three main ways in which memories of the war have been revived and marked *physically* within the state since the late 1980s: by the insertion of war narratives into already-standing museums, the recuperation of 'local' Perakians' war experiences through the renaming of streets and the emplacement of history storyboards at specific locations within Ipoh, and the production of heritage trails and story-maps in Ipoh and Taiping (which was recently designated a 'heritage town', thus putting it on the same league with other well-known heritage towns such as Malacca and Georgetown) (*Malaysian Insider* 12 August 2008). This section examines each of these efforts in turn, particularly how they have been adapted by the state to privilege the 'postcolonial' project and recuperate the locals' war stories.

5.2.1 State Museums and Historical Complexes

It has been highlighted that there is a tendency for the federal government to mark the war since the late 1980s by inserting narratives on (and exhibits associated with) the event into the spaces of already-standing museums (see Chapter 4). The Perak state authorities have also sought to do the same. One example of this pertains to the Pasir Salak Historical Complex located in the town of Pasir Salak, 70 km southwest of Ipoh. Inaugurated on 26 May 1990, this museum was established to function as a resource centre that transmits the illustrious history and rich heritage of Perak to its visitors, and remind them of some of the significant events that have taken place in the state from prior to British arrival – and thus in line with the federal privileging, within its museums, on *precolonial* (as much as its *postcolonial*) histories (Ngah Talib 1998) – right up to the nation’s independence. Yet, mentions of the war years were noticeably missing. This changed in 1995 when, as part of the third phase of its development, the ‘History Time Tunnel’ was set up (**Fig. 5.2**), comprising 42 dioramas of scenes tracing the history of Perak since before colonialism till *Merdeka*.



Fig. 5.2: Pasir Salak’s History Time Tunnel (source: author)

One of these wax dioramas depicts the war years (**Fig. 5.3**), the first time in fact that the state had actually included a public representation of the war in Perak. Depicting Japanese troops passing by the Ipoh Railway Station, with a few locals at the side, literally (and perhaps metaphorically) standing out of the spotlight. The text

accompanying the war diorama was brief: ‘The Japanese Attack on Malaya 1941: Japanese troops marching in front of the Railway Station in Ipoh in 1941’. In the museum’s guidebook, though, the war is more extensively narrated as ‘an event of hardship and suffering among the local population’, of ‘dramatic socio-political and economic transformations’, and ‘what finally led to the birth of the Malayan spirit of nationalism’, where atrocities of the Japanese had awoken the people to the need to never again be dominated by foreign (colonial) powers. This discourse also fits that of the complex more generally. Located where J.W.W. Birch, the first British Resident of Perak, was murdered by local perpetrators back in 1875,¹¹ the historical complex as a whole has adopted this narrative of Birch’s murder symbolising the first time that locals had risen against the British (Nghah Talib and Mat Kasa 1998).



Fig. 5.3: War diorama, Pasir Salak Historical Complex (source: author)

Another insertion of the war into state museums in Perak is at the Historical Museum of Matang. The residence of Ngah Ibrahim, historically, one of those exiled by the colonial government for his involvement in the plot to murder Birch, the museum staff told me that the site was also ‘where the collaborators met and the idea for the

¹¹ A Resident is a representative of the British colonial government that advised local leaders then whose decisions are binding on all matters of state except for Malay customs and religion. Not to enter into too much detail, Birch was murdered due to his reforms in those days intended to re-delegate much of the autonomy of the local rulers and its people to the British government.

plot itself was hatched’, thus again reiterating the link between Birch’s murder and the birth of Malay nationalism. Unlike Pasir Salak, though, there is a more extensive coverage of the war, due to the recent addition of a room set aside specifically for those years. Aside from Japanese propaganda posters, such as one of the bombing of Pearl Harbour, there is also a replica of a Japanese office (complete with a wax figure of a Japanese soldier) (**Fig. 5.4**), and other items, such as Japanese helmets and radio devices.¹² On the storyboard in the room are photographs and accounts of Japanese rule and local life in Matang (and Perak more generally) during the war.



Fig. 5.4: Matang Historical Complex (source: author)

Outside, there are also two Japanese stone monuments (**Fig. 5.5**), relocated from their original locations in Kroh after the villagers found and donated them to the museum. The storyboard between the two monuments relates the story of the Japanese landing at Kota Bharu at the start of the Malayan Campaign, its narrative glorifying the soldiers then, such as their ‘great courage in defeating 1500 Allied soldiers despite heavy rain’. This shows the tendency of the museum to be positive in their depictions of the Japanese, where the ‘heroism’ and ‘bravery’ of the invading Japanese enemy is remarked upon whilst the atrocities that they did were taken out of

¹² Many of these objects were discovered in 1990 during the construction of the new Ipoh Airport in 1989 (*New Straits Times* 9 July 1990).

the picture (Ahmad A.T. 2006). Within the museum, along with the Japanese propaganda poster hanging on the wall that celebrates Japanese victory at Pearl Harbour, there is also a photograph taken of Malay leaders posing with their Japanese masters (**Fig. 5.6**), with the caption indicating the collaborations taking place between them during the war, which were later to contribute towards the birth of the national spirit among the Malay leaders. These positive depictions within the museum may be due to the desire not to demonise the Japanese given the good relationship between the two countries, reminiscent of nations choosing to play down memories of personal victimisation as a way to maintain bilateral transnational ties (see Choo 2001; Raivo 2000a). Yet, given the muddy interpretations of who the enemy really was during the war (see Chapter 4), it might also be a reflection of how, in areas like Matang, the people actually do possess more positive reactions to the Japanese and their occupation in Malaya (see also Akashi 1995; Ahmad A.T. 2003).



Fig. 5.5: Japanese stone monuments at Matang (source: author)

At this juncture, a few brief observations can be made. First, it is clear that, at these sites, the war has been rather simplified, and reduced as one of the events, along with Birch's murder, that led to the rise of Malayan nationalism or, as one of the officers

at Pasir Salak told me, ‘the story of how we became free of British colonialism’. In that sense, it represents how, rather than simply exorcising the colonial past (as the state government had done in the early decades of Malaysia’s independence), ‘postcolonial’ projects can at times also involve the re-appropriation of such history, where the colonial past is capitalised upon for postcolonial processes of nation-building and identity formation (see Muzaini and Yeoh 2005b; Crampton 2003; McEwan 2003; Dora 2006). By avoiding much detail about the war itself, and glorifying the Japanese, the state has also sidestepped dealing with some of the more problematic aspects of the war, such as that of Japanese war atrocities, which would have entailed the demonisation of the occupying enemy, something the Perak state authorities (in line with the federal government) arguably are not really keen to do.



Fig. 5.6: Photograph of Malay leaders with the Japanese (source: author)

Second, both museums are almost exclusively *on* the experiences of Perakians, not only in terms of local vernacular life before British arrival and during the colonial period (including the war), but also in emphasising significant events responsible for clearing the way for *Merdeka* to later take shape, particularly that of Birch’s murder and the war. This is a reflection of how, as part of its ‘postcolonialising’ enterprise,

the state had sought to salvage the experiences of its people which have long been submerged under colonial representational practices that tended towards focusing on the experiences and stories of foreigners and former colonial subjects. Yet it is noteworthy that the specifics of local (war) experiences were still kept abstracted and generalised. While the staff at Matang said that this was because ‘Malaysians do not like to read too much’, one could also argue that it is to avoid bringing up troubling elements of the past – such as that of racial tensions during the war – that may work to disrupt the overarching project of the state to bring its multiracial population together. In any case, the ‘local’ bits that are represented are frequently aggrandised towards making dramatic statements about nationalism writ large which diminishes their potential to shed light on the actual war experiences of the local peoples.

It is also significant that the ‘local’ stories on the war tend to be almost exclusively on the Malays, and at the expense of non-Malay accounts of the past, especially jarring given the more intense war experiences of the Chinese. This is an example of how, despite claims of the state authorities to gel together its plural society as one, local nation-building has tended to be ‘Malay-centric’, where stories of other communities tended to fall by the wayside, particularly within state museums and other official projects of public representations (Lepawsky 2007: 127; Kalb 1997). The blatant disregard for the ways in which the Chinese may react adversely to such exclusions, and how this may sabotage the fragile multiracial harmony among Perakians, is also evident in these museums not only rendering obscure Japanese atrocities but also, and worse, in glorifying, within the Matang museum, the first Japanese landing in Malaya. In fact, in place of the Japanese, it appears that it is the Chinese who are demonised, apparent, for example, in the wax diorama of Pasir

Salak Museum depicting the Emergency years with a scene of *Chinese* MCP soldiers massacring the *Malay* villagers of Kampong Bekor! As such, in a paradox of public representations, it would seem that, despite the state's projection of the war within the museums as a shared event for its people in terms of bringing them together towards attaining Malaysian independence, in other ways, it has also proverbially shot itself in the foot particularly in alienating a big proportion of its local population (i.e. the Chinese) by demonising them as well as neglecting to include their stories.

5.2.2 History Storyboards and Street-Names

While the state's initiatives thus far have been to insert the war within bounded museums, the second group of efforts is more dispersed, such as via street names and storyboards. First, as part of the Ipoh Structure Plan in 1991, a local conservation unit, under the Ipoh City Council (ICC), took on the task of listing 25 visually striking buildings within the city to be conserved (see Appendix C), such as the Ipoh High Court and Old Federal Building (**Fig. 5.7**). Representative of many urban preservation projects elsewhere, their selection was based on architectural merits and visible presence 'as intact, authentic elements of the historic built environment' (Milligan 2007: 111). According to Mohamed et al (2008), such historic buildings 'build a lucid image and distinct identity of a heritage city which differentiates it from other regular cities elsewhere', such that their preservation has constituted one of the main heritage activities of many of Malaysia's prominent cities (see Cartier 1996; Mohamed and Mustapha 2005). Such was also the case in Ipoh, where keeping these buildings, many of them with colonial origins, within the fabric of the city today has become a means of capitalising upon the tangible heritage of the capital to differentiate it from other cities in Perak, and provide visible attractions to strike awe among the population and entice Malaysians and foreigners to visit (Mohamed et al,

2008). It could be argued also, however, that the ICC had intended, by gazetting these historical sites, ‘to translate former colonial structures into a suitable backcloth for cultivating a sense of national pride and identity’ (Kong and Yeoh 1994: 258).



Fig. 5.7: Ipoh High Court (left) and the Old Federal Building, Ipoh (source: author)

At each of the 25 sites, there is a history storyboard – in the shape of a large rectangular panel on two metal poles so as to allow it to meet the reader at eye level – containing old photographs of the places marked, as well as a brief narrative, written in English and Malay, about their specific histories. Located throughout the city, these storyboards thus represent veritable signposts to the city’s history (and that of Perak generally). As a representative from the ICC mentioned, ‘These are places that hold an important place in the history of [Ipoh] city and Perak and [via the storyboards] we wanted that history to be known by the people’. He also said how it is very pertinent ‘for Ipohites to know their city and feel that they belong to it’, and how the sites are ‘not just former colonial buildings but also sites that are important to Malaysians themselves’ including mosques, churches and civic buildings which, he continues, ‘highlight the multiracial and multi-religious heritage of not only Ipoh but the nation generally’, thus functioning not only to educate Perakians on their history but to form a bond between them and where they reside.

Out of these 25 sites, three of them are associated with the history of the war years: St. Michael's Institution (**Fig. 5.8**), the Royal Ipoh Club near the Ipoh Padang (**Fig. 5.9**) and the Hong Kong and Shanghai Building (now HSBC Bank) (**Fig. 5.10**). The history storyboards at the three sites were erected close to the actual buildings themselves so as to, according to the ICC representative, 'allow visitors to see for themselves [the subject of] what they are reading about [on the storyboards]'. On these boards, the main building of St. Michael's Institution, now still operating as a school, is described as the location of 'the Japanese Army's Administrative and Medical Centre', the Royal Ipoh Club as 'the base for the Japanese Army Reserve Force', and the Hong Kong and Shanghai Building as the main Army Headquarters of the Japanese Administration' (Storyboards Narratives). Aside from the war-related information, the rest of the text point to the neo-classical architectural origins of the sites and what they are being used for in the contemporary (postcolonial) present.



Fig. 5.8: St. Michael's Institution, Ipoh (source: author)



Fig. 5.9: Royal Ipoh Club (source: author)



Fig. 5.10: Hong Kong and Shanghai Building, Ipoh (source: author)

Apart from these storyboards, the war is also marked in Ipoh through street names. In 1999, the ICC began renaming the streets in the capital to reflect the shift from the colonial period from which many of the names originated then, a practice common in other former British colonies as well, such as Singapore (see Yeoh 1996). Thus, words like ‘Street’ and ‘Road’ were replaced with their Malay translation, ‘*Jalan*’, and roads named after British figures gave way to names that reflected local places and personalities (Ng 2008). As part of this project, two of the newer roads in the state capital were also subsequently dedicated to honouring the memory of two of Malaya’s local war ‘heroes’: *Jalan Lim Bo Seng* and *Jalan Sybil Kathigasu* (**Fig. 5.11**). While Lim made his name from his role during the Malayan Campaign, as one of the Chinese leaders of what was later to become Force 136, Sybil Kathigasu was a midwife who assisted the Allied efforts by supplying medical services to local resistance forces during the Occupation (Kathigasu 2006 [1954]; see Chapter 1).

Through the postcolonial toponymic re-inscription of Ipoh’s streets and storyboards which includes narratives of the *after*-colonial (as much as the colonial) histories of the buildings, the Perak state government hopes to achieve two things. First, through the use of ‘urban designscares’ (Julier 2005: 869), it seeks to rework memories of

the ‘colonial’ in deference to a more ‘postcolonial’ way of appreciating the city’s past, thus ‘recolonis[ing the city] with a different script, a script which destabilises the logic of colonial imaginings by offering its own accents in counterpoint to what was there before’ (Yeoh 2003: 371; see also Lahiri 2003). This is also accomplished by rendering, within the narratives, how these sites, albeit used by former colonials, are now institutions *in Perak*, thus appropriating them as part of *postcolonial* Malaysia. Second, in doing so, the state hopes that the people would be able to be more familiar with their own histories, not only of ‘local’ places but peoples (such as via the street-names) and better relate to the histories represented, such that, in turn, these can help develop, for locals, ‘a sense of place’ with which they could relate.



Fig. 5.11: Roads in Ipoh named after Malaya’s local war heroes (source: author)

Speaking of street names, but equally relevant to the storyboards in Ipoh as well, Azaryahu (cited in Alderman 2003: 163) cites that these ‘conflate history and geography and merge the past they commemorate into ordinary settings of human life’. By locating remembrance within the ‘ordinary settings of everyday life’, namely on roads, shops, markets and so on, vis-à-vis bounded sites like museums, it

not only provides a spatial and semiotic orientation to the city but also increases the possibility of encounter between the people and their histories, making the past ‘tangible and intimately familiar’ (Azaryahu 1996: 321). Similarly in Ipoh, the objective of ‘locating’ history in sites of day-to-day practices, the intention is so that locals could encounter them on a regular basis. As the ICC representative told me, ‘the aim is to let the people see [them] on a daily basis, when they go to work, shopping, or to the market...then they can be reminded of the past all the time’. As such, these markers are meant to be constant prompts to local history and heritage where, in the process, as ‘mundane testaments to memory’ (Dywer 2002: 33), Perakians are also, via constant encounters, able to ‘participate in the naturalisation or legitimization of a selective vision of the past’ (Alderman 2002: 101, also 2000).

Aside from raising the profile of its history and making it more likely for people to encounter these markers which indicate for its people the historical significance of the city, there is another reason for dispersing the markers rather than consolidating them at one place. According to the ICC representative, ‘we wanted to put [the storyboards] at the sites so that people can *see* what they are reading about’. Thus, these were placed at their actual locations to capitalise on the traces themselves, as a mode of visualising the past and better imagining what it was like then, such that ‘symbolic imaginings of the past interweave with the materialities of the present’ (Rose-Redwood 2008: 433) along with the ‘ghosts’ (read: memories) that are attached and come along with them (see Bell 1997). At the same time, these markers also lend a ‘time thickening’ to Ipoh which relegates it as more than mere spatial coordinates on a map to become a city with deep histories and affective meanings capable of invoking a sense of awe and inspiration of the past (Crang 1994, 1996).

Like at the museums, the narratives at the three sites marked with storyboards tend to be brief. Aside from identifying these places, and what they were used for during the war, nothing much in terms of information is provided. When I asked the ICC representative why this was so, he told me that 'it was because we wanted to focus on the beauty of the buildings themselves and for people to not have to read too much'. Still, by keeping the texts brief, the ICC can also eschew problematic war stories of its people, such that, inasmuch as the storyboards were meant to allow its people to get to know 'local' histories, the way it was implemented also allowed the state to legitimately leave out histories that might be potentially destabilising to its identity-building objectives. However, since the three sites were largely associated with the British (and later Japanese) and to which locals did not have much access, it has also served to restrict stories of locals (during the war) from emerging, something that was later to become a bone of contention for its people (see below).

5.2.3 Heritage Story-Maps

Hebbert (2005: 581) once said that the city is 'not just a metaphor for individual recollection but a giant device for shaping collective memory' (see also Boyer 1996; Phelan 1996). This is to say that, by virtue of the fact that the past always, through the actions of its inhabitants, leaves imprints on the landscape, such that, as Crang and Travlou (2001: 175) write, 'places are not unitary spaces and times but include subterranean landscapes of fragmented spaces', physical sites can evoke memories of the past regardless of whether they have been specifically marked with them. While this has, to a certain extent, been capitalised upon by the state via the storyboards, given their lack of information especially on *local* war experiences, the state introduced another project that also takes advantage of its cities' war past, seeking to

not only provide more detailed information about the war years, but also narrate more local war experiences: by way of the heritage story-maps of Ipoh and Taiping.

In 1997, the Taiping Municipal Council produced its very first heritage story-map (Taiping Municipal Council 1997), and Ipoh, through efforts by the ICC, followed suit two years later (Government of Perak 1999). These story-maps were created to accompany people, both locals and foreign visitors through the cities, who are more interested to, as Khoo (pers comm. 2008), one of the local historians who were commissioned for both the projects, puts it, 'find out about the past of the cities by walking the grounds themselves and discovering what [the cities] have to offer'. In each map, historically interesting places in the cities are indicated, with brief nuggets of information about them, along with suggested walking (or driving) heritage trails to let visitors discover the cities in a systematic way, 'find little gems of historical treasures and then read about them off the maps' (Khoo). In addition to site-specific information, the histories of the cities are also rendered in greater detail at the beginning, where readers can get a bird's eye view of the cities they are exploring.

Compared to the storyboards, although both are similar in terms of using physical sites to deliver a 'visual' component to their experiences, by way of *authentic* locations, there is much more information about the cities, and what they contain, in the story-maps. This was so that, as the ICC representative said, 'people can now read about the buildings in their own time and not under the red hot sun [at the sites themselves]'. Also in contrast to the storyboards, the story-maps also include more mundane places not necessarily deserving of gazetted status, but are, as Khoo puts it, 'still important to the day-to-day lives of the people themselves', such as the Taiping

Market, ‘where locals go to buy meats and vegetables’, and the Perak Chinese Amateur Dramatic Association, ‘where the Chinese staged dramas ... in the past’ (Fig. 5.12). Indeed, these are places locals might encounter on a more regular basis, such as shops, residences, schools and temples that are not architecturally and functionally distinct. As such, there are altogether 79 sites that are marked on Ipoh’s heritage story-map while, on the Taiping story-map, there are 39 (see Appendix D).



Fig. 5.12: Taiping Market (left) and the Ipoh Amateur Dramatic Association (source: author)

Pertaining to the war, there are 20 (out of 79) sites on the Ipoh story-map, and 9 (out of 39 sites) on the Taiping story-map, that mention the war, each of them described in much more elaborate detail compared to the storyboards. For instance, while the insert on the storyboard at St. Michael’s Institution, Ipoh, only mentions its use by the Japanese as an Army Administration and Medical Centre, the story-map relates how the building was used as shelter for Allied soldiers, a ‘personal suite of the Japanese Governor, an air raid bunker, a Japanese telephone exchange centre and the State Legislative Council Chambers’. In addition, there are also brief descriptions of how the school was once ‘machine-gunned from the air which damaged its roof’ (Government of Perak 1999). As such, from these story-maps, there is definitely much more that can be learnt (and imagined!) about what happened during the war.

On the Ipoh story-map in particular, aside from site-specific information, there is also a whole subsection that is dedicated to just describing the war years in the city.

The inclusion, within these story-maps, of sites that are not necessarily architecturally remarkable was to also have an impact on the number of stories related to the war more intimately associated with locals that could be put onto them, considering that many of these took place in nondescript places, given associations with the underground resistance movement, which meant that they had to work subversively so as not to attract the attention of the Japanese. In Ipoh, these would include the *Kian Aik Chan* shop (formerly an Allied espionage base), 144, *Jalan Sultan Idris Shah* (Brewster Road, where Sybil Kathigasu's husband operated his clinic and Sybil, some of her anti-Japanese activities, now a shop) and the former Tong Ah Hotel (where the MPAJA used to have secret meetings) (see Appendix D for listing). Looking at these sites, there is really nothing about them that stands out architecturally (**Fig. 5.13**), which explains why they were not chosen as sites worthy of being preserved or, for those in Ipoh, significant enough to be graced with their own history storyboards. Yet, gleaned from the storymaps, readers are able to step into the world of some of the activities that the locals participated in during the war.

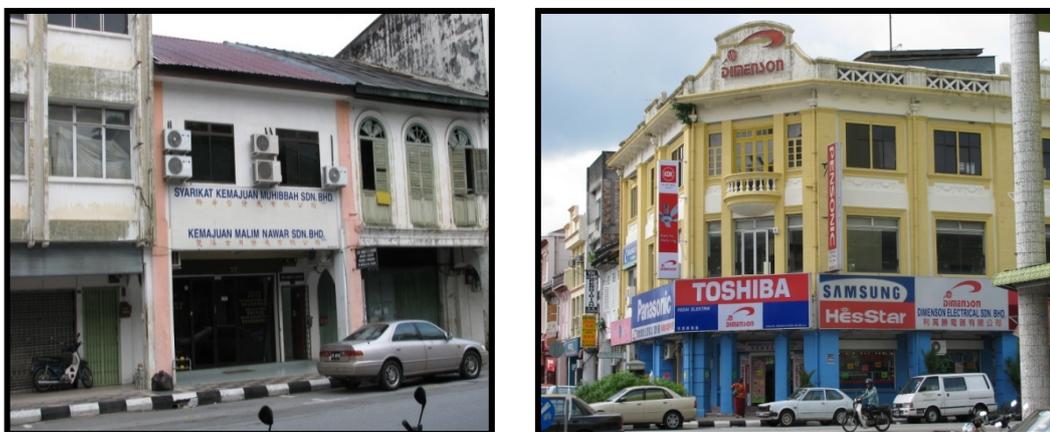


Fig. 5.13: *Kian Aik Chan* shop and former Tong Ah Hotel (source: author)

The story-maps also include places where Japanese atrocities took place, which also set them apart from their storyboard and museum counterparts, and the earlier tendencies to glorify the enemy and avoid highlighting what the Japanese did during the war. Examples of these would include the Taiping Gaol (formerly a POW internment camp, now still an operational prison) (**Fig. 5.14**), a late 1930s house in Ipoh (where leaders of Force 136 were detained and tortured during the war, now a private residence) (**Fig. 5.15**) and even Birch Fountain, where ‘the head of a man executed by the Japanese was exhibited by the Japanese on a spike’ (**Fig. 5.16**). Not only are these sites included as important heritage sites within the two cities, the narratives written on them also indicate what they were used or known for during the war. Even then, as will be shown below, despite their inclusions, Perakians feel that much of the horrors of these places have still largely been varnished over, a sign that perhaps there is still the imperative to officially censor aspects of these atrocities.



Fig. 5.14: Taiping Gaol (source: author)



Fig. 5.15: A late 1930s house, Ipoh (source: author)



Fig. 5.16: Birch fountain, Ipoh (source: author)

As such, these heritage story-maps in many ways redress the omissions of history that are apparent in the museums and storyboards. First, there is now a more extensive coverage of the stories of the war, particularly those that locals would be more familiar with, such as the activities of the underground resistance. Second, there is now also a comparatively more balanced representation of the Japanese and what they did. Third, because the heritage story-maps veer away from being physically attached to grand and spectacular buildings (as the storyboards were), they would also include the traces of the past that may not be around anymore – such as those that have over time been the casualty of the cities’ development and urbanisation processes in the earlier decades - as well as aspects of the war past that are not buildings per se. An example of the former would be the Children’s Playground in the centre of Ipoh. Although it is still a playground today (**Fig. 5.17**), the original one set up by the Japanese was torn down just after independence.

In so doing, unlike the storyboards that privileged only visually-stunning buildings, many of them associated with colonial rulers in the past, these storymaps elevate the stories of the locals, particularly those that have been ‘marked out as distinct and extraordinary... positioned as separate, as excerpted, from present everyday life and thus rendered strange or exotic’ (Crang 1996: 437; Crang 1994; Hassan 2006). More

importantly, these storymaps are prime indicators that the war did not only affect colonial subjects, many of whom harked from elsewhere to fight on Malayan soil, but also the local population in Perak, who also went through much hardship and turmoil in having to scrounge a basic living on a day-to-day basis, suffering under the tough iron-clad rule of the Japanese, and also in contributing towards anti-Japanese war efforts albeit in a less visible way through the activities of the MPAJA and Force 136. As such, through the heritage storymaps, the mundane experiences of the locals are no longer kept under wraps but now shown as examples of local endurance and resilience, initiative and war participation; that ‘they too were there!’



Fig. 5.17: Children's Playground, Ipoh (source: author)

By marking the past through sites, and heritage trails, it also brings history learning back to the field itself, where individuals can roam around the city themselves and pick up information about the past along the way, something that some scholars have already highlighted as a popular means, among Malaysians, of learning about history (see Hassan 2006). Yet, although the storymaps allow visitors the liberty to go to whichever sites they want and in whichever order, far from this being emancipatory, by using the maps, these individuals are already extremely bound by the ‘cultivated practices of the elite’, given that the sites for them to visit are already marked out for

them as important to be visited, and the stories associated with them are officially crafted to render only what the state feels pertinent, much to the exclusion of other sites and stories. As such, these efforts become, as Crang (1996: 437) would put it, a particular form of ‘institutionalised forgetfulness’ that, ‘although it apparently ratifies the historic importance of an area actually erases a vast amount of its history’.

Still, the inclusion of sensitive bits of the war also provides a more (f)actual representation of the event, compared to the museum insertions. Their inclusion could be due to the maps written by local historians (as opposed to bureaucrats) who are not bothered with the politics of representations, and eager to, as Khoo puts it, ‘tell the story of what happened like it happened’. Still, it is notable that the state gave them the ‘green-light’ to do so which might indicate an ideological shift on the part of the state, where it feels enough time has passed that its people should no longer be too emotionally affected by what happened. The history markers are thus signs that the war has moved from living memory to national history, and made the transition from *milieux de memoires* to *lieux de memoire* (Nora 1989). Despite the desire to ensure that public representations of local stories are elevated as important, the fact that the sites pinpointed on the storymaps are still tied to particular places *within the cities* is something that Perakians were to later criticise (see below).

5.3 Popular Responses to State Remembrances

In the preceding discussion, it is clear how the state has, since the late 1980s, begun to mark the war years. Through its initiatives, the state has sought to ‘postcolonialise’ (or ‘nationalise’) what was really a colonial event, not only in terms of identifying the war as one of the impetuses for the birth of Malayan nationalism but also, via its

storyboards, in capitalising upon 'local' places and stories associated with the war (as opposed to more foreign commemorative elements in the landscape such as the Cenotaph in Ipoh) as a way of making it more visible that the event took place *in Perak* despite its colonial connotations. By emphasising more of what the locals themselves experienced during the war (such as via the story-maps), the intention is also to make these initiatives something which the local population could embrace. Yet, despite these efforts, my respondents have generally not been able to identify their war experiences through these initiatives. This section discusses their bones of contention under the themes of location, representation, form, and target audience.

5.3.1 Location

As space (and spatiality) is integral to memory making and an integral component of the meanings being communicated to the public (Dwyer 2002; see also Hoelscher and Alderman 2004), the location of a particular site of memory also determines if it would contribute to the raising of public consciousness as to what is commemorated (see Azaryahu 1996). In Perak, some locals have taken issue with the the state's initiatives not being extended to outside of the cities. According to Ahmad (81, Slim River), '[the state] should put such markers in Slim River too because many people suffered here too', referring specifically to the battle of Slim River and the hardships faced by people in the rural areas of Perak during the war years. Indeed, while the cities were where the Japanese set up their main military and administrative bases, their tentacles of atrocities did reach out to the smaller townships and cities within the state (see Ban and Yap 2002; Akashi 1995). As such, the state has been perceived as marginalising the experiences of those who did not live in the two major cities.

The criticism pertaining to the location of the state's efforts has also been framed in an ethnicised way. Aside from the impression that, as Ahmad continues, 'the state is saying that it was only the people in the cities who suffered', showing how, in their understandings, there is a direct relationship between the extent of remembrance at one location and the importance accorded to that place, there are those, like Joyah (80s, Grik) who believe that 'the state is only remembering the Chinese by remembering in the cities'. This was borne out of the extent to which it was mainly the Chinese living within the cities at the time, and also since many of the subversive anti-Japanese activities had involved the Chinese, such that the experiences of the Malays living *in the villages outside of the cities* and not involved in subversive activities are excluded, even though their stories were popularly perceived as no less significant. Thus, notwithstanding the fact that representations of the past forwarded by the state, taken more generally, have focused largely on *Malay* histories, specifically where war representations are concerned, by locating them within cities, it has given rise to claims that the war stories of the Malays have been marginalised.

Alderman (2003: 165) once said that 'the geographic scale at which memory is produced [also] determines in large measure the populations who will be touched by the memorial meanings being communicated'. In Perak's case, the decision to mark the war only within Ipoh and Taiping have been seen to also exclude Malays, many of whom, like Joyah, *still* live outside the cities. Yet, the Chinese too feel as if they have been marginalised, but in terms of how the emphasis on the cities has meant that many of the stories relating to those (Chinese) who fought and gave their lives in the jungles of Perak outside the cities are forgotten. As Seng (78, Taiping) said: 'there is nothing [on the story-maps] that talks of how the war was fought in jungles

and how many Chinese died'. Joyah also said that, by focusing on the cities, which were largely occupied by the Japanese, the state has elided the experiences of locals who escaped and 'lived quiet lives in the smaller towns outside of Ipoh and Taiping'.

Thus, it is clear how the decision by the state to focus only on Ipoh and Taiping for their (war) markers, it invited criticism, framed ethnically, that it has marginalised (the war stories of) those outside the cities. Yet, it is indeed interesting that the ethnically-framed criticisms have been brought up by *both* Malays and Chinese as being discriminatory to the memories of their communities, where the desire is to extend representations of the war outside the main cities, not only in terms of the places and stories depicted but also in broadening the extent to which local Perakians could actually get to and engage them. Still, it is ironic that all of my respondents have never been to the museums at Matang or Pasir Salak even though they are located outside the cities. The main reason cited for not having gone to the museums is because 'they are too far away and inconvenient to get to', although it is argued in a later chapter that this is also a reflection of how locals tend to want to remember the war their own ways vis-à-vis museums and other 'sites of memory' (Chapter 7).

5.3.2 Representation

Aside from views that there has been too much emphasis on the war as experienced within the cities, some also took issue with the fact that representations of Japanese atrocities tended to be too 'politically correct'. According to Chan (88, Taiping), commenting on how King Edwards VII school (**Fig. 5.18**) is represented through the story-map, 'it does not tell you what they did inside and how many died there. Only the older generations can tell you about the screams they would hear coming out of

there'. Indeed, while the narratives on the storymap indicates the use of the classrooms as 'torture chambers', beyond that nothing more about the tortures conducted there and the number of people who suffered and died due to these tortures is mentioned. Although, for some locals, such excisions are necessary given that, as Hashim (78, Taiping) puts it, 'it is a school and you don't want to scare the children, or bring back horrible memories for the [war generation]', for Chan, it was perceived as not telling the whole truth about what happened there during the war.

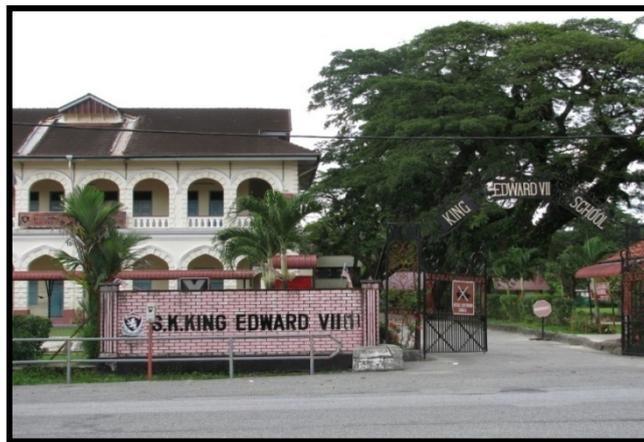


Fig. 5.18: King Edward VII school, Taiping (source: author)

There is thus a perceived tendency of the storyboards and maps not to demonise the Japanese, despite there now being more representations of war atrocities compared to the museums. However, given the extent to which the people in Ipoh and Taiping were Chinese who would have had a worse experience during the war (compared to the Malays in Matang) (see Akashi 1995), the 'political correctness' here could be due to the need to maintain Malaysia's good ties with Japan and not encouraging acrimonious reactions (see Cheah 2000, 2007). Yet, it could also be due to the need to maintain multiracial harmony. As Law puts it, 'if you focus too much on how the Chinese suffered more and the Malays did not, it might remind people they went through different experiences'. Thus, it could be that the need to play down atrocities

against the Chinese, and focusing more on the shared experiences more generally, was prompted by the imperative to focus on aspects of the war congenial to nation-building, and elide those with the potential to speak to the racial tensions of the past.

To push the point further, there are those, like Rainah (26, Ipoh) who commented that the storymaps ‘only tell you the history of places and not of the people. What about [war] stories that did not take place in public’ referring to ‘women who hardly came out in public for fear of being raped’. In her estimations, thus, the ways in which the war is represented now has not only still elided the histories of the *people* (as opposed to *places*), but particularly those of women. Looking at the maps, it is obvious that, despite an increase in depicted local experiences, they are still partial to the men, reflecting how war representations tend to be gender-blind and partial only to what the men, particularly combatants, went through (Enloe 1998, 1995; Muzaini and Yeoh 2005a; Yural-Davis 1997). Rainah suspects, however, that this could also be because ‘women do not talk about the war [such that] there may be very little information on what they went through’. She might be right as Khoo also said ‘we were limited in what we knew from reading books on the war’. Still, Rainah feels that ‘more should be done to try and get their stories from the women themselves’.

5.3.3 Form

The effectiveness of commemorative street-names is dependent on the extent that people are familiar with what is commemorated (see Alderman 2003). While some of the locals I approached to ask about Sybil Kathigasu and Lim Bo Seng, the two ‘war heroes’ honoured through street-names in Ipoh, knew of their war connections, almost none had any idea what they did or why they are on the roads. Thus, despite

streets being named after them, without knowledge of their significance, the effort is largely in vain. Law attributes this to ‘there not being much focus on *local* heroes other than on the roads’. He also suggested that the reason why Lim and Sybil have not been promoted is because ‘he is Chinese and she was involved with the MCP’, pointing to how nation-building in Malaysia tended to *Malay*-centric narratives, devoid of mention about the MCP that caused much terror during the Emergency (see Lepawsky 2007; Kalb 1997). In any case, Sybil and Lim are hardly household names, thus limiting the extent to which their memories are relevant to local people.

According to Law, ‘it is not enough to have street-names for Lim Bo Seng and Sybil like that without also teaching the public about *who* these people are and what they did’. This pertains to the fact that, in schools, there has not been much emphasis on the local war experiences during the population and, as Law puts it, ‘there has only been one *Malay* person elevated as a war hero’, referring to Lt. Adnan Saidi, an officer of the Malay Regiment who died during the battles of the Malayan Campaign and who has been commemorated in school textbooks and in other ways (Chapter 4). Thus, it is his opinion that commemorative street-names (and even storyboards and story-maps) are not going to work if there is no accompanying efforts made in the educational system to ensure that the people first know what happened to the locals during the war, something that Low (30s, Ipoh) also averred to when he said that ‘the government should do more to promote the war in schools rather than through [the story-maps]. Only then will the people be able to relate to, and embrace their past’.

In some cases, locals have also suggested that the state should not really have bothered with these physical markers of war given that, as Asmah (49, Ipoh)

mentioned, ‘we are not the kind of people to remember through storyboards or heritage trails’. She also told me that ‘the people remember those who died during the war... we do not care about whether the state has put a storyboard at this place or that place’. Specifically, her thinking is that it is more important to remember the *people* (rather than *places*) associated with the war. This is something brought up by Law as well: ‘If you ask people who know (of) Sybil, they would tell you that, in Ipoh, she is remembered not through where she was during the war, but where she is buried’. Indeed, at her grave (**Fig. 5.19**), there are many clues – candles, flowers etc. – to suggest that it has been the main site in Ipoh where people have gone to pay their respects to Sybil. This suggests how some locals have not been able to embrace the state initiatives because they perceive war remembrance as not so much a matter of honouring the memories of *where* and *how* something happened, but rather *who* were there during the war. This might also explain why locals have not been keen on visiting the museums in Pasir Salak and Matang, a theme pursued later in Chapter 7.



Fig. 5.19: Sybil’s grave at St Michael’s Church, Ipoh (source: author)

5.3.4 Audience

The next criticism is associated with the promotion of these commemorative initiatives to the public and who the target audience for the storyboards and the story-maps actually are. It is felt by some of the respondents that not enough has been done

to promote the storyboards to the local people. Some, like Rahimah, 46, from Ipoh, said, ‘I have seen the boards but I don’t think people know about them or have read them’. In fact, in most of the cases, while there is knowledge that the storyboards are there, it is usually through coming across a few by accident and not knowing that they are many others around. Law, president of Perak Heritage Society, also said:

‘The [Perak] government is stupid... They mark the sites on the maps and at the buildings, but they do not publicise them. So nobody knows about them. How do you expect people to know about them if you do not tell them?’

Thus, locals have generally not taken much notice of these boards, effectively rendering them faded into the background. It also does not help that these boards have generally been poorly maintained, where some of them have been removed by vandals or destroyed through constant contact with weather and sun (**Fig. 5.20**).



Fig. 5.20: Poorly maintained storyboards in Ipoh (source: author)

Also, some of the respondents questioned if the storyboards and story-maps are in fact for them. According to Chan (88, Taiping), these initiatives ‘are only for the tourists, that’s why they are in the cities [where tourists usually go]’. Alice (30s, Taiping), the manager of Peking Hotel who has the map posted in the hotel (**Fig. 5.21**), also highlighted how difficult it was ‘to get this Taiping [story-map]. I think it

is only for tourists’. There might be ground for suspecting this. When I first went to the Taiping Information Centre and asked for the map, the first question that the counter assistant asked me was where I came from. It was only after I told her that I was a Singaporean that she gave me a copy of the map. According to her, ‘I thought you were Malaysian. At the moment, we can only give out the maps to tourists... we don’t have enough’. This shows the intention that the maps are, at least ‘at the moment’, mainly for the tourists, which has thus led to suspicions among some of the locals that, as Asmah (49, Ipoh) puts it, ‘[the maps] are not for the use of the people’.



Fig. 5.21: Alice at Peking Hotel, with the map behind her (source: author)

The general sentiment here therefore is that local heritage has been commodified primarily for purposes of tourism and not particularly to reflect the experiences of, or to target, the local population (see Domic 2000; Hewison 1987, for similar). Thus, although the state had intended for these history markers to be elements in the cityscape that its people could identify with, the contrary has been the case, where Perakians have mostly not considered these official efforts at war heritage ma(r)king and commemoration as being ‘for them’. As far as they are concerned, the museums, storyboards and heritage story-maps are mechanisms that have been put into place to increase the attractiveness and ‘visitability’ of the two main cities of Perak to

potential foreign visitors, something that has been remarked upon by others with regards to other Malaysian states as well (see Ahmad A.G. 1994, 1999; Jenkins and King 2003). This therefore raises questions as to whether the Perak state is indeed committed to the process of salvaging the experiences of its population during the war, or perhaps, it is a case of, as Asmah (49 Ipoh) puts it, '[the state] saying it is for the people but like many other things, what they really want is profits and money'.

5.4 From *Postcolonial* to *Neocolonial* Memory-Making

This chapter examined war remembrance in Perak since the 1980s, primarily through insertions of war narratives into already-standing museums, storyboards in Ipoh and heritage trails and story-maps in Ipoh and Taiping. The analysis showed how these were capitalised as platforms to present a more 'postcolonial' (or 'localised') version of the war and, especially with the maps, to render more of the experiences of its people. This was accomplished on the back of a number of strategies, such as the honouring of 'local' heroes, emphasis on 'local' places and experiences, and the inclusion of narratives that centre on how it paved the way for *Merdeka*, as well as downplaying aspects of the war seen as potentially destabilising to race relations. Through the more dispersed form of story-boards and -maps, the chapter also argued how these were meant to conflate history into the cities' everyday geographies, towards making it more 'natural' for locals to encounter them and thus become more familiar with their own histories (see Ayaryahu 1996; Alderman 2002, 2003, 2000).

Despite these initiatives, however, it was found that locals have not been able to embrace these (and the histories associated with them) as theirs. The reasons ranged from how representations of the war have been too focused on the histories of *places*

(rather than the *people*), the exclusion of war experiences outside the cities (and thus those belonging to locals either living in the rural areas during the war, or who were part of underground operations of the MPAJA in the jungles), the lack of accompanying changes within the educational system to promote the war (and its heroes), and the ways the initiatives were promoted to the local public. These have in turn given rise to sentiments that the state has been selective in what to represent of the war and that the initiatives were targeted more for the tourists rather than for the locals. More significantly, in some cases, these have translated into questions of whether the state has intentionally marginalized the experiences of certain ethnicities, which is highly dangerous in a racially volatile multicultural nation like Malaysia.

As such, it would seem not only that the state has failed, to a large extent, to recuperate the war experiences of its people through its efforts. In forwarding only aspects of the war and downplaying its troubling aspects, particularly those that can undermine race relations and Malaysia's bilateral relationship with Japan, it too has adopted the (*neocolonial*) practice of memory-making that is highly selective in what it represents of the past, thus eliding much of the people's war experiences, despite intentions otherwise, and further alienating the local public. Notwithstanding that, in terms of war remembrance, locals may be more in tune with more embodied (as opposed to physical) modes of recollecting the war (see Chapter 7), these negative reviews of official initiatives – in the form of museums, storyboards and story-maps – have thus not become something that the Perakians look positively towards as a means of acquainting themselves with their war histories, something that the state attempted to rectify with the Cenotaph Remembrance, the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

Against ‘Memoryscapes that Forget’: Interpreting the Cenotaph Remembrance in Ipoh, Perak

6.1 (En)Countering ‘Memoryscapes that Forget’



Fig. 6.1: Datuk Thambipillay laying a wreath at the Ceremony (source: CP Lo)

‘It was a great success... It must be one of the biggest gatherings for an event that is held in Perak for a long time outside the annual *Merdeka* [Independence] celebrations of course... or maybe the local elections’.
(Datuk R. Thambipillay, pers comm. 2008)

On the sunny morning of 13 June 2008, the Perak state government held its first memorial ceremony to commemorate those who perished during not only the Second World War (1941-1945) but also other conflicts since Malaysia’s independence in 1957. In attendance, estimated to be more than 200 participants, were the High Commissioners of countries involved during the conflicts (including Australia, United Kingdom, New Zealand, Nepal and India), members of the local and international media and press, representatives from the Perak state government,

personnel from military institutions within Perak and overseas, war veterans and survivors (from the conflicts) along with their respective families, and other Perakians. It was an elaborate event, with performances by a local brass band and bagpipers (from Nepal), official speeches, prayer recitations, observance of silence, and the laying of the wreaths (**Fig. 6.1 above**) (see Appendix E for full programme). The affair lasted 90 minutes, and it was one that the organiser, Datuk Thambipillay, a former chief of the Malaysian Police, considered ‘a great success’ (see quote above).

Memorial ceremonies to the war dead, such as the one described, popularly known as the Cenotaph Remembrance by virtue of its location at the monument established within the capital by the former British government right after the First World War, have been part and parcel of many societies in the West (see Marshall 2004; Gough and Morgan 2004; King 1999, 1998; Shay 2005). Within Southeast Asia though they tend to be less common, with most conducted by Western governments, since many of their (war) dead fought on ‘foreign’ territories, buried where they fell, and thus are ritually honoured and commemorated where they were finally interred (see Heffernan 1995; Foster 2004). As such, the Cenotaph Remembrance in Perak was somewhat of an anomaly. Another factor that makes the occasion an anomalous event is the state’s part in it, given that the federal government has not been the most excited about remembering an event from its ‘colonial’ past, and honouring the dead, many of whom harked from elsewhere though fighting on ‘local’ soil (Chapter 4).

The anomalous nature of the event aside (see below), Datuk R. Thambipillay, the organiser of the Cenotaph Remembrance, told me the idea for it emerged out of his desire for a memory gesture that goes against the tendency of more *physical*

memorials in Perak ‘to forget’. Using the example of the Taiping War Memorial (Fig. 6.2), he explains how these types of memoryscapes are prone to be selective:

‘There are Gurkhas and Malaysians buried there but they are not honoured because only foreigners go there... even these foreigners don’t go there much anymore. It is maintained but if nobody visits, they are still forgotten... And what about those not buried there... should they be forgotten?’



Fig. 6.2: Tombs at the CWGC Taiping War Memorial (source: author)

This reflects upon two ways that he sees physical memorials, as being inclined to forget: the non-inclusion of those who may have contributed to and died during wars but whose memories are not honoured on site; and the nature of such memorials to be rendered irrelevant over time. As regards the former, he was referring to those who took part in the wars but are interred elsewhere, such as the locals who are buried in communal grounds where their involvement in the war are not (re)marked (upon), as well as those who fought but are still living today. This pertains to the nature of such sites to be selective in remembering only parts of the past and not others, and how this leads to memories sidelined. Indeed, although there are those not commemorated

at the memorial in Taiping who are not necessarily forgotten, as they could be remembered elsewhere (see Chapter 7), the idea that physical sites of memory, like the Commonwealth war cemeteries, are usually ‘political’ and ‘selective’ in nature is indeed a theme that is already widely accepted within the literature on war memory and commemorations (see Heffernan 1995; Cooke 2000; Muzaini and Yeoh 2007).

Second, Thambipillay was also referring to how tangible war markers on the landscape, like the Taiping War Memorial, can run the risk of being forgotten once they become obsolete and no longer relevant to the present. This is what Gough (2004: 238) meant when he said that, ‘without frequent reinscription, the date and place of commemoration fades away as memory atrophies [and] the commemorative space loses its potency to reinvigorate memory’ (see also Winter 1995). The premise here thus is the potential for physical sites of memory to be ignored and abandoned in the long run, such that, as Young (1993: 5) would say: ‘once we assign a memorial form to memory, we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember’ (see also Nora 1989). Indeed, inasmuch as stones, plinths and marble may be mobilised to ‘make permanent’ particular war memories, they too can be forgotten; their *disembodied* materiality and obscure location might lead to them to ‘blend’ into the background, and fade from public consciousness (see Cooke 2000).

This is how Thambipillay sees physical structures – like war cemeteries and monuments – as memoryscapes ‘that forget’. From previous discussions, this may be true given how *disembodied* markers in Perak tend to be not only selective but also ignored by locals (see Chapter 5). *Embodied* memoryscapes like ceremonies, however, Thambipillay sees as a means of ‘countering’ that tendency to forget. For

one, he said that ceremonies, through their speeches and rituals, can ‘involve [surviving] veterans and also speak of others who fought but whose memories are not marked’ (cited in *The Star* 12 August 2003). Also, they are useful in enlivening and bringing back to consciousness ‘sites of memory’ (Nora 1989) that are forgotten: ‘I am helping to revive other memorials, like the Cenotaph, and ensure they do not fade in time’. Also, he envisions ceremonies as providing platforms where ‘anybody, Chinese, Malay or [White] can come together to remember’, *inclusive* spaces that transcend differences and allow for participation regardless of race and nationality.

Many scholars have indeed remarked upon the advantages of commemorative rites. Jarman (1999: 172) sees them as ‘physical re-presentation[s] of the primal or historical event through which the participants *bodily* re-enact their history and in so doing create a conjuncture of past and present in which a sense of time passing, or change occurring is denied’. Through the operations of ‘bodily automatism[s]’, such as ‘performed’ in rituals, symbolic acts and collective gestures, as well as ‘the grammar of dress’ (or what is inscribed on the body) (Connerton 1989), an individual or group is thus able to reproduce a moment and space for reliving the past within the present. For Connerton (1989: 45), the value of ceremonies also lies in their capacity to forge a connection among participants, and ‘giv[ing] value and meaning to the life of those who perform them’, thus pointing to their ability to bind people, acting in unison with each other towards the promulgation of a sense of collective connectedness, whilst allowing for individuals to come to terms with their grief (see King 1999).

Although ceremonies, and other embodied commemorations – such as parades and pilgrimages – have been highlighted as a way that mourning may be accomplished

(see Winter 1995), scholars have also pointed to their political side, when these are used to project hegemonic ideologies (see Piehler 1994; Forster 2004; Johnson 1999a; Shay 2005; Yea 1999). Jarman (1999: 171), in his analysis of parades in Belfast, claims that ‘the power of the past, of a collective memory, to influence the present and the future, relies heavily on the process, or practices, of commemoration, and the selectivity of memory and forgetting’. By participating in a ceremony, one is thus in consensus with what the event stands for since, as Connerton (1989: 44) puts it, ‘to enact a rite is always, in some cases, to assent to its meaning’. Yet, King (1999: 148) has also reminded us that, while there might be convergence in the meanings among participants, ‘to act together [does] not presume a common interpretation of this action’, where individuals participating may be doing it for objectives that do not at all coincide with that of organisers (see also Jarman 1999).

This chapter considers these issues through a detailed examination of the Cenotaph Remembrance in Perak. After providing a brief background to the event, it outlines Thambipillay’s objectives for it, highlighting his desire for it to become an *inclusive* event, in terms of its commemorative scope (who it honours), as well as in allowing everyone to participate. The chapter then discusses the views of locals, both participants and those who have chosen to stay away, on what they thought of the ceremony. Specifically, it is argued that, while some are generally pleased with the event, there are also criticisms centred on issues of who is being honoured via the event, how it was conducted, and for whom the ceremony was targeted. The chapter thus highlights the contested terrains of local *embodied* memorialisation (and memoryscapes), especially in light of questions to do with conflicting interpretations of the past and how best to honour the memories of the war dead (see Mitchell 2003).

6.2 Ceremonial Precedents in Perak

‘Rituals transform a landscape and the memory associated with it, even if only briefly’. (Mayo 1988: 71)

The Cenotaph Remembrance was not the first service to those who died during wars in Perak although it was the first time such an event was organised by the state on a state-wide level. While such ceremonies have been conducted within the state before, it has usually been the preserve of foreign organisations. When Malaysia was still Malaya, a ceremony to honour the war dead was conducted by the colonial government at the Ipoh Cenotaph annually till the early 1950s (*The Star* 12 June 2008). Since independence, similar ceremonies have also been held by institutions like the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and supported by foreign embassies of nations involved during the war, in conjunction with ‘Remembrance Day’ (by the British) and ‘ANZAC Day’ (by the Australian and New Zealand Commissions). More often than not, these ceremonies take place at the Taiping War Cemetery, and involve only the High Commissions and foreign residents living in Perak. Though less frequently now, some are still carried out within the state today.

Aside from these, there are also those organised for conflicts during the period after the war, the Emergency particularly. The best known is the ‘God’s Little Acre’ ceremony, conducted at a Christian cemetery of the same name since 1980, to honour the dead from those communist insurgency years. Spearheaded by Thambipillay as well, then Police Commissioner of Batu Gajah, he discovered 116 abandoned graves, 3 belonging to the killed European planters (their murders having led to the declaration of the Emergency in Perak on 16 June 1948) (Thambipillay 2003) (**Fig.**

6.3). With the support of his police unit, ‘God’s Little Acre’ was cleaned up¹³ and a service held at the Anglican Church, followed by wreath-laying at the cemetery. This ceremony has been held annually since although, following Thambipillay’s transfer to Ipoh in 1982, the task of executing it now rests with Perak Planters Association (now, Malaysian Palm Oil Association) (see Appendix F for 2008 programme). The date for the event was fixed, since the first one, to be the second Saturday of every June each year, to be close to when the planters were killed and Emergency declared.



Fig. 6.3: The graves of the 3 planters murdered by the MCP (source: author)

Since the first ceremony at Batu Gajah, and even after he had passed the baton of organising it over to the MPOA, Thambipillay continues to sit on the ‘God’s Little Acre’ committee, and has been actively campaigning for more knowledge about the Emergency years to be gathered and transmitted, culminating in two publications, his first book on ‘God’s Little Acre’ (1998), and the second, ‘The Malayan Police Force in the Emergency 1948-1960’ (2003). Proceeds from both these books have either been channelled to charity¹⁴ or towards maintaining the cemetery and funding new

¹³ Prior to being discovered by Thambiplay, the cemetery was a haunt for thieves and drug addicts. Thus, in addition to physically cleaning up the site, Thambipillay and members of his police unit have also had to clear the site of these delinquent individuals and make it safe for the public to visit it.

¹⁴ Parts of the proceeds from the sales of his second book also go to Perak Society for the Promotion of Mental Health and Perak Society for the Intellectually Disabled (*The Star* 12 August 2003).

monuments on site including the centrepiece Cross, which has become the nexus of the ceremony, and a marble memorial plaque duly engraved with the names of the 116 men that are now lying buried at the cemetery (Thambipillay 1998) (**Fig. 6.4**). He also continues to be the main patron of the ceremony which has since witnessed a tremendous growth in participants into the hundreds (*The Metro* 12 August 2003).



Fig. 6.4: Marble plaque at ‘God’s Little Acre’ (source: author)

Thambipillay’s interest in the Emergency years is fuelled by factors both personal and professional. As the Police Commissioner of Batu Gajah, and later in Ipoh before he retired in 1984, Thambipillay witnessed first-hand, and was involved in, those years. During one of the skirmishes with the communists, he had also lost friends (Thambipillay 2003), making ‘God’s Little Acre’ somewhat of a personal project and a labour of love for him. Professionally, given the role of the Malayan Police Force during the conflict, he also felt incumbent upon him, as part of the Force, to pay respects to his police comrades who died (Thambipillay 2003, 1998). Aside from his associations with ‘God’s Little Acre’, the publication of his books, and involvement in the *Batu Gajah* ceremony, Thambipillay also conducted other ceremonies in Perak dedicated to honouring others involved during the Emergency years. In 2004, for instance, with the support of the officers of a local military regiment, he inaugurated

the annual service for fallen Gurkhas at Tambun Road Camp where 28 of them lie interred today in a cemetery maintained by the British High Commission (**Fig. 6.5**).



Fig. 6.5: Some of the war dead graves at the Tambun Road Camp (source: CP Lo)

Although held at different sites, the ceremonies at ‘God’s Little Acre’ and Tambun Road Camp are very similar. Both tend to involve (largely foreign) war veterans and their families, as well as representatives from the High Commissions and military of nations that took part in the Emergency. Second, they are held by the respective institutions to which the sites are attached, the Royal Malaysian Police Force (RMPF) for ‘God’s Little Acre’ and the Tambun Regiment for the other. In fact, the ceremony at Batu Gajah has become somewhat of an institutional rite for the RMPF, given that many who died during the Emergency years were from there (Thambipillay 2003). Their *modus operandi* is also the same. Although each tends to diverge slightly, in terms of rites performed towards particular religious denominations of those commemorated – Christianity for God’s Little Acre (MPOA 2008), and Sikhism/ Hinduism for the other (**Fig. 6.6**) – there would always be the obligatory speeches by guests, an observance of silence and the laying of wreaths.

From casual conversations with some of the attendees of both these events in 2008, particular those who lost comrades and families during the Emergency, special

meanings have definitely been attached to these events. For many, their participation during the ceremony and symbolic rituals allow them to reconnect with their loved ones, and ceremonially relive the past to honour the memories of the dearly departed. As one visitor (from Britain) said, ‘We get so busy with our lives we tend to forget to remember... Here we can remember not to forget and make sure our loved ones know they are still part of our lives’. That way, as Mayo (1988: 71) would put it, ‘war memory... becomes active in a landscape through rituals that enable people to use war as an ongoing event in their lives’ (see also Connerton 1989). The attendance of government representatives (**Fig. 6.7**) and the involvement of religious leaders – a Catholic priest for ‘Gold’s Little Acre’ and a Sikh priest for Tambun Camp – also authenticate these events as something that is not only ‘sacred’ but also a ‘national duty’. As Thambipillay said, ‘British and Australian veterans they come every year to the events. For them it is a national duty to honour those who died before them’.



Fig. 6.6: Nepali priest performing rites at the Tambun ceremony 2008 (source: CP Lo)

Thus, due to Thambipillay’s efforts, war ceremonies are not that anomalous after all in Perak, though they do tend to be organised on the scale of the institutional (primarily the Police Force) and the communal, largely directed to a foreign audience and without the state. Also, they are centred on the Emergency, understandable given his background, and that many veterans still around are those who served in the

institutional forces in Malaya then. Still, the Cenotaph Remembrance, with the state's collaboration, its target audience of Perak's population and its more overarching memorialisation of all the wars in Perak (as well as the Emergency) may be seen as unusual. The next section discusses Thambipillay's objectives for the state's flagship memorial ceremony to the war dead and how he, with the support of the Perak government, hopes to make it a proper state-wide occasion in which all Perakians can come and participate, as well as to capitalise upon the ceremony as a way that he could counter the tendency of more physical memoryscapes 'to forget'.



Fig. 6.7: Representatives from High Commissions and the military (source: CP Lo)

6.3 The Birth of an Idea

'[Outside the Emergency], there is still a need to remember others who too fell in the defence of Perak'. (Datuk R. Thambipillay, pers comm. 2007)

Despite his role in spearheading and backing the many memorial ceremonies that have been organised in Perak since *Merdeka*,¹⁵ Thambipillay always knew that there

¹⁵ For his efforts, he was given full *Datuk*-ship, appointed the Liaison Officer (International) of the National Malaya and Borneo Veterans Association (NMBVA), honoured with an MBE by the British (in 1998) and selected by a special committee of the National Archives as '*Tokoh Batu Gajah*' for his contributions not only to the state of Perak but also for the nation in general. In 2005, he was also made an Honorary Member of the General Division of the Order of Australia (Thambipillay 2006).

was still a need to honour the memories of those who died ‘in defence of Perak’ outside the Emergency years. In a write-up (2006), he said that it was with this in mind that he decided to explore other commemorative pursuits that veer away from the Emergency. The one in which the Cenotaph Remembrance may be best traced back to, was a ceremony in 2005 in Ipoh at the Khalsa Diwan. Jointly held by Thambipillay and Gurdwara Sahib Kampar, this honours those who died in battles in Perak during the Second World War ‘where fighting was fiercest’ (Singh 2005; GSK 2005) (see Appendix G for programme). His reason for having the *Khalsa Diwan* ceremony was made clear to me at the time (Thambipillay, pers comm. 2005):

‘It was organized so that people could pay their respects to the brave men and women who fought in the battles in Perak. It is for the people to remember them and their courage. I feel it is important for people to remember them and what they have done so that we can live the free lives that we live today’.

At the same time, Thambipillay also supports memorial ceremonies executed on other communal scale such as the one organised by the Sikh community in 2007 to commemorate in particular the Sikhs who were involved, and many of whom died, in the conflicts that had taken place within Malaysia and elsewhere (see Chapter 7).

It was during the conduct of the Khalsa Diwan ceremony that he realised that something was still missing and that was ‘local participation’. As he said (in 2006):

‘I understood why ordinary Perakians stayed away from the Emergency ceremonies as these were organised on a smaller scale and tied to specific religions. But [at the Khalsa Diwan ceremony] I opened it to all who wants to attend and even had *the multiracial service*; still [the locals] did not come’.

The multiracial service he was referring to is the section during the ceremony where he invited the religious leaders from 4 different religions, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism, to say prayers for the war dead, something that has been a staple of this now annual ceremony since then (**Fig. 6.8**). While Thambipillay figured that the lack of local participation – aside from a few media people, I was the only Malay there and no Chinese at all – could be due to the ceremony ‘associated mainly with the British who fought’, he did recognise the issue, which he hopes to eventually remedy in ‘having one state-wide ceremony that also includes locals who participated’. This then paved the way for the Cenotaph Remembrance to take shape.



Fig. 6.8: Religious leaders at *Khalsa Diwan* (source: CP Lo)

It was since then that Thambipillay began the arduous task of putting his committee together towards accomplishing ‘one state-wide ceremony’ that commemorates all those who died during the many conflicts in Perak, not only the Second World War and the Emergency years, as well as one where all Perakians, regardless of their race, religions and any other affiliations, could attend and be involved in. He also approached the Ipoh City Council and various other state bodies to get them involved in the project. As he said (in 2006), ‘It is important to get the state involved in this because just like the involvement of the High Commissions in my other ceremonies helped to bring the different (foreign) nationalities to the event, the involvement of

the Perak state would make [the Cenotaph Remembrance] an official event and many of the locals would want to come as part of their national duty'. The planning of the event took two years and by June 2008, the Cenotaph Remembrance was conducted.

6.4 The Cenotaph (Remembrance) Unveiled

'Sacred to the Memory of the Men from the state of Perak who fell in the

Great War 1914-1918... Their Name Liveth for Evermore'

(Epitaph on one of the original plaques on the Cenotaph Monument, Ipoh)

The Cenotaph, located in front of the majestic Railway station and hotel in the capital of Ipoh, was initially constructed by the British government in 1922 to commemorate those from Perak who died during the First World War. Also known as the 'Perak War Memorial' at the time (*The Star* 12 June 2008), listed on the attached brass plaque are the names of 91 (foreign) soldiers who were sacrificed during that war. After the Second World War, a marble plaque was subsequently added onto the monument below the original one with the inscription: 'And to those who died in the 1939-1945 War'. While there was an annual ceremony held by the British government to commemorate Armistice Day there, this ended circa 1957, when Malaya gained its independence. In the light of what was happening in the whole of Malaysia then, the cessation of the ceremonies signifies how the state government then (following the federal authorities) tried to erase memory traces *and practices* linked to the colonial presence towards the promulgation of a postcolonial identity.

Thus, since then, the monument was, for all intents and purposes, left neglected and unmaintained. The original brass and marble plaque were, for a long time, also

removed, although when this was and the reasons for it are not known. When I first encountered the Cenotaph, it was by accident – I was staying at the hotel at the time – and the only plaque on it was a plastic one with the inscription ‘Memorial to the dead of the two world wars... Sacred to the memory of the men from the state of Perak who fell in the Great War, 1914-1918... And to those who died in the 1939-1945 War’. Interestingly, the shape of the plaque (**Fig. 6.9**) indicates a local Malay-inspired design of a spear that was used in traditional Malay societies in the past, which suggests that probably this was put up by the postcolonial state government to replace the brass and marble materials typical of more ‘Western’-style war memorials (such as at the Taiping War Memorial), perhaps evidence of earlier attempts to ‘localise’ the plaque. Regardless, the cessation of the ceremonies and the neglect of the Cenotaph, according to Thambipillay (2008), marked the loss of ‘a very valuable source of history and sense of legacy [had] ended for young people’.



Fig. 6.9: One of the plaques on the Cenotaph (source: author)

This changed, however, on a sunny Friday morning in 2008 when it became the location of the state-wide consolidated memorial service, known as the Cenotaph Remembrance, organised by a committee headed by Thambipillay to commemorate ‘those who sacrificed their lives since 1914 for the security and tranquillity of the

Nation' (Thambipillay 2008). Unlike the ceremonies discussed earlier, the Cenotaph Remembrance is the first time such a consolidated service, one that honours the dead from *all different conflicts in Perak* in one event, has ever been accomplished. It is also different from the previous ceremonies by having the full endorsement of the Perak state government, and involving participation by official bodies such as the Ipoh City Council and Perak Tourism Action Council. Aside from the involvement of the state, Thambipillay also attempted to 'localise' the Cenotaph (and the ceremony) to ensure it becomes an *embodied* memorial that encompasses everyone. Specifically, this was done in three ways: by updating and rededicating the Cenotaph to make it relevant to the present, *multiracialising* the ceremony, and remembering war participants who have thus far been forgotten. After elaborating on the nature of these three strategies adopted by Thambipillay and his committee to render the event 'more local', the views of locals on the event and how it was carried out, are sought.

6.4.1 Updating the Cenotaph

It has already been said how the Cenotaph has, for a long time, been ignored and left unmaintained not only by the state but also the local population. Even individuals I approached at the hotel where I was staying were not able to tell me much about the monument, let alone the people on the street. As one passerby said, 'I don't know anything about [the Cenotaph]'. The fact that it was established by the colonial British government and honours the memories of the *foreign* combatants during the war who died albeit in Malaya then might explain why Perakians have never really considered it as a state or a national monument, and what would also be one of the main criticisms levelled on the ceremony later (see below). This is something of which Thambipillay was well aware: 'One thing I wanted to do during the ceremony

is to ‘update’ that Cenotaph so that locals can see it as something they too can be interested in’. Towards this end, he began the revamping of the Cenotaph monument.

The first thing he did was to re-instate onto the monument the plaques that had long gone missing. In conjunction with the ceremony itself, the missing plaques, which mysteriously reappeared at the Public Works Department storeroom in Ipoh (*The Star* 17 June 2008), was reinstated and a new plaque was also put up. On this new plaque, written in gold letterings upon a black background (**Fig. 6.10**), are: ‘In Memory of Gallant Members of the Armed Forces, Police and Civilians Who Sacrificed their Lives Defending the Nation during... Malayan Emergency 1948-1960; Indonesian Confrontation 1962-1965; the Re-Insurgency Period 1972-1990’



Fig. 6.10: The new plaque on the Cenotaph (source: author)

The new plaque was sponsored by Datok Chan Yew Mun, a prominent personality and Managing Director of Peng Yong properties, who was also responsible for repairing and refurbishing the original bronze and marble tablets that were removed from the Cenotaph, and which was put back onto the monument during the ceremony. Far from an attempt to ‘re-place’ memories (Azaryahu 2003) that have been associated with the Cenotaph for many generations, the addition of these new

plaques represents what Dwyer (2004: 420, following Foote 1997) refers to as ‘symbolic accretion’ or ‘the appending of commemorative elements on to already existing memorials’ to make it relevant to the present generation. While such a process may be done to disrepute standing memorials – what is called ‘antithetical accretion’ (Foote 1997) – in the case of the Cenotaph, the intention is to enlarge the remembrance scope of the monument to include other events that have occurred since – or ‘allied accretion’ – where the Cenotaph becomes ‘a repository for other memorials that help to reinforce its status as a meaningful place’ (Foote 1997: 213).

Through the ceremony itself, Thambipillay also hopes to inject new life into the Cenotaph that has long faded into the landscapes of Ipoh. During his speech, he said:

‘With this, the decades old Cenotaph now has a breath of renewed life where we can gather to honour not just the two world wars but also those who fell [in other conflicts]... with the intention that this Cenotaph will be a focal point of assemblies for locals and foreigners for commemorative events’.

As such, the ceremony – as a way of *re*-introducing the Cenotaph to the general public – may be seen as a way of countering the tendency for physical memoryscapes – in the shape of monuments, war cemeteries or even a museum – ‘to forget’, or rather to be forgotten, over time, not only by those who went through the war, but also the public generally. By enlarging the commemorative scope of the monument, he also hopes that, aside from the Cenotaph Remembrance, planned to be held annually, the site will be used for ‘many more similar ceremonies... to foster friendships among families whose past generations were involved in the wars as well as boosting state tourism’ (Thambipillay, cited in *New Straits Times* 14 June 2008).

6.4.2 *Multiracialising the Ceremony*

‘I am happy the state approved the event and gave its *restu* [blessing]... Now, [locals] can see this as a state event’. (Thambipillay, pers comm. 2008)

Another way in which Thambipillay and his committee, and in conjunction with the state authorities, have sought to ‘localise’ the Cenotaph Remembrance is by turning it into a multiracial and multi-religious event. Although the usual (foreign) crowd was present: representatives from High Commissions of the United Kingdom, Australia, Nepal and India, and members of the National Malayan Borneo Veterans Association (NMBVA) (United Kingdom and Australia), Royal Green Jackets and Royal British Legion, who also came with their families, and bag-pipers and buglers from the Royal Gurkha Regiment (from Brunei), the Cenotaph Remembrance diverges from prior ceremonies by including the participation of many locals making up the more than 300 people in attendance. This included representatives from the Ipoh City Council, such as the Ipoh mayor, staff from the Perak Tourism Action Council, the Royal Malaysian Police Force and Malaysian Armed Forces, 150 teachers and schoolchildren, and the St. Michael’s Institution Band (**Fig. 6.11**).¹⁶



Fig. 6.11: The St. Michael’s Institution Band at the ceremony (source: CP Lo)

¹⁶ The choice of St. Michael’s Institution school band was intentional, given the wartime history of the school. During the Japanese Occupation, the school was made the seat of Japanese Administration in Perak (Perak State Government 1999).

Aside from the direct involvement of the local authorities, and the local regimental institutions, which Thambipillay hopes will project the ceremony as an event that is relevant to the state as a whole (see quote at the head of this section),¹⁷ the presence of the schoolchildren, in their uniforms and representing the mosaic of different races in Malaysia (**Fig. 6.12**), was also intentional to make the event more inclusive, and one that would resonate for years to come. During his speech, Thambipillay said:

‘It is admirable to see some of you who are getting along with age but have the spirit to attend this ceremony. I am sure your fine example will encourage youngsters like these 150 school children with us here. Thanks to them ...the sacrifices of the past will always be remembered by generations to come’.

In a Press Release (Thambipillay 2008), he also cited how the ceremony ‘serves as a valuable source of historical knowledge and perspective for the young on how and at what expense our continued freedom was attained’. Through these narratives, and of war and courage, as well as in capitalising upon war veterans as ‘fine examples’ to inspire the young, Thambipillay seeks to not only project the event as salient to Malaysian nation-building – for the young to know ‘at what expense our continued freedom was attained’, but also get them interested to learn about the war and for all this to sustain their interest so that such ceremonies are also organised in the future.

Although there were still the marks of a ‘Western’-style ceremony to cater to the foreign participants who were present, such as the minute’s silence and the laying of wreaths, the Cenotaph Remembrance also had a session of multi-faith prayers which, as the master of ceremony (MC) puts it, are (national) traits of ‘multiracial, multi-cultural, multi-religious Malaysia, all coexisting in peace and harmony’ (**Fig. 6.13**).

¹⁷ The state has, however, been known, in some cases, to hold fringe activities to coincide with these ceremonies, such as the hi-tea hosted by the then Chief Minister after the *Batu Gajah* ceremony in 2003 in conjunction also with the launch of Thambipillay’s second publication (*Metro* 23 June 2003).

Speeches and prayers were read by leaders of Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Hinduism and Buddhism, in accordance to the myriad religions of both the commemorated as well as those present. Yet, through comments like the one by the MC, it could also be argued that it symbolises a way of representing the *multireligiosity* of Perak (and Malaysia) to the world (via the foreign participants and the international media) and further project the ceremony as one relevant to, and which would resonate with, all Malaysians. Still it was a measured move. Unlike previously, aside from prayer readings, there were no embodied *local* rituals like the burning of the joss sticks for the Chinese, a fact that would be criticised by some of the locals present (see below).



Fig. 6.12: Schoolchildren in their uniforms at the ceremony (source: CP Lo)



Fig. 6.13: A few of the religious leaders at the ceremony (source: CP Lo)

6.4.3 Remembering the Long Forgotten

Aside from updating the Cenotaph with the new plaques, and being committed to representing the multiracial and multi-religious cross-section of the commemorated war dead and the current audience present at the ceremony, the organisers of the Cenotaph Remembrance also realised that more should be done to honour the memories of the locals who participated during the war. The desire to widen the scope of the people commemorated to also include those who may not be honoured anywhere else which, as highlighted above, Thambipillay feels is one way in which ceremonies are best suited to do over physical memorials, is something that he has already believed years before the 2008 ceremony itself. As he told me in 2006:

‘I always dreamt of having an event that brings together all the ceremonies ... When I organised the one in Batu Gajah, I am sad thinking those from the Second World War are not remembered... and at the one for those who died in battles [during the war], I think about the [war dead of the] *Konfrontasi*...’.

Thus, the Cenotaph Remembrance represents his intentions for a consolidated moment where every person who has died in the name of the state (and nation) is honoured. By organising a ceremony for all the conflicts, Thambipillay hopes to ensure no one who has ever died during wars in Perak is overlooked and forgotten.

One way in which he has done this is through the addition of the new plaque, a form of ‘symbolic accretion’ which transforms the Cenotaph monument from one that commemorates only those who fought during the First and Second World Wars to one that also honours those who gave their lives during the other conflicts that took place in Perak post-independence. Through his speech, Thambipillay was also careful to highlight that ‘the freedom that we enjoy today was not only won by the

people, both *from Malaysia* and those representing the British Empire, who gave their lives and whom we are remembering today, but also many others who are still alive today, some of them here with us today... I thank you'. It is clear from this statement that he had used his speech as a way to 'remember' those who may not – either due to lack of funding or the need to make such memorials non-specific and 'democratised' (so that they become specific to no one but relevant to everyone) (see King 1999; Dimitrova 2005; Shay 2005) – be represented via inscriptions on monuments. That way, the hope is that what may not be written down or carved on memorial concrete, wood or plinth could be remarked upon literally in words.

For the same reason of wanting to use the ceremony to honour those who have contributed to the war but have thus far been excluded from physical memorials or elided in collective memorialisation is through the inclusion of *local* participants of the war. This pertains specifically to the invitation, as special guests of the ceremony, of a group of locals who served during the war and Emergency years, the state's indigenous population, or *Orang Asli* (**Fig. 6.14**). During his speech, he mentioned, 'For the first time, we have included the *Orang Asli* in the ceremony because their role in fighting the communist has never been remembered'. Indeed, given that many of them lived a nomadic life in the jungles of Perak, they were inevitably embroiled in the war particularly as aids to Allied guerrilla fighters against the Japanese and subsequently against the communist terrorists during the Emergency (Bayly and Harper 2005). Aside from the Head of *Orang Asli* Affairs in Malaysia, the community was also largely represented during the ceremony by a number of them who were themselves personally involved in the Emergency (*The Star* 17 June 2008).



Fig. 6.14: *Orang Asli* war veterans participating in the ceremony (source: CP Lo)

There is another advantage to having these survivors of the war years, both *Orang Aslis* and foreign veterans, present and that is through their positions as ‘witnesses’ and themselves as *embodied* conveyors of history. Scholars have remarked about ‘witnesses’ becoming ‘relentless recorders’ of history (Connerton 1989: 15) and as ‘authenticators’ of memory (Patraka 2001). This pertains to how war survivors, due to their ‘having been there’, are often able to salvage stories from the past that may have been forgotten. It is clear how Thambipillay has capitalised upon war survivors to inspire the young. Yet, in another way, their presences have also served to resuscitate aspects of the past that have been left out of record books, particularly through their conversations with others, during the event, and with the media through which they got the opportunity to ‘talk’ about the past (*The Star* 17 June 2008). In that sense, thus, facets of the past hitherto forgotten may be brought to life again.

6.5 Towards *Inclusivity*?

It is thus clear from how the Cenotaph Remembrance was choreographed the organisers wanted an *inclusive* event that not only remembers everyone who has ever fought and/ or died in Perak’s wars, but also resonates with those present, regardless

of nationality, race or faith. Generally, participants were positive about the involvement of the young, recognition of the *Orang Asli*, and the insertion of multi-faith prayers, aspects also highly regarded by the news coverage in the following days (*New Straits Times* 14 June 2008; *The Star* 12 June 2008, 17 June 2008). Yet, from conversations with local participants and those who stayed away, criticisms have also emerged about the event's preference for 'colonial' subjectivities and stories, the exclusion of 'local' rites, and clashes over how to honour the dead. This section argues that, despite intentions otherwise, the event was still seen as selective in its rituals and in what it remembers, and exclusive in privileging the foreigners (rather than locals), such that many did not feel the event was actually 'for them'.

The first criticism was that the event was perceived as reflecting preferences for 'colonial' stories and subjectivities. One reason for this centred on its location. While some were glad that it was held at the Cenotaph, seen as a public enough place for an event that involves locals and foreigners, it has not escaped others that the Cenotaph is a site that brims with colonial connotations. This is to say, despite efforts to rededicate it as a memorial to *all* the war dead, it is still seen by a few, like Rainah (26, Ipoh), as 'British [and that] they should have it at the Padang'. The suggestion of the Padang itself is interesting given it too has its colonial associations¹⁸ although these have been re-appropriated, through the Independence celebrations held there annually, and local activities (**Fig. 6.15**), as also a place with local significations (see Kong and Yeoh 1997; Yeoh 2003, for other cases of such 'colonial' to 'national' re-appropriations). If one accepts though that the Padang could 'become' 'local', it is

¹⁸ For one thing, the Padang was in itself the product of British urban planning and design and, not to mention, also the nexus of the colonial everyday in the past. During the war, it was where all the staff of the government offices in Ipoh participated in a Japanese bowing and allegiance ceremony. When Subas Chandra Bose visited Ipoh on 1 October 1943, he also spoke to a large gathering here and recruited hundreds of volunteers for his Army of Free India (Perak State Government 1999).

then possible that the same could, over time, happen to the Cenotaph. Still, for now, the monument is still perceived as tied to the colonial past such that to have it there is considered, as Rainah puts it, ‘just for the benefit of the British [participants] there’.



Fig. 6.15: The Padang in Ipoh (source: author)

The sentiment that the Cenotaph Remembrance is more for its foreign (vs. local) participants is also based on how the event was promoted to the public. There were many Perakians, particularly those who stayed away from attending, who criticised the event as being only for foreigners, particularly the war veterans and that there was no serious attempt to really promote it to the local public. According to Alisha (80s, Ipoh), ‘I did not know about the event at all... but I am not surprised. Usually these events are just for the foreigners’. This is a view shared by many who refrained from participating because they saw it as ‘not for us’, which explains why comparatively there were more foreigners than locals in attendance on the day (**Fig. 6.16**). The suspicion may also be grounded by the fact that, while formal invitations were given out to schools, local regiments and a few other institutions, lay Perakians had to learn about the event through newspaper articles published only a few days beforehand such that, as Alisha puts it, ‘they are not serious about wanting us there’.



Fig. 6.16: Some of the foreign war veterans at the event (source: CP Lo)

Aside from the location of the Cenotaph Remembrance at ‘a profoundly British icon’ (see Gough and Morgan 2002), and the way it was promoted to the public, seen as privileging ‘colonial’ subjectivities’ in the shape of the (foreign) attendees, many locals also took issue with the way that the organisers had shown preference to stories of battle glory at the expense of (more local) stories of hardship and everyday sufferings. According to Zainal (70s, Bagan Serai), ‘[the ceremony] does not honour men like me because I did not fight’. Thus, he said, ‘I will not go to [such] ceremonies because it reminds me that we are forgotten’. To prove his point further, he highlighted how the event consisted only of ‘those involved in battles... even the *Orang Asli* are honoured because they *fought* against the communists’. This points to how the event focuses too much on combatants and not local war civilians. Indeed, from the speeches, while there were many who spoke on ‘sacrifice in battles’ and ‘fallen heroes’, there was no mention of locals who also suffered as civilians, a criticism already levelled on the state for its other remembrance efforts (Chapter 5).

Related to this is the criticism that, while the Cenotaph Remembrance honours the men who fought, the women have been left out. According to Alisha (80s, Ipoh), ‘It is clear the ceremony is for soldiers and not locals... sad because it means women

are not seen as important... just because we did not fight'. Notwithstanding that there *were* women who participated during the war (see Wong 2005; Khoo A. 2007), where their exclusion from the ceremony was indeed an oversight on the part of the organisers, some feel that even those women who were confined at home but who also faced the hardships of war should be honoured, a theme that also rings in the literature on the marginalisation of women in war representations that usually reproduces 'patriarchal and masculinist nostalgia for community and sexual ownership' (Fujitani et al 2001: 5; see also Dwyer 2000; Enloe 1998; Muzaini and Yeoh 2005a). Dalilah (20s, Ipoh) also highlighted this when she said that 'women who went through [the war] are not remembered, even though they too went through much pain', thus pointing to the ceremony as privileging 'colonising' war stories of glory but to the detriment of the stories of hardship faced by the former colonised.

The second main criticism, in addition to perceptions that the event privileges former 'coloniser' subjects, both the living and those who have passed, is its exclusion of local rites and customary rituals. Allen (35, Kampar), for one, lamented that 'there was nowhere [at the ceremony] for Chinese people to practice rituals like the burning of joss sticks that they are familiar with when praying for the dead'. According to Thambipillay, this was intentional as he did not want to encourage such (Taoist) practices because 'I wanted to make the event for everyone, where every religion is featured without any one of them seeming special'. His rationale is that it is enough for locals to see he has included all the races and religions, thus allowing for differences, for them to want to participate, even though this was also done by simultaneously discouraging specific elements of religious rites and practices which might give the impression that he was partial to some religions and not to the others.

Yet, it was found that, where it concerns the act of honouring the (war) dead, locals take their rituals seriously and that, as Allen indicated, ‘if you want [locals] to take part in [the ceremony], you have to do it properly ... have a place to burn the joss papers to send messages to the heavens. If not, your prayers will not reach [the dead]’. By not following the proper ways of praying to the spirits of the war dead, it also means that, as Seng (78, Taiping) said, ‘our forefathers will not bless us and we will have a hard time’, premised on the Chinese belief in ancestral worship where if one does not propitiate the spirits of ‘forefathers’ correctly, and ensure harmony between the two worlds, the spirits will not allow for positive blessings to get passed on to ensure ‘the fundamental well-being of living family members’ (Cartier 1997: 558; see also Lip 1997; Kohn 1993). Given the weight locals put on these rituals, their inability to practice them, and the comparatively higher leeway given to ‘Western’ rituals, have made the locals feel the event is not for them. Thus, although it was the intention to make the ceremony *inclusive*, by including differences in an egalitarian way, it has ironically also made it extremely *exclusive* in the locals’ eyes.

Thirdly, there were also a few, like Rahimah (46, Ipoh) who felt that, while it was good the organisers included the *imam* in the ceremony, ‘I did not appreciate it that we are made to say our prayers in front of all those non-Muslims and also made to take part in prayers [of other faiths]’. The statement reflects her belief that, customarily, to offer respect to the Muslim dead ‘should be at the cemetery itself or at a mosque and [where] only Muslims are present’ (**Fig. 6.17**). The Cenotaph Remembrance therefore goes against local Muslim sensitivities not only in terms of its collective framing, but also how it was conducted. This would mainly point to the awkwardness she felt in not only ‘imagining’ the war dead through the monument,

which she sees as not the Islamic way to do things, given that Muslims are not allowed to (even symbolically) represent the dead through such structures, but also in partaking in prayers not of her own faith. Thus, in adopting the monument as the central focus, and collectivising the ceremony, the ceremony has turned off some of the locals, like Rahimah, who saw it as an inappropriate way to honour the war dead.



Fig. 6.17: A Muslim cemetery (source: author)

On a related note, a few who chose to stay away also felt strongly that it is wrong, according to local customs and religions, to even honour and remember the (war) dead through such ceremonies. Notwithstanding the inclusion of ‘Western’ elements, such as the minute’s silence and the symbolic wreath-laying, which Kamal (74, Taiping) saw as ‘just following the Whites’, another more serious contention lies in the question of whether the (war) dead should be collectively remembered at all. Fatimah (47, Taiping) related how ‘[the ceremony] is just not the way we honour the dead [as] we have our own ways as Muslims... it is wrong to treat people who died [in wars] as special [since] we are all equal in the eyes of God’. Kamal also highlighted how ‘Muslims do not remember the dead that way... The important thing is the good [Islamic] deeds that we have done in our lives and not whether we died during wars unless it is for upholding religious values’. In these views, thus, the

sense is that, in Islam, one should not ever glorify *any* kinds of death, where events that are dedicated to wars are seen as ‘unIslamic’ and against tenets of the religion.

The issue of how religion and personal, and cultural customs and inclinations, impinge upon notions of collective memorialisation, particularly those that are state-led, is dealt with in greater detail later (see Chapter 7). At this juncture, the point being made is that the Cenotaph Remembrance has been popularly seen as rubbing against, and being restrictive of, traditional beliefs as to how the (war) dead should be remembered, which has led to criticisms that the event has not been ‘localised’ enough to suit and accommodate local beliefs, rituals and practices. This and the sentiment that the event has privileged foreign participants and excluded the war stories of locals – both of combatants and war civilians – have thus led some of the locals to think that the event is not for them. In that respect, despite Thambipillay’s hopes to hold an event that is *inclusive*, it has in fact been seen as *exclusive* in its scope of commemoration, reproducing the marginalisation of local experience in deference – or maybe preference – to elements that speak to the colonial (war) years.

6.6 Becoming a ‘Memoryscape that Forgets’

This chapter considers the flagship Cenotaph Remembrance, a state-wide service held in Ipoh on 13 June 2008 to examine how its organisers, led by Datuk R. Thambipillay and his committee, and with the support of local authorities, have sought to counter the tendency of physical memorials – like museums and monuments – to be selective in their representations of the past, and their potential to be ignored or fade from public consciousness, by conducting a more *embodied* form of memorial service. It first showed how, via strategies adopted, such as by

multiracialising the ceremony, updating the Cenotaph monument in Ipoh, and honouring those who fought in the war but are long forgotten, such as the *Orang Asli* (or indigenous) community, they attempted to put together a memorial event that is *inclusive* not only in terms of commemorating everyone who has been part of, and killed, during wars fought within the borders of Perak, but also in ensuring that everyone living is able to partake in it, regardless of religion, race and nationality.

The rest of the chapter then explored the views of locals, both participants and those who stayed away, on what they thought about the ceremony. It was found that, while there has been some positive recognition of the efforts the committee put into ‘localising’ the event, there were still criticisms arising out of three main issues: the perceived preference of the organisers for ‘colonial’ subjectivities and stories (as exemplified by the choice of location for the event, its commemorative scope, and how it was promoted); its exclusion of traditional rites and rituals, seen as antithetical to local sensitivities; and differences in opinions with regards to how the (war) dead are to properly be remembered. These have, in turn, led to accusations that the event was organised not so much for the (postcolonial) locals but for the (colonial) foreigners there, thus putting limits on the success of the event as proclaimed by Thambipillay at the beginning of the chapter. In fact, by being seen as selective and exclusionary, and the fact that many locals have boycotted it, the Cenotaph Remembrance may ironically be projected as itself a memoryscape ‘that forgets’.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Making Memories ‘Our Own Way’: From ‘Silences’ to Grassroots War Remembrances in Perak

7.1 Between ‘Silences’ and Remembering

‘It seems that mankind prefers to suffer in silence, prefers to live in the world of silence, even if it be by suffering, than to take its suffering into the loud places of history’. (Max Picard, cited in Sheriff 2000: 114)

In the last two chapters, it has been made clear how commemorative initiatives by the Perak state have come under criticism for eliding, within public representations of the war, stories pertaining to the experiences of the locals. Yet it is interesting that, unless solicited, these disgruntled opinions of the people rarely get publicly expressed, where many would prefer to remain ‘silent’ about their unhappiness with official remembrances, rather than openly using their voices to destabilise those of the elites as manifest in what Picard would refer to as ‘the loud places of history’, where public discourses and national ideologies dominate (see also Sheriff 2000). These ‘silences-from-below’ (Pitcher 2006) are in fact so ‘deafening’ that, unless one knows better, it could be forgiven to think that locals are in cahoots with the state in thinking that what has been done formally to remember (or forget) the war *is perhaps the best way to go*. As Law said, ‘I don’t really know why people don’t want to say anything. Maybe they are content or maybe they are happy that the war is forgotten’.

While there are those who would rather memories of the war remain obscure, which would explain why they have not made a fuss out of the state’s selective memory, preferring even that the state does not do anything towards recalling the event (see

Chapter 9), this chapter shows how ‘silences’ – not only in terms of reluctance to speak up against official remembrances, but also refusing to speak publicly about what happened to them during the war – are, in fact, loaded and multifaceted, governed by a number of factors. In addition, it also demonstrates how, despite these ‘silences’, it does not necessarily mean that the people are content to allow memories that may have been elided within more public representations of the event to slip into total oblivion, or even that these ‘silences’ may not in themselves represent ways of exercising grassroots agency in resisting the state’s hegemony. Rather, as the chapter eventually highlights, even though the state is not very interested in remembering the experiences of, especially, the war civilians, the people are keen for them to be marked and transmitted although, as Ahmad (81, Slim River) says, ‘our own way’.

The chapter begins by highlighting how Perakians remember the war ‘our own way’, and where occluded memories of the event have found sanctuary from amnesiac state practices but not via the conventional means characteristic of commemorations of wars in the West. These grassroots memoryscapes are, instead, situated within private spheres and often engaged in by intimate gatherings of people, and established in an *embodied* way (Connerton 1989), although not in the usual high profile fashion that are typical of collective types of embodied memorialisation, as exemplified by the Cenotaph Remembrance. Rather, it shows how local ways of remembering are more characteristic of what Kuchler (1993: 104) refers to as ‘landscapes-as-memory’, or memoryscapes not visibly etched on space but implicit in the act of remembrance itself, most times in close association with traditional customs and religions (*vis-à-vis* ‘landscapes-of-memory’ that are memories that are physically coded in and represented on the space itself) (see also Curtoni et al 2003).

The second part of the chapter then explores why the locals would much prefer to ‘not speak up’ (against official state memory initiatives) or allow the state ‘to speak for their war experiences’, even if this means their war recollections might not endure the test of time, and that, publicly, ‘silences’ would prevail. In noting that one cannot ‘(dis)miss’ ‘silences’, already an overlooked subject within the social sciences (see Hyams 2004; Sheriff 2000), and considering how these may sometimes speak ‘louder about the past than the stories themselves’, the chapter thus takes up the challenge of ‘listen[ing] and talk[ing] to these silences without banishing them’ (Kee 2006: 468, 463). Specifically, it shows how the avoidance of overt criticisms of state efforts or, rather, the preference for the state to not take the helm of representing *their* war memories, does not imply there is complicity between the state and its people with regards to how the war is to be marked (see King 1999). In fact, it would appear that such ‘silences’ are indicative of, and enacted for, a variety of motives.

The enactment of ‘silences’ does not, however, mean that the vernacular memories of the war, particularly as held by those who themselves went through the event, are not also being transmitted and passed on to the next generations. Despite not wanting the state to take charge in remembering their experiences *for them* or to promote the significance of their personal and social accounts of the war within more public or state-wide realms, Perakians have, in addition to materialising the (war) past ‘our own way’, also sought to bestow their stories to future Perakians, albeit on a more private, intimate and personal scale or, at least, through mechanisms that do not require the state to be involved. In doing so, it reflects upon the anxieties that these individuals, especially the war civilians, too feel about the danger that their stories will die with the war generation, and what they have done to attempt to arrest that

(see Kusno 2003). The (material and *embodied*) means in and by which Perakians have attempted to do this constitutes the third and final section of this chapter.

More generally, the chapter first argues that ‘silences’ do not just represent the continued sidelining of ‘subaltern’ voices by state tendencies to ‘control’ memory (O’Hanlon 2000), although this may be the case at times. Rather, there are grassroots memoryscapes that ensure local war experiences are also marked and transmitted. Second, it argues how ‘silences’ are multi-motivated, some representing enactments of subversion against domination but in the shadows and away from public scrutiny, yet no less powerful in contesting elite practices (see Legg 2007, 2005a; Kusno 2003). As such, it recognises that ‘hearing “silence within voice” offers insights into the dynamic, relational and hierarchical nature of knowledge construction and intersubjectivity’ (Hyams 2004: 116), and how resistance can rear its head in ways not at all confrontational (Pile 1997). While the absence of ‘speaking’ due to the need to overcome trauma (Caruth 1991), are tackled in Chapter 9, here the focus is on those who seek to remember on their own terms, in less collective, private scales.

7.2 Grassroots Memoryscapes

‘This artefact of memory goes beyond the function of representation, as it also evidences a process of representation inseparable from the act of remembering and dwelling’. (Curtoni et al 2003: 74)

Curtoni et al. (2003) once highlighted how scholars should look for modes of remembrances that lie beyond what is merely ‘represented’ by way of appropriated material landmarks. These pertain to also considering practices of remembering that

are not discernibly commemorative per se but are still able to trigger the past for individuals and groups within the present, what Kuchler (1993: 104) refers to as ‘landscapes-as-memory’, or memory-making practices that are not visibly etched on space but implicit in the act of remembrance itself, customary to many non-Western traditions where museums and other physical markings on space – Kuchler refers to these as ‘landscapes-of-memory’ – are made redundant through the ability of the past to be naturally coded in the landscape itself (see also Kusno 2003; White 1996). Taking up the challenge posed by Curtoni et al (2003) above, following Kuchler (1993), this section identifies three types of grassroots memoryscapes to be found in Perak, which represents both ‘landscapes-of-’ (but mainly) ‘landscapes-as-memory’.

7.2.1 War Civilians as *Embodied Memoryscapes*

‘The present and future are continuously haunted by a past that is registered, not in any monument, but in the minds of the people’. (Kusno 2003: 175)

The most popularly found form of popular trigger of war memory takes the form of what locals refer to as *orang-orang lama* [literally: ‘old people’], specifically referring to those who themselves went through the war. It was to them that many pointed to as the best way to learn about the war as it took place in Perak (**Fig. 7.1**). Opah (79 Slim River) says: ‘the white people go to the museum to learn about the past... but the people in Perak go to the *orang-orang lama*’. In that respect, in contrast to more conventional avenues for learning about the past, war civilians are themselves, with their own memories, a type of historical resource, where living bodies represent, as Longhurst (1995: 101) puts it, ‘primary objects of inscription’, as it were by their ‘witnessing’ of the war. More significantly, these bodies, as evident

later, in their capacity to also ‘perform’ – primarily through their ability to speak – are also useful transmitters of otherwise sidelined memories (see Patraha 2001).



Fig. 7.1: War civilians in Taiping (source: author)

In many ways, this is undeniable. During the whole time that the war as it took place in Perak was officially overlooked, and traces of the event erased, war civilians have always been around as witnesses to what happened during those years. Even when the state was extremely selective in representing only particular elements of the war years and not others, the *orang-orang lama* have all along been sharing the war with others as they themselves saw and experienced it, ensuring that what is publicly forgotten is still remembered within more private and embodied realms, especially through the form of ‘story-telling’ (see Blokland 2001; Yu 2002). This is not to say their memories are not selective though, many remembering only aspects relevant or related to what they themselves went through personally. Yet, in the light of the fact that much of the criticisms of the ways the state has officially represented the war has centred on the occlusion of the personal experiences of the local population, these war civilians represent the very living embodiment of what may have been sidelined.

Indeed, from personal remembrances shared by these war civilians, there was much which could be learnt about the war that includes aspects of the event not easily read

from museum panels or history storyboards, as well as anecdotes about local history that cannot be learnt about by consulting history manuals, or even by looking for them through the manifest landscapes today. To cite an example, Bagan Serai was heavily bombed during the war, a fact that was related by Hashim (78, Taiping) even though making the trip to the town one would not guess this from the redevelopment that has taken place. Yet it was only by a chance encounter with Rosman (70s, Bagan Serai) that I found out more about places there that were bombed. According to him:

‘Yes, the Japanese were here and Bagan Serai was bombed a few times during the war but these places are no longer here... They have been modernized and developed, like LPN building... That building was bombed.’

Although what remains of the LPN building is still standing, albeit abandoned (**Fig. 7.2**), one would not be able to tell its history of being bombed by looking at it, the ‘debris’ of the war for a long time having been cleared. Yet, what this shows is how memories erased from public landscapes, many through modernization and urban redevelopment projects, may still survive well in the memories that are *embodied* in the witnesses to the event itself, although these may be easily overlooked if one were to merely focus on seeking out physical representations of the war (see Kusno 2003).



Fig. 7.2: LPN building in Bagan Serai (source: author)

Ahmad (81 Slim River) also related to me stories about the Slim River battle that go beyond what is written in history books: ‘I was living near the site and it was really very chaotic... I was so scared and everyone was running away from it... The area was bombed before the battle and an Indian rubber tapper died there along with his dog. I don’t know what he was doing there but then the British started coming down’. The Slim River battle was the last major battle to take place in Perak before the Japanese advanced south. While historians have written about the battle (see Elphick 1995; Ban and Yap 2002), these accounts never centred on the experiences of non-combatant locals, much confined to describing the battle action itself. Also, walking through the market town of Slim River today, these stories are no longer publicly visible. The site where the battle took place, and where the ‘Indian rubber tapper’ and his dog were sacrificed as a result of the bombings before the battle took place have, since early post-war years, been converted into a rest house (**Fig. 7.3**).



Fig. 7.3: The battlefield of Slim River today (source: author)

During the course of my fieldwork, there were indeed many such stories about the war, particularly those not reflected within official representations of the event, which were told to me through the *embodied* memories of *orang-orang lama*. Many of these also emerged during the walking interviews where locals would show me

places that were significant Japanese sites during the war but are not marked as such on the ground. During my walking interview with Chye (83, Kampar), he would often stop at sites that have not been officially marked by the state to relate to me war-related stories. One of these was the Anglo Chinese School, which the Japanese used as a *Kempeitai* (police) headquarters (**Fig. 7.4**). According to him, ‘this playground was where the Japanese would line suspects of the [mainly Chinese] anti-Japanese resistance movement and chop their heads if they were found guilty’. As such, war civilians, by virtue of having been ‘witnesses’ to what happened during the war represent a way memories of the war have remained in the present. Entrenched, as these memories are, in their very beings, war civilians are considered authorized figures of war knowledge by virtue of ‘having been through it’, which makes them invaluable as a veritable historical resource. As Dalilah (20s, Ipoh) puts it, ‘who needs museums when you can get the best history from talking to *orang-orang tua*’



Fig. 7.4: Chye at the Anglo Chinese School (source: author)

7.2.2 Objects as Reminders of the Past

Aside from through the *embodied* forms of *orang-orang lama*, memories of the event are also survived by the things that many of them have kept from the war years. On

many occasions, I was introduced to the colourful world of these objects, including photographs, clothes, ration cards, diaries, personal and official documents, (out of commission) weapons, hairpieces, jewelry, books and many other things bearing marks of the war, such as the *rehal* (Fig. 7.5), an item used to hold the *Quran*, that Moin (78 Slim River) has kept today even though it has been damaged by a gunshot imprinted on it. According to him, who also brought out his collection of ‘banana money’, ‘I keep these things as they remind me of those years of the war when our lives were difficult, something I never want to forget’, an indication of how people project lives onto objects not only as reminders of the self (see Mehta and Belk 1991), in this case during the war, but also as a means of remembering the war past.



Fig. 7.5: Moin and the *rehal* (left), a *Quran* holder with the bullet shot (source: author)

For some of my respondents, memories of the war are also triggered by personal diaries and other forms of writings that they have kept, where they have penned down, and a few even reflected upon, some of their own personal war experiences. For Lim (83, Kamunting), a war civilian who was also with the British Royal Air Force (RAF) during the war, the impetus to keep his diaries is so that, as *aide memoires*, they may function to prevent him from forgetting any of the specific details of his personal war experiences, especially when asked later to recount them:

‘I have a notebook where I write down my experiences... This is for when somebody asks me about my time in the war. I am old and I usually forget things. So I jot down all the main points so that I can remember my stories’.

Lim also keeps official documents such as a certificate he received as a member of the Home Guard during the Emergency, which he displays on the mantelpiece so ‘people will know that I served in the Emergency against communists’, an example of how the objects can serve as a kind of ‘evidence’ for having gone through the war.

While objects may serve as a reminder of their experiences in the war they are also reminders of lessons that can be learnt from them. Rashid (72 Kampar), for instance told me that the reason why he still kept kitchen items from the war although they are no longer in use: ‘We have new ones but I told my wife I would like to keep them as I don’t want to forget we were poor [during the war]’. For Moin (78 Slim River), the *rehal* triggers memories of the horrors of war that should never be forgotten or worse repeated, ‘I keep these objects to remind me about those times [of war]... If the bullet can damage the *rehal* like that, imagine what it would do to a human. It is a reminder of how bad wars are and we should never be involved in wars anymore’. From these examples, it is clear therefore how objects kept from the war do not only function as material reminders of war or triggers of their personal (or social) experiences during the war, but can also be didactic in their purpose of reminding war civilians of some of the useful lessons to the present, a subject taken up below.

In addition to acting as triggers of personal memories, objects are also valuable for their ability to remind beholders of people linked to them, as material ties between the living and those who have passed on (Hallam and Hockey 2001). In Moin’s case:

‘This *rehal* was given to me by my uncle when I was a child and we left it at the house when all the battles were going on... I still keep it to remember my uncle... he died soon after the war. He went through a lot [during the war]’.

Similarly, Lim (83 Kamunting) keeps photographs of his time during his RAF days for the memories these trigger of his mates (**Fig. 7.6**): ‘I look at them and it reminds me of the friends I lost in the war’. Although the photographs were taken pre-war, still they remind him of the war since, as Tolia-Kelly says (2004a: 315), material objects are not ‘simply situated as mementoes of a bounded past but are [also] precipitates of syncretized textures of remembered ecologies and landscapes’ (see also Schwenkel 2006). In this case, the photographs remind him of his friends lost in the war. Thus, objects can also be ‘surrogates’ for loved ones who died during the war, a way of honouring their memories, thus ensuring that they are not forgotten.

Some of these objects that are kept by war civilians are also useful as ‘triggers’ of memory in another way, that is, as *memento mori*, or ‘objects that act as reminders of death for the living’ (Hallam and Hockey 2001: 48). We have already seen how the *rehal* is kept by Moin as a reminder of the damage that a bullet can do to a human considering the damage that it had on the object itself. He also then goes on to say:

‘Sometimes when I look at [the *rehal*] it makes me feel extremely lucky to be alive... imagine if I had been the one who was shot by that bullet. There is no way I would have survived. It definitely taught me that we should always appreciate we are still alive and not waste any single moment that we have’.

For Lim too, looking at the photographs of his mates also reminded him of how easily ‘it could be me... I was so lucky the Japs [sic] did not kill me’. In that way, the objects have served to influence, and impact upon, some of the war civilians in Perak

by ‘calling death into life and creating metaphorical connections that associated the passage of time in life with the inevitability of death’ (Hallam and Hockey 2001: 59).



Fig. 7.6: Lim and photos of his RAF days (source: author)

Objects thus play a salient role as reminders of the war in Perak. Unlike the physical environment, or material sites and places, as traces of the war, these objects are portable and easy to move around. This quality thus makes them something that can be better appreciated by war civilians who are thus able to carry and ‘mobilise’ these fragments of the past – along with the ‘ghosts’ [read: memories] attached to them (see Bell 1997) – wherever they want. Unlike places, these objects can also be brought into the ‘closed doors of the private sphere’ (Miller 2001: 1), not only as a means of transporting the past into the present but also, as reminders of deceased loved ones, allow for a ‘tangible connection between the living and the dead, traversing time and space through memories associated with the object and the dead’ (Saunders 2003a: 153). Put on display – like Lim’s Home Guard certificate (**Fig. 7.7**) – or ‘kept away’, these objects represent value to war civilians who look to them to remind them of the war past, and also transmitting memories forward (see below).



Fig. 7.7: Lim Chun Bee's Home Guard Certificate (source: author)

7.2.3 Physical Markers as Grassroots Commemoration

Aside from the *orang-orang lama*, and remembering through the medium of objects within the home, there are also a number of physical markers emplaced as reminders, particularly of the war dead. These come closest to the 'landscapes-of-memory' conceived by Kuchler (1993), in terms of how memories are physically and materially captured on the landscapes, although, in these cases, they are significant only on a private scale and not meant to be made public or relevant to the population more generally, motivated rather to honour memories of a more personal and specific nature: of particular individuals, particular places, particular incidences, and even then, as evident below, just barely. Perhaps due to the parochial nature of these grassroots markers, they are not widely known by Perakians – some are forgotten – where knowledge about them is restricted to a few and, even then, highly sketchily. In some cases, this reflects upon the local penchant for more *embodied* forms of memory practices than through the more physical and spatial(ised) memoryscapes.

One of the first of such grassroots markers that I found out about was a monument located within the Yuk Choy (Independent) School, a Chinese vernacular institution

in Ipoh. Near the entrance of the school is a monument said to have been erected in honour of some of those, from the MPAJA, who died during the war (**Fig. 7.8**). (Law told me that this is the second monument built there; the original was a wooden structure that was built after the war, remnants of which are still visible beside the new one). According to Alisha (80s, Ipoh), ‘I think that monument was built to remember [locals] murdered by the Japanese so that they will not be forgotten’. Alisha told me there also used to be ceremonies at the school, where the monument is currently located, conducted by the teachers and students of the school ‘but I don’t think they now do it anymore’, though no reasons were provided for the cessation of these ceremonies.¹⁹ The many times that I was there, students from the school did not seem to notice the monument, now just an invisible fixture on the large school field.



Fig. 7.8: The monument at Yuk Choy School (source: author)

In her examination of grassroots war memorials in Johore, Lim (2000: 154) observed the preponderance of such markers set up by local people themselves, which led her to suggest that while: ‘Memories of war gradually fade but memories of victimhood not only persist but are constantly renewed. Memories of defencelessness and helplessness violated seem to take a firmer hold on the imagination than heroic

¹⁹ I was not able to speak to the school’s principal, who was reluctant to encourage such stories about the school, but two of the teachers corroborated the existence of memorial ceremonies held there before. While they also indicated that it was war-related, no details were known or shared.

battles’ (see also Blackburn 2009). This point was made with regard to the tendency for residents to remember their experiences as war civilians even as they ignore those set up by the state. So was the case in Perak where the lack of any official physical marker erected by the state to remember the experiences of the local population during the war is inversely matched by alternative grassroots monuments that were set up by the local Perakians themselves, for whom the memories of what happened during the war – of loved ones lost, depravity felt, and autonomy diminished – have left such an impact on them they would rather not have the memories ever forgotten.

I was also able to trace two other grassroots memorials. The first is a mass grave in a Chinese cemetery at the Old Salak Village (near Chemor) for those killed during a Japanese *sook ching* massacre in the village during the war (**Fig. 7.9**). The epitaph on the memorial is a clear indication of this – ‘Built by the Chinese community of Pasir Salak on the 35th year of the Republic of China to remember the Chinese who died in the war’ – and the names of 14 local individuals who died. The current one is a new memorial inaugurated in 2003 to replace the original that was set up after the war, which had borne the weight of much time and weathering to require a new one.



Fig. 7.9: A mass grave at the Old Salak Village (source: author)

The second is a grave memorial that stands on the cremated remains (kept in urns) within a ‘Travellers Cemetery’ (during a time when local Chinese felt more of an attachment to China rather than Malaya where they saw themselves as temporary settlers) in Temoh, a town between Kampar and Tapah. Marked by three red stars, an identifying marker of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) usually imprinted onto comrades caps and uniforms to identify their affiliations, the epigraph writes: ‘The Temoh community built this monument to mark the three locals martyrs [with their names inscribed as well] on the 35th year of the Republic of China’ (**Fig. 7.10**).



Fig. 7.10: ‘Travellers’ Cemetery’ in Temoh (left) and grave marker (source: author)

These are just a few of the grassroots memorials in Perak; many more exist (see Low 2005, 2006), although many are not known much about, and tended to only by close family. While the one at Temoh looks abandoned (and its urns with the remains of the dead disturbed), the Old Salak memorial lies under undergrowth that reduces its visibility from the main road (**Fig. 7.11**), despite its recent resurrection and, as one villager puts it, ‘that does not belong to the village and not many people even know about it. But some residents do clean it during *Qing Ming*’.²⁰ Speaking of the Temoh memorial, one resident said: ‘nobody here knows about it... you would have to know

²⁰ The *Qing Ming* festival is a religious holiday for the Chinese celebrating the start of spring, thus denoting a popular and auspicious time for families to maintain and tend to graves of departed ones.

the person or have family buried nearby'. It is noteworthy though that, in both cases, not many knew of them; I myself knew via the word-of-mouth of my respondents.



Fig. 7.11: Tall grasses obscuring view of Old Salak memorial (source: author)

The oddity of the unkempt surroundings of the Old Salak memorial (given that the rest of the cemetery was only recently cleaned up) and residents claiming ignorance about the Temoh memorial is also complemented by what is (not) written on the Yuk Choy memorial. Although I was told it was a war memorial, there was nothing written on it that suggests so, indicating it as part of a community hall of people from Guangdong. While this initially made me sceptical of the truth of the monument as being war-related, I reserved judgment when many people told me that it was. Another clue it was a war memorial came when I found that the monument, along with the ones in Temoh and Old Salak, had also been included in a compilation, by Low Toh Nam (2005, 2006), a local historian, of the presence and whereabouts of grassroots memorials set up by the local Chinese population to remember the war.

From the preceding discussion, it may first be noted that the ‘almost forgotten’ nature of these physical – as evidenced by the abandoned look (of the Temoh memorial), the lack of much local knowledge (about the Old Salak memorial) and the possibility that people may have been wrong about the Yuk Choy memorial –

could be a case of memories (and memoryscapes) atrophying over time without constant upkeep (see Gough 2004), although, at this point I only say this tentatively as other possible reasons emerge that might also explain this (see below). Yet, and second, it shows that locals prefer *embodied* practices of remembering vis-à-vis those representative of Kuchler's (1993) 'landscapes-of-memory'. Many spoken to are happy with this. Although they are critical of the state's ways of remembering, due to the presence of these grassroots memoryscapes, they are content to leave things as they are, thus contributing to a pervading 'silence' of their voices in public. Still, while this already shows that officially marginalised memories of the war are not necessarily rendered forgotten, the 'silences' do represent something more complex.

7.3 The Many Face(t)s of Silence

'There must ... be considerable doubt about the power of commemoration to achieve through representation, a degree of unanimity amongst members of the public beyond that which already exists or is imposed as part of the conduct of everyday affairs'. (King 1999: 150)

Although there have been myriad grassroots commemorative activities going on in Perak to ensure that personal and communal experiences of the war are remembered and not allowed to slip into oblivion, established or practiced by the locals themselves, and on smaller and more intimate scales, many also accept the fact that, unless the state is involved, these memories may not be around for long since, as Chye (83, Kampar) says, 'if you want the young to be interested about the war, you need the [state] government to make learning *local* history a part of the curriculum'. Yet, many are adamant that they would rather maintain their 'public silence' than to

see the state represent them and their stories. This section examines three reasons for this: perilous memories, socio-cultural factors, and shadowy resistances. In doing so, it argues that there are many 'face(t)s' to these 'silences' that have been the mainstay of locals in terms of confronting the state with respect to war commemoration issues.

7.3.1 Perilous Memories

The first motivation for preferring to keep silent on how the state has remembered the war, and keeping their personal experiences of the event to themselves, was brought up by those linked to the 'communists', where there is concern that 'going public' might risk them getting into trouble. Seng (78, Taiping), for one, fears that his former involvement with the MCP is revealed if he were to take part in public ceremonies, or say something about his past publicly. Speaking about the reasons why he chose to shy away from the public and high profile commemorative events:

'People like me cannot be commemorated in such events [because] people might know and recognise us. If the government finds out we were with the MCP once... they call us communist terrorists... we are in trouble'.

This shows how some locals feel as if they are restrained or prevented from speaking up and being candid about their war experiences (or criticisms against the state) out of the risks and dangers that this may pose to them and, as Seng puts it, 'my family as well as those who know me', should his dealings with the MCP ever come out.

The indication here is that, for these individuals, the decision to keep silent is instigated by rules, both written and unwritten, against the remembering of those individuals who have been regarded as national 'traitors' (see Ban and Yap 2002; Ho T.F. 2000a). While there is no law that forbids publicly talking about the MCP in

Malaysia, the excision of narratives associated with the communist collective from public representations of the war, and the extent to which films on the subject (such as Amir Muhammad's movie, 'The Last Communist', on the life of Chin Peng, the former leader of the MCP) have been banned by the Malaysian government (see *The Star* 9 May 2006) still show the authorities up as being sensitive about the MCP and the years of the Emergency (see Chapter 5). In that sense, Seng's case represents how particular types of 'silences' may actually be (formally or informally) enforced, as it were, 'from above', in that, as Norquay (1999: 6) puts it, 'authoritatively sanctioned discourses frame what is both sayable and unsayable', and where the public exposure of one's story, or openly talking about the past, may result in peril and injuries to self as well as others (see also Kee 2007; Kusno 2003; Gheith 2007).

This may also provide a clue to better understanding the memorials in Temoh, Old Salak and Yuk Choy. I managed to uncover that many of the individuals honoured through these memorials had, at some point in the past, also served with the MCP, which thus render them – both these individuals and the memorials – difficult for locals to claim ownership (see Kee 2006). This potentially explains their tendency (or appearances) to be abandoned or obscured, and why there is no *written* indication of the memorial at Yuk Choy being a monument to the war dead, and locals' reluctance to say they know about these monuments. It could be that the Chinese community especially are concerned that if they are found out spreading the word about these memorials, it might land them on the wrong side of the law. Given that there has always been a tense relationship between the *Chinese* community generally and the *Malay*-dominated federal and state government (see Comber 2007), avoiding such a specific spotlight on oneself would thus be seen as most keenly desirable.

7.3.2 Socio-Cultural Factors

While some public silences may be somewhat ‘enforced’, in other cases, it may just be that locals are content to remember privately. As Moin (78 Slim River) explained, ‘As long as my family remember, I am happy’. Aside from a perceived lack of interest from the young to listen to or, worse, to ignore or ridicule their war stories as unimportant, which might, as Lim (80s, Kamunting) puts it, ‘hurt me more than if my stories are forgotten’, for Moin, it is a case of wanting to spread his stories to his family and loved ones, where there is no need for his stories to be made public and to be depicted in more state-wide war representations. Seng (78, Taiping) also pointed to this when he said that public remembrances tend to privilege only tales of heroism and battle glory, such that the experiences of the locals, which are centred on generic and everyday hardship, which would only be relevant ‘to those who know them’. This then paves the way for understanding how public silences may be instigated by more personal preferences for ways of remembering than to have it on display for all.

Also, there are those who prefer to remember the war, particularly their own experiences of it, in ways that are more in line with their own cultural and religious practices. In Chapter 6, it has already been shown how some locals were unhappy that more personalised and religio-centric ways of honouring the (war) dead, such as through the burning of the joss sticks, typical of Taoist practices, were not allowed during the Cenotaph Remembrance given how it was strictly choreographed. Others, particularly from within the Malay community, also feel that such collective forms of memorialisation went against the teachings of Islam, where the multi-religious blending of the event and, more seriously, the raising of individuals to heroic status just because they went through the war, was seen to be, as Kamal (74 Taiping) said,

‘wrong and not what Islam teaches us’. He continued: ‘God sees and treats all Muslims equally and we should too. Just because they went through the war does not make them special’. Habsah (79 Kampar) also mentioned how ‘it is enough to say prayers to the dead through our prayers... no need for big events and fancy plaques’.

These therefore show how locals have preferred to remain silent about the war for reasons that are not so much ‘enforced’ by the state but so that they are able to remember the war (dead) in their own ways. That Islam is seen as forbidding the sanctifying of individuals who died in wars through markers also explains why, for Muslims at least, preference is for *embodied* forms of remembrance, which also explains why physical structures like the grassroots memorials highlighted above tend to only belong to the Chinese community. For the most part, however, many are just content to engage in remembering ‘our own way’, that is in conformity to their own respective cultural and religious practices. For the Muslims, this would be through daily prayers and *Muslim* gatherings and, for the Chinese community, in accordance to Taoist beliefs and traditional practices of ancestral worship, to set up a Chinese altar in the house in honour of the (war) dead or, like Allen (35 Kampar), ‘to burn joss sticks at home and ask spirits of the (war) dead to bless and bring us luck’.

7.3.3 Shadowy Resistances

In addition to ‘silences’ prompted by fear of reprisals and the need to comply with religious tenets, there are also those that are instigated by resistance to having their war memories manipulated by the state. According to Opah (69, Slim River), ‘[the state] leaves out things and our stories might be left out too’, pointing to the state practice of privileging only some memories and marginalising others. Hashim (78,

Taiping) also cites his fear that his stories might ‘just be made part of the bigger story and all the little details of my story will disappear’, indicating how he is afraid that the particularities of his own personal story would be subsumed into the Perak story writ large. Due to these fears, locals like Opah and Hashim feel that it is necessary for them to remember privately and among people who know them, so that their stories will remain their own. Thus, as much as remembering ‘our own way’ might be due to the desire to remember according to religious practices, it could also be to avoid details of their stories from being diluted via collective memorialisation.

On a related note, there is also the desire to capitalise upon the war as a means of forging other collective identities, other than that of the state or the nation. When the God’s Little Acre ceremony was first introduced at Batu Gajah by Datuk Thambipillay, it was to honour the institutional history, and develop *esprit de corps* among members, of the Royal Malaysian Police Force (RMPF), such that even though there is now the state-wide Cenotaph event (Chapter 6), he saw it as important to still keep the Batu Gajah ceremony going since ‘it will continue to serve a specific [institutional] history, that of the police force, and not that of the Perak state or Malaysian nation’ (Fig. 7.12). The concern here lies in the fear that by surrendering their institutional war stories to be inserted and aggrandised as part of a collective [read: state or national] narrative, it would tend to dilute the potential for the same stories to also be pushed towards the configuring of other collective histories, in this case that of the RMPF, which the Batu Gajah event continues to do.

In this regard, grassroots remembrances serve to prevent the state from laying their hands on personal, social and institutional memories and manipulating them

according to their own agendas. In that sense, ‘silence’ becomes the people’s reaction against the state’s ‘historicism’ that constantly ‘encrypts and forecloses the meaning of historical and contemporary events within a singular point of view’ (Legg 2005a: 181), or the tendency for collective forms of commemoration to be generalising, especially where being ‘included’ means losing control over personal memories being folded into grand narratives, thus diminishing the particularity of individual narratives (Lomsky-Feder 2004). More saliently, the ‘silences’ show how they can also be used to ‘resist’ elite practices, not in an antithetical manner to public representations, but by withholding their voices (and stories) from the state, yet still remembering them through other scales as the ones highlighted above (see Spivak 1999; Pile 1997; Davis and Starn 1989). Still, despite not wanting the state to take the helm in telling their war stories for them, these locals are still keen to transmit them on, but on their own terms, and this is the main focus of the rest of the chapter.



Fig. 7.12: The Batu Gajah ceremony (source: author)

7.4 Transmitting the Past, Memories at Risk?

‘No matter what... the war will always be remembered because the locals will never want to or allow for people to forget’. (Ahmad (81, Slim River)

While locals prefer to take the responsibility of remembering the war ‘our own way’ many, particularly the war civilians, are not as confident as Ahmad (see quote at the head of section), that their stories will survive after they have passed on. According to Joyah (80s, Gerik), ‘I know that as much as I remember, if they are not passed on, my stories will die with me’. As such, many do realise that, while it is possible for them to keep their war memories alive for now, it is not something at all permanent, since current remembrance practices, as highlighted above, are centred on the very *embodied* memories of war civilians themselves, such that, when they pass on, so would their memories to a large extent. This has led a few of them to also propagate their memories their own way. While there are those who sought to cast the scope of the commemoration net to include all Perakians (and Malaysians) (see Chapter 8), the ones considered here are happy that what they have gone through during the war is transmitted through ‘bodily’ (Connerton 1989) and material strategies, in their own capacity and sans state involvement. This section considers these myriad strategies.

One way in which war civilians have attempted to ‘pass their stories on’ is by sharing them with their children as well as others, essentially anyone, who is willing to listen, via ‘casual conversations’ (*bersembang*) at places like the local coffee shops, as well as at each other’s homes or during social functions. Consider Kassim (80, Taiping):

‘Some people just like to talk about the war... at coffee shops, hawker centres, during feasts [*kenduris*]... with people who went through the same thing. We can understand each other better because we went through the same thing.... That way, we can also spread our stories like if there are young ones with us because they like to hear the stories of the *orang-orang lama*’.

One can thus see how war civilians, like Kassim, enjoy sharing their stories with others, but in a way that is less formal than through official speeches and writings but in a 'format that did not create serious commitments or obligations' (Blokland 2001: 273). The impetus to do so may vary; some do it out of habit, some out of the desire to speak about the event with similar others, and others as a way of 'letting it all out' (see Blokland 2001). Yet, more interestingly, Kassim also perceived it as a great way of passing his own war stories on so that 'my stories are not completely forgotten'.

Kassim is not alone in sharing his stories with the younger generation as a means of passing them on. Ahmad (81, Slim River) also highlighted to me that 'I like to tell my children stories from the war because if my children do not remember me, who will, right? It is a good way to pass on your stories... like now, I tell you my stories and you will hopefully remember'. The reason why he feels strongly that 'talking about the war' is the best way to ensure that their memories are not forgotten lies in the belief that their very status as actual 'witnesses' to the war would render them as most suitable conveyors of local and personal war histories, better than having to read about the past from history books or learning about it from a museum: 'When children hear it from their fathers or mothers, or even someone else who went through the war, it makes it more interesting for them than reading about it from books, and they want to know more because it is us telling them ... us who were there. What better way is there to learn history' (see Patraha 2001; Wieworska 2004).

Aside from the act of orally telling their stories to the younger generations, some also capitalise upon material cultures as a useful way to make them more interested to learn about what happened (to them) during the war. One of these material aides used

to facilitate, or complement, the telling of their stories is the built environment, especially sites where actual massacres took place. According to Chan (88 Taiping):

‘Sites and places... like the [Taiping] prison there (**Fig. 7.13**)... where many locals were tortured and killed... are a good way to talk to our children about the war because they can see and it is also something that they understand because they can see... and they can imagine what happened’.

The perception that the post-war generation would be more interested to learn about the war if it is associated with former sites of deaths may be attributed to the fact that these are traces already there, where their ‘visuality’ (Raivo 2000a,b) not only makes it easier for the war generation to point out and narrate, but also make it more interesting on the part of the young to learn about the war, since, as Marshall (2004) indicates, by encountering the places associated with the stories, a connection is established between the landscape and the listener. In these cases, the ability of the sites and places associated with the war years to allow those who did not go through the event to also imagine the past is what makes them suitable not only as *material* aids to personal memory but also in passing the stories on to the younger generation.



Fig. 7.13: Taiping Prison (side view) (source: author)

There are also those who saw objects in the same way, as aides to make the younger generation interested to know about the war, based on the belief that they would be

more interested to hear war stories if there were also accompanied by relics kept from that past, to be visually seen and touched, towards fulfilling the aim of communicating oneself to others (Mehta and Belk 1991). For Moin (79, Slim River): 'Here are banana notes from the war. During the war not much value [but now] it has historical value... I will keep them to show to my children so they know about my past'. One day, he hopes to 'hand-down' his collection to his children so that his children too could use them to tell their own children about the war, where 'passing them on' represents the hope that their attached memories are also kept for posterity (see Denning 1996). It also shows how objects are used to make stories 'more interesting'. As Ahmad (81, Slim River) says, objects can 'make our stories beautiful [*cantikkan cerita*] so the people listening to them will be more interested to listen'.

For this reason, many whose homes I visited had their own 'stuff' they kept from the war, from groundsheets, uniforms, Japanese currency, ration cards, notebooks, cutlery, pieces of jewellery, old CDs and so on. Some of these indicate that they were from the war (e.g. *banana* notes and ration cards), as 'fragments' that have been conferred with 'some inherent metonymic qualities, as if the parts could stand for the whole' (van der Hoorn 2003: 193) – in this case, where these objects serve to refer to their personal and social experiences of the war – as well as random objects that could only have war-related salience to the beholders (see Saunders 2003a; Harrison 2006). Whilst for the most part, items within the home take centre stage, like for Datuk R. Thambipillay who puts his items kept from the Emergency years on a mantelpiece 'so that people know what I did during the Emergency fighting the communists' (Fig. 7.14), others are kept out of sight, taken out only when they feel the need to remember or when there is any interest from others to see these objects.



Fig. 7.14: War-related objects at Thambipillay's home (source: author)

Aside from war civilians and their families, objects have also been capitalized upon on a more communal or institutional level, to educate about the war. We have already seen this via the ceremonies held to honour the institutional memories of those who gave their lives during the Emergency (see above; also Chapter 6). Another example is the event put on in Ipoh, entitled '*Exploring the role of Sikh soldiers – Where valour is a tradition*' (*The Star* 29 November 2007), an exhibition of 200 rare black and white photographs displaying Sikh soldiers' bravery during wars, including the Second World War as well as the Emergency (**Fig. 7.15**). At the exhibition, organised by Harchand Singh after seeing the photographs, held at IWM, on the internet, and attended by foreign dignitaries, there were also stalls for Sikh/ Indian cultures. According to the organiser, 'We wanted to make it about more than just the war as that may not get many people interested... that's why we made it into a Sikh thing so the community could see the photos and learn about its history'.

These attempts at remembering their experiences of the war 'from-below', through the modes of story-telling, the 'handing-over' of war-related objects, physical markers and the organisation of communal-level events have had mixed results. We have already seen how many of the grassroots memorials are now abandoned (see

above). While, at times, objects passed on have managed to inspire the younger generation to keep the memories of the war civilians alive, at other times, they are not as well-received, the extent to which they are useful largely depending on whether these are also perceived as valuable by members of the younger generations. Thus, although there are those, like Harchand (above) and Allen (35 Kampar) who ‘still keeps many of the things that my parents gave me from the war years’, who have indeed, through objects, embraced war legacies of their forefathers, and made them their own, there are those who feel such practices are, as Nurul (19 Slim River) puts it, ‘a waste of space and not something that I would like to keep in my house’.



Fig. 7.15: Photo exhibition on Sikh Soldiers (source: author)

With regards to the stories informally passed on, some of my respondents from the post-war generation have indicated how they still remember the stories told to them by their parents, some of them surviving as ‘tropes’, the use of inherited stories from the past but in reference to, or in support of, different circumstances within the present. According to Asmah (49 Ipoh), ‘I was not interested before but now I find myself also telling the stories to my children...for them to learn to appreciate hard times, to get inspired by stories of bravery, ...and also to make them eat their

vegetables because [I would tell them] ‘during the war, they never had enough to eat’. War tropes also exist through ‘ghost stories’. Consider Ida (47, Slim River):

‘I hear that the Dato’ Dzul kifli [Muhammad] school (**Fig. 7.16**) is haunted and that’s why I did not send my daughter there. Many people told me that... [H: What do you mean haunted?] I hear it was a Japanese execution site and people died there. The bodies are gone but spirits may still be there... I am afraid if [my daughter] goes there, she might be possessed [*terserap*]’.



Fig. 7.16: Dato’ Zulkifli Muhammad School (source: author)

There are at least two issues to this quote that deserve attention. First, it is not so much the reality that the school is haunted that Ida was referring to but only that it might be’. (According to some others, the school was only built in the 1960s, but this does not preclude the possibility that it might have been a Japanese execution site prior to that, although I was not able to confirm this). Yet, and secondly, despite not knowing, it has still made her decide not to send her daughter there. Thus, ghostly stories may affect the present regardless of their truth (see Pile 2005; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 2002; see also Chapter 9 for a discussion of ‘hauntings’). More importantly, it is a sign of how stories of the war have survived into the post-war era, albeit as ‘tropes’. Yet, Allen (35, Kampar) still laments how there are ‘many stories that I heard from my parents but I forgot, which is an indication of how even despite

war civilians keen to transmit their stories, it is sometimes the case that, like for Allen, because stories are usually not written down, they get forgotten over time.

7.5 From 'Silence' to Grassroots Remembrances

'Social silence indicates a lack of social interaction, but not necessarily a lack of all noise... Not only is it an active performance, but also it involves conscious activity'. (Tacchi 1998: 28)

This chapter pays attention to practices of memory-making by (and through) locals. First it showed the breadth of grassroots remembrances in Perak and the extent to which the (subaltern) experiences of local war civilians are not necessarily forgotten or relegated to the past just because of the Perak state's (and the Malaysian federal government's) tendencies to elide aspects of the war, through official amnesia and selective practices, typical of the old 'colonial' strategies of memory control (O'Hanlon 2000; Loomba 2000). In fact, it is clear how locals have adopted their own means to ensure the survival of their memories, not so much via conventional 'landscapes-of-memory' – although there are a few of these around – but more through 'landscapes-as-memory' (Kuchler 1993), where memories reside in the act of remembrance itself. As such, memories as embodied within the self (rather than those represented by scaffoldings of memory external to the self), or to use Nora's (1989) terms, *milieux de memoires* (as opposed to *lieux de memoires*), are very much alive in the non-Western context of the Malaysian state of Perak (see Legg 2005b).

The second purpose of the chapter was to interrogate grassroots 'silences' in Perak, or the relative *absence*, within the state, of *vocalised* expressions of critique by locals

against official memory projects, and the desire to refrain from making public local recollections. The chapter pointed to how there are many face(t)s to these ‘silences’. While they may be indicative of how the state has succeeded in keeping some memories out of public circulation, or of desires to remember as per preferences and socio-cultural beliefs, they may also seek to work against ‘the state-backed machinery of forgetting’ (Legg 2005a: 186) by resisting the encapsulation of local memories into state (or national) crucibles. Through the ‘silences’, these individuals are thus enacting their own ‘spaces of withholding’ (Spivak 1999: 190) where subversive behaviour takes place in the shadows, yet no less powerful in contesting elite remembrances (Legg 2007; Kusno 2003). Still, while many have tried to pass on their memories to others their own way, there are those who feel that, without the state, such efforts are bound to fail, which has led to them trying to acquire official backing to aid in transmitting memories. It is to these that the next chapter turns.

CHAPTER EIGHT

‘Rescaling’ Memory (Practices): Grassroots Politics of Preserving the Green Ridge Battlefield in Kampar

8.1 Grassroots Remembrances as Recuperative?

‘The Malaysian government is determined to exorcise the ghosts of the war, especially the dark and ugly aspects, within the public consciousness’.

(Cheah 2007: 47)

Despite attempts by the Malaysian government to render forgotten, or marginalised, negative aspects of what happened in Malaysia during the Second World War (see quote above) – e.g. aspects that speak to the communist MCP movement, of inter-racial conflicts and clashes particularly between Malays and the Chinese, and stories of massacres of the population by the Japanese during the event – and highlighting elements deemed suitable for (postcolonial) nation-building purposes, scholars have shown how ‘there is [still] no let up in the people’s interest on the World War II [where] the ghosts (read: memories) of the war are very much alive [such that] it looks like exorcising the ghosts of the World War II will take a long time’ (Cheah 2007: 47, 57). The last chapter has shown how such is the case in Perak, where the state’s tendency towards selective remembering has not meant that elements elided in public representations are forgotten, much having still survived and are transmitted via grassroots strategies of remembrance carried out on other more private scales.

While many of these strategies adopted by locals, particularly war civilians, to ensure that their personal and social memories of the war continue to live on within the present seek to veer away from more collective (or national) (plat)forms of

memorialisation, and for the Perak state government to not have a hand in them, there are others who have cast the commemorative net wider in the hope that the war is still remembered by *all* Malaysians rather than remain within intimate circles. As Tan Chuan Hin, a reporter in his 40s and based in the township of Kampar, says:

‘The war is important for all Perakians and Malaysians to know about, especially what happened in the local areas... in our own backyards. If you just tell your children and friends [your stories], you cannot share with others and if your children are not interested to remember, then that’s it’.

Tan’s concern here is two-fold. First, he sees the war in Perak as something that needs to be told to every Perakian within the state. Second, he fears that if one remains narrow-minded about sharing his or her stories, these stories eventually might be forgotten, especially if listeners are not keen on transmitting them forward.

For these reasons, some Perakians, as well as Malaysians generally, have sought to spread the word about the war within the state, particularly that pertaining to the experiences of the general populace (*vis-à-vis* former combatants). These include (auto)biographical publications (see Hussain 2005, a former Japanese collaborator; Chin Peng 2003, himself leader of the MCP); the written histories of specific localities, like books by Khoo and Lubis (2005) on the (war and social) history of the Kinta Valley, and Tan Chuan Hin (2000), on the (trench) history of Kampar; private museums, such as Sybil’s Clinic @ Papan (see Chapter 1); and, most recently, a commemorative DVD produced by Harchand Singh, *Remembrance Day* (2008), in conjunction with the 60th Anniversary of the Declaration of the Emergency (see also Kathigasu 2006 [1954]; Ho T.F. (2000a, b); Miraflor and Ward 2006). Elsewhere, there has also been an oral history project undertaken by a historian, Abu Talib

Ahmad, from the *Universiti Sains Malaysia* (in Penang), to document the war experiences of war civilians from the north of Malaysia, including northern Perak.

However, even with their best intentions to disseminate local (war) histories more widely, many realise that, without state backing, it is impossible to move forward. This sets them aside from those considered earlier where there is resistance against the state taking part in *local* commemorative activities. According to Ahmad (pers comm. 2005), 'it is difficult to continue doing this [the oral history project] without the support of the state because of lack of funds and having to put up with bureaucratic red-tape'. Aside from these issues, Tan Chuan Hin also said that:

'We need the government to be more serious with the teaching of history in schools. It is hard if children do not see history as important and this they learn in school [where] history is not properly taught by teachers'.

As such, for some of these individuals, there is recognition that to ensure that officially marginalised histories are recuperated and preserved for the future, there is a need to get the state to also be involved, and for both the state as well as more grassroots agencies of remembrance to work together towards war commemoration.

That official amnesia can be countered by popular memory is not a novel idea (see Reid 2002). Yet, many, particularly those interested in such issues in Malaysia, tend to romanticise the 'recuperative' nature of popular remembrances, usually seen as salvaging what may have been marginalised through elite representations (see Cheah 2007; Khoo, A. 2007). By considering the case of Green Ridge, the site of the Battle of Kampar, and the efforts of Chye Kooi Loong in lobbying for it to be marked as Perak heritage, this chapter draws limits to the extent that grassroots remembrances

can be perceived as necessarily recuperative. First, by looking at how Chye has tried to pressure the state to support his project, the chapter will first argue that grassroots remembrances can be just as politically-instigated and highly selective as official remembrances (see also Forest et al 2004). Then, by showing how, even after getting the state's backing, Chye continues to face challenges from locals not keen on the project, the chapter goes on to suggest the ways in which the vernacular can also be a major impediment to emerging war memories, as much as they can recuperate them.

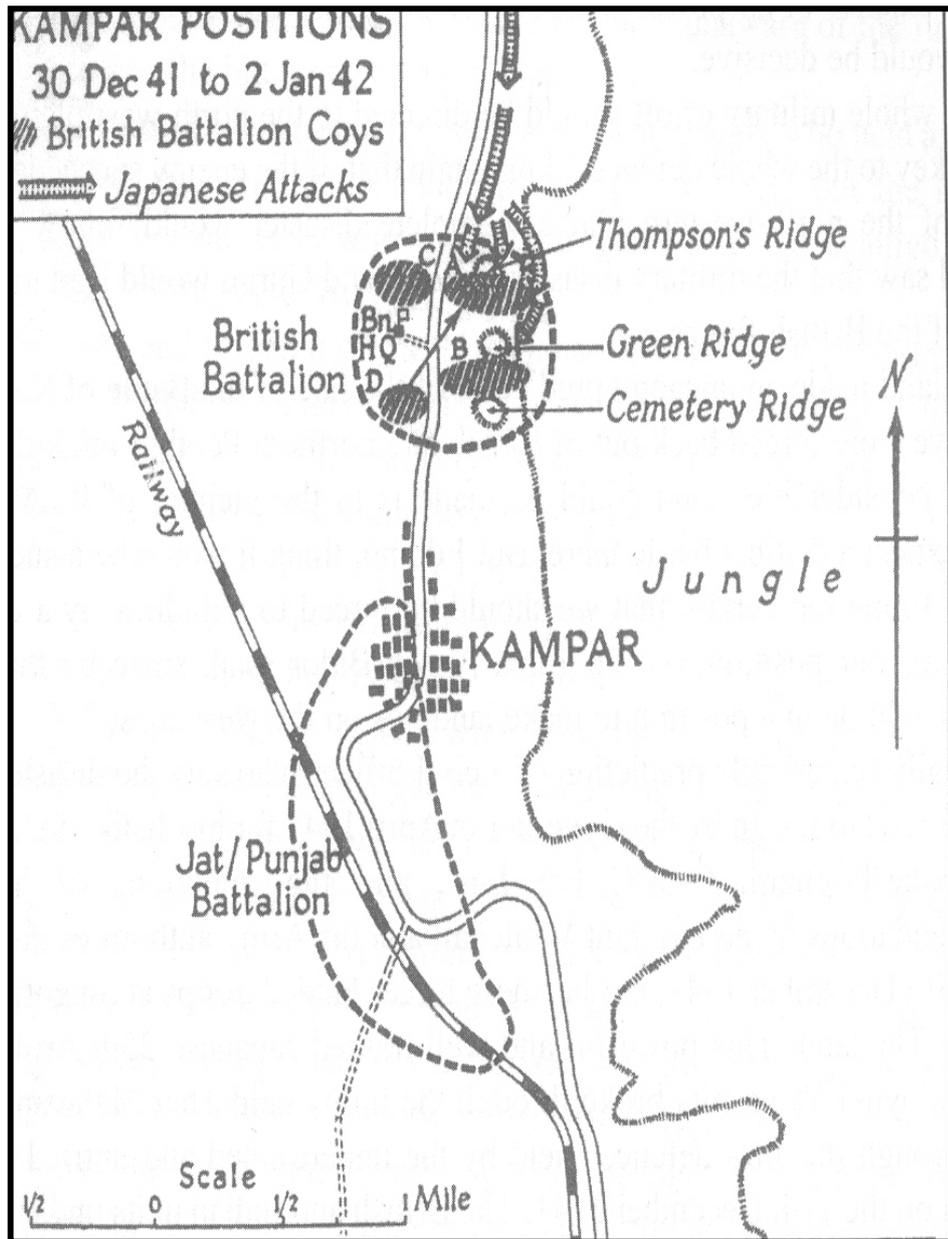
Central to the discussion is the notion of 'scale' (Marston 2000; Smith N. 1993; Matsuda and Crooks 2007). Vertically, remembrance practices can take place on varying scales depending on the rememberer – state, family, individual – which then determines the crafted memory. Yet, accepting that individuals too can be 'sites of multiple scales' (Cidell 2006), the past can also be viewed and narrated through a number of scalar lenses – as an event of 'global', 'local' or 'national' significance. In both these cases, the scales are themselves fluid, such as to make them malleable to (re)appropriation towards fulfilling current objectives, not only by elites but also by members of the grassroots public (see Forest et al 2004; Alderman 2003, for some examples). In this light, the chapter argues how Chye Kooi Loong has attempted to capitalise upon the malleability of memory (practices) through 'rescaling' strategies. However, it then also demonstrates how it is ultimately this fluidity of memory (and its practices) that were also to later bring the overall project to a virtual standstill.

8.2 Revisiting the Battle(fields) of Kampar

The township of Kampar, approximately 24 miles to the south of Ipoh, was founded in 1886 with the discovery of an abundantly rich tin field in the valleys of Kinta.

Many of its initial settlers were Sumatrans who named the area Kampar after a river in Sumatra of the same name where they harked from, although the Chinese would probably attribute the origins of the name to the phrase ‘*Kam Poh*’ (or ‘Precious Gold’) given by the Chinese miners who settled there after the tin rush of the 1880s. As the Kinta Valley grew as a hub of mining activities, European mining conglomerates opened bases there which led to its booming population, from 400 originally in 1818 to over 20 000 before the war in 1941, making Kampar one of the fastest developing, and best known, townships that were borne on the back of the state’s lucrative tin industry (Khoo and Lubis 2005; Chye 2002). During the war, though, the name ‘Kampar’ also became synonymous with the site of one of the most intensely fought battles in the Peninsula during the entire Malayan Campaign.

After landing in the north of Malaya, the Japanese followed the roads on the Peninsula to advance down to Singapore (Chapter 4). One of these was a trunk road driving through Kampar which the Japanese had to pass to go south, a fact of which the British were well aware. After a number of bitter defeats in earlier battles, this led the British to select three peaks of the *Bujang Melaka* mountain range overlooking this trunk road – Thompson Ridge, Green Ridge and Cemetery Ridge – from which they were to launch a major ambush against the enemy (**Map 8.1**). Prior to the Japanese arrival, thus, temporary makeshift communication and escape trenches, mortar pits, machine gun sites, foxholes and shell-scrapes, supported by barbed wire and a wide fire perimeter, were set up on site by the British Battalion, an amalgamated force formed in Ipoh on 20 December 1941, out of the remnants of the 1st Battalion Leicestershire Regiment, 2nd East Surrey Regiment, and a composite Jat and Punjab Regiment of the 11th Division Indian Army (Chye 2002) (**Fig. 8.1**).



Map 8.1: Kampar positions around main trunk road (source: Chye 2002: 110)

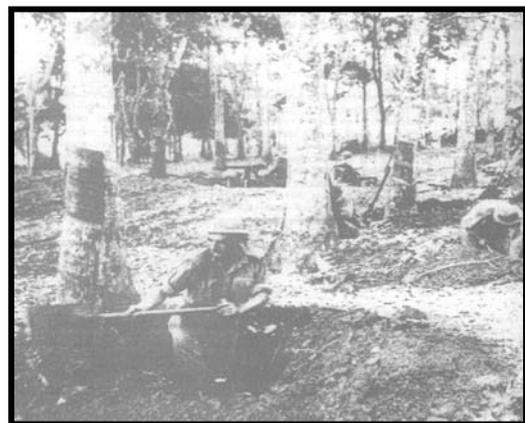


Fig. 8.1: British Battalion preparing defences at Thompson Ridge (source: Chye 2002)

The Battle of Kampar itself began on 30 December 1941, between a 1,300 strong British Battalion and the Japanese 41st Infantry Regiment of 4,000. Although inferior numerically, the men of the Battalion, mainly based on the ridges of Thompson and Green ridges brought the Japanese advance to a standstill for four days (until 2 January 1942) which effectively denied General Yamashita of the Japanese Army his wish to capture Kampar as a New Year's gift to the Emperor (*The Star* 10 December 2002; see Orrill 1999). These four days saw some of the most intense confrontations of the Campaign, between the Battalion and the Japanese Imperial Army, comprising bayonet charges, trench fighting, hand to hand combat as well as artillery and infantry action (for a detailed day-to-day account of the Battle, see Chye 2002: 145-174). Despite the fierce resistance, and giving the Japanese 41st Regiment 'a bloody mauling for the first time in the Malayan Campaign' (Chye, cited in *The Star* 8 May 2002), the Battalion was forced to retreat due to Japanese reinforcements (11th and 42nd Infantry Regiments) outflanking them from the southwest (Mohd Salleh 2000).

For their heroism, medals were awarded by the British government to all the men from the Battalion. Their courage on those ridges has also been remarked upon by historians, both for acts of individual bravery – such as of Captain John Graham (of the Punjab Regiment) who led bayonet charges and stayed to command his men even after he was hit by grenade fragments (see Chye 2002: 161-3) – as well as collectively. Lt. Gen Arthur A.E. Percival, the GOC Malaya, in his book, *The War in Malaya*, also portrayed the Battle as a 'classic example of what can be achieved by determination and it brought out the finest characteristics of the troops', hence showing how our men 'were superior man for man than to the Japanese troops' (cited in Chye 2002: 174-6), and Chye (2002: xxi) mentioned how the Battalion's men

‘conducted themselves in the grim struggle with consummate bravery and exemplary discipline under ... trying conditions and the men of the British Battalion have set an extremely high example of steadiness and pluck’ (see also Orrill 1999).

Despite these glorious testaments to the bravery of the men of the Battalion, for a long time, nothing was done to remember them or the Battle locally in Perak (or in Malaysia). This is particularly apparent in the way that the sites of the Battle themselves have been treated. While Thompson Ridge, where the main fighting took place, has been completely transformed into the *Kampar Jaya* housing estate (**Fig. 8.2**), Green Ridge, along with Cemetery Ridge, have essentially been so neglected as to render them almost buried under thick and dense undergrowth. While Cemetery Ridge has remained largely intact, perhaps due to the reverence that the local people attribute to their dead – there are still graves scattered throughout – one section of Green Ridge has been developed into a mining factory, and parts have been levelled to widen the trunk road, the excavated sand being sold to contractors of the new *Kampar* town, a settlement of houses, shops and multi-purpose lots (**Fig. 8.3**) to serve a recent satellite branch of Tun Abdul Rahman University (UTAR) nearby.



Fig. 8.2: *Kampar Jaya* housing estate (formerly Thomson Ridge) (source: author)



Fig.s 8.3: Mining factory (left) and shops for the new Kampar town (source: author)

Despite the silence maintained locally, memories of the Battle, and of the men involved, are honoured elsewhere. For one, they are remembered by the men of the Leicesters and East Surrey Regiments in the United Kingdom, where since 1967, ‘on the 20th December, the ‘British Battalion’ toast is drunk by each Battalion and if a band is present, it plays the Regimental march of the other Battalion before its own’, traditions meant to maintain the close links established between the regiments, and so that ‘the courage and fortitude of those officers and men shall not be forgotten’ (cited in Chye 2002: 239; see also www.queensroyalsurreys.org.uk/anniversaries). On several occasions, former veterans and their families, from the Allied side as well as from Japan, have been known to visit the ridges to duly honour memories of those who died (*The Star* 10 December 2002). As such, despite the tendency to forget the Battle locally, its memory lives on in more transnational forms of commemoration, and thus in stark contrast to the Malaysian nation’s non-remembrance of the event.

The extent to which the British Battalion and the Battle are forgotten in Perak, and commemorated elsewhere, reflects the salience of ‘scale’ in commemoration. For the men of the Regiments (above), the Battalion is seen as their predecessors at arms, where the significance of the Battle speaks directly to their history and integrity on an ‘institutional’ scale. However, when considered that the Battle was one involving

foreigners, albeit fought on local soil, it was still one fought in defence of the Empire and not Malaysia, thus not seen as salient enough to be remembered on a ‘national’ scale. Thus, it is symptomatic of the state’s tendency to emphasize only narratives of the past *post*-independence, where much of the nation’s colonial history (and their material traces), were rendered neglected (as in Green Ridge), if not destroyed (as the redevelopment of Thompson Ridge testifies). Viewed in this way, what has happened to the sites of the Battle are thus a microcosm of a much larger postcolonial mnemopolitics at work: to institute in Malaysia only memories *of Malaysia as a nation*, and where memories of its former British legacies no longer have a place (see Chapter 4).

In the light of the gross neglect, locally, of sites of the Battle, one man, Chye Kooi Loong, a retired school teacher who witnessed the war as a teenager, has become key in lobbying for the Green Ridge site to be preserved. Born of a father who worked with a tin mining conglomerate, Chye was familiar with the site even before the war. However, it was only in the 1950s, after reading *Eastern Epic* by Scott Mackenzie, that he learnt more about the Battle. Yet another reason for his passion is personal:

‘Before leaving for the safety of the hills... a few soldiers gave me four brass buttons and two badges and their parting words were ‘Remember us Joe’. I buried the buttons and badges in a cigarette tin under the *jambu* tree which I later dug up after the war to find they belonged to men of Leicesters and East Surrey Regiments [of the Battalion]’ (cited in *The Sun* 13 January 1999).

Since then, Chye vowed to honour the request that was made to him by those soldiers in their parting words, and embarked on the journey that was to consume much of his life till the present: to ensure people knew about the Battle, and also to preserve Green Ridge as a living reminder of not only local heritage, but also national history.

8.3 Towards the Grassroots Preservation of Green Ridge

‘The first thing we are going to do is to go visit the battlefields. I have done this many times with different people and it has given them a good idea of what I am doing. I hope it is also the same with you’. (Chye, 83, Kampar)

When I first met Chye in 2005, he was adamant that we had to first visit Green Ridge, not only to witness what had happened to Thompson Ridge, but also to see what it is about Green Ridge that has made him so intent to preserve it as a heritage site. The first thing he showed me was a sign located midway up the hill of Green Ridge. The Malaysian flag on one side and the Perak state flag on the other, the sign is the first visible marker on site indicating it as the ‘Battle of Kampar site’ (**Fig. 8.4**). He told me that ‘the sign was sponsored by wealthy locals whom he approached for help, not by the state’, although the flags indicate his hope that ‘the state would one day take over’. His reasons for wanting the state ‘to take over’ were financial and pedagogic. Aside from the issue of financial support – ‘I cannot afford to do this on my own’ – he also wants the state to promote the site as ‘national’ heritage so that ‘all Malaysians can learn about local history and be interested to know about the war, especially once they visit these sites and they can see what can be found there’.



Fig. 8.4: The sign on Green Ridge (source: author)

Then, through a narrow entrance at the foot of where the sign stood, just beside the mining factory, Chye took me up the hill and pointed to me various traces of the Battle to be found that would make Green Ridge a ‘remarkable’ site. During the trek, there were indeed these traces although, due to years of neglect, many are no longer clearly visible to the naked eye, buried as they were under tall grasses and thick foliage. These include numerous makeshift communications trenches (**Fig. 8.5**), shellscrapes (**Fig. 8.6**) and machine gun emplacements (**Fig. 8.7**) (see Appendix H for a mapped inventory of trench sites at Green Ridge). There were also many items of war that were found at the site, such as helmets, ammunition shells, mess plates and water bottles (**Fig. 8.8**), although Chye has already removed and loaned them to the Department of Museum and Antiquities in Kuala Lumpur ‘for their safekeeping’.



Fig. 8.5: A communications trench at Green Ridge (source: author)



Fig. 8.6: A shellscape shelter at Green Ridge (source: author)



Fig. 8.7: A machine gun emplacement at Green Ridge (source: author)

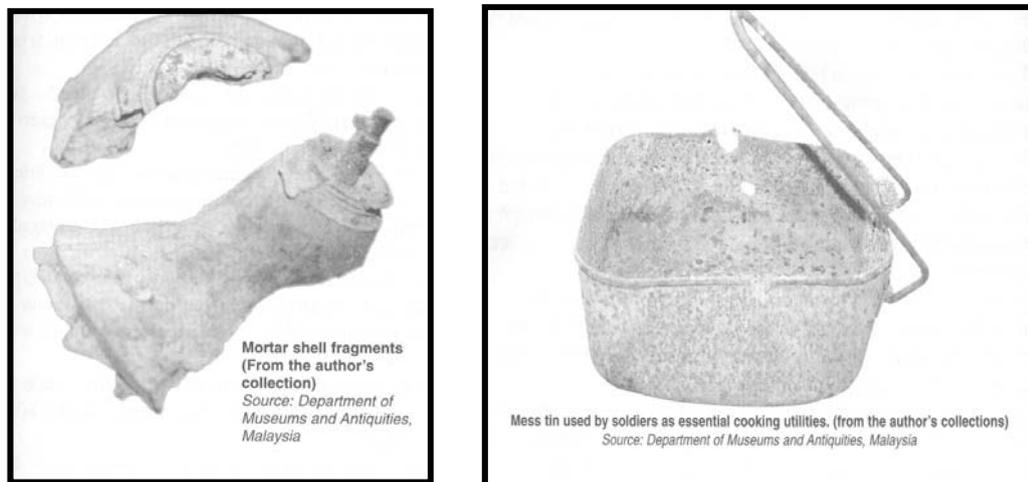


Fig. 8.8: Some of the items recovered from Kampar battlefield (source: DMA, Malaysia)

During the excursion, Chye shared his hopes for the site. The first thing he would like to happen is for the state government to mark and ‘gazette the site as a national heritage site’. This is in response to Green Ridge being in danger of disappearing, with all the recent developments of its surrounding environs. According to Chye:

‘If the state does not gazette the site, it will suffer the same fate as Thompson Ridge. It needs to make sure that Green Ridge is protected by the law’.

Indeed, there are already signs that this is taking place. At one part of the ridge, to the south, there are many contractors that have, at least for the last two years, been excavating the area for sand and earth, drastically changing the landscape and outer

appearance of the ridge in some areas (**Fig. 8.9**). In addition, Chye would also like the state to promote Green Ridge as a heritage attraction and significant part of local history. Perhaps, according to him, ‘the state could clean up and restore the trenches, build a museum and promote the place to tourists and locals... so that they can learn about the rich [war] history of Kampar and feel proud of that local history’.



Fig. 8.9: Parts of Green Ridge that have been excavated for sand (source: author)

Yet, he is also cognisant of the fact that, given the history of the Battle as something that involved foreign combatants, during a time when Malaysia was still a British colony, and where the locals were not directly involved in the fighting, coupled with the lack of commitment to preserving historical sites in Perak more generally, the government may not be interested in doing anything about Green Ridge. As he says:

‘I know it is difficult because the government is not really interested in preserving history, not only in Perak but in Malaysia... and to remember something that took place before we became independent... The Battle did not involve the local people. But I still feel that it is important to remember’.

In the light of this, over the years, Chye has tried to pressure the state to preserve the Green Ridge site, through strategies of ‘re-scaling’ memory narratives and practices. The first is to extract ‘local’ significance out of what was an Imperial battle fought

on local grounds (or the ‘down-scaling’ of memory narratives); and, second, to elevate the issue of Green Ridge’s preservation onto more transnational platforms so as to drum up support for the project (or the ‘up-scaling’ of preservation concerns).

8.3.1 From ‘Imperial’ to ‘Local’: ‘Down-scaling’ Memory Narratives

After reading *Eastern Epic*, Chye started to conduct more research on the Battle: through local archives, writing to the Regiments in Leicester and Surrey for more information, and producing appeals in newspapers for survivors of the two regiments and next of kin to write to him about their experiences. He also wrote to ‘the British Army Museum in Tokyo for information regarding the 5th Division from Hiroshima which led to the Japanese veterans from the 41st and 42nd Infantry Regiment supplying information to him on the condition that they would remain anonymous’ (*The Sun* 13 January 1999). From this process, he later published the book *The British Battalion in the Malayan Campaign 1941-1942* (1984). Yet, it is noteworthy that the book was published in Leicester as ‘no local publisher was interested in the book then and I was told that there was no sales value for war history books in Malaysia’ (Chye, cited in *The Star* 10 December 2002), a sign of the times then which saw a diminished sense of national importance accorded to the war years.

Chye would often spread his knowledge on the Battle by giving lectures (**Fig. 8.10**), writing letters to the state and via the media (*The Star* 8 May 2005). During these instances, he would restate that, while the Battle was an ‘Imperial’ event, many locals *did* participate in it, although one would not know this from reading colonial accounts of the Battle (see for instance Kirby 1971): ‘while many locals sought safety, there were those who stayed to help the British set up defences, serving in the

intelligence activities of the British’, where their knowledge of the terrain and local language were ‘extremely useful to the British’. Also, these locals served as guides and food supplier to Allied soldiers cut off from their units, or stretcher bearers and medics on the field (see Chye 2002; Mohd Salleh 2000), or even, as with the FMSVF, as artillery men (*The Sun* 17 April 1999). Thus, far from the Battle being just a foreign battle fought locally, there were many local actors in it, although, as Chye puts it, ‘their efforts are being forgotten and also written out of history books’.

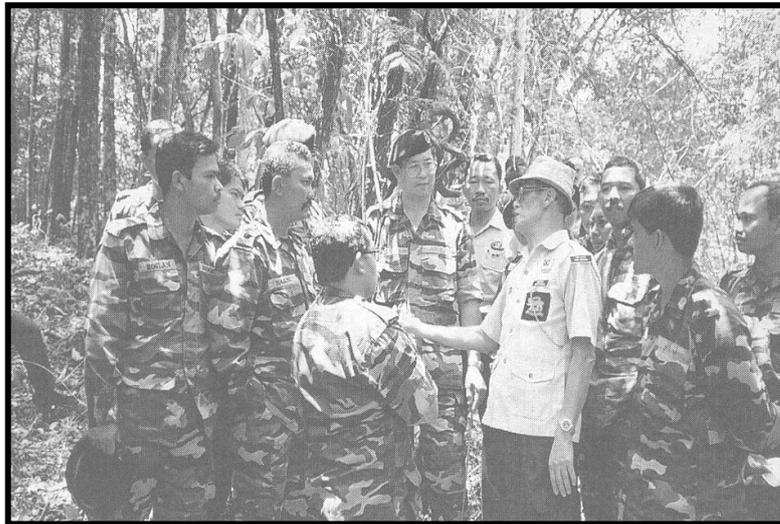


Fig. 8.10: One of Chye’s lectures (source: Kwang Wah Press)

Second, Chye would also reiterate that, though there were not many local combatants the Battle was still fought on ‘Malayan’ grounds, and that, while done in defence of the Empire, it was also to defend ‘our’ local territory, ‘fought in Kampar and [thus] *part of our local history...* they were defending not Britain, but Kampar... [and so] Malaya!’ The argument here therefore was that one needs to focus only on *where* the Battle took place, rather than *who* took part in it, to realise that it was one with much local relevance and geographically served to defend Malaya. In doing so, location represents a strong justification for Malaysia to embrace the Battle as part of its heritage since the Battalion were defending Kampar and, by extension, Malay(si)a.

Third, Chye would also espouse the importance of preserving the site and stories of the Battle, by visiting Green Ridge and seeing the trenches, for ‘teaching the local military about tactical knowledge and battle strategies’ and also to reflect upon the heroism of the Battalion, as ‘a good source of inspiration’. By extracting these more ‘universal values’, such as that of ‘heroism’ and ‘courage’, Chye therefore hopes that the Battle could have more resonance to *Malaysian* soldiers, regardless of the nationalities of the Battalion’s men, or ethnicities of local soldiers, which, although predominantly Malay, are, as in the population of the nation generally, multiracial.

Fourth, Chye emphasised the benefits of preserving the site for the sake of younger generations learning history, especially in terms of potentially bringing them out of the classroom ‘to learn about history by visiting actual sites of battle’. The argument here is, given that Green Ridge was where the battle happened, it thus possesses an ‘aura’ and ‘sense of place’ about it, where ‘the cruelty of war, death, fear, pain and hopelessness [is] powerfully present’, capable of invoking emotions from people who visit them, haunted as it were by the ‘ghosts’ of what has passed (Raivo 2000a: 159; Saunders 2003b). Students can thus better imagine and, by being at the site itself, get excited about learning history (see Marshall 2004). Also, Chye feels that students would be more interested in ‘the history of their hometowns rather than to learn about what happened in Europe or elsewhere’. That is the way, Chye feels, ‘to get students today to be interested in history again. It is something that is alive and they see it with their own eyes, not something that is dead and read off textbooks’.

Lastly, the ‘foreignness’ of the Battle has also been framed in terms of how it ‘helped speed up Malaya’s fight towards independence’ (Chye, cited in *The Star* 20 February

2008). When asked to elaborate on this, Chye indicated that ‘as the Japanese and the British were fighting, the locals were suffering.... We were dependent on the British to protect us [but] they did not in the end. [The Battle] is one evidence of this’ (see also Chye 2000). A similar argument was also repeated in other writings on the Battle. Mohd Salleh (2000: 44) reckoned that ‘even though the Battle involved two foreign powers, it should also be a reminder we should be defending our own territory’. These echo the macro-narrative of the war as revealing the inability of the ‘White Man’ to defend Malaya, and how this spurred local nationalism (see Wong 2001). By ‘recasting’ the battle onto a larger template of the war, Chye hopes to ‘make the Battle one that can also tell the bigger story of Malaysian nationalism’.

Through these narratives, the main aim was to ‘down-scale’ the Battle from an ‘Imperial’ to a ‘national’ event, one with repercussions for local history and heritage, and relevant to Perakians as well as others from around the nation more generally. By renarrating the Battle as significant for all Malaysians to remember, and embedding it with local relevance, he hopes that the Perak state could support him in his quest to preserve Green Ridge. This also caught the attention of some prominent individuals in society, such as the reigning monarch, Sultan Azlan Shah, who learnt about the site during one of Chye’s travelling school exhibitions in 2003, who also lent his support to the idea that a museum should be built ‘to preserve the town’s war history’ (*Metro* 30 August 2003). From his contacts with the local military, Chye also got the 4th Royal Malay Regiment to promise a squad of men to clean up the site. As such, the ‘re-placing’ (Azaryahu 2003) of the memory of the Battle from a foreign event to a local one did accomplish Chye’s aim of getting some local support.

8.3.2 From 'Local' to 'Transnational': 'Up-scaling' Memory Practices

Aside from 'down-scaling' narratives of the Battle, Chye also 'up-scaled' the level of interest in preserving Green Ridge, from a local concern to one that also involved national and transnational actors. First, as a result of the publicity his book received, Chye was invited to make a trip to the United Kingdom in 1984, where he was honoured as a military historian (*New Straits Times* 2 June 1984). Since then, Chye has been invited many times to the United Kingdom, to attend memorial services, commemorative parades and dinners, as well as give speeches to schools not only on the Battle but the Pacific War. Aside from establishing contacts with war veterans, the Regiments, and other institutions in the United Kingdom, many of whom already know of the Battle, and, as indicated, have themselves been active in commemorating the men who died there, Chye was also able to acquire the commitments, such as from the Royal Leicester Army museum, and the Queen's Surrey Museum, to help with the Kampar museum when (or rather if) it was set up.

Chye was also able to persuade many of these former veterans, and Regimental members, to visit the Ridge, where he personally conducted tours. He also got these men to write letters to the media urging the local government to preserve the site, such as Major Richard Trant from the British Army's Queen's Royal Lancers Regiment, who wrote that 'people can visit these places and be proud of their national heroes the way Malaysians are proud of Lt. Adnan' and that 'many relevant lessons about warfare can be learnt here by local and foreign soldiers' speaking in reference to the war relics still at Green Ridge (*The Star* 10 September 2000; see also McConnell 2000; *Metro* 19 July 2005). Chye was also involved, as guest speaker and guide, in field combat training exercises, held at Green Ridge itself not only by the

local military but also the Singapore Staff College and the Commonwealth Armed Forces (Chye 2000), all of which provided a transnational platform allowing him to showcase the plight of preserving Green Ridge to a more international audience.

These tours serve more than just to allow people to learn about the Battle, or to encourage transnational players to exert pressure on the state; the raising of the international interest in the site is also meant to justify to the Perak state as to the value of Green Ridge as a tourist attraction. As Chye puts it: 'I was also hoping to show the local government that there is much interest in the site, as a local and tourist attraction and that the state should not just ignore it' (see also Chye 2000). This sentiment is also apparent in the letter he wrote to the Perak government in 2000 which espouses that: 'Every year hundreds of tourists from abroad come to visit Green Ridge' and how 'Japanese visitors especially the old ladies and men lit joss sticks and wept openly when they stood and faced Green Ridge ... to pay their respects to the lost husbands and fathers who died [in the Battle]'. It is thus apparent how Chye was capitalising on the transnational interest in the site to argue for the benefits of preserving the site in terms of generating tourism income within the state.

In addition, Chye also got representatives from foreign High Commissions – such as India and the United Kingdom – to 'speak up' for the project during memorial events. In 2005, Chye, together with Datuk R. Thambipillay, organised a service in Ipoh to remember those who died during the many battles in Perak, including Kampar, where many of its foreign guests were said to call for the state to 'save Green Ridge' (*The Sun* 11-12 June 2005). Most recently, in 2008, at a memorial ceremony and war exhibition held at the YMCA in Ipoh, attended by war veterans

and their families, representatives from the High Commissions of India, Nepal, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom – all of whom were already in Ipoh for the Cenotaph Remembrance that morning (see Chapter 6) – and also the Chief Minister of Perak himself (**Fig. 8.11**), many of the speeches made then spoke of the need to preserve Green Ridge. In his speech, the Indian High Commissioner said that ‘It is important for the site to be preserved as it was where an event of significance took place... We hope the government does something’. Similar sentiments were also found in the media. The British defence adviser said: ‘I hope the Government will preserve the place. It is through remembering what had happened that we know what to do in the future’ (cited in *The Star* 20 February 2008). All of these contributed to pressuring the state to, as the Indian High Commissioner puts it, ‘do something’ towards preserving the Ridge as a ‘local’ as well as an internationally important site.



Fig. 8.11: The British Defence Advisor at the YMCA exhibition (source: author)

For his work in lobbying for memories of the Battle and the Green Ridge battlefield to be preserved, Chye has received numerous letters of appreciation from overseas, including from the British Prime Minister, Lady Margaret Thatcher (*Metro* 30 August 2003), was granted an audience with the Queen of England during his visit to

Malaysia (*The Star* 10 December 2003), and was even awarded an Honorary Member of the British Empire (MBE) by Britain's Queen Elizabeth II for 'many years of his life to preserving the memory of those British and Commonwealth soldiers who gave their lives in the defence of Malaya' (British High Commissioner, cited in *The Star* 19 October 2007). At every opportunity, Chye would capitalise upon this international reputation of his to further the cause of getting the state behind the Green Ridge preservation project, constantly pushing the issue on an international platform. This was done in the hope to prod the Perak state government to support the project by 'shaming' it for ignoring what he has done thus far, and neglecting to preserve a site that has, on a transnational scale, been highly revered.

To further prompt the Perak state, Chye also got federal organisations involved. First, he contacted the Department of Museums and Antiquities (DMA), to seek their commitment to support the project. He also contacted the Armed Forces Museum Chief who promised to help and provide exhibits to the Kampar Museum once it was set up (*The Sun* 21 August 1999). These really gave his efforts the impetus he needed. On 18 October 2002, the Department of Museums and Antiquities agreed to republish his book locally as a pertinent source to 'bring out the spirit of patriotism in all Malaysians and help them to understand the nation's history' (Deputy Defence Minister, cited in *The Star* 10 December 2002) and 'enriching [Malaysians'] knowledge of the region's military history' (Datuk Adi Taha, Director of DMA, cited in *The Star* 10 December 2002). These therefore helped to elevate the status of the preservation efforts at Green Ridge a notch, where the site was now promoted not only as a local point of interest but one that involved the nation as well. Through his 're-scaling' strategies, it has been Chye's aim to ultimately persuade, and exert

pressure on, the Perak government to preserve and mark Green Ridge as local heritage. To raise the issue on a ‘national’ platform, he has had to be careful with how the Battle, and discourses on the site, can be shaped into something the Perak state would be interested to lend its support, financially and also in terms of its resources, and even take the preservation of the Ridge on as its own commemorative effort. This reflects how grassroots commemoration can itself be a political project (Forest et al 2004). Still, his efforts seem to have had some, albeit ambivalent, impact on the Perak state authorities with regards to the task of preserving Green Ridge.

8.4 Ambivalent State Responses

On 1 December 2000, in reaction to Chye’s early efforts, the Perak State Planning Unit (in a letter to Chye) agreed to preserve the site (*The Star* 14 December 2000; McConnell 2000). Under the 9th Malaysia Plan, news also came that the Perak government was to spend RM1.3 million towards the ‘cleaning up’ and preservation of the Ridge (see Appendix I). This formalized some of the informal promises that Chye received from the state a year before, for which Chye said: ‘I am happy all my effort has paid off and [Green Ridge] will finally get the recognition it deserves’ (*The Star* 12 September 1999). The Perak Museum, along with a few of the men from local regiments, also worked to make the ridge structurally safe with proper steps, and vegetation cleared to reveal the trenches, gun positions and communications posts. Markers, in the form of vinyl tapes and wooden stakes, were also emplaced to identify these relics (**Fig. 8.12**). According to Chye, ‘I was there when the soldiers cleaned up the place. You could see the trenches that were concealed under the big mess for a very long time. It makes sense for visitors then to come and visit’.

Since the clean-up of Green Ridge, and despite news about the funds allocated to the project under the 9th Malaysian Plan in 2006 (see also *BBC News*, 18 April 2006), nothing else was done to further develop the site. When I visited in 2005, the site had reverted to jungle, something the local media also reported on (see *The Star* 19 October 2007). The trenches are yet again covered up, markers that were placed in 2000 were no longer visible and sand continued to be mined. In 2008, even the signboard was missing, lying on the ground no longer visible, all bent out of shape. When I told Chye about it, he said: ‘It might be metal thieves or the developers who want to make sure our history disappears so they can build some new thing’. A few months later, the sign had been moved to another location (**Fig. 8.13**). As for the items held at the Department of Museum and Antiquities, I was told they were in a private collection. Yet, it has also been reported the items that were handed over by Chye to the DMA are now ‘lost’ (‘hilang’) while in their care (Mohd Salleh 2000).



Fig. 8.12: Proper steps and white markers in 2000 (source: author)

Thus, it would appear that the state has been blowing hot and cold over the project. Chye feels it might be a delaying tactic on the part of the state that is ‘in fact not interested in the site but just saying they are ... hoping that in time when the site is already levelled, then they really would not have to do anything’. Others are resigned

to the fact that the site is not going to be preserved, especially with individuals referring to the site as a ‘national heritage doomed to be neglected’ (see Yusof 2005, 2002). As for the money allocated to the site, Chye is sceptical it would be used for the purpose it was given due to the ‘corruption of the state government’. There may be some grounds for speculating this since it has been reported that, out of the money allocated to Perak under the 9th Malaysia Plan, the amount spent on developments has been far less than the allocation (*The Star* 27 November 2007). More than the frustration in seeing his work come to nought and the site eaten away by hungry capitalists and developers, Chye laments the disappointment he feels for ‘not being able to honour requests of men of the Battalion who told me to “Remember us Joe”’.



Fig. 8.13: The sign in an obscure part of *Kampar Jaya* estate (source: author)

Most recently, however, at the memorial service held at the YMCA, the Chief Minister did commit to setting up a proper ‘memorial park’ on the site, and discuss with the Ministry of Unity, Culture, Arts and Heritage, Museums and Antiquities Department, and others to see how to best preserve the site (*The Star* 15 June 2008). To Chye, this may be his last chance to get the ball rolling preserving Green Ridge. Still, he is hopeful this time his dreams for Green Ridge to be marked as heritage will materialise given that it can ride on the coat-tails of a new government in Perak that

is, as Chye puts it, ‘no longer UMNO that is [predominantly] led by the Malays, but one that is a mixture of Malay, Chinese and Indian leaders’. Indeed, Perak is now run by the *Pakatan Rakyat* which is a grouping of opposition parties that won the state over from UMNO during the last elections in 2007. Even then, Chye is extremely tentative in his excitement: ‘I hope that the new [Chief Minister] will do something. ... From the speech he was positive about doing something but we will see later’.

Yet again, many are not convinced that anything would come out of this. Notwithstanding the fact that the *Pakatan Rakyat* local government, along with its Chief Minister, was recently overthrown by the state’s monarchy (*Malaysian Insider* 27 March 2009), it would seem that there is a bigger challenge against Chye’s project aside from merely the state dragging its feet on the matter. According to Md Taib, from the Perak State Office, ‘Perak is now under new government, and the Chief Minister was just eager to please... plus he was ambushed. I also don’t think the government knows how big the problem is. [H: What do you think this is then?] ... To get the people’s support’. Taking this cue, the next section focuses on what locals think, and how there is indeed grassroots resistance to the project. In doing so, it shows that, while the fluidity of memory narratives and practices on the Battle has served Chye in rallying state support, this fluidity has also led to locals interpreting the project in many other ways that have, in turn, impeded it from moving forward.

8.5 ‘Scale’ as Memory Impediment: Local Reflections/ Inflections

‘The Green Ridge site is titled land... owned by many people. If the state wants to develop it, it will have to compensate them.... about RM2 billion. I think also the local people don’t want it developed that way’. (Md Taib)

One problem associated with the task of preserving Green Ridge lies in how to acquire the land from its current owners. In the letter the Perak state gave to Chye (2000), it is indeed the case that memorial development on the site was contingent on the state acquiring the land from its owners. Also, by the estimates above, the cost of compensating land owners itself would far exceed the money allocated to the project under the 9th Malaysian Plan. Thus, even if the state were serious about developing Green Ridge as a heritage site, without the permission of local owners, or the ability to garner funds for compensation, nothing more could be done. Even so, speaking with some of the site's current owners, there seems to be reluctance in giving up the site for the amount of money that they have been offered. According to one of the owners, 'the state has approached me but they are not offering much... I get more money from the developers'. As such, these owners have highlighted how they got more profits out of allowing the site to be mined than if they were to sell to the state. However, to bring it down to a simple matter of economics is to underestimate the real extent of the issues underlying local lack of support for Chye's labour of love.

First of all, there is the fear that if the land is taken over by the state, the locals would no longer have any say in what happens at the site, and what they could do there. Green Ridge is currently used by some of the locals as a jogging track and trekking route (**Fig. 8.14**). There is then the belief that once the site is developed, these activities would no longer be options that are open to the public. As Chong (30s, Kampar) puts it: 'I go there because it is nice and wild. If they develop it then it would not be wild anymore and people will not be allowed in easily'. Pritam (40s, Kampar) also feels the same: '[Chye] is trying to make [Green Ridge] into a museum. But does that mean it is not going to be free to the public anymore? If that's

the case, then I am not interested because I love to walk around in that place'. Thus, although there are few like Jean (80, Kampar) who feels that 'I think it is great to have a museum there', although her reason is not so much to commemorate the Battle but 'for children to not go in and get lost in there', other residents are against the idea of developing the site into a museum which would severely restrict their 'free' access to the site. Indeed, this view is not totally groundless as, in Chye's vision, 'once the museum is established, we will have to set up wire perimeters around the site to prevent people from coming in outside hours'. It also indicates an interpretation of the site that is viewed through a different lens. While Chye sees the site from a 'historical' viewpoint, the locals were looking at it from the stance of the site as a mundane 'functional' space (see Schwenkel 2006), where the establishment of a museum would just render them with less space and areas to move around in.



Fig. 8.14: One of the jogging routes at Green Ridge (source: author)

There are also those who feel that there is really nothing at Green Ridge that is worth setting it up as a tourist attraction. As Chong (30s, Kampar) said: 'Why make it into a museum? No one will go'. It is interesting to note that, while Chye (2000) saw the potential for Green Ridge to become an attraction, many locals do not. Aside from doubt on the viability of the site to bring in the tourist dollar, it could also be due to

sentiments that ‘museums’ are just not, as Selvi (79, Ipoh) said, ‘a Malaysian thing’. It has been said that, where the war is concerned, Perakians prefer to remember in other ways that are less high profile, less state-led and less *represented* over space. This is another example where plans for the museum to mark the war runs against the grain of what Perakians generally see as appropriate ways to remember the war. The inclination against museums is also apparent in how other war museums, like the one in Penang, with more permanent and identifiable structures and attractions, have not been doing very well (see Ahmad A.T. 2006) (**Fig. 8.15**). Also, considering that museums in Malaysia, particularly in Kuala Lumpur, tend to focus on elements of the past that feeds into a distinctive ‘postcolonial’ identity (Lepawsky 2007), a museum like the one planned for Green Ridge which is, despite Chye’s efforts, still one seen as an Imperial battle fought by the British (see below), would be quite an oddity.



Fig. 8.15: Some of the attractions at Penang War Museum (source: author)

Some locals spoken to also raised doubts as to Chye’s intentions for embarking on the project. Despite Chye’s efforts in ‘spreading the word’ about his intentions for Green Ridge, there are still those who have no idea that the site might be converted into a museum. Rashid (72, Kampar) told me, ‘the local people don’t really know what the place is about and what happened there’. Also, I find out from a local resident Yusran that ‘Chye has not really come to ask us what *we* want... I am not

surprised. I don't think the museum is for us... It is only what *he* wants'. This is interesting in that it shows how some may feel that the project is not intended for them by virtue of the fact that Chye has not even approached them for their views. As such, although his efforts have been effective in getting federal and international support, he has neglected to get the support of the locals themselves, which is a flaw according to Md. Taib: 'I admire Chye in his ability to get support from this and from that but nothing will happen if he does not get the local people to support him'.

More than Chye not having involved the locals within the project enough is the accusation that, as Habsah (79, Kampar) cited, 'he is not interested in us [locals]. If he was, he would have chosen to remember our experiences of war than [that of] the British'. This is a sentiment that is felt keenly by many residents, like Seah, who said that 'the history [of the Battle] has got nothing to do with us. It is just the history of the British'. There is thus a sense of resentment that Chye (and the state) have spent so much effort trying to memorialise what they still see as a 'British' site when nothing has been done to commemorate their own experiences. As Habsah continues:

'If he wants to remember the war, he should remember the villagers here first.

If that is not done, how can we support something remembering the British?'

The main bone of contention here, therefore, lies in the fact that more effort should be put into remembering the war accounts and experiences of the local (especially Kampar's) population, and preserving the sites and stories associated with them, rather than 'wasting time' remembering what is seen as not of any interest to locals.

This accusation that has been leveled on Chye is felt even more strongly among those who believe that Green Ridge was where the the local resistance, many of

whom were operating in Perak then, was based. According to Chong (20s, Kampar), 'I think the locals will support if Chye is telling the story of the resistance'. Notwithstanding the fact that the guerillas were never based at Green Ridge (see Chapman 2006; Cheah 2003), it is interesting that some locals still see it as a place more appropriately suited to honouring these individuals. Some also said how the jungles reflect negative memories, such as of communist terror, such that to focus on the 'heroism' of the British also means reflecting upon, as Rashid (72, Kampar) puts it, 'the cowardice of the locals'. Still, some, like Allen (35, Kampar) also sees the jungles as where inspiring stories of 'local survival under adversity' prevail. For him, thus, as much as the jungle may be seen as 'a place of violence... [and] a source of anxiety in the public imagination', it can also at times be seen as 'a reminder of the hardships and danger that the people then previously endured' (Sioh 1998: 158, 160).

From these responses, three things may be said. First, more than a simple economic case of the state not being able to sufficiently compensate the local land owners, they reflect that the marking of Green Ridge as commemorative, by way of a museum or in fact any type of *physical* markers, is not something Perakians identify with (see Chapter 7). Second, it also highlights how there can be multiple narratives of a particular event or place (see Chronis 2005), depending on which 'scalar' lens one is viewing through (see Marston 2000). While Chye sees the Ridge as a 'special 'map' on which the spatial dimensions of the national memory [can be] made visible' (Raivo 2000a: 163), some locals see it as a site where the British fought, albeit on their soil, but still in the name of the Empire. This points to how, despite getting the backing of the state, in the opinions of Perakians, Chye has still failed to 'localise' the Battle and make the Ridge a site that resonates with the local population. It also

highlights the fraught and contested nature of the term 'local' itself, where what one defines as 'local' may not be shared by others (see Muzaini and Yeoh 2005a).

This brings us to the third point. Despite Chye's efforts to 're-scale' memory practices, by 'up-scaling' the preservation concerns of Green Ridge from a 'local' and localised platform to one with (inter)national repercussions, it could be argued that this has also worked against his attempts to appropriate the memories of the Battle as a 'local' or 'national' event. By involving national and transnational commemorative actors in his lobbying activities against the state, such as from the federal government and foreign dignitaries, war veterans, their families, and the international media, Chye has, perhaps inadvertently, also sabotaged his desire to promote the Battle (and the site) as 'local'. Rather, in seeing how his efforts have focused not only on (what many residents still see as) a 'foreign' site where an 'Imperial' battle took place, but also in inviting 'foreigners' to support his cause, many locals saw Chye as not keen in including and representing the people's stories, especially in how he is seen as very *selective in privileging other people's histories*.

Due to the lack of local support, therefore, the state has had to appease Chye and his supporters by proceeding to remember the Battle in other ways. The most recent development is that a memorial to the event is to be constructed at *Sungei Siput*, located miles away from Green Ridge (*Heritage News* February 2008). This selection was based on the availability of the land, particularly given much of *Sungei Siput* belongs to *foreign-owned* (mainly British) oil palm plantations whose owners welcome the idea of constructing such a memorial in the area. Paradoxically, though, this would also make it harder for Chye to promote the Battle as 'national' since

Sungai Siput is also an area closely tied to the Emergency years, since it was here that the murders of the European planters by the Malayan Communist Party, and the declaration of the Emergency, took place. Yet, while this may be a mark of how grassroots preferences have prevailed over those of the state, I would also say it with reservations. Scholars have remarked on how nation-states do have the resources to impose on the people their versions of the past regardless of what the people want (see Lahiri 2003; Kusno 2003). As for the ‘vernacular victory’ at Green Ridge, I do contend that this is also because the state itself is not that interested in marking what is essentially a ‘throw-back’ to its colonial past. Still, that the people can hold on to their views, and exert them onto the state, does show how individuals, ‘as sites of multiple scales’ too can participate in politics of memory-making (Cidell 2006: 196).

8.6 On the Recuperative Extent of Grassroots Remembrance

This chapter focused on the Battle of Kampar and the politics of preserving Green Ridge where the Battle took place. It drew attention to grassroots efforts made to pressure the Perak state into marking Green Ridge as a national site, which was accomplished through the ‘down-scaling’ of narratives of what was a battle fought between empires (British vs. Japanese) to one with ‘national’ salience; and ‘up-scaling’ a local preservation concern onto more (inter)national platforms. In doing so, the chapter showed how the notion of ‘scale’ in memory-making may be capitalised upon to ‘legitimise’ memory (practices) not only on the level of the state but by individuals (in this case Chye, a local military historian) on a more vernacular grassroots level. As such, it challenges the ‘hierarchical perspective’ of privileging the role and power of manipulating public memory only to agencies within more supra-local scales (Matsuda and Crooks 2007: 258; Forest et al 2004), and how, via

these ‘re-scaling’ strategies, it is possible to attain some measure of success in moulding public memory-making but ‘from below’ (see Muzaini and Yeoh 2007).

Despite acquiring the state’s patronage, however, the chapter has shown how Chye’s work has still been hampered by locals not supportive of the project. The reasons for this point towards how narratives of the past can be interpreted in protean ways, even within the scale of the ‘public’, determined as they are by issues of *how*, *who* and *why* to remember, arising astride differences in the cultural specificities and personal preferences of rememberers (see also Kong 1999). Lastly, while Chye’s efforts have, in many ways, salvaged the long forgotten Battle from oblivion, he also had to be *as selective as the state* in manipulating memories of the event (Forest et al 2004). This, and the fact that the impediment to memory excavation here has emerged ‘from below’, thus provides limits to which vernacular remembrances can be seen as ‘recuperative’ (Confino 1999). Still, in the grassroots being firm with their views, it does show how ‘taken-for-granted political hierarchies that are imposed on individuals, communities and societies can [also] be resisted, ignored or reconfigured [and] through the agency of subordinate groups’ (Matsuda and Crooks 2007: 158).

CHAPTER NINE

Memory, Materiality, Forgetting: Rendering the Past Passé and ‘the Haunting’ of the War Past in Perak

9.1 Materiality, Forgetting and the ‘Immanent Past’

‘Any autonomous order is founded upon what it eliminates: [...] But what was excluded re-infiltrates the place of its origin – now the present’s ‘clean’ place’ (Michel de Certeau, cited in Kusno 2003: 162)

On 3 June 2008, residents of Tambun, a suburb of Ipoh, were given an order by the state authorities to evacuate their homes from 0830 to 1400 hours while a bomb disposal unit destroyed a live 1000-pound bomb from the Second World War that was discovered by a fisherman along the local *Pinji* River (**Fig. 9.1**). Usually a nondescript area, on that particular day, sites and places in Tambun lying within a 500-meter radius from the bomb were demarcated by police barricades so as to prevent individuals and vehicles from entering, and chartered buses were arranged for residents without transport to be brought either to the Tambun mosque or the Royal Malay Regiment Base (see *New Straits Times* 2 June 2008). While this was not the only time that bombs from the war have been found in Malaysia, it was the first instance where the residents had been made to leave their homes so that a bomb could be detonated on site.²¹ When I asked a local state officer what he thought about the whole incident, his reply was: ‘It is very interesting that, even after so long, the war is still able to ‘come back’ and turn our lives upside down and all inside out!’

²¹ Such cases of discovering live bombs from the Second World War have also been reported in the southern state of Johore (*The Star* 5 May 2008) and in Malacca (*The Star* 21 April 2008). In all these other cases, however, the bombs were removed from where they were found and brought elsewhere so as to prevent the disruption of lives of the residents nearby.



Fig. 9.1: *Pinji River on the day the bomb was found (source: *The Star* 17 June 2008)*

Despite the capital Ipoh (which includes the district of Tambun) being bombed during the war more than sixty years ago, resulting in a number of casualties, there have been no efforts by the state or the people living in the area to remember that fact, or commemorate the dead, publicly such that it may be said that the Ipoh bombing has largely been ‘exorcised’ from the consciousness of its residents (as well as the state). As the local state officer said, ‘nobody here even remembers that this area was actually bombed during the war [because] it happened such a long time ago and many who saw it happened are no longer around’. Thus the Tambun incident on that morning represents, following de Certeau, a case of how the (war) past has ‘re-infiltrated’ back into living memory through the materiality of the bomb, in a way that is not only unexpected, but also potentially working against any conscious attempts by individuals or groups to remember only what they choose to remember.

While previous chapters have touched upon the ways in which official strategies of forgetting aspects of the past can be challenged by criticisms and (c) overt resistance, this chapter focuses on how local individuals themselves sometimes seek to forget their own experiences of the war. Instead of making the war visible, publicly or

within more private realms, those considered here would rather nothing is done to remind them of those times. After outlining reasons for why these local individuals may desire to leave their (traumatic) war past behind, the chapter examines some of the material strategies that they, particularly war civilians, have adopted to achieve this. It then shows how these tactics to arrest war remembrance are not always reliable given how the past can occasionally, through 'immanence' (Birth 2006), emerge unsolicited, as if 'haunting' the present – both *metaphorically* (through the material world) and *literally* (through the immaterial 'spectre') – even when they have not been called forth. Broadly, the chapter shows how the past can at times structure prevailing reproductions of knowledge and subjectivity within the present, as much as present concerns can also shape the past (see Bell 1997; Jordan 2005).

The chapter first argues, following Freud (cited in Forty 1999: 5) that, occasionally, aspects of the past that have once been formed do not perish – 'that everything is somehow preserved and in suitable circumstances ...can once more be brought to light', particularly elements of the past that have left an indelible dent on the self that it is almost impossible to perish them despite attempts to suppress it, lying in 'latency' before they present themselves when least expected (Caruth 1991). Second, that despite the ability of the material to revive the past, the material too can at times be stumbling blocks preventing the past from being forgotten. In doing so, it also challenges 'presentist' notions of memory pervading much scholarship on the subject, where the emergence of the past is perceived as valid only insofar as it fulfils current needs (Halbwachs 1992; Schwartz 1982), by highlighting cases where traces of the past, through the material, the corporeal and the 'less-than material', can at times impinge on the present, as much as the reverse being true (see Birth 2006).

9.2 Desiring Closure, Rendering the Past Passé

‘I was traumatised by the memory. I could hear screaming and I was scared... I was crying... crying because I did not know what I was seeing. I did not want to see. It was terrible... terrible. I can still remember the screaming. I will remember it forever. But I would rather forget, forget what happened to my mum, about what happened during the war. It is just too painful for me’.

Such are the words of Habsah, a 79-year old woman, currently living in Kampar, when she was asked to describe the memory of a traumatic incident that happened to her during the Second World War. As a six year old when the war first broke out in 1941, Habsah had to witness Japanese Imperial soldiers entering her house uninvited, pillaging it, and raping her mother in her presence. This event, which has left an indelible mark on her, has understandably made her wish that what happened during the war is forgotten or rendered passé. Although the rape happened to her mother and not her personally – ‘I was too young then and I think that’s why they left me alone’ – her emotional recounting of the event itself, rendering her ‘witness’ not only of the actual violence but the memories of how her mother was psychologically affected after the event – ‘she was a changed woman... went from being a talkative woman to being very quiet and troubled [*selalu runsing*] right until her death [almost two decades ago]’ – as traumatic as suffering the brutality itself (see Caruth 1995).

The ability for a traumatic event to intensely affect individuals who ‘witness’ an atrocity, rather than go through it themselves, is also reflected in my meeting with Zainal, 78 years old, from the township of Bagan Serai. During our conversations, he

recounted a story, drawn from his experiences of the war years, about some of the horrible things that he saw as a war civilian during the time of Japanese Occupation:

‘One day I saw the Japanese man on the street [in Bagan Serai] and there was a Chinese man in front of him. The Chinese man was kneeling and asking the Japanese soldier to let him go. The man was crying. Then, the Japanese man just hit the Chinese man with the end of his sword and then killed the man with his sword. I do not know why the Japanese man did that or what the Chinese man did but it was scary... I was still young and I remember running home and telling my parents about it. I did not go out of the house for one week because I was scared and my parents were worried about me’.

Like Habsah, the atrocity here was not something that happened to Zainal personally but still it was something that was ‘scary’ and traumatic enough to make him want to erase the memory completely from his present consciousness. As he himself says, ‘I would rather forget the war because it scares me to the bones when I remember it’.

Related to the desire to forget the traumatic past is frequently the sense of shame and guilt for not being able to do more within the situations, where ‘the survivor often feels complicit in the betrayal perpetrated by others’, not only in remaining as a spectator to the atrocities committed but also in surviving something that others have not, a frequent subject in much work within the trauma literature (Edkins 2003: 4; see also Caruth 1995; Douglass and Vogler 2003). In Habsah’s case, for instance, she does have regrets that she could not do anything to help her mother. As she puts it: ‘I wish I could have done something to prevent it, to help her... hit the Japanese on the head... or something... but I did not... I could not... the soldiers were too big and very fierce... I remember my helplessness... not being able to do anything to help

her'. She also related how her father, who was not at home when the incident with her mother took place, often blames himself for what happened to her mother: 'Every time he thinks about it [the war], he would blame himself for not being there when mum was... you know [raped]'. Out of pangs of guilt, they would thus rather forget.

The fact that the war may represent a highly traumatic period in individuals' lives, even as 'witnesses' to horrible acts perpetrated by the Japanese not to them but others, and the shame and guilt that is constantly attached to not being able to 'do more' to help others during the war (see also Edkins 2003; Lomsky Feder 2004), is also shared by others. Consider the following story by Ahmad (81, Slim River):

'I remember this man, Leong, a friend of the family [who was older]... who went to buy food at a shop near here and then a Japanese soldier came to buy something as well. Leong was there and he got his food. But the Japanese thought it was his and he threw [the food] on the floor and then hit Leong. Leong was bleeding... so I helped him to go home. It was humiliating [*malu*]. He told me not to tell his wife... he did not want to remember something so embarrassing... he let the Japs push him around... [I] did not want to remember when I was not able to do more to help him'.

Indeed, many were not able to do anything at the time and were resigned to their fates under the Japanese. No doubt they could be forgiven for they were no more than teenagers during the war. Yet, that fact has not stopped these individuals from also feeling the 'guilt'. As such, forgetting may be seen not only as a means of coping with the experience of 'witnessing' something traumatic but also to cover the fact they were robbed of free will (Stanley 2000; Lomsky-Feder 2004). Such 'guilt' interestingly coincides with the Perak state in terms of how, as colonial subjects, both

the state and these individuals were unable to 'do more' to prevent the Japanese from turning Malaya, and the inhabitants living within there, 'upside down' (Chin 1976).

The individuals highlighted thus far represent those for whom remembering particular episodes during the war results in highly emotional reactions and, for some, mental anguish. Each of their stories may be said to enter what Edkins (2003: xiv) calls 'trauma time' where what happened may not be reconciled with what one would like to remember of the past towards positive outcomes. Aside from the horrors bringing up the past may inflict, there is also often the feeling that they would not be able to recount the stories in a way that could do justice to what happened, of 'telling it right... in a way that does not lose their impacts' (Caruth 1995: vii). In that sense, the stories may be said to exist in Lacanian 'real time', 'which cannot be symbolised', where, in trying, may render them being ridiculed or, worse, not believed (Edkins 2003; Seidler 2007). As such, individuals would rather just render the past passé, where forgetting enacts 'a conscious process of dissociation from the past, engaged in for the purpose of constructing a new ideology... and organising new networks to confront the present' (Pitcher 2006: 89).

The desire to forget the war may also stem from the desire to maintain the fragile status quo of racial harmony within the country. As mentioned before, the relationship between the Chinese and Malays has always been a strained one. Much of this may be traced back to the war, when the Japanese differential treatments of the races – 'friendly' with the Malays, harsh against the Chinese – and skirmishes emerging from the largely-*Chinese* Malayan Communist Party's (MCP) trying to wrestle power from the *Malay*-controlled government during the latter part of the

Emergency produced a climate of tension between the two groups (see Comber 2007), thus rendering the war as an event best forgotten. As Ali (20s, Ipoh) says:

‘I don’t think it is advisable to remember the war as it might lead to racial problems [since] the war was also a war between Chinese and the Malays’.

As such, according to some of the respondents, these incidents have therefore served to make the memories associated with the war in Malaysia very ‘perilous’ (Fujitani et al 2001), such that to remember the war may potentially re-ignite enmities and re-stoke negative memories of the past, and thus best be forgotten by all Malaysians.

There are also those, especially the ones who did not go particularly traumatic events, who would prefer to forget the war due to how ‘remembering the war’ may affect others from the community who did ‘witness’ war atrocities. In Habsah’s case, she highlighted how those who knew (of) her mother, and what happened, have tried to forget the incident out of respect to Habsah and the memory of her mother, where rendering the war passé is a mechanism adopted to not ‘hurt’ by recounting traumatic experiences of the war. This perspective was shared by Jamal (59, Bidor) who said:

‘I don’t think there is a need to remind people about what happened during the war. They should just leave it alone... just forget the war *lah*. It is too insensitive to those who went through horrible things during the war’.

This shows how silences may also be derived from how local individuals perceive the reception of these public narratives by others, especially those who went through the war years, where it is felt that by harping on the war, or having physical reminders of the war in Perak, such as through monuments or museums, would only serve to make it worse for those who went through enough suffering during the war.

The preference to forget the war (or aspects of it) is also shared by some of the local proprietors of war heritage sites in Perak with significant war stories attached. Alice (30s, Taiping) is the manager of the Peking Hotel in Taiping (**Fig. 9.2**), used during the war as a Japanese secret police [*Kempeitai*] headquarters, and where many people died. Though she is not totally dismissive of capitalising upon local history as a means of promoting the business – as evidenced by the Taiping heritage map pasted on the wall behind the counter, which indicates the heritage of the site as a *Kempeitai* headquarters (see Chapter 5) – Alice would rather the fact that it was also where many people had died not be highlighted. As she puts it: ‘I don’t want people to know that people actually died here. If you own a hotel, you would not want that too. Who would come?’ Thus, Alice is not keen on reflecting the ‘horrible part’ of the history of the site, and would much rather render it forgotten, so as not to turn away clients who may not want to stay there as ‘they are afraid of spirits roaming around’.



Fig. 9.2: Exterior of Peking Hotel in Taiping (Source: author)

According to much of the literature on ‘thanatourism’, or the desire to travel to a location that is wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire to encounter deaths (see Seaton 1999), ‘horrifying’ histories are often capitalised upon to draw tourists in, particularly when it is connected to deaths of famous personalities or events (see also

Strange and Kempa 2003; Lennon and Foley 2000). In Perak, however, the tendency is rather to keep such stories hidden. This could first be attributed to the fact that 'dark tourism' is not something that is encouraged in Malaysia by the state, seen as going against the tenets and teachings of Islam (see Chapter 5). Second, despite the nation's position on the matter, however, ghosts have always captured the imaginations of Malaysians, backed by entrenched beliefs within many of the nation's religions, in the 'otherworld', such that, as Alice puts it, 'many Malaysians *do* believe in ghosts and spirits ... if they hear that people had died [at the hotel], nobody would want to stay. It is *suey* [taboo]'. This subject is taken up further below.

These represent examples of how some individuals, including war civilians as well as from the post-war generations, have expressed their desire to render the war years as *passé*, thus highlighting how the practice of selective remembering does not only belong to the elites (see Boyarin 1992). Be it to circumvent the troubling memories, of personal and secondary trauma (such as when one indirectly 'witnesses' an atrocity) (Caruth 1995), to avoid memories of the war that might destabilise the current status quo, to save loved ones (or others) who might have gone through a traumatic event from having to keep reliving the event, or merely to maximise capital accumulation, these individuals would rather forget the past, to provide a space where the present may move forward into the future without looking back. Memories of the war though do not disappear just by wishing them away. More often than not, these intentions to forget are accompanied by the *appropriations of the material*, via practices that seek 'to permit only certain things to be remembered, and by exclusion cause others to be forgotten' (Forty 1999: 9), which is the subject of the next section.

9.3 Materialising Forgetting, Erasing the Past

‘Might it be possible to construct a history not of memorials, but of amnesiacs?’ (Forty 1999: 8)

During the first decades of Malaysia’s independence, it is clear that the Perak state government, in accordance to prevailing federal trends, has preferred to forget that it was involved during the war years by adopting the culture of non-remembrance. This was done through the paucity of efforts to establish commemorative forms within the state, the non-maintenance of such already in existence, particularly those set up by the British government during the years after the war, such as the Cenotaph in Ipoh and, under the umbrella auspices of capitalism and urban development, destroying elements in the landscape that resonate with memories of the war years (Chapter 4). Even after the ‘commemorative turn’ of the late 1980s, the state continued some of these practices of rendering particular aspects of the war lost or forgotten by being selective in what it has elected to remember, thus eliding elements of the past with the potential to disrupt the overarching project of nation-building and also destabilise race relations (see also Chapters 5 and 6).

Central to these practices of official amnesia and selective remembrance, one can argue, is how the material, as represented by and through memoryscapes, has been manipulated – through their absence, neglect and ‘iconoclasm’ (Forty 1999) – as a strategy to elide ‘perilous memories’ (Fujitani et al 2001) that might work against the task of providing a shared (postcolonial) history for the people that is divorced from colonialism and devoid of elements that could potentially pull its multiracial citizenry apart. Given that the material – as fundamental constituents of memory-

making practices, be it through the body, objects and physical sites and buildings – do possess the ‘agency’ and ability to invoke the past (see Buchli 2002; Gell 1998; Appadurai 1986), sometimes even when this is not actively sought after (see below), drawing attention away from these forms of materiality, such as through the visible erasure and ‘elimination’ of material cultures (see Buchli 2002) associated with the war, thus serves the purpose of rendering events of war less visual and thought about.

Similarly, many of the locals who seek to submerge memories of the war, especially their own experiences and what they witnessed of the event, have also attempted to do so through the material, both that are found within the home and within more social realms. Here, it is argued that as much as places, objects and the body may be mobilised to reinstate ‘from-below’ the past within the present (see Chapter 7), they too may be capitalised upon to make the past invisible. The preceding section has already highlighted how there are locals who would rather the war was forgotten, triggered as it were by the sense that such memories may, on a personal level, invoke trauma and shame for war civilians and potentially be detrimental to Malaysian race relations and economic fortunes. Towards suggesting a particular shape in which an account of ‘amnesiacs’ (Forty 1999) may be fashioned, this section therefore seeks to highlight some of the material strategies, or ‘avoidance tactics’ (Stanley 2000) that locals have adopted to avoid the recollections of the war and render them forgotten.

One of the material tactics adopted towards leaving memories of the war past *in the past* and ‘out of mind’ is by deciding ‘not to talk about the war’, as seen in the case of Habsah, her father, and those who knew (of) her mother. According to Habsah:

‘It hurts [me and my father] to remember what happened to my mother [during the war]... Because of that, nobody I know today [or who knew my mother] would *talk* about the war or about [the rape]. They know it would really hurt me and my family... That way we hope to forget what happened’.

This represents a *bodily* strategy that works via the incapacitation of speech and the ability of the body to hear or listen about the war, as a way of overcoming trauma. The same strategy is adopted by Ahmad (81, Slim River) to erase the ‘guilt’ that he feels for his inability to help his friend. As he puts it, ‘I have never talked about the incident out of respect to Leong, since he asked me not to, but also because it is not something I am proud of... I would rather talk about other things than that’. The practice of ‘not talking’ about negative aspects of the past, towards forgetting them, is also shared by Alice, from the Peking Hotel: ‘Don’t say *lah*... [about those killings] ...I don’t want people to hear what happened. Better if people do not know’.

According to Rydstrom (2003: 6), in the context of war narratives produced by Think Tri women in Vietnam, ‘narrating selected episodes of war and violence makes it less difficult to ignore those experiences, which are too painful to articulate’. Similarly, for Ahmad, when he finds himself in situations where he is asked to talk about his experiences during the war, he would choose to bring up ‘other things’ rather than his recollection of the incident with Leong so that, as he puts it, ‘I can force myself to forget what happened [with Leong] by focusing on other stories where I do not have to feel guilty for what happened’. In this case, by enacting his ‘coexisting desires of forgetting and narrating’, Ahmad is thus able to ‘create a space due to which it becomes possible to cope with the influential powers of past brutality’ (Rydstrom 2003: 6). By not mobilising the function of ‘speech’ or by being

selective in what is said, Habsah and Ahmad hopes to avoid dealing with memories of what happened – which they are unable to incorporate with their need to ‘move on’ and ‘sustain a feeling of ‘being normal’ (Seidler 2007: 144) – and circumvent the pain that remembering poses to them. Thus, as much as ‘not talking’ ‘may exacerbate people’s feelings of isolation and reduce opportunities for collective responses’ (Beristain et al 2000: 119), at times, it too may serve the desire to just forget the past.

There are also those who aim to ‘forget’ the war by not having any objects kept from the war around them. This works by either discarding these material triggers of memory or keeping them ‘out of sight’ so that they will not work towards bringing to mind what happened during the war. Ali (20s Ipoh), for instance, related how his parents, war civilians themselves, were never keen on saving things, especially those that have survived from the war years, so that they do not have to remember them:

‘I am very sure my mother and father never keep these things like the money used at that time and this helmet my father picked up from... I cannot remember where. I think they threw them away. [H: Why do you think they did that?] I think it is because they do not want to remember what happened’.

In the case of Ali’s parents, the act of discarding these items after the war, therefore, serves as both a *bodily* strategy (in the act of ‘throwing away’) to render the war years forgotten, as well as in terms of eradicating traces of the war, in the form of *objects* salvaged from the war, that could potentially act as triggers to memories of the war event, that they would rather keep obscure, if not render totally forgotten.

Teo (79, Kuala Kangsar [was in Ipoh during the war]) also related his own experience of ‘hiding’ photographs taken with his family before the war as a way of

not wanting to bring to mind memories of loved ones who died during the war, only taking them out ‘from storage’ to show me his collection of items:

‘These are photographs of my father taken with me when we were on holiday in Pangkor... We were so happy at that time before the Japanese came and made everything chaotic [*tak tentu arah masa tu*]. I like those times [before the war] [H: Why don’t you frame it up then?] No *lah*. We were happy but the photo also reminds me of my father during the war and how he died’.

Teo’s father was one of the underground guerrillas who died during a skirmish in Chemor, Perak. Though the photograph brings Teo back to when they were ‘so happy’, looking at it also reminds him of how his father died. This explains why he keeps the photograph hidden, so that ‘I don’t have to feel sad’. Thus, while objects have the potential to remind individuals of war, sometimes transformed into household ornaments, ‘as embodiments of war stridently present among the otherwise pacific creature comforts of the living room, parlour or hallway’ (Saunders 2003a: 152), in Teo’s and Ali’s parents’ cases, the practice of ‘discarding’ or ‘hiding’ them represent intentional acts to make them *invisible*, where rendering them ‘out of sight’ also keeps them, and memories of the event attached to them, ‘out of mind’.

These (material) strategies adopted to render the war passé are also matched by their desire for the Perak state as well as other groups not to do anything that might remind them of the war. According to Habsah, ‘I don’t want the state to remember the war [as] it would remind me about what happened to my mother’. This shows how Habsah’s desire to not remember the war pertains also to not wanting *others*, such as the Perak state, to mark the event in any way, not even in commemorative forms. In that regard, her strategy to forget the war pertains not only to restricting the

personal remembering of the war but also in possibly preventing *collective* remembrances to take place, either by the state or on a more grassroots scale. Karim (79, Taiping), also said something similar: ‘We saw things that we will never forget for the rest of our lives. Why make it harder for us? I think it is better [for the state] to not remember and maybe tear down [sites] where people died’. While this was also prompted by the belief that these sites might be ‘haunted’ by spirits of those who died unjustly (see below), it is also due to the difficulty in separating two things, where *any* type of remembrances, even those with no direct links to personal memories, or memorial events such as the Cenotaph Remembrance can still provoke pain, such as the memories of hardship associated with the reign of the Japanese.

Failing the prevention of remembrance gestures – memoryscapes – from being set up, another strategy towards ‘forgetting’ the war is that of non-participation in public commemorative efforts, which Stanley (2000) highlighted as one of the ‘avoidance tactics’ used by sufferers of PTSD to forget their participation in war. It has been shown how there has not been much local support for official and grassroots remembrance efforts (see Chapters 6 and 8). While this may be attributed to the desire to steer away from collective forms of remembrance (see Pitcher 2006; also Chapter 7), it may also be a means of lobbying against *any* memory-making, with the hope that with the lack of local support, as Habsah puts it, ‘these people would then stop trying to remember the war... so that we can finally, finally forget!’ As such, the desire to ‘forget’, and not have the war constantly shoved in their faces, forcing them to remember, may be another reason preventing commemorative projects from amassing the local support that they need to achieve some measure of success.

Thus, it has been demonstrated how some locals have adopted certain material strategies as a means of erasing memories of the war from the present, primarily by way of ‘not speaking of/ listening to the war’, getting rid of material objects that are potentially able to *presence* and trigger the war past within the present, and staying away from, and not participating in, sites or occasions where memories of the event may be invoked, such as in memorial ceremonies, both those spearheaded by the Perak state as well as on the more local grassroots scale. These therefore demonstrate how the materiality of war – through tactics involving the body, objects and spatial avoidance – have been capitalised upon by locals; only this time, rather than as a means of reviving memories of the war but to render them forgotten (Forty 1999). Despite these efforts, however, the past may still ‘emerge unbidden’ by way of ‘involuntary remembering’, and it is towards these instances the chapter now turns.

9.4 Haunting Presences, or the Return of ‘the Immanent Past’

Despite the material attempts to relegate the war to history, or as Joyah (80s, Gerik) puts it, ‘to pack [history] into a little box and thrown away’, the past may still return without the premeditated act of recollection, particularly by way of ‘involuntary remembering’ or ‘an immediate experience of variable intensity whereby traces of the past happen but without intentional solicitation’ (Anderson B. 2004: 9). These unbidden urges to remember ‘without intentional solicitation’ are unpredictable and often prompted by the very material that has been called upon to purposefully prolong the survival of memories or render them forgotten (Forty 1999; Kuchler 1999). Birth (2006: 179) refers to the ability of the past to return and affect the present, even when it has not been called forth, as the ‘uncanny, disruptive and contested presence... of the immanent past’ (Birth 2006: 179). The rest of the

chapter outlines three ways that ‘the immanent past’ operates in Perak: through inanimate elements, corporeality, and the less-than-material notion of the ‘spectre’.

9.4.1 Inanimate Prompts to ‘the Immanent Past’

In a study on the ways the Indonesian government has tried to erase traces of the May 1998 riots in Jakarta from its public landscapes, Kusno (2003) reiterates how memories of the event have continued to live on in other ways, such as through the city’s built urban environment, serving as triggers for personal experiences of the conflict otherwise publicly or personally forgotten. Similarly, it was the case with Perak with regards to the Second World War years. Some of these have already been highlighted in Chapter 7, where buildings associated with the war sometimes prompt images and memories of the war for Perakians, even after these have been converted to other (more commercial) uses. Yet, while in these cases, this was a positive thing, particularly when locals capitalize upon the material and visual features of these sites to consciously remember the war, and to pass memories of it to the next generations, in other cases, these represent ‘eruptions of the unruly past’ (Birth 2006), where the physical environment itself has prevented locals who want to forget from forgetting.

Consider two accounts of how places that were used by the Japanese during the war years are sometimes able to cue images of the event for war civilians even though these places no longer look like that they did in the past. This makes it extremely difficult for people to completely erase the events of war from current consciousness.

(1) ‘There were some of the shops [in Kampar] used by the Japanese for their offices and other uses. There was a Japanese club there (**Fig. 9.3**) too but many of these places have changed... It is difficult to forget when these

buildings are still around. I pass by these shops but sometimes it just happens, looking at the building makes me think about the Japanese. When I think about them, I remember what they did to my mother' (Habsah, 79, Kampar).



Fig. 9.3: The shophouse that used to be a Japanese club (source: author)

(2) 'Look at the school [King Edward VII (**Fig. 9.4**)]. When I pass by the school, sometimes I still remember. You cannot forget it. When you know that people were killed there, some of them you know, you cannot forget it. We were really scared... I am glad it is a school now. At least people don't think about it as a bad Japanese place anymore...But for the people who went through it, no matter how hard you try to turn the place into a nice place now, they will still remind you of what happened. You cannot do anything. When I pass by the school, sometimes I become sad and at first I don't know why, then I start thinking about those horrible things again' (Kassim, 80, Taiping).

In these cases, it is clear how the subsequent conversion of particular sites associated with the war into other uses does not mean that they are no longer capable of generating (sometimes unsolicited) war memories. In fact, despite attempts to 'varnish over' the past with fresh coats of paint, attaching new functions to them (e.g.

Japanese club in Kampar, now a CD shop) or reinstating their prewar uses (e.g. King Edward VII school), in the minds of war civilians, the mere presence and materiality – i.e. architecture and physical structure – of the buildings themselves continue to prompt alternative war stories that they would rather forget, where the war past in the form of ‘the unsettling ghosts of place’ (Bell 1997: 827) ‘haunt’ through their very traces – speaking of ‘the ones who did not make it’ (such as Habsah’s mother and victims of the Japanese *Kempeitai*) – even when individuals would rather not face up to them; where memories lie dormant within the material in its period of ‘latency’ only to later ‘affect’ the living when they least expected (Caruth 1991; Seidler 2007).



Fig. 9.4: King Edward VII School in Taiping (source: author)

Aside from the landscape, memories of the war may also ‘emerge unbidden’ through inanimate objects, both those that have survived from the war, and others that would otherwise have no direct relation to the event that happened many years ago. This was apparent to me when I was talking to two of my respondents who related to me incidents where inanimate objects were instrumental in forcing them to relive the war years sometimes even when they would prefer to forget them (see Saunders 2003a for similar). Moin (79, Slim River) highlighted one time when he was ‘forced’ to remember the war while he was cleaning up his store room many years ago:

‘I was just in the store room trying to clear the things inside because my wife was complaining that it was getting too messy. I came across these [*banana notes* (**Fig. 9.5**)] and all of a sudden [*secara tiba tiba*] I remember some of the horrible things I saw during the war. It was a very disturbing feeling’.



Fig. 9.5: Moin with his collection of Japanese *banana notes* (source: author)

Moin is today one of those not intentionally trying to forget the war as he feels that there is much that the young can learn from it (see Chapter 7). Yet, there was a time when he would rather have just forgotten what happened, particularly during the first few decades after the event. It was at this time that he came across the currencies that were used during the time of Japanese Occupation. When I asked him to describe what he meant by ‘a very disturbing feeling’, he said: ‘I felt like crying... I could imagine that time when I was still a child and the Japanese were everywhere and they were very very bad to the people and I remember telling myself, ‘Oh god. I hope this never ever happens again in my lifetime’. From this example, it is clear how objects that have survived from the war years do have the potential to remind individuals in the present of what happened, effecting emotions, sometimes when they least expect it (see Bell 1997; Saunders 2003a, b, 2002; Hallam and Hockey 2001). Moin now keeps the notes in an album, eager to show it to those who are interested to see them.

Hashim (75, Taiping) mentioned when ‘involuntary remembering’ took place while he was simply putting on his clothes to prepare for an event that he was attending:

‘I was getting ready to go to a *kenduri* [feast] and was putting on my *baju Melayu* [traditional Malay dress] which I had just bought a week before. But all of a sudden I started thinking about the war, how lucky we are now, with everyone wearing nice *baju kurung* and other beautiful clothes. When I see these people wearing nice clothes, I always remember other people [during the war] who did not have enough clothes. I remembered feeling sad’.

This showcases a situation where seeing, and the ability to now wear, ‘beautiful clothes’ triggered for Hashim memories of the time during the war when locals had to live under horrible conditions where many things were scarce, not only in terms of the food available but also down to the clothes they wore. Although there is no direct association between the *baju Melayu* he was wearing and the war itself, he was still able to juxtapose the two temporalities, the past and the present. This demonstrates how individuals can sometimes make mental links and connections with the past through objects. The salience of this is how it makes it harder for material strategies of forgetting to be effective since there is no straightforward way of identifying or predicting which object will hold the cues to the past and which will not, thus highlighting the nomadic and haphazard nature of ‘the immanent past’ (Birth 2006; Anderson B. 2004). Regardless, such incidents can at times relegate rememberers into depression. For Hashim, the incident prevented him from making it to the feast.

9.4.2 Body/ Embodied Cues to ‘the Immanent Past’

The ‘body’ is yet another way in which elements of the immanent (war) past may be cued through ‘involuntary remembering’. While it may be argued that the cases

highlighted above already involve the body, since the act of being reminded of the war through objects and places already necessarily presumes the existence of a mind or minds to remember the war past, in this section, the focus is on how the body, and bodily practices, as ‘a basis for anchoring important aspects of ‘the truth’ of human existence and identity’ (Douglass and Vogler 2003: 13), may be considered not only as the receptors of ‘the immanent past’, but also as cues to the past that some would rather forget. In this way, it is considered as another form of materialised trace of the past, apart from objects and places, which have survived from the war and also have the capability to exert influence not only on remembering and memory, but also individuals’ subjectivities, emotions, feelings, and actions (see Cole 2006).

According to Sturken (1991: 133), ‘veterans’ bodies – dressed in fatigues, scarred and disabled, contaminated by toxins – refuse to let historical narratives of completion stand [where] Memories of the war have been deeply encoded in them, marked literally and figuratively in the flesh [as] evidence of the act of injuring’. This is appropriate to describe the case of Ramli (80s, Batu Gajah) who related to me how he, as a young recruit member of the Batu Gajah Police Force, was shot during the Emergency years just after the war, leaving physical and mental scars such that it has made it virtually impossible for him to forget the incident completely:

‘We encountered some communists and [one of them] managed to shoot me. This is the scar of the shot I got [Fig. 9.6]. I was in a coma for a day and a night. And it still hurts around my stomach even now. It happened a long time ago but it still hurts. The scar is fading but the memory is still clear’.

Ramli was, during the war, a member of the local police force then attached to the Japanese Military Administration which would identify him as a collaborator of the

enemy at the time (Ahmad A.T. 2003). While he was initially hesitant to talk because of this, my reassurance his identity would be kept secret persuaded him to share his experiences. His example reiterates how bodily scars and injuries are sometimes able to re-ignite memories of the past, even when they have not been called for, and influence one's current behaviour (see Jelin and Kaufman 2000; Saunders 2003a, b).



Fig. 9.6: Ramli showing me his scar from a bullet wound (source: author)

For Ramli, the necessity to ‘not talk’ about what happened to him during the war was borne out of the shame for having been involved with the Japanese at the time although, as he puts it, ‘he had no choice [because] I was already in the [police] force and working with the Japanese meant my safety as well as that of my family’. Yet, no matter how he tries to forget that episode in his life, he is often reminded of it essentially by physical and psychosomatic workings of his body. According to him:

‘Whenever I feel pain on my body or legs because of falling into trenches, it reminds me of the war. It was a difficult time. And my pains and scars will never let me forget what happened to me at that time’.

Thus, for Ramli, it is not only the physical scars but also the pain he still occasionally feels from the bullet, as well as in his legs from ‘falling into the trenches’, which represent potent triggers that have prevented him from putting the war years behind him. Due to this, he now chooses not to exert himself so as to prevent his body from reacting, in the form of pains, so as to never be inadvertently reminded of the war.

For Chan (88, Taiping), 'feeling hungry' also serves to constantly remind him of the war, especially when he sees his children taking what they have for granted without realising how lucky they really are to have everything that they already have:

'They [the younger generation] cannot understand what happened during the war... like being hungry. It is easy for them. When they are hungry, they just go to their mother and ask for something to eat. Sometimes they are so impatient and want everything quick. But they don't understand what hunger means for us. We had to be hungry for days sometimes. They think their hunger is bad but they don't understand the type of hunger we went through'.

Kassim (80, Taiping) also highlighted the same when he recounted various instances where he would see his children being unreasonable when they want something, instances which would usually make him sit them down and tell them about 'how difficult the war was and how children at that time always could not have anything, even things that they need to survive'. As such, in Kassim's case, the desire to forget the war years is also triggered, albeit involuntarily, by witnessing other bodies, here the behaviour of his children, so that 'even if you want to forget it, it is not that easy'.

Another 'bodily' function that serves to prompt the immanent war past is that of taste. The following case of Lim (83, Kamunting) illustrates how sensations emerging when he eats particular types of food today occasionally remind him of the war years, and how he has learnt to avoid these foods so as not to inadvertently trigger horrible memories of the war as he, as well as others like him, experienced it:

'When I was with the [Royal Air Force] and a prisoner of the Japanese, we always eat salted fish. I cannot eat salted fish now because of that, especially cheap ones. It reminds me too much about the war and how the Japanese tried

to stuff it into our faces as if making fun of us saying ‘here, today is your lucky day, you get to eat fish’ and then proceeds to force it down our throats’. Here, it is clear how the taste of salted fish, especially ‘the cheap ones’, sometimes trigger memories of the war even when he tries not to, another instance of how the *bodily* action of eating too has the agency to bring the war past into the present. More than that, it also highlights how it has prevented him from consuming certain types of food that have the potential to allow any unwanted war memories from emerging.

For some of my respondents, the sounds they heard during the war, especially when the Japanese zero fighters were flying overhead, or when the bombs were dropped over the major cities, are still something they remember very vividly. As Zainal (78, Bagan Serai) said: ‘I remember being scared of the sound of bombs. I can still remember the sound. It was really loud and it was scary I would always run to my mother whenever the sounds came’. Consequently, for some, listening to the sound of the bombs meant they get extremely nervous when hearing loud noises even today, or when they hear bombs dropped elsewhere, such as on TV. Zainal said:

‘Now if I watch TV and I see the stories about Iraq and about Afghanistan, I feel bad for the people who are there. I know how scared they are.... and I hope people don’t ever have to go through that... Even now if I hear a very loud sound, like a plate breaking..., I remember the sounds of the bomb’.

Moin (78, Slim River) also highlighted a situation very similar to that of Zainal’s:

‘I do remember the sounds of aeroplanes flying over head and I could hear bombings here and there but I cannot tell you where they hit. Every hour, it zooms here and there [*zoom sana, zoom sini*]. You hear the buzzing sound.... Buzz.... and you know they are nearby and it was very loud... Today, when I

hear any plane flying overhead, sometimes I would [cringe: the action of shrivelling oneself out of fear] and close my eyes because I am reminded of the time of war. It is horrible when a sound can have such an effect on you’.

This highlights again how horrible memories of the war can sometimes be triggered by ‘involuntary remembering’ through bodies and also their associated functions.

In the examples provided here, it is apparent how memories of the war past may be unpredictably triggered through the senses – of taste, sight and hearing. Locked, as it were, ‘within that skin, played out within it in actions other than words, in patterns of consciousness below the everyday and constructions of language’, these senses are evidenced to be capable of bringing images of the past within the present, as if ‘haunting’ rememberers of something that they would rather forget such that, trapped in the body, ‘the violation [of the past] seems to continue in a reverberating present that belies the supposed linearity of time and the possibility of endings’ (Culbertson 1995: 170; Edkins 2003; Caruth 1995). More than just re-enacting the past, these memories also influences one’s behaviours, such as, for Moin, deciding never to fly on an aeroplane and, for Lim, to refrain from ever eating salted fish. These are all indicative of how it can be difficult to really forget the war if, as Hashim (75, Taiping) says, ‘it is lodged in my head and we are condemned to remember forever’.

9.4.3 ‘The Immanent Past’ and ‘Less-Than-Material’ Ghosts

Aside from the inanimate and the corporeal, there have also been a few accounts of how memories of the war have ‘emerged unbidden’ in Perak through the ‘less-than-material’ form of the ‘spectre’ – ghosts, apparitions and spirits – thus moving away from considering ‘haunting’ as a ‘metaphorical or allegorical device’ for signifying

the return of ‘the immanent past’ towards elements that are of a more ‘literal’ kind but ‘beyond the real’ (Maddern and Adey 2008: 292), capable of forcing individuals within the contemporary present to engage with the past in ways *involontaires*. While hardly visualised and not tangible to the physical touch, the ghosts here, ‘trapped in the flow of time’ are, more often than not, attached to, and manifested through, unexplainable facets of physical places, particularly those where horrific and traumatic events happened, or believed to have happened, thus rendering them ‘simultaneously visible and invisible’ (Pile 2005: 139; see Bell 1997; Gordon 1997).

The first two accounts pertain to strange happenings at the Yuk Choy [Independent] School, a vernacular Chinese institution in Ipoh city. It has been said that the school was one of the bases of Japanese operations in the capital during the war itself. Memories of the local war dead are currently also honoured through a concrete memorial which was established near the entrance (see Chapter 7). Yet, it has been said that the school is also the location of a few ‘ghostly’ and inexplicable sightings and occurrences that have been attributed to those who died there during the war ‘returning’ to haunt the living. These were related to me by Low (30s, Ipoh). The first brings attention to ‘blood stains’ to be found on one of the walls at the school:

‘Many people at the school have told me about a red blood-stained wall within the school where many people were killed by the Japanese. They had tried to clean these stains, even repainted it, but the blood is always there the next day. I have seen the stains and people are really scared at first’.

The second incident centres on the school field (**Fig. 9.7**): ‘I do not know how true this was until I saw it myself once... On the field, many people told me that after it rains, shapes would emerge on it that look very much like coffins... perhaps the

coffins belong to ghosts who died coming back and telling us not to forget them'. When he first saw it, he said 'I was amazed... I was working and people started talking about these things on the field... and that's when I saw it, the 'coffin-like' shapes and everybody was talking about the war, all the students and the teachers'.



Fig. 9.7: Yuk Choy school field (source: author)

In both instances, I was not able to witness first hand whether these occurrences really happened, although these stories were also related to me by the school's caretaker even though he too never saw them personally. During my visits to the school, there has not been anything strange on the field and children were still using it as they usually do – but of course, it never rained while I was there – and, where the stained wall is concerned, I was told that the school had just recently repainted it in a maroon colour such that the stains are 'no longer visible' (**Fig. 9.8**). I also found it suspect that of the few students I spoke to – granted, I did not speak to many of them – only Low claims to have *seen* these incidents. It also did not help that Low was the official photographer engaged to put together a pictorial history of the school as part of its centennial celebrations. Regardless, it is something that got people talking about the war. As Low said, 'the war is hardly remembered now but when the incident happened, everyone was talking about the war like it happened yesterday'.



Fig. 9.8: The repainted walls of Yuk Choy (source: Lo Chok Ping)

In another example, also witnessed indirectly, are accounts of spirit possessions said to have occurred at the Slim River Police Station, the location of a number of massacres committed by Japanese soldiers during the war (**Fig. 9.9**). In addition to stories of sightings of ‘Japanese soldiers walking around the place’, Abu Bakar (54, Slim River) also highlighted how officers from the Police Force were possessed:

‘They were working night shifts and all of a sudden one started shaking around and could not speak properly. His friend who saw this said that the face [of the possessed] had changed to someone he did not recognise.... It was really scary... [H: Then what happened?] Then the friend said some *Quranic* verses and it was all over. Some said it was the ghost of someone who had died there during the war, someone killed by the Japanese... scary!’

While again there is no way of proving that this event really occurred, it did get people talking about the war, specifically the event that happened at the Police Station, something that happened a long time ago and which people no longer talk about. As Abu Bakar continued, ‘after that happened, everyone was talking about it... [H: Why do you think that is so?] I think it is because we have started to forget that people died there and the spirits are telling us to start remembering them!’



Fig. 9.9: Slim River Police Station (source: author)

Whether the spirit possession really happened or not, stories of hauntings like these, borne as they were by incidents and events of the war, pervade much of Perak. Speaking of the proliferation of ghost stories in Singapore, Pile (2005: 113) said: ‘what is of interest is the sheer quantity of the tales. ... By sheer weight of numbers, readers are almost carved into submission – forced to doubt their own doubt on the existence of these horrors’. So it is in Malaysia too, further underlined by the acceptance, within many of the local religions, even Islam, that humans do live amidst the spirit world (Skeat 1972). As such, though these stories may be invented, or driven by ulterior motives, their power to ‘haunt’ is still remarkable (see McEwan 2008) and capable of bringing back memories of what may have occurred a very long time ago into the ‘right here, right now’, as ‘present absences’, or ‘the representation of what was once there and no longer is, the representation of something that has been erased, silenced or denied’ (Jelin and Kaufman 2000: 106).

9.5 Forgetting the Past yet Failing to Forget

History is written, but remembering can use far more than the written word.... It can rely on buildings, spaces, monuments, bodies and patterns of representing self and others’. (Birth 2006: 176)

In this chapter, the focus has been on locals who would rather forget their experiences during the war. This was derived from the desire to render forgotten memories of 'trauma' and 'guilt' incurred or associated with the war, or of the 'shame' for having survived, while others did not, and of having done something wrong, or perhaps not doing enough, sentiments that have led individuals to want to render the traumatic past passé, a theme that is ripe within the literature on trauma (see Culbertson 1995; Caruth 1991; Douglass and Vogler 2003). For some others, the desire to forget may also be socially driven such as the need to avoid remembering something that is potentially detrimental to race relations in Malaysia, able to cause pain in or to others, or out of economic imperatives (see Kusno 2003; Dimitrova 2005; Theriault 2003). The necessity of forgetting the war may be accomplished materially, through the *bodily* strategies of not talking about/ listening to war stories, discarding/ hiding any *objects* associated with the war, and being against/ not supporting memoryscapes, regardless of whether they are by the state or otherwise.

The second part of the chapter then provided examples of how, despite the intention to forget, and the (material) strategies adopted to let the war past slip into oblivion, the event at times 'emerges unbidden' as an 'immanent past' (Birth 2006), primarily through the process of 'involuntary remembering' such that the past does sometimes still impinge upon the present albeit unexpectedly (see Anderson B. 2004; Stanley 2000). In many cases, these situations arise through encounters with the very materials that war civilians have tried very hard to keep obscure so that memories of the war could be managed, thus showing how material culture may be manipulated not only to *presence* the war past, but also to render it *absent*. Yet, regardless of how the material is used to close the chapter on the war, it may also be a stumbling block

preventing the complete immersion of the war, evidencing the work of the immanent past and how it, as Birth (2006: 186) went on to say, ‘structure the reproduction of knowledge and subjectivity, as much as present concerns can shape the past’.

CHAPTER 10

Conclusion

10.1 Tense Pasts / Present Tensions: A Summary

This thesis has been concerned with how the Second World War is remembered (or forgotten) in the specific context of Perak in Malaysia. Drawing on memoryscapes of the war within the state, both within the public and private realms, it has examined how the state and its people have sought to memorialise (or render obscure) its tense pasts, and reveal the present tensions that are being played out within and through them. In addition, the thesis has also interrogated the role of the material in memory-making practices, particularly as it sheds light on the relationship between space and time, and in the ways that memoryscapes can become contested. This concluding chapter summarises the main arguments that the thesis has put forward, addressing three broad themes: postcolonial memory-making practices and politics; issues of grassroots remembrance, reception and resistance; and the role of materiality in processes of remembrance and forgetting. It also highlights the areas where the study makes key contributions to the wider literature on war memory and commemoration.

10.1.1 Postcolonial Memory-Making and its Politics

According to Ashplant (2000: 263), ‘one of the central tasks of the nation-state in war commemoration is to maintain or secure the unity of the imagined (national) community, and its associated narratives and rituals, in the face of sometimes acute divisions’. Often times, the ‘maintenance’ of such a national community involves the elite manipulation of the past, remembering aspects of it that serve present purposes and doing away with others that have the potency to destabilise prevailing political ideologies (Cooke 2000). Within pluralised postcolonial societies, this would also

include the desire to form a common history and identity for the population that are not only free from former ‘colonial’ associations, but also capable of binding the citizenry as one. With respect to war commemoration, elites of such nations, particularly multiracial ones, would thus often elect to only remember narratives of the war that can bring their national communities together, whilst downplaying those that have the potential to pull them further apart (see Anderson 1991; Johnson 1995).

This is an apt way to describe the route that official war commemoration in Malaysia has taken as a whole. Since Malaysia gained independence from the British, scholars have shown how the federal government has exorcised memories of its involvement during the Second World War (see Cheah 2007; Wang 2000). Such was also the case in Perak where the state government chose *not* to remember the war, sweeping the event under the proverbial carpet (along with other aspects of its Imperial past). The thesis has shown how this was, firstly, part of the strategy to forget aspects of the past that bore the ‘colonial’ legacy of the nation (of which the war was a part), perceived as working against a more ‘national’ identity to be forged. Also, it is argued how the controversial nature of the war ran the risk of raising ‘perilous memories’ (Fujitani et al 2001) – of ethnic rivalries, splintered loyalties and muddy readings over *who* the enemy really was – reopening old wounds that might potentially divide the diverse population and thus better left forgotten (Chapter 4).

As representations of the past may change with evolving current circumstances and demands (see Legg 2007; Halbwachs 1992 [1925]) and due to pressures to do so arising from within as well as without the nation (see Ashplant et al 2001; Muzaini and Yeoh 2005c), so they did in Malaysia where, in the late 1980s, the federal

government changed its attitude towards the war from disavowal towards embracing it as part of its national heritage. This may be attributed to the rising (international and local) pressures to remember the war in Malaysia brought about by the fiftieth anniversary of the war in 1992 that witnessed an array of commemorative activities on a global scale (see Wong 2001). On another level, though, it could simply be a reflection of how enough time has passed that marking the war that occurred when Malaysia was still British Malaya was no longer seen as contentious, particularly since many of the war generation with the potential ability to repudiate war narratives projected by the state tailored to national needs had, by then, died or were advanced in age. As memory gives way to history (Nora 1989), therefore, Malaysian federal elites are presented with a relatively blank slate to make the war 'their own'.

The thesis has shown how this change in federal attitudes towards the war has been translated in Perak, via the efforts of local state authorities, in myriad ways (see Chapters 5 and 6). Yet, the desire to 'own' the war as a nationally-significant event rather than present it as one that was part of 'colonial' Malaya still remained. The thesis has shown how, in line with federal practices, the Perak state has sought to then 'postcolonialise' what was a 'colonial' event, meaning to rework the fac(e)ts of the 'colonial' past (as well as its symbolic and material legacies) to serve current 'national' objectives. As such, although there is now the keen revival of narratives of the colonial war in Perak (as in Malaysia more generally), it is still done very selectively with an eye to presenting only aspects of that past that are palatable to current nation-building and eliding those that are not. This included, in particular, efforts to foreground more of the war experiences of its locals (as opposed to former colonial subjects) as well as privileging elements that speak to the nationalist ethos.

Such postcolonial practices of memory manipulation towards forging identities that are free from the trappings of how things were under former colonial regimes are not unique to Malaysia (see Lahiri 2003; McEwan 2003; Crampton 2001; Kusno 2000; Treacher 2007). Yet, at the same time, these have also pointed to how such ‘postcolonialising’ practices tend to fail. In Perak, this is exemplified by how the state has ended up reproducing many of the practices of its former colonisers particularly in the form of its selective remembering, towards fulfilling current needs, of some aspects of the past and omitting others. In doing so, the thesis has also shown how, despite its proclamations to allow for public representations of the war to depict more of its local war experiences, the state has been responsible for the continued suppression of subaltern voices and war experiences, as they were during colonial times, such as those perceived as irrelevant or against national aims and objectives, particularly those belonging to women and non-combatant war civilians.

As such, the thesis provides a case study of how the ‘postcolonial strivings for a new identity [often] do not completely banish the colonial past but involve the selective retrieval and appropriation of indigenous *and colonial* cultures to produce appropriate forms to represent the postcolonial present’ (see Yeoh 2003: 371, 1996). More importantly, it reflects how, as Bunnell (2004b: 298) puts it, ‘the *postcolonial* is often [still] marked by a perpetuation or even exacerbation of practices and violence associated with that period supposedly left behind’ (see also Yeoh 2001; 2003). The ways in which Perakians have taken issue with the state’s exclusion of local war experiences and rituals within official memoryscapes also raise questions as to whether ‘postcolonial’ projects do have the potential to liberate the voices of the suppressed in colonial discourses (see Yeoh 2003). This shows how there can be

limits to the extent that one may see any attempt to ‘postcolonialise’ a colonial event as ‘national’ to be a success since they are frequently undermined by what Jacobs (1996: 15, 23) calls ‘the anxious tenacity of colonialist tendencies’, where ‘citizens of newly independent nations and indigenous peoples face the force of neo-colonial formations and live lives shaped by the ideologies of domination’, although this does not mean that such neo-colonial forces may not be contested themselves (see below).

More generally, the thesis also highlights the contributions that can be made towards the wider literature by providing a rich ethnography of such practices in a non-Western context that varies from how commemoration is commonly depicted within cases drawn from the West, usually collectively framed and based on Judeo-Christian traditions. Particularly, it demonstrates how there can be many ways that acts of remembering past conflicts, based as it were on local customs and religious beliefs, may be practiced or, as the example of the Malays in Perak shows, even explicitly resisted in principle given how they are seen as going against Islamic tenets (see Chapter 7). Second, the thesis foregrounds the idea that what works as commemoration in some (Western) contexts may not apply to (non-Western) cases. This is clear, for example, in how memory-making practices that have been imported by the Perak state from Western traditions – such as through memorial ceremonies (see Chapter 6) – have been perceived as inappropriate to local sensibilities and thus shunned by Perakians in deference to their own ways of remembering the war (dead).

10.1.2 Grassroots Remembrance, Reception and Resistance

Many scholars have pointed out that memoryscapes of war – museums, monuments, cemeteries, ceremonies – are heavily contested phenomena, particularly in terms of

tensions arising from varying opinions as to what should be the best way to represent conflicts in the past and commemorate the dead from those conflicts (see Heffernan and Medlicott 2002; Kong 1999; Johnson 1994; Jarman 1999; Muzaini and Yeoh 2005b; Osborne 2001; Yea 1999). Similarly, the thesis has shown how official memoryscapes of war in Perak have indeed been fraught entities, where Perakians have criticised how the state has publicly represented the war and commemorated its war dead within Perak. Interestingly though, in Perak, there was never much public airing of these grievances. Even when the state (as well as the federal government) was reticent about marking the 'colonial' war in any way, there were no reactions from the general populace on the matter such that one might begin to think that Perakians are complicit with the state in thinking the war should indeed be forgotten.

Yet, Cheah (2007: 47) has already reminded us that, even when the federal (and state) authorities were hesitant about remembering the war during the first decades of the nation's independence, the event has always had a place in the hearts and minds of Malaysians, especially war civilians (see Ahmad A.T. 2003; Lim 1995). This is evidenced by the extent to which the war has indeed survived in Malaysia at the level of the grassroots (Wong 2001; Lim 2000; Haji Ismail and Haji Salleh 2003; Cheah 2007; Blackburn 2009) and transnational levels, such as within war cemeteries established by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC 2001). Indeed, these efforts initiated not from the 'top-down' but 'bottom-up' and 'beyond' the nation, have served to make the paucity of official remembrances, especially in the early *Merdeka* years, starker. The point is that commemoration can take place in many forms – public, private, over various scales – such that the non-remembrance of an event on the public level does not necessarily mean that the event is forgotten.

Similarly, in Perak, despite the state's nonchalance towards remembering the Second World War in the early years of Malaysia's independence in 1957, and the selective nature of its current commemorative efforts, the thesis has highlighted how practices of remembering the war at scales other than that of the national have always been around. This is clearly demonstrated in how memories of the war have been kept very much alive by local Perakians themselves including aspects of the war years that may have been marginalised or omitted within official remembrances by the state (see Chapter 7). These alternative forms of grassroots memory-making have taken a variety of forms, such as grave monuments, communal tombs, publications, objects kept and rituals practiced within the domestic realms of the home, as well as memorial ceremonies organised albeit on a more private capacity. As such, although the Perak state has been intent on exorcising memories of the colonial war, recollections of the event that have not attained public representational status, have still, on many occasions emerged on other, rather more private grassroots, platforms.

Prevailing geographical studies on war commemoration have tended to emphasise such processes on the more public and collective 'national' scale at the expense of the analysis of memoryscapes on other scales – the individual, the communal or the institutional – within more private realms (see Hebbert 2005; Atkinson 2007). Yet, the thesis has shown how there is much that can be learnt by casting the research net beyond the analyses of prominent memorials to also consider other ways in which wars can be marked in less public for(u)ms. In Perak, given the proclivities of the locals to refrain from publicly opposing official war remembrance efforts, it was only by seeking out, and examining, the ways in which the war is remembered by local war civilians in Perak that their voices and critical opinions emerged, and a better

understanding of the multi-stranded nature of their public silences achieved (see below). As such, to provide a more nuanced analysis of memory processes in any geographical context, the thesis foregrounds the importance of considering memory making activities that exist on multiple scales, on the grassroots as well as the level of the elites and, more significantly, how they interact and intersect with each other.

Many studies within current literature on (war) remembering are also prone to focus on what Nora (1989) refers to as 'sites of memory', where the task of remembering has increasingly been externalised from the mental faculty towards forms that are 'distanced' from the body (see also Lambek and Antze 1996), and how this has consequently led to the demise of more traditional types of remembering that are more embodied (rather than signified). The thesis, however, has shown that while such observations may be true in the West, such as in Nora's study on France, the same may not be so in other societies (Legg 2005a). As such, it challenges the tendency of prevailing geographical works on commemoration to only focus on what is *visually* perceived, particularly given the extent to which remembrance practices may vary in different contexts, some in ways that may not be visible and spatially bounded (see Curtoni et al 2003; Atkinson 2007). In this regard, the thesis also underlines the merit of oral interviews with war civilians as a means of revealing 'hidden geographies' of war remembrance (see Agnew 1993; Andrews et al 2006).

While grassroots memoryscapes may be able to 'recuperate' memories excluded from official commemorations, in terms of allowing them to survive in other forms and realms, it does not, however, necessarily make them any less political. The thesis has shown how grassroots efforts at remembrance may also serve as platforms for

commemorative activism. Indeed, there have been many local grassroots attempts to remember the war that are spearheaded by individuals who have their own private agendas. According to one respondent, 'Commemoration [in Perak] is very individual-centric if you have not already noticed. They say they are representing what the people really want but nobody has actually said anything to us [locals]. They just take it upon themselves to do it... [many] doing it for some reward, monetary, whatever!' This is exemplified in various cases in Perak, where grassroots remembrance efforts – such as the Green Ridge project (see Chapter 8) – have been seen by some as not really targeted for the people, despite proclamations otherwise.

The thesis has also shown how grassroots efforts to remember the war may be impeded by the non-backing of local Perakians themselves. This was seen, for one, in the case of Chye Kooi Loong's attempt to pressure the state into preserving Green Ridge (see Chapter 8). Although Chye managed eventually to get the state to accede to his request, the thesis has demonstrated how he continues to face challenges in the way of Perakians not keen on the commemoration of a battle they saw as 'not their history'. As such, it is apparent how elites, such as the state, are not the only ones quick to erase particular aspects of the past. Rather, the thesis argues how, far from being 'recuperative' (in terms of salvaging marginalised memories), grassroots efforts can be just as politically exclusive and an impediment to emergent memories (Confino 1997). This way, the thesis differs from studies on war commemoration drawn from Western contexts that have tended to romanticise 'bottom up' memory-making efforts as non-political agendas that only seek to champion aspects of the past that are victims to the selective memory practices of the elites (Bodnar 1992).

The case studies in this thesis have alluded to how state commemorations in Perak have been criticised by the people although one may not guess this from the extent that these criticisms have not been openly vocalised. The foregoing chapters have shown that these ‘silences’ that locals have chosen to maintain publicly on the matter do not (essentially) mean that they comply with what the state thinks are the best ways of remembering (or forgetting) the war. Rather, many of them do not even think about official memory-making practices, preferring to remember and transmit their memories ‘our own way’ (see Chapter 7). The reasons for deciding to maintain silence as opposed to publicly airing their complaints are multifaceted. These include the desire to practice commemoration according to personal preferences and cultural-religious rituals and conventions, the promulgation of alternative (non-state) collective identities and, particularly for those that have former relations with the MCP, to avoid official reprisals by remembering their past communist involvement.

In addition, there are also those who chose to not speak about their experiences, or publicly voice their disapproval of official remembrances, as they would rather forget what happened to them during the war, where ‘silence’ is an adaptive strategy to cope with traumatic pasts (see also Beristein et al 2000; Kilby 2002). Finally, the thesis has shown how some are reluctant to vocalise their war stories so as to prevent these stories from being subsumed – generalised, abstracted and collectivised – within larger national narratives writ large, that would then diminish the personal(ised) significance of their stories. As such, it would seem that the decision to ‘keep silent’ is indeed multi-stranded and does ‘play critical, if often unrecognised (or unremarked) roles in shaping not only private experience but ... the politically charged social relationships that make up public life’ (Sheriff 2000: 114; see also

Pitcher 2006). More than that, it also shows how ‘keeping silent’ itself can at times be enacted as a strategy of resistance, albeit one that does not arise in antithetical fashion to official remembrances (see also Spivak 1999; Muzaini and Yeoh 2007).

Many scholars have highlighted the difficulty, or even impossibility, of ever getting past the ‘colonial’ in ‘postcolonial’ enterprises (see Yeoh 2003; Sidaway 2000). This is clear in how, despite the intentions to capitalise upon its memories of the Second World War to forge a Malaysian identity that is ultimately ‘postcolonial’, the Perak state has still largely reproduced much of the imperial tendencies of its former British colonisers (see above). Yet, in considering the ways in which the war has also been remembered in Perak ‘from below’, much of it in ways that are not necessarily made visibly public but are still effective in keeping *their* memories of the war alive, the thesis has shown that the people on the ground still possess the agency to subversively ‘fight back’, if not to ‘speak up’, against such neo-colonial tendencies. This is what Jacobs (1996: 161) refers to as ‘the fantastic optimism of the term “postcolonialism”’, where it ‘is not so much about being beyond colonialism [that is important] as about attending to social and political processes that struggle against and work to unsettle the architecture of domination established through imperialism’.

10.1.3 Remembering, Forgetting and Materiality

Another key concept that framed the thesis more generally is that of materiality, particularly how, in Malaysia, places, objects and the body are usually entangled in complex ways within practices of remembering and forgetting the Second World War. This is apparent, first, in how the Perak state adopted material practices as a means of marking the war years (or not) within the state. If indeed, as Gillis (1994:

17) proclaims, remembrance is now difficult to achieve ‘without access to mementos, images, and physical sites to objectify their memory’, the initial practice of not commemorating the war, and unmarking or even destroying former sites in Perak that were associated with (the remembrance of) the war as it took place locally, would represent the desire to ultimately forget the war through the appropriation of the material. This is in the eventual hope that the elimination of public traces and visible manifestations of the war within national memoryscapes, the war as it happened in Perak would eventually be something of a distant memory for its people.

Similarly, when the state later decided to mark the war as part of its local heritage, the material world was once again manipulated to only allow the ideological vision/version of the war that the state would like to project as being the most natural, one that was able to provide its citizens with a shared history, and promoting tourism within Perak. Based on this, particular material traces of the war were promoted through its official memoryscapes whilst other more problematic aspects of the war were marginalised if not erased altogether. This may be exemplified in the ways that the state has named some streets after local war heroes and not others, or placed storyboards in some places, whereas other war-related places were left unmarked. By remembering some aspects of the war and not others, the Perak state could definitely be seen as appropriating the war in ways it would like its population to remember the event. At the same time, by rendering other material elements of the war unsaid or unmarked, these would run the risk of being forgotten by the people in the long run.

The salience of the material here first lies in its ability to allow for memories of particular aspects of the past to be remembered, and not others, based on the premise

that each component of the material world possesses its own ‘ghosts’ (read: memories) of the past (Bell 1997) and a ‘biography’ which tells of its own life history of former and present ownership, and previous roles it has played within social circulations (see Appadurai 1986; Hoskins 2007). Thus, selecting which of the material to serve as a focus of (war) commemoration determines which memory is most pertinent to be remembered, as much as marginalising certain places, objects and peoples also means the marginalisation of the stories or ‘biographies’ attached to them. In this respect, the thesis has shown how the selection, as well as the physical marking and discursive remarking upon some material sites and stories – such as via storyboards, storymaps, monuments and ceremonial speeches – as war-related and pertinent to be remembered, other material components left unmarked or not remarked upon are thus seen as irrelevant and less important (see Crang 1996, 1994).

The thesis also found, however, that while this does constitute a particular form of hegemonic strategy on the part of the Perak state government to make its people remember only aspects of the past that the state itself would prefer to remember, it has not always succeeded given that many Perakians, particularly war civilians, tend to remember the war in their own way regardless of how the state remembers it. The effectiveness of state strategies are also diminished by the fact that, for many of the locals, *embodied* memory making practices are perceived as a more natural way of remembering the past (vis-à-vis physical forms of memorialisation like museums and memorials) such that a particular site or building can still invoke memories of the war for them even if it has been torn down or left unmarked by the state. As Kassim (80, Taiping) mentioned, ‘it does not matter what the state wants to remember... the people will remember what they want to remember!’ Thus, while materiality has

been officially used to manipulate popular memory, it has also served to impede the state's ability to make Perakians remember some aspects of the war and not others.

Second, the thesis has also shown how the Perak state has capitalised upon the visual and 'memoried' nature of the material to *presence* the war past. For instance, in placing the heritage storyboards at the original sites where the events being narrated took place, or locating museums at locations that are historically significant, as with its state museums (see Chapter 5), it is the intention of the Perak state for Malaysians as well as foreign visitors to be virtually transported into the past, thus allowing them to imagine what happened during the war itself. If places possess 'ghosts' of everything that had happened there before (see Bell 1997), then the act of reading the storyboards are meant to instigate these 'ghosts' to affect the public, especially those who went through the war – via the word and the visual impact of 'being there' – of what occurred during the war. Yet, where Perakians are concerned, it would seem that while they appreciated the locational authenticity of the state's efforts, criticisms have arisen that this was done at the expense of the stories of the people themselves.

The manipulation of the material towards attending to present needs and circumstances was also obvious on other scales as well. The thesis has shown numerous examples where grassroots commemorative efforts – the personal, the institutional and the communal – have also taken advantage of the essence (or 'ghosts') that inhabit objects and places by organising their own *embodied* ceremonies, building their own *material* monuments and keeping their own things and objects associated with the war. Aside from providing cues to remind their beholders of the past, these objects also allowed for a locus of commemoration, as

intermediaries between the present and what happened in the past, the living and those who have passed away (Hallam and Hockey 2001; Saunders 2003a). As much as objects and places are ‘memoried’, so is the human body, exemplified by the tendency of Perakians to point towards war civilians as the main way in which memories of what happened in the state during the war are constantly remembered.

Although the material may be capitalised upon to invoke memories of the war, at times individuals have also sought to intentionally forget the war – what Rowlands (1999: 132) refers to as ‘an active process of forgetting’ – by discarding, concealing and not speaking about the event, and avoiding any situations where the war may be commemorated (see also Lambek and Antze 1996 and Stanley 2000 for similar). In Perak, there were indeed a few, especially war civilians – who have witnessed something that happened during the war that was so traumatic they would rather not remember – who have sought to forget or render obscure these traumatic war experiences through the manipulation of the materials of memory. In just the same way as the Perak government has attempted to *unremember* facets of the war by *unmarking* material components capable of invoking them, the intention by local Perakians here is to dispose and be rid of any material evidence of the war in his/her surroundings towards erasing what happened in the past from present consciousness.

However, the thesis also shows how these efforts may at the end of the day be futile given the possibility of the war past to sometimes emerge unbidden and, most often through the material strategies locals have adopted to render memories of the war forgotten. In this regard, the thesis has shown numerous cases where Perakians who seek to forget the war ever happened have had their intentions foiled by instances of

‘involuntary remembering’, where the material – in terms of sites, objects and the psychosomatic operations of the body – have led to individuals being reminded of the war even when they would rather these remain in the past (see Chapter 9). These instances manifest the workings of the ‘immanent past’, where ‘vestiges from the past... haunt and subtly structure intersubjective relations’ at times via ‘unwanted, anxiety-provoking flashbacks’ (Birth 2006: 186). As such, the thesis highlights how ‘the past does not evaporate, but persists in multiple ways’, capable of affecting individuals when they would rather not be affected by memories of the past (Berliner 2005: 201; Hutton 1993). While the thesis does not go so far as to suggest, as Forty (1999: 5) does, that ‘forgetting is an impossibility and oblivion non-existent’, it argues that insofar as the material can invoke memories in ways that are not predictable, it presents a stumbling block to forgetting or rendering the past passé.

In line with the growing popularity of the term ‘materiality’ within social and cultural geography (see Jackson 2000), the analyses of memory-making practices through the lens of ‘the material’ is an emergent one (see, for examples, Hoskins 2007; Tolia-Kelly 2004a, b; van der Hoorn 2003). Surprisingly though, such analyses are comparatively scarce on the subject of war commemoration (for an exception, see Saunders 2003a, b). In that respect, the thesis has thus shown how an examination of the diverse materialities of memory can indeed provide a much more nuanced understanding of the mechanics that lie behind the ways in which individuals and societies set out to *presence*, transmit or forget past conflicts, and how this may shed light on the relationship between memory, materiality and time. More importantly, it has also demonstrated how the tendency of the past to affect the present sometimes goes beyond human desires and intentionality (see Birth 2006; Anderson B. 2004). In

fact, it is at times possible that memories of a specific conflict can indeed at times ‘haunt’ the present regardless of whether individuals and societies want them to. To conclude, I would like to revisit Sybil’s Clinic at Papan with which the thesis began.

10.2 Sybil’s Clinic @ Papan Revisited

Chapter 1 began with the example of Sybil’s Clinic @ Papan – a private museum set up by Law Siak Hong to honour a local war heroine, Sybil Kathigasu – and the problems Law has faced since the museum first opened back in 2003. Particularly, Law pointed to the issue of the lack of state support – in terms of funds and infrastructure to Papan – that have made it difficult for the general public and foreign visitors (without private transportation) to visit the museum. Second, Law reckoned that, since there has not been much efforts put in by the state to promote Sybil Kathigasu as a prominent historical figure (as, say, compared to Lt. Adnan Saidi of the Malay Regiment), it would explain why not many Malaysians even know of Sybil, thus limiting the extent that Sybil’s Clinic was able to amass *local* and foreign visitors. On hindsight, though, based on the thesis findings, it would apparently be the case that there could be several other, much deeper more fundamental elements that may potentially pose significant challenges to Law’s labour of love.

More than financial and infrastructural constraints, it may be speculated that the reason why the Perak state has not taken notice of Sybil’s Clinic, and why it has been highly tentative in honouring Sybil as a local war heroine (see Chapter 5), is due to political factors, where the story of Sybil is tied to issues that have made her position within the war highly controversial. First, it could be that her Eurasian status goes against the Perak state’s tendency to privilege only *Malay* histories even if this

means that the memories of the other communities are marginalised, as we have seen in the case of the Pasir Salak Museum (see Chapter 5). Second, it may be that her non-combatant status was seen as not in keeping with the emphasis on national war narratives that privilege stories of ‘honour’ and ‘patriotism’ (Chapter 6). Although some might argue that Sybil did exhibit patriotic fervour in her contributions towards anti-Japanese efforts, it could also be the case that her gender, as a woman, has made her unsuited to insertion in a patriarchal national historiography (see Khoo A. 2007).

More than all this, however, it could be argued that Sybil has been somewhat marginalised within official memory making practices because of her links to members of the resistance fighters, many of whom were also members of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), whose heroic acts during the war were written off after the Emergency (see Ho T.F. 2000a). This means that Sybil may be perceived as a communist herself, where honouring her as a ‘national’ heroine is seen as running against official desire to exorcise memories of the insurgency. This has thus made Papan and Sybil’s Clinic highly unsuitable to be marked as heritage. In fact, some of my respondents pointed to this as to why they would not visit the museum. As Johan (20s, Ipoh) said, ‘Papan is a communist nest. I hear there are still many communists there. I would never... visit the museum. It will be too awkward for Malays’. As such, Sybil’s links with the MPAJA may have led to Law’s inability to increase visitorship to the museum. It might also explain why the state has not been keen on the project, both financially and in facilitating public transport to allow better access.

Three particular incidents may exemplify the lack of state *as well as* popular support for Law’s project. For many years now, Law has embarked on a number of initiatives

to familiarise Sybil not only with Perakians but the national Malaysian citizenry in the hope that more people would know about this civilian woman who contributed towards anti-Japanese activities. Most recently, in June 2008, Law, in association with the Actors Studio, staged a 100-minute play in Ipoh and in Kuala Lumpur about Sybil because her ‘noble acts needed to be remembered by all and that the play would be one way for the public to learn about her life’ (Law, cited in *The Star* 9 June 2008) (**Fig. 10.1**). The play did not, however, do well. Aside from criticisms that it was too violent, seen as a ‘deeply disturbing assault on audience sensibilities’ (see *The Star* 17 June 2008), the play was also hit by poor attendance, which caused shows to be cancelled, a sign of just how much Sybil Kathigasu is still a name locals are not able to, or perhaps do not want to, identify with, which raises questions as to whether the museum is going to be popular with Malaysians as Law had intended.

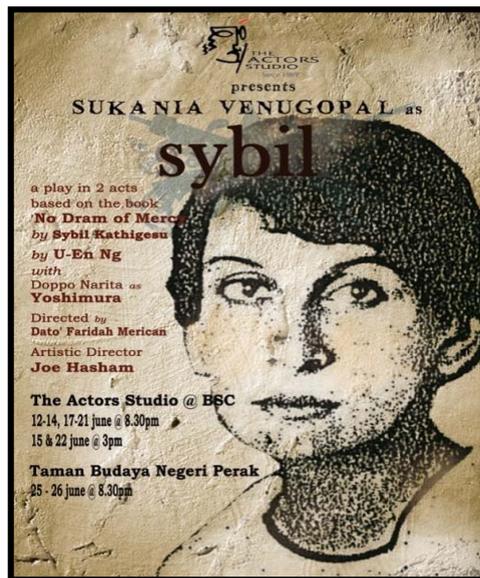


Fig. 10.1: Poster for *Sybil*, the play

To generate more interest in Papan, on 18 August 2007, Law also held an event, ‘Papan Memories’, where visitors were invited to wander around Sybil’s Clinic, treated to history talks, taken on night walks through the ruins of Papan, regaled with

performances put up by local Papanites ‘by candle- and car head-lights’, and an elaborate supper spread of local delicacies, including the main speciality during the war, tapioca (*Business Times* 24 August 2007). This event was co-organised by the Perak Heritage Society (PHS) as well as the residents of the town, such that it serves to not only allow these residents to be proud of the town’s history but also to let them participate in promoting this history to the public. According to Law, the event was well received: ‘It was a good night... the people had fun’. Yet, while attendees were appreciative of the events that were inserted into ‘Papan Memories’, it is noteworthy that it was mainly the Chinese who came, whereas the Malays largely stayed away, perhaps a reflection of the Chinese roots of Papan (and MPAJA heritage), something Chinese Perakians were able to identify with and the Malays ultimately could not.

Third, it has always been Law’s intention to capitalise upon the Perak state’s recent gazetting of the *Raja Bilah* House and Mosque in Papan (**Fig. 10.2**) – physical structures belonging to a former chieftain of the Mandailings, who settled there from Sumatra and who contributed much to the early tin mining history of Papan, alongside the Malays, before Chinese miners took over – as ‘national’ icons and developing them into local heritage attractions in Perak.²² As Law says: ‘If *Raja Bilah* House is developed, there is [therefore] a higher chance that the state might support [the Clinic] in its plans since they are all located very close to one another’ (pers. comm. 2007). As such, Law is very hopeful that, in raising the profile of Sybil and the museum through events like the ones above, he might be able to get the state

²² The century-old Mandailing double-storey mansion made of bricks and *cengal* timber with eight-sided columns to symbolise that the building was erected with the support of people from the eight directions of the compass. The house was mostly used for ceremonies such as weddings, feasts and other receptions, rather than as a residence for the late local chieftain, Raja Bilah. A few metres away, there is also the old 1888 Papan Mosque, believed to be the last remaining large-scale 19th century mosque of Mandailing architecture found in the country and Indonesia (Chan 2003; Lubis undated).

interested in supporting the Clinic as an added attraction to accompany *Raja Billah* House and Mosque and designation of Papan as an expose of the Mandailing past.



Fig. 10.2: Raja Bilah House, Papan (source: author)

Yet, it does not look like this will happen. For one thing, while the state gazettement of *Raja Bilah* House and Mosque took place some time ago, the actual restoration of the buildings on the ground has been slow causing many locals to wonder if it would happen at all. Also, when state officials recently approached Law, as president of the Perak Heritage Society, in December 2008, about developing a few local history attractions, despite knowing about Law's own labour of love in Papan, Sybil's Clinic was not included in the subsequent list of new places to be preserved (*Heritage News* February 2009). Thus, Law still has a long way to go in terms of promoting Sybil as a household name among Malaysians, and getting the state interested in doing more to elevate Sybil as a local war heroine. While this might be attributed to the general bureaucratic red tape associated with such heritage projects in Perak, the nature of the story of Sybil, particularly in the light of the state's tendency towards selective remembering, would certainly also be a possible candidate to explain the state's non-interest in commemorating her. Given the challenges stacked against it, it appears

that the name Sybil is either going to remain obscure in the consciousness of the local people, or perceived as a problematic war personality that is best left forgotten.

Yet, this does not mean that memories of Sybil are going to be forgotten, since aspects of the past that are not made public or are officially forgotten in Perak do not necessarily mean that they may not be remembered or commemorated elsewhere through grassroots memoryscapes. Indeed, as the thesis has shown, it is the case that the Sybil story is still being told although not necessarily in public. Aside from the fact that the problems Law has faced thus far have not at all discouraged him from doing what he has been doing all this time, others who knew (of) Sybil, like her only surviving daughter, Olga, will also continue to be, at least for the moment, living testaments to Sybil, the woman, and what she did during the war (see *The Star* 10 March 2007) (**Fig. 10.3**). As she put it: ‘Even if the people forget, I will remember her’ (indicated to me by Law, pers. comm. 2008). Sybil’s graveyard at St. Michael’s Church in Ipoh also continues to be a popular pilgrimage site not only for those who knew her personally but also history enthusiasts who have read her autobiography.



Fig. 10.3: Olga Kathigasu (Source: *The Star* 10 March 2007)

As such, though the Perak state government may be reluctant or tentative to mark Sybil as a 'local' heroine, as exemplified through her non-inclusion within official school textbooks and by naming a road after her without much accompanying explanation of what she did during the war (Chapter 5), it would seem memories of Sybil and what she did during the war have indeed survived elsewhere such as in the form of her daughter as well as other heritage enthusiasts who have taken a more personal interest in her story. Thus, it seems that as much as some Perakians (the state included) would like to render memories of Sybil, and much of what happened during the war irretrievably lost, it does not look like this will happen anytime soon. As Cheah (2007: 57) says of war memories in Malaysia more generally, despite official attempts to forget the nation was part of the 'colonial' Second World War', it is safe to say that 'exorcising ghosts of the World War II will take a very long time'.

APPENDIX A

COMPLETE LIST OF INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED (p.1 of 3)

S/no.	Name	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Location/ Remark
1.	Abu Bakar	54	M	M	Slim River
2.	*+Ahmad	81	M	M	Slim River, Home Interview (related to Ida – daughter)
3.	Ali	20s	M	M	Ipoh
4.	+Alice	30s	F	C	Taiping (Manager, Peking Hotel, Taiping)
5.	*Alisha	80s	F	C	Ipoh
6.	Allen	35	M	C	Kampar
7.	Asmah	49	F	M	Ipoh
8.	Azi	20s	F	M	Taiping
9.	Azmi	31	M	M	Tapah
10.	Badrul	40s	M	M	Perak State Government
11.	*Chan	88	M	C	Taiping (Walking Interview)
12.	Cheng	20	M	C	Ipoh
13.	Chong	30s	M	C	Kampar
14.	*+Chye Kooi Loong	83	M	C	Kampar (Military Historian; Author; Activist for Green Ridge) 3 Home Interviews; Walking Interviews
15.	Dalilah	20s	F	M	Ipoh
16.	Rosman	70s	M	M	Bagan Serai (retired taxi driver)
17.	Fatimah	47	F	M	Taiping
18.	*Habsah	79	F	M	Kampar
19.	*Halimah	71	F	M	Bagan Serai (Walking Interview)
20.	Hamidon	35	M	M	Kampar
21.	+Harchand Singh	20s	M	I	Ipoh (Organiser, Heritage Enthusiast; Sikh Exhibition)
22.	*Hashim	78	M	M	Taiping (Walking Interview)
23.	*+Hassan	84	M	M	Taiping (Home Interview)
24.	*Herman	77	M	M	Taiping (Walking Interview)
25.	*Hui	76	M	C	Gerik
26.	+Ida	47	F	M	Slim River (see Ahmad)

COMPLETE LIST OF INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED (p. 2 of 3)

S/no.	Name	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Remark
27.	*Jaafar	84	M	M	Ipoh (Home Interview)
28.	Jamal	59	M	M	Bidor
29.	*Jean	80	F	I	Kampar (Home Interview)
30.	*Jiang	80s	M	C	Ipoh, formerly involved with the MCP/ Emergency
31.	Johan	20s	M	M	Ipoh
32.	*Joyah	80s	F	M	Gerik
33.	Justine	35	F	C	Batu Gajah
34.	*Karim	79	M	M	Taiping
35.	*Kamal	74	M	M	Taiping (Walking Interview)
36.	Karim	40s	M	M	Kampar
37.	Kartina	59	F	M	Kampar
38.	*Kassim	80	M	M	Taiping
39.	Kiah	20s	F	M	Gerik
40.	+Law Siak Hong	50s	M	C	Perak Heritage Society (Historian; President of PHS; Owner of Sybil's Clinic)
41.	*Leman	70s	M	M	Ipoh – Orang Asli (Met at Cenotaph Remembrance)
42.	*Lim	83	M	C	Kamunting (Involvement in RAF; Japanese Prisoner); Home interviews conducted in Kamunting
43.	Low	30s	M	C	Ipoh
44.	+Md Taib	50s	M	M	Ipoh
45.	*Meng	73	M	C	Lenggong
46.	*Moin	79	M	M	Slim River; Home Interviews; with wife (Opah) and daughter (Nurul) present
47.	+Nurul	19	F	M	Slim River; Home Interview (see Moin)
48.	*Omar	81	M	M	Kuala Kangsar (Walking Interview)
49.	Ong	54	M	C	Caretaker, Taiping War Cemetery (2 On-Site Interviews)

COMPLETE LIST OF INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED (p. 3 of 3)

S/no.	Name	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Remarks
50.	*+Opah	69	F	M	Slim River; Home Interview (see Moin)
51.	Pritam	40s	M	I	Kampar
52.	Rahimah	46	F	M	Ipoh (Walking Interview)
53.	*Raihan	89	M	M	Taipung (Home Interview)
54.	+Rainah	26	F	M	Ipoh
55.	*Ramlı	80s	M	M	Batu Gajah (Home Interview)
56.	*Rashid	72	M	M	Kampar
57.	Salehah	42	F	M	Bidor
58.	*+Santokh Singh	70s	M	I	Ipoh (President, Diwan Khalsa, Ipoh; Organiser of Diwan ceremonies)
59.	Seah	45	M	C	Kampar
60.	*Selvi	79	F	I	Ipoh
61.	*Seng	78	M	C	Taipung
62.	Siva	37	M	I	Ipoh
63.	*Tan	68	M	C	Ipoh
64.	+Tan Chuan Hin	40s	M	C	Kampar (Author of Heritage Books on Kampar; Journalist)
65.	Tay	30s	M	C	Ipoh (Heritage Enthusiast, Photographer)
66.	Teng	42	M	C	Ipoh
67.	*Teo	79	M	C	Kuala Kangsar (Home Interviews)
68.	*+Thambipillay R. (Datuk)	80s	M	I	Ipoh (Organiser, Cenotaph Remembrance, God's Little Acre ceremonies; Author of <i>God's Little Acre</i> and <i>Malayan Police Force During the Emergency</i>); Involvement in Emergency; 3 Home Interviews
69.	*Vincent	82	M	C	Taipung
70.	*Zainal	78	M	M	Bagan Serai (Walking Interview)

Notes:

- * This denotes that the person is a war civilian (aged > 65y.o. when fieldwork started); i.e. went through some aspect of the war years.
- + This denotes actual names were used throughout the thesis.

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE AIDE MEMOIRE FOR PERAKIANS FROM THE POST-WAR GENERATION* (p. 1 of 2)

Interview information:

- Date/ time/ venue of interview

Biographical information:

- What is your name/ age/ educational qualifications/ gender?
- Do you know of people who have gone through the war? What is your relationship with them? Where are they now?

Knowledge about the war:

- Do you know much about the war? Can you tell me a little about what you know about the war?
- How did you learn about the war? Did you learn about the war in school? What did you think of it? Do you think that more should be done to teach you about the war in schools?

Thoughts on war commemoration:

- Do you think it is important to remember the war? Why (not)?
- Do you have family members who tell you about the war?
- If yes, through what forms have the information been passed down to you (story-telling; warnings; scoldings)?
- (What is the role of actual sites and places, and objects in the way that this knowledge has been passed down to you?)
- How do you think the war should be remembered?

Thoughts on public war commemoration:

- What do you think of how the war is publicly commemorated today?*

[PROMPT: Cenotaph monument; Taiping War cemetery; the Green Ridge project; Cenotaph Remembrance; storymaps, storyboards; street names; museums; etc]

- Are you familiar with any of the public war commemoration sites in Perak?

SAMPLE AIDE MEMOIRE FOR PERAKIANS FROM THE POST-WAR GENERATION* (p. 2 of 2)

- Are you concerned that memories of the war are slowly dying out?
- Do you think the state has done enough to remember the war?
- Do you think it is important for the state to remember the war? If not the state then who do you think should do it?
- Do you know of any other instances where the war is remembered?

Transmission of war memory:

- Would you tell war stories to your children?
- Do you talk about the war with others?
- Do you think it is important for you to ensure the war is not forgotten?
- If yes, how do you think you would help towards achieving this?

* Note: These are generally guide questions and were only loosely adhered to.

**Aside from these questions, each was asked about the particular site of commemorative efforts where I encountered them e.g. near the Cenotaph; near the storyboards etc.

APPENDIX C

LIST OF GAZETTED BUILDINGS IN IPOH (p. 1 of 2)

1. Perak River Hydro Building, Jalan Maharaja Lela
2. Birch Memorial, Jalan Dewan
3. Ipoh Railway Station, Jalan Panglima Bukit Gantang Wahab
4. Ipoh Town Hall, Jalan Panglima Bukit Gantang Wahab
5. Ipoh High Court, Jalan Panglima Bukit Gantang Wahab
6. *Bangunan Pejabat Hal Ehwal Agama Islam dan Adat Istiadat Melayu Ipoh,
Jalan Panglima Bukit Gantang*
7. Ipoh Anglo Chinese School, Jalan Lahat
8. Ipoh Convent School, Jalan Sultan Idris Shah
9. Ipoh Anderson School, Jalan Ashby
- 10. Ipoh St Michael's Institution, Jalan S P Seenivasagam**
11. *Wesley Church, Jalan Lahat*
12. Masjid Panglima Kinta, Jalan Masjid
13. St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Jalan Race Course
14. Masjid India Muslim, Jalan S P Seenivasagam
15. 'Tambun Cave', Gunung Panjang, Tambun
16. Masjid Kg Paloh, Jalan Datoh
- 17. Royal Ipoh Club, Jalan Panglima Bukit Gantang Wahab**
- 18. Hong Kong and Shanghai Building, Jalan Sultan Yussuff**
19. 'Balai Bomba', Jalan Sultan Idris Shah
20. Ipoh Education Office, Jalan Tun Razak
21. St John the Devine Church, Jalan St John
22. Markas Regimen, Jalan Raja DiHilir

LIST OF GAZETTED BUILDINGS IN IPOH (p. 2 of 2)

23. Bulan Bintang Building, Jalan Chin Hwa

24. FMS Bar & Restaurant, Jalan Sultan Idris Shah

25. Ipoh Padang, Jalan S P Seenivasagam

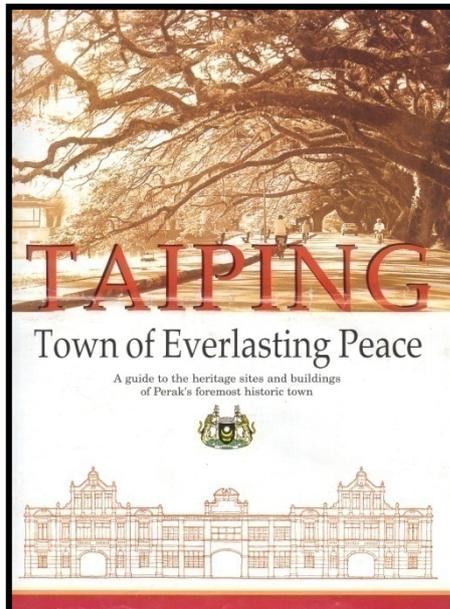
(Source: Heritage News – A Bimonthly Newsletter of the Perak Heritage Society Volume 5 issue 6, February 2009, p. 7)

Notes: No. 6 and 11 were burnt in fires and are not longer standing; in bold are the three sites that mention the war

APPENDIX D

HERITAGE STORYMAP LISTINGS (p. 1 of 5)

Taiping Storymap (source: Taiping Municipal Council 1997)*



The map shows a grid of streets including Station Road, Main Road, Barrack Road, and others. Numbered locations 1 through 15 are marked on the map. A legend indicates that a blue line represents a 'driving tour' and a yellow line represents a 'walking tour'. A note states '*Military establishment, restricted access'.

1 Kapitan Chung Keng Kooi's Townhouse, Barrack Road
A prominent tin-miner and leader of the Taiping Hakka community, Chung Keng Kooi (1829-1901) was also a Kapitan China of Perak and sat on the Perak State Council. His eldest son Chung Ah Yong, who resided here, was a member of the Taiping Sanitary Board and "all the important racing clubs". He employed an European trainer for his prize-winning race horses and maintained his stables at 12,000 dollars a year.

2 Post and Telegraph Office, Station Road
The first Post Office in the FMS, built in 1884, to replace an earlier timber building. The post from Taiping was carried by a relay of runners (dak) and ponies.

3 Perak Museum, Main Road
The Perak Museum, the first in the country, was started in 1883 in the former government offices. The building was developed in stages from 1886 to 1903. The first curator was Leonard Wray, who built up the much admired natural history and ethnological collections, including a section on the aboriginal peoples. Assembled in the grounds today are a stone marking the site of Maharaja Lela's Fort and the statue of Col. Walker.

4 Town Rest House, Station Road
The Town Rest House was built in 1894, near the former Taiping Railway Station at Station Road. George Peet who stayed there in 1933 remarked, "It was known as the 'Raja Resthouse' but I could find no rajas in the visitors' book".

5 King Edward VII School, Station Road
The Central School, started in 1883, was the first English school in the Malay States. It was renamed the King Edward VII School when the present building was opened in 1905. The angasana trees of "the most picturesque school ground in Malaya" were planted in 1910. The school excelled in sports, especially football, rugby, hockey and athletics. During the Japanese Occupation, the school was the base of the garrison commander who converted the classrooms into torture chambers and dug up the playgrounds to grow food.

6 Ceylon Association, Station Road
The Ceylonese Tamils came to Perak in the 1880s to join the civil service and build the railways. In 1899, they founded the Ceylonese Association and put up the building two years later.

7 St. George's Institution, Station Road
The Catholic boys' school was established in 1918 and 13 years later the original building was extended with a wing on each side. During the Japanese Occupation, the school served in turn as Nippon Go Gakko (Japanese school), Kempetai (Japanese military police) base and Japanese officers' hotel.

8 FMS Indian Association, Main Road
The founder was Sheikh Nunne-meah. In 1925, his son-in-law, a Ceylonese Muslim named Dr. I. Md. Ghows presented the building to the association for the use of both Muslim and Hindu ethnic Indians.

HERITAGE STORYMAP LISTINGS (p. 2 of 5)

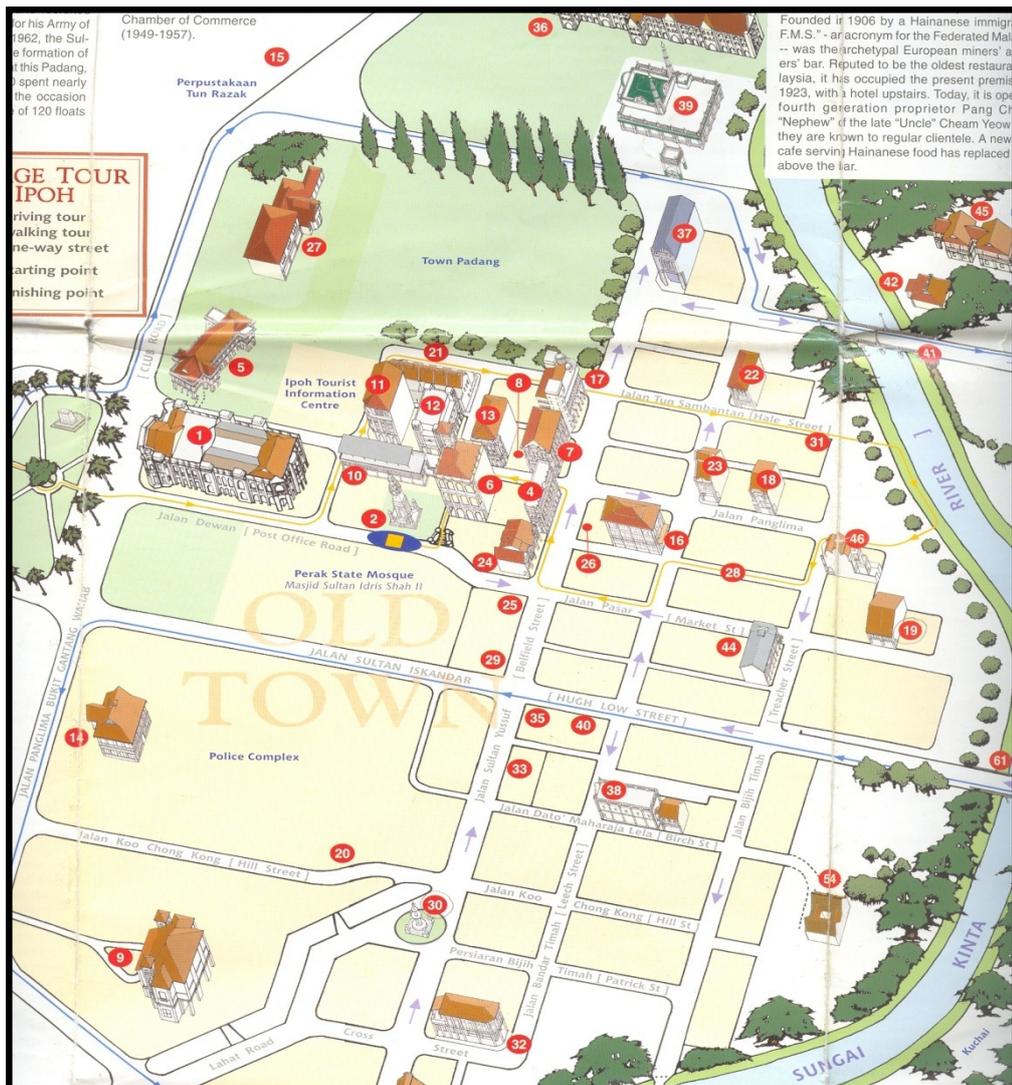
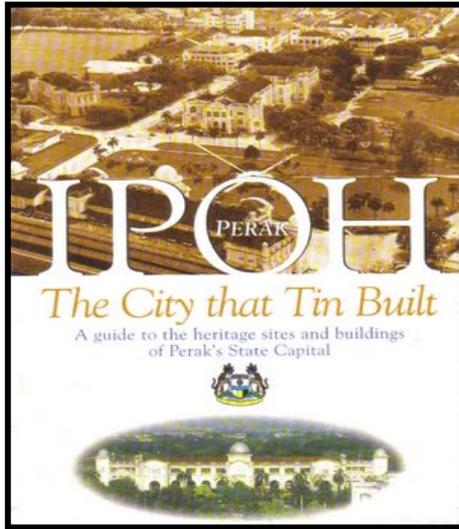
Sites Included in the Taiping Heritage Storymap:

- 1) Taiping Government Offices, Kota Road (1895)
- 2) Kapitan Chung Keng Kooi's Townhouse, Barrack Road
- 3) Post and Telegraph Office, Station Road (1884)
- 4) Town Rest House, Station Road (1894)
- 5) King Edward VII School, Station Road (1905)**
- 6) Ceylon Association, Station Road (1901)
- 7) St. George's Institution, Station Road (1915)**
- 8) General Hospital, Main Road (1881)
- 9) FMS Indian Association, Main Road (1925)
- 10) The Keling Mosque, Kota Road (1969)
- 11) Taiping Convent, Convent Road (1938)**
- 12) Tengku Menteri's Residence PWD 41, Kota Road
- 13) Hokkien Association, Kota Road (1931)
- 14) Sunlight Muslim Association, 212 Kota Road
- 15) Old Kota Mosque, Mosque Road (1897)
- 16) Peking Hotel, 2 Jalan Idris (1929)**
- 17) Coronation Park, Theatre Road (1920s)
- 18) Tseng Lung Hakka Association, Market Road (circa 1887)
- 19) Taiping Market, Market Square (1884/5)
- 20) Police Station, Kota Road
- 21) Guan Hin Chan, 19 Cross Street No. 4**
- 22) Shun-te hui-kuan, 36 Kota Road (possibly 1895)
- 23) Cantonese Association and Temple for Immortal Girl, Temple Street (1887)
- 24) Taiping Public Library, Kota Road (1888)
- 25) Taiping Lake Gardens, Circular Road (1884)
- 26) Taiping War Cemetery, Waterfall Road**
- 27) Ng Boo Bee Fountain, Waterfall Road
- 28) The Residency, Residency Road (1884)
- 29) The New Club and Golf Course, New Club Road (1894)
- 30) Cenotaph, Esplanade Road**
- 31) The Secretary to Resident's House, Esplanade Road (1890s)
- 32) Chinese Tombs, Esplanade Road
- 33) Malay States Guides Barracks, Main Road (1880s)
- 34) British Officers' Mess, New Club Road
- 35) Old Saints Church, Main Road (1886)
- 36) Fort Carnavon, Main Road (1881)
- 37) Lady Treacher Girls' School, Upper Museum Road (1941)**
- 38) Perak Museum, Main Road (1883)
- 39) Taiping Gaol, Main Road (1879)**

* In bold are sites that mention the war

HERITAGE STORYMAP LISTINGS (p. 3 of 5)

Ipoh Storymap (source: Perak State Government 1999)*



HERITAGE STORYMAP LISTINGS (p. 4 of 5)

Sites Included in the Ipoh Heritage Storymap:

- 1) Town Hall Building, Club Road (1916)
- 2) Birch Memorial, Post Office Road (unveiled in 1909)
- 3) The Railway Station, Club Road (1917)**
- 4) Chung Thye Pin Building, 14 Station Road (1907)
- 5) The Court House, Club Road (1928)**
- 6) Straits Trading Building, 2 Station Road (1889)
- 7) S.P. H. De Silva, 43 Station Road (business in 1950s)
- 8) Leong Yew Koh's Legal Firm 37 Station Road (business in 1920s)
- 9) State Medical and Health Office, Club Road
- 10) Municipal Car Park, Post Office Road (1962)
- 11) Perak Hydro Building, Cooper Road (1930s)
- 12) Merchantile Bank Building, 15 Station Road (1931)
- 13) The Chartered Bank, 21-27 Station Road (1902)
- 14) The Central Police Station, Club Road (1911)
- 15) The Church of St. John's the Divine, St. John's Road (1912)**
- 16) Dramatists' Hostel, 75 Leech Street (1920s)
- 17) Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, 138 Belfield Street (1931)
- 18) Perak Ku Kong Chow Kung Wui Association, 39 Panglima Street (1928)
- 19) Kian Aik Chan, 77 Market Street**
- 20) Pakistani Mosque, Hill Street (1930s)
- 21) Residence and Law Office of the Seenivasagam Brothers, 7 Hale Street
- 22) Ali Pitchay's Townhouse, 22 Hale Street
- 23) Kin Kwok Daily News, 21 Panglima Street
- 24) Jan Sahib's Office and others, 128-136 Belfield Street
- 25) Jaya Villas's, 102-4 Belfield Road
- 26) Mikasa Photo Shop and Others, 93-95 Belfield Street**
- 27) Royal Ipoh Club and Padang, Club Road (1898)**
- 28) Panglima Lane, Jee Lai Hong
- 29) Kinta School of Commerce, 84 Belfield Street (1936)
- 30) Birch Fountain, Belfield Street**
- 31) Yat Loo Club and Perak Chinese Mining Association, 71-73 Hale Street
- 32) Kinta Aerated Water, 1-3 Leech Street
- 33) Star Printing Works, 75 Belfield Road (1933)
- 34) Straits Trading Company Warehouses, 1-3 Belfield Street
- 35) Ambika Estates Office, 4 Hugh Low Street (1950s)
- 36) St. Michael's Institution, Clayton Road (1912)**
- 37) F.M.S. Bar and Restaurant, 2 Brewster Road (1906)
- 38) Eu Tong Sen 1907, 36-38 Leech Street (1907)
- 39) Town Padang Mosque, Clayton Road (1908)

HERITAGE STORYMAP LISTINGS (p. 5 of 5)

- 40) Overseas Building, 12 and 14 Hugh Low Street (1932)
 41) Birch Bridge, Brewster Road (1907)
 42) Guan Yin Temple, Brewster Road
43) Foong Seong Villa, Laxamana Road (1931)
 44) Sinhalese Bar, 2 Treacher Street
 45) Malay House, Kampong Jawa
 46) Han Chin Pet Soo, 3 Treacher Street (1929)
47) Lam Looking Bazaar, Laxamana Road (1933)
 48) Mausoleum of Wan Muhammad Saleh, Kampong Paloh
 49) Kampong Paloh Mosque, Jalan Datoh (1912)
 50) Kinta Fire Brigade, Brewster Road (1913)
 51) Singapore Cold Storage, 1-5 Clare Street
 52) KG V Silver Jubilee Rotary Home for Destitute Boys, South Treacher Street
 53) Chua Cheng Bok Building, 94 Brewster Road (1930s)
 54) Pa Lo Ku Miao, People's Park (1872)
 55) Warta Kinta Office, 5 Jalan Datoh
 56) Information Centre, 75-95 Brewster Road (circa 1940)
 57) Times of Malaya Building, 107-111 Brewster Road (1930s)
58) Oriental Hotel, Anderson Road
59) Mo Ching's Home, 6 Clare Street (former Tong Ah Hotel)
 60) Dato' Seri Adika Raja's House, 20 Jalan Datoh (1910)
 61) Hugh Low Bridge, Hugh Low Street (1900)
62) Sybil Kathigasu's Home, 144 Brewster Road
63) Children's Playground, Anderson Road
 64) Dato' Panglima Kinta's Mosque, Jalan Mesjid (1898)
 65) Perak Chinese Amateur Dramatic Association, 2 Osborne Street (1938)
 66) Yau Tet Shin Market and Shopping Centre, Cowan Street
 67) St. Michael's Church, Church Road (1890s)
68) The Convent, Brewster Road (1907)
 69) Malay Girls' School, Jalan Mesjid
 70) Kingsvilla, Hugh Low Street
 71) Chinese Association Buildings, 4-12 Jalan Mesjid (1930s-50s)
 72) 1903 House, Kampong Kuchai (1903)
73) Japanese Counter-espionage Headquarters, 7 Chapman Street
74) Anglo Chinese School, Lahat Road
 75) Kota Tuan Habib, Istana Road, Kampung Pisang
 76) Panglima Lane, Lane of Second Concubines
77) Anglo Chinese Girls' School, Kampar Road (1927) (now MGS)
78) Anderson School, Douglas Road (1909) and Ashby Road (moved in 1941)
79) Muzium Darul Ridzuan, Douglas Road (building set up in 1926)

* In bold are sites that mention the war

APPENDIX E

OFFICIAL PROGRAMME FOR CENOTAPH CEREMONY 12 JUNE 2008




REMEMBRANCE PROGRAMME

Date: 13 June 2008 (Friday)
Time: 9.00 am
Venue: CENOTAPH
 (In front of Ipoh Railway Station)
 Jalan Panglima Bukit Gantang Wahab
 Ipoh, Perak.

ORGANISED BY :
 WORKING COMMITTEE
 REMEMBRANCE
 PROGRAMME

SUPPORTED BY :


MTPN PERAK


**MAJLIS BANDARAYA
IPOH**

ITINERARY PROGRAMME

9.00am	Arrival of guests
9.15am	School Band by St. Michael's Institution, Ipoh
9.25am	Invite Guest of Honour to receive salute from Band Master
9.30am	Welcome address by Dato' R.Thambipillay (Organising Chairperson)
9.40am	'Lament' by Bag pipers from Royal Gurkha Regiment Brunei
9.45am	Bugle Call- Last Post by Royal Gurkha Regiment Brunei, followed by a minute's silence
9.50am	Bacaan Doa/Reverend/Hindu/Sikh/Buddhist priests
10.00am	Symbolic Wreath laying by the Guest of Honour
10.15am	Closing address by H.E. Mr. Boyd McCleary, High Commissioner for United Kingdom
	Quick March by Royal Gurkha Regiment Brunei
	Refreshments
11.30am	END

***Attire:** **Dark Lounge Suite**

APPENDIX F

OFFICIAL PROGRAMME FOR BATU GAJAH CEREMONY 14 JUNE 2008 (p. 1 of 3)



**PERSATUAN MINYAK SAWIT MALAYSIA - PERAK
MALAYSIAN PALM OIL ASSOCIATION (MPOA) - PERAK**
(Nombor Pendaftaran Pertubuhan 1045)

REGISTERED OFFICE : NO. 7 JALAN HUSSEIN,
(PO BOX 424) 30750 IPOH,
PERAK DARUL RIDZUAN.
TEL / FAX NO. 05-254 9582

**MEMORIAL SERVICE
AT THE LITTLE ACRE IN BATU GAJAH
ON SATURDAY, 14 JUNE 2008**

TENTATIVE PROGRAMME

- 7:30 a.m. 1. Service at the Church of the Holy Trinity, Batu Gajah.
Lesson by H.E. Ms. Penny Williams, Australian High Commissioner
Address by Mr. R.Sivalingam, Chairman Little Acre Sub-Committee
Malaysian Palm Oil Association - Perak Branch
- 8:00 a.m. 2. Adjourn to Cemetery (i.e. Little Acre) for Wreath Laying Ceremony.
- 8:30 a.m. a) Arrival of the Guest of Honour - ACP Najib bin Mohamad, Ketua Polis Daerah Batu Gajah (representing the Chief Police Officer Perak) who will go to the dais and take the salute. He will inspect the Guards of Honour. He will then return to the dais and take the salute.
- b) The Chairman of Malaysian Palm Oil Association - Perak (Mr Ong Buck), will introduce ACP Najib bin Mohamad to VIPs and Guests present. Thereafter ACP Najib bin Mohamad and all present will be seated.
- c) Prayers led by Anglican Padre.
- d) Last Post followed by 1 Minute Silence after which ACP Najib bin Mohamad assumes his formal position.
- e) ACP Najib bin Mohamad lays symbolic wreath.
- f) Lament by Gurkha Pipers from Brunei
- g) Wreath laying by representatives of the following organizations:-
- | | | | |
|----|--|---|--|
| 1) | Malaysian Palm Oil Association
- Perak Branch | - | Mr Ong Buck
Chairman |
| 2) | Markas Briged Kedua
Infanteri Malaysia | - | Lt.Kol.Firdaus
Quah Bin Abdullah |
| 3) | Briged Utara
Pasukan Gerakan Am | - | Supt.Haji Roslan
Bin Haji Mohd.Noor |

**OFFICIAL PROGRAMME FOR BATU GAJAH CEREMONY
14 JUNE 2008 (p. 2 of 3)**

4)	British High Commission	-	H.E. Mr Boyd McCleary High Commissioner
5)	Australian High Commission	-	H.E. Ms Penny Williams High Commissioner
6)	New Zealand High Commission	-	H.E.Mr David Kersey High Commissioner And Capt.Steve Streefkerk Defence Adviser
7)	Malaysian Palm Oil Association	-	Mr Ravindranath G.Menon
8)	United Plantations Berhad	-	Dato' Carl Bek-Nielsen
9)	Unitata Berhad	-	Mr Martin Bek-Nielsen
10)	UIEM Sdn.Bhd.	-	Mr Loh Hang Pai
11)	Veterans Association	-	Mr Harold Speldewinde
12)	The 8th Gurkha Rifles Regimental Association (UK)(In memory of Ian D.Christian -Sg.Siput Estate)	-	Mr A.W.Wanless
13)	The Green Howards	-	Mr Rathakrishnan
14)	The Master Gunner and all Ranks of the Royal Regiment of Artillery	-	Mr Denise Collison
15)	REME – Electrical and Mechanical Engineering (Army)	-	Encik Mazalan Kamis
16)	Coldstream Guards	-	Mr A.Elson
17)	The Queen's Royal Hussars	-	Mr William Sankey
18)	On behalf of Royal Malaysian Former Police Officers Association, UK	-	Dato' R.Thambipillay
19)	Taiko Plantations Sdn.Bhd.	-	Mr Thomas Thomas
20)	Plantation Agencies Sdn.Bhd.	-	Mr R.Vettiveloo
21)	Boon Siew Group of Compaines (Plantations Division)	-	Mr Ong Buck
22)	Bukit Asa Sdn.Bhd. - Blenheim Estate	-	Mr Lee He Yam
23)	The Incorporated Society of Planters	-	Capt.(Ret'd) N.Sundian
24)	In Memory of D F Baxter	-	Mr Geoffrey Cooper
25)	Scottish Malaysian Association	-	Mr A.W.Wanless

**OFFICIAL PROGRAMME FOR BATU GAJAH CEREMONY
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26)	International School of Penang	-	Representative
27)	British High Commission - Defence Section	-	Col. P A W Edwards MBE
28)	Foong Lee Plantations Sdn.Bhd.	-	Mr Poh Weng Hong
29)	Royal Ipoh Club	-	Mr N.Sakthival
30)	Penang Veterans Association	-	Dato' Mary Ritchie
31)	In Memory of Charles Alma Baker	-	Mr James S.Devadason
32)	In Memory of the 1 st Battalion of the Gordon Highlanders (1951-1954)	-	Mr Bob McLeod
33)	The Ex-Kinta Valley Home Guards Association	-	Dato' Seri Yuen Yuet Leng
34)	Royal Rangers Regiment	-	Lt.Col.(R)M.Yunus Ali
35)	Selangor St.Andrews Society	-	Mr Ian Anderson
36)	In Memory of George Huntsman	-	Mr James S.Devadason
37)	Helicopter Operations (Malaya Emergency) Association	-	Mr A J Tamblyn
38)	In Memory of Dato John Bishorek	-	Datin Mary Bishorek
39)	In Memory of P/L Peter Gould	-	Ms Jenny Gould
40)	Federation of Malaya Police	-	Mr Tom Turnbull
41)	To the Fallen (from Royal Green Jackets)	-	Mr Garth Cobley
42)	Royal Australian Air Force	-	Mr Fred Simpson
43)	In Memory of the Fallen (from Mr Charles Letts)	-	Mr R.Sivalingam
44)	In Memory of G.M Burns	-	Mr James S.Devadason
45)	NMBVAA National Committee and All States - Australia	-	Mr Brian Selby
46)	NMBVA - UK	-	Mr George Worsnip
47)	The Malayan Agricultural Producers Association	-	Mr R.Sivalingam

3. ACP Najib bin Mohamad will go to the dais and take the salute.

4. All present then to adjourn to Church compound for refreshments.

APPENDIX G

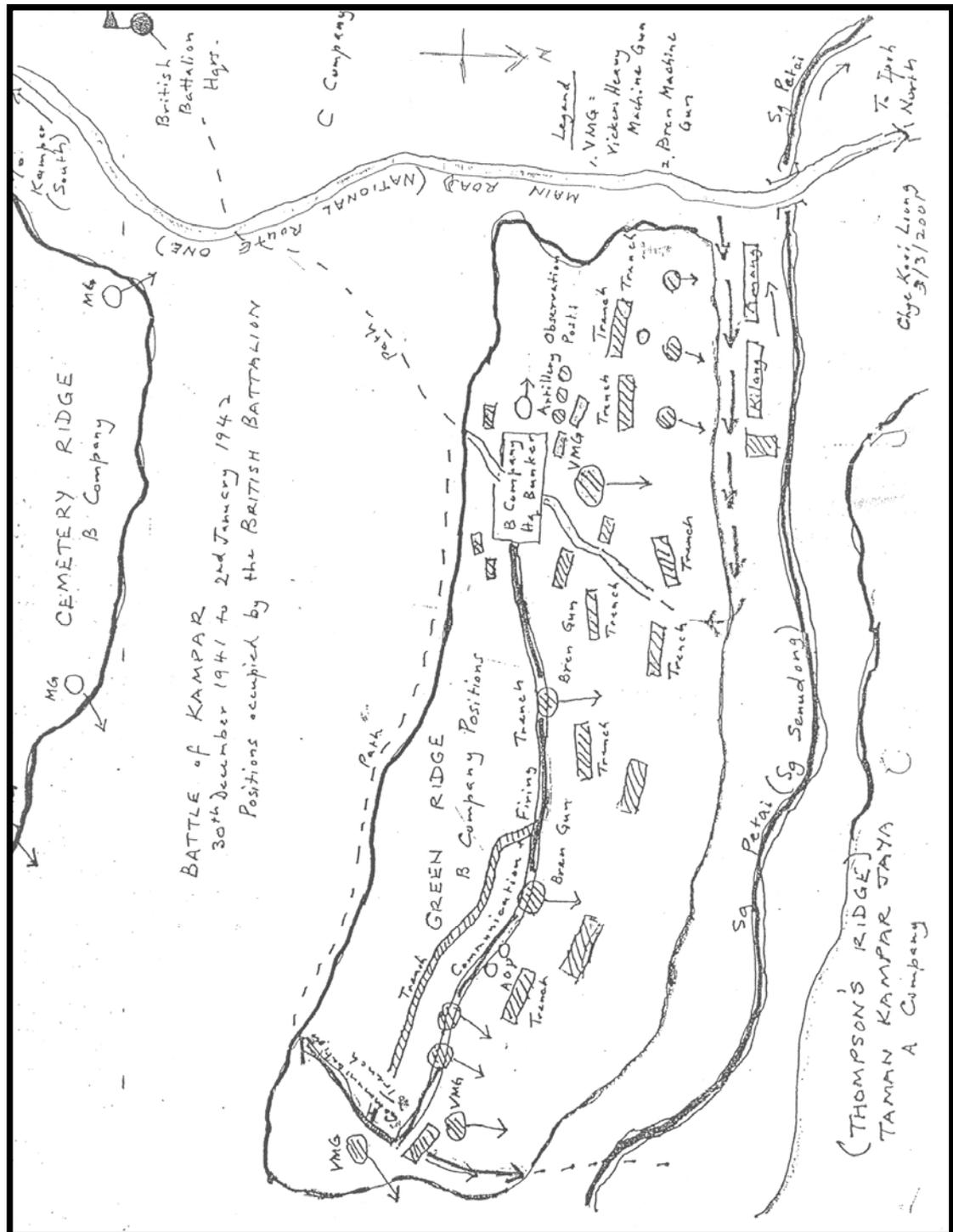
OFFICIAL PROGRAMME FOR *KHALSA DIWAN* CEREMONY 12 JUNE 2005

PROGRAMME	
DATE & TIME :	SUNDAY 12 TH JUNE 2005 AT 8.50AM
PLACE :	KHALSA DIWAN MALAYSIA
9.00am	- Prayers by Giani Surinderpal Singh Ji
-	- Prayers by Rev. Robin Arumugam
-	- Baca Doa by Tuan Haji Abu Bakar.
9.20am,	- Gurkha Bag-pipers from Brunei will play the "lament"
9.35am	- Band display by Sri Dasmesh Band from K. Lumpur
9.55am	- Address by Mr. Santokh Singh, President Gurdwara Sahib Kampar
10.05am	- Gurkha Bag-pipers from Brunei will play a "quick march".
10.20am	- Refreshments.
	END

ALLIED TROOPS INVOLVEMENT IN WW2 (KAMPAR AND TROLAK TO SLIM RIVER) JANUARY 1942.	
(1)	16 th Indian Brigade – The Punjabi Battalion under the command of Capt. John Graham & his second-in-command Lt. T. Lamb. He was killed in action, while Graham died later of severe injuries sustained in this battle.
(2)	4/19 Hyderabad and 5/2 Punjab – both of the 12 th and 18 th Indian Brigade.
(3)	2 nd Battalion Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders.
(4)	The Gurkha Units from 28 th Indian Brigade.
	War historians have described these battles in the Malayan Campaign. Both the Japanese and Allied Forces suffered heavy casualties. This crucial encounter not only highlighted the bravery, tenacity and sacrifice of the men who served in the cause of freedom but also focused attention on Kampar – a hitherto ordinary small mining township.
	(Prepared by R. Thambipillay, Liason Officer (International) National Malaya & Borneo Veterans Association.)
	-0-
	<i>Mr. R. Thambipillay retired as a Superintendent of Police 21 years ago. He lives in Ipoh. He has been involved in many voluntary activities amongst which is remembering all those who were killed in World War II, the Malayan Emergency and other conflicts. He brought out this idea of remembering all those killed in WW2 in 1942 in Kampar and Trolak to Slim River. He is the author of several books and articles, amongst which is "The Malaysian Police Force in the Emergency 1948-1960". May God bless him for his sacrifices and contributions towards this memorial service for the fallen. – Gurdwara Sahib, Kampar.</i>

APPENDIX H

MAPPED INVENTORY OF TRENCH SITES AT GREEN RIDGE (source: Chye Kooi Long)



APPENDIX I

DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR PERAK UNDER THE 9th MALAYSIA PLAN (p. 1 of 2) (Source: Chye Kooi Loong)

PROJEK/PROGRAM RANCANGAN MALAYSIA KE SEMBILAN (RMKe9)				
Bil.	Projek/Program	Bil./ Unit	Peruntukan (RM) (Kerajaan Persekutuan)	Jumlah (RM)
<u>A</u>	<u>Projek/Program Baru</u>			
1	Membina jambatan merentasi Sg. Keranji di Taman Ros, Kampar.	1	1,500,000.00	1,500,000.00
2	Menaiktaraf kemudahan asas di Air Terjun Batu Berangkai, Kampar.	1	1,000,000.00	1,000,000.00
3	Projek pengindahan tebing Sg. Keranji, Kampar.	1	1,000,000.00	1,000,000.00
4	Mengekalkan tapak sejarah kubu perang 'Green Ridge' di Kampar.	1	1,300,000.00	1,300,000.00
5	Menaiktaraf kolam takungan untuk tebatan banjir dan tujuan rekreasi di Pekan Kampar.	1	2,000,000.00	2,000,000.00
6	Membina 3 buah jambatan merentasi Sg. Keranji di Wah Loong, Kampar.	1	1,500,000.00	1,500,000.00
7	Menaiktaraf Jalan Stesen di Pekan Kampar.	1	500,000.00	500,000.00
8	Menaiktaraf jalan di Kawasan Perindustrian II, Mambang Diawan.	1	500,000.00	500,000.00
9	Menaiktaraf sistem perparitan di Mambang Diawan.	1	800,000.00	800,000.00
10	Menaiktaraf sistem perparitan di Kopisan, Gopeng	1	300,000.00	300,000.00
11	Menaiktaraf sistem perparitan di Pekan Kampar.	1	800,000.00	800,000.00
12	Menaiktaraf sistem perparitan di Pekan Gopeng.	1	500,000.00	500,000.00
13	Menaiktaraf sistem perparitan di Gopeng Industrial Park	1	1,000,000.00	1,000,000.00
14	Menaiktaraf laluan Utara-Selatan di Jalan Stesen, Kampar	1	1,500,000.00	1,500,000.00
15	Membina bengkel-bengkel di Jalan Stesen, Kampar.	1	1,000,000.00	1,000,000.00
16	Menaiktaraf pasar Kampar.	1	1,000,000.00	1,000,000.00
17	Menaiktaraf gerai-gerai di pusat penjaja di Jalan Batu Sinar, Taman Bandar Baru, Kampar.	1	1,500,000.00	1,500,000.00
18	Membina dataran serbaguna (untuk pasar malam/ parking dan lain-lain) di Taman Bandar Baru, Kampar.	1	500,000.00	500,000.00
19	Membina kompleks sukan MDKS. Kampar	1	7,000,000.00	7,000,000.00
20	Membekal dan memasang lampu jalan dan hiasan.	1	2,000,000.00	2,000,000.00

DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR PERAK UNDER THE 9th MALAYSIA PLAN (p. 2 of 2) (Source: Chye Kooi Loong)

Bil.	Projek/Program	Bil./ Unit	Peruntukan (RM) (Kerajaan Persekutuan)	Jumlah (RM)
21	Membina taman rekreasi awam di Lawan Kuda, Gopeng.	1	2,000,000.00	2,000,000.00
22	Membeli kenderaan dan jentera.	1	2,000,000.00	2,000,000.00
23	Membina taman rekreasi, Kampar.	1	2,000,000.00	2,000,000.00
24	Membina Dataran Kampar.	1	1,500,000.00	1,500,000.00
25	Membina rumah rehat, Kampar.	1	3,000,000.00	3,000,000.00
26	Membina perpustakaan awam, Kampar.	1	1,000,000.00	1,000,000.00
27	Membina pintu gerbang di dalam kawasan MDKS.	1	1,000,000.00	1,000,000.00
28	Program-program lanskap di jalan-jalan utama.	1	1,000,000.00	1,000,000.00
29	Penyediaan infrastruktur pusat penjaja malam (night hawking).	1	300,000.00	300,000.00
30	Membina sebuah dewan serbaguna di Kampar.	1	3,000,000.00	3,000,000.00
B	<u>Projek/Program Sambungan</u>			
1	Membina kompleks bangunan 'food court' di Taman Bandar Baru, Kampar.	1	2,500,000.00	2,500,000.00

47 500,000.00

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