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Navigating the Wreck: Writing women's experience of the Japanese Occupation of Singapore. Salvaged from the Wreck: A novel -and- Diving into the Wreck: A critical essay

Dawn Nora Crabb
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Navigating the Wreck:
Writing women's experience of the Japanese
Occupation of Singapore

Salvaged from the Wreck A novel
- and -
Diving into the Wreck: A critical essay

This thesis is presented for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (Writing)

Dawn Nora Crabb

School of Arts and Humanities

Edith Cowan University

2021

ABSTRACT

This thesis is in two parts. The first and major part consists of a historical novel followed, in part two, by an essay. The title of this thesis, “Navigating the Wreck”, refers metaphorically to the Fall of Singapore in 1942, the ensuing human tragedy unleashed on the people of Singapore and Malaya, and the literary and historical processes of exploring, interpreting and depicting the past. The Japanese occupation of Singapore has, to date, been described mostly by Western historians and former prisoners of war who have forged a predominant patriarchal narrative. In that narrative—despite the all-encompassing nature of the occupation and the cataclysmic effect it had on civilians—women are virtually invisible.

The objective of this thesis is to privilege women’s experiences by ethically gathering, analysing and re-imagining the accounts of a group of women of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds—Chinese, Indian, Malay, Eurasian—who lived through the occupation, using historical fiction to engage as broad a readership as possible. As well as literary praxis, research centres on analysis of relevant literature, including eight ethnically diverse published female memoirs and eleven women’s oral histories held by the National Archive of Singapore.

The essay discusses the artefact-centred, pragmatic and self-reflexive bricolage approach of this thesis, its feminist and phenomenological framework and my ethical responsibility and outsider authorial position as a white Australian woman reliant on local witness accounts. Feminist concerns addressed in the thesis are invisibility, plurality and intersectionality and I adopt a critical feminist phenomenology based on five aspects of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* to discuss the aims and the research and writing processes of the thesis.

Working within that framework, I summarised and categorised female oral interview data from audio and written transcripts enabling comparison of each woman’s individual experience of the war and the effects that the occupation had on each woman’s life situation, revealing a diverse set of experiences, some of which influenced my literary choices. By immersing myself in the particular remembered experiences of each of the female interviewees and considering their stories against the tapestry of my own extensive lived experience of the physical, cultural and social world of Singapore, as well as an in-depth investigation of other historical data and male and female written memoirs, I identified gaps

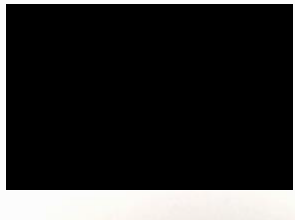
and silences that needed to be addressed. These include the strategic household, wage-earning, food-supplying and charitable role that women played in the dangerous and difficult situation of the occupation as well as the ignored or marginalised active participation of women in Singapore's pre-war anti-colonial communist movements, support for and armed participation in anti-Japanese activities in China as well as the jungle-based guerrilla militias in Malaya, and the urban anti-Japanese underground in Singapore.

The essay weaves the creative thinking and practical processes of researching and writing the novel through discussion of practice, literature, theory, methodology and craft, retrieving and exposing what is usually submerged in the creative process to indicate a matrix of production.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- i. incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or a diploma;
- ii. contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis or;
- iii. contain any defamatory material.



Signature of Candidate

Acknowledgements

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Thank you to the librarians and staff at the inter-library loans of the ECU library. Without that service and their patience much of the material I have consulted in this thesis would not have been available to me. Thanks to ECU for financing indispensable research trips to Singapore and also to the librarians and staff at the National Library of Singapore and the National Archive of Singapore for their helpful cooperation in locating and obtaining unique material in their care.

A special thanks to my journalist husband who patiently and valiantly proof-read various drafts of the thesis and whose gracious support in this endeavour, as in life, has always been a boon and a joy.

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NOVEL: SALVAGED FROM THE WRECK

The Novel is not included in this version of the thesis

ESSAY: DIVING INTO THE WRECK

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTON

The Japanese occupation of Singapore

During the Second World War, after just seven days of a bloody and one-sided battle about which, at every turn, the British colonial government, through delusion, incompetence, obfuscations and lies misled both their own and the local population (Bayly & Harper, 2005; Blackburn, 2003; Lim, 1976; Morrison, 1942) the island of Singapore was subject to a change in circumstance so abrupt and total that it is difficult today to appreciate the immensity of the dislocation and terror that plunged the hapless inhabitants into dystopian darkness, cut off from the entire world, under the brutal, capricious and sadistic rule of an alien and ruthless military dictatorship.

Within forty-eight hours of the surrender on 15 February 1942, the colonial civilian ruling class—white British men and women—disappeared from the stinking, corpse-strewn streets and wrecked villages of a bombed and smoke-choked island into their own newly built Changi prison. A mass of Japanese flags flew from buildings across the city. English was officially forbidden. The island, its streets and its buildings were renamed. Time shifted: ten-thirty became midday, sunrise and sundown irrelevant. Bloody heads adorned the streets and bridges of the town. Countless numbers of girls and women were raped and murdered and forced into sexual slavery, and a reign of terror began with the rounding up of tens of thousands of Chinese men and women into concentration camps.

The title of this thesis is “Navigating the Wreck”. The wreck refers metaphorically both to the Fall of Singapore in 1942 and the ensuing human tragedy unleashed on the people of Singapore and Malaya, subjects which, 75 years later, continue to be insufficiently explored. Within a feminist framework and adopting an artefact-based approach to the data, this thesis aims to address this insufficiency by exploring and reintroducing these faded subjects to a wide audience by means of a work of historical fiction.

The extraordinary Japanese military triumph that crushed the centuries-old British and Dutch Empires in the East went largely unwritten after Japan's surrender to Allied forces in 1945. More than that, the humiliation of the surrender and Japan's own subsequent occupation became its disaster and shame and it retreated into a long silence. Into that space stepped European, Australian and American historians, academics and prisoners of war who forged a predominant patriarchal narrative. In that narrative—despite the all-encompassing nature of the Pacific War and the cataclysmic effect it had on civilian populations—women are virtually invisible.

Nothing could bring home to me more powerfully the voiceless experience of women in that conflict than the recollection of a man who would go on to become a cabinet minister in an independent Singapore (Lim Kim San in Lee, 1998, Chapter 3):

I found myself imprisoned in a room about 15 feet by 10 feet shared by about 30 people, male and female...There was a lavatory in one corner of the room, a squatting type with a cistern...It was also the water you drank and washed with...I was disgusted by the sight of flowing blood from a woman menstruating.

Amongst all the filth and fear of a *kempeitai* prison cell, that nameless woman's ordeal is recorded only by a man's disgust. Jolted and repulsed I instantly felt as if I were there in that cell alongside that woman. Without any means to conceal or contain the natural flow of her blood, possibly cramped in menstrual pain, the male gaze humiliates her. Though this project did not begin there, that simple, contemptuous sentence expressing the chasm between a woman's and a man's physical and psychic experience of oppression became a touchstone during all the twists and turns of this project.

Key research data: oral histories and memoirs

Fortunately, over many decades (1953–2010), a few local women's voices were recorded, and some memoirs were published. Research for the novel draws on my critical analysis of hitherto neglected oral histories of eleven women of diverse ages and ethnicities recorded for a Project on the Japanese Occupation of Singapore (1981–2011) which is preserved in the Oral History Centre of the National Archive of Singapore (NAS) (See Table, pp. 300-302),

and also of eight local female memoirs (Akbar, 1990; Duncan, 2010; Kathigasu, 1953; La Brooy, 1987; La Fontaine de Clercq Subli, 2007; Lian, 2008; Lim, 1959; Lum, 2007).

In addition to reviewing and assessing a range of other literary and historical sources for background and pertinency to the historical novel, my readings of oral and written testimonies by women have been supplemented by analysis of and comparisons with memoirs written by non-local men (Corner, 1981; Fujii, 1943; Shinozaki, 1975) and local men (Baker, 1999; Chen, 1969; Chew, 1945; Chin, 1981; Danaraj, 1990; Gwee, 2013; Hussain & Jomo, 2005; Lee, 1999; Low, 1947; Mosbergen, 2007; Tan, 1999; Thio, 1977; Van Cuylenburg, 1982; Yap, 1982). Of these memoirs, the most important has been that of English scientist E.J.H. Corner (1981).

Significance of the research

Kratoska (1998, p. 1) points out that “remarkably little is known about what happened during the occupation”. The academic literature on the period deals for the most part with military activity and the ordeal of Europeans held as prisoners of war or as civilian internees and there are few studies concerning the local population. Equally, this most dramatic period in Singapore’s history has attracted scant attention from either international or local fiction writers with only seventeen novels published from 1962 to 2017 of which only two—the most recent—are narrated entirely from a female point of view (Chand, 2017; Farnham, 2017).

Huang (2014, p. 12) argues that the current overarching narrative of Singapore’s past is narrowly scripted and hegemonic, limited to Carlyle’s “Great Man” view of history. This approach provides recognisable anchors to the state-sponsored “Singapore Story” for the easy consumption of the masses, but also disengages Singaporeans from a history in which they cannot see themselves. One recognisable anchor, the Japanese occupation, is presented in history textbooks in a way that highlights the forging of the nation out of an undifferentiated and common suffering: “The well-established fact that the Japanese had favored the Malays and Indians and treated the Chinese harshly was, in effect, erased from this revisionist version of the past”. This reinterpretation is possible at least in part because the younger generations, some 80 percent of the population, have no direct experience of the war

(Blackburn, 2008, p. 43). In Malaysia and Singapore, Kratoska (1998, p. 1) writes, each succeeding generation finds war stories less compelling.¹

In this respect, the historical novel can be or do many things (de Groot, 2016). It can be one way of educating readers about the past. By its phenomenological nature it can involve readers in the individual lives of those who experienced war and lay bare, for those who have never known war, what is at stake.

By creating a connection between then and now and offering insight into the minds of members of a past society, the historical novel may induce understanding and empathy for a diversity of viewpoints and challenge prior “truths” about the past: “Perhaps novels and their fictions are, perversely, the more ‘honest’ way to try to understand and write about the past...a novel will always, already, be a work of fiction and thus can never claim to be the whole truth and nothing but the truth” (Peace in de Groot, p. 1).²

For women and other marginalised readers, the novel can challenge mainstream historiography and offer the imaginative space to create different and more inclusive versions of history, as well as to present forgotten or suppressed social and political movements whose narratives offer dissenting accounts of the past.

For citizens the historical novel can offer different generations the possibility to explore the ways nations, and therefore national identity, are constructed, allowing consideration of the nation as something complex, protean and continually in flux.

Given war and the threat of war are ever present in our lives now as in the past, historical fiction can highlight the connection of the historical to the contemporary.

¹ A recent discussion of post-war tensions over war memory can be found in Kwok (2015).

² The ‘history wars’, concerning competing versions and interpretations of the past and their politicisation, as well as hotly debated questions about the dynamics of historical research, veracity, creative licence, representation and interpretation in relation to the differing roles and potential of fiction and non-fiction, are important and inescapable, but discussion of these is largely beyond the scope of this essay. (For one discussion see a series of articles in *The Conversation*, June 9, 2015, <https://theconversation.com/historical-fiction-fictional-history-stories-we-tell-about-the-past-40315>).

A matrix of production

In his study about the thinking that occurs in the making of works of art, Carter (2004, pp. xi-xiii) writes that the creative process is not some kind of mysterious and romantic myth that cannot stand up to rational enquiry: “The decisions that characterise it are material ones...the processes of which normally go missing in translation”. The meaning of an artwork is mostly “detached from the matrix of its production”. This essay weaves the creative thinking and material processes of “Salvaged” through the discussion of practice, literature, theory and methodology in order to arrive at a matrix of production underpinned by questions about ethical responsibility and authorial principles, thereby retrieving and exposing what is ordinarily submerged in the creative writing process.

Objectives of the research

No life goes untouched by war. Levinas (1969, pp. 21-22) observes that the violence of war “does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves” in an order “from which no one can keep his [or her] distance”. War does injure and annihilate, of course, but Brighton (2011, pp. 102-5) observes that through the “unmaking of meaning” and the “casting into motion of subjects” war can also show people a way to contest prevailing norms: “War opens out a space of mute possibility and contestation fundamental to the quotidian orderings of peace”.

My objectives in researching and writing a feminist historical novel about the war in occupied Singapore are inter-related and overlapping. The first is to address and redress a female past silenced by patriarchal historical and literary traditions and practices by ethically gathering, analysing, re-imagining, dramatising and presenting in fictional form new stories based on the accounts of a group of women who lived through the occupation.

The second is to bring the stories of individual local civilians, men and women of different ethnicities and social classes, back into the war story of Singapore in order to reveal a more dynamic and nuanced version of the past, offer a greater understanding of the individual in the diverse collective, and challenge the androcentric singularity of the national narrative of Singapore.

The third is to bridge the gap between past and present in order to involve subsequent generations in what has gone before by using historical fiction—which offers the reader “access to the inaccessible by inventing possibilities” (Iser, 1997, n.p.)—in order to engage as broad a readership as possible and throw light on the shocking, the mundane, the uplifting and the shameful acts and experiences of ordinary men and women caught up in worlds unmade by war in every village, street and house across Malaya.

Research questions

From the preceding considerations, the following research questions were formulated:

- How can I, as a historical novelist, use feminist principles to create a work of effective, accessible and ethically responsible narrative fiction to address a dearth of knowledge about women’s experiences of the Japanese occupation of Singapore?
- How can I best convey the lives of a group of women from diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds living in Singapore during the 1940s despite being a later generation, white middle-class Australian outsider?

Background to the project

The idea for this project began when I was researching the Japanese occupation of Singapore in the Oral History Centre (OHC) of the National Archive of Singapore (NAS) in order to extract detail for a previous novel, written under my pen name of Dawn Farnham, called *A Crowd of Twisted Things* (Farnham, 2013, revised and republished as *Finding Maria* in 2017). At that point I had lived for over twelve years in Singapore (2001-2013), studied formally the histories and cultures of the various ethnic groups which make up Singapore’s diverse communities through the Friends of the Museums’ Docent Training Programme, served as a volunteer docent in Singapore’s museums and written four other historical novels collectively published as *The Straits Quartet* (Farnham, 2014) based in Singapore and the surrounding region.

That initial exploration in the archive was not carried out in a stringent or methodical manner but, having identified the hitherto neglected oral histories of eleven women of diverse ages

and ethnicities, I recognised the potential for a more rigorous study with a view to writing a novel dealing with the local civilian female experiences of the Second World War in Singapore using multiple points of view.

Simone de Beauvoir (2009, p. 5), one of the only women of the time to write both fiction and non-fiction about the German occupation of France, described her experience of living in Nazi-occupied Paris as “an existential rupture in time”. The historical, cultural and social world of Nazi-occupied Paris was completely different from that of Singapore; nevertheless, I speculated that women under the Japanese occupation must have felt the same existential ruptures. Those eleven voices lying silently in the archive were the opening for me to examine and write about the nature of what I came to see not merely as a period of rupture (pause, interruption, fracture) but as a wreck (ruin, devastation). Wreckage and what can be salvaged from it became the central theme of the novel.

In one of the few studies about women and wartime Paris, Sebba (2016, p. xx) writes that the German occupation carried with it “perversions, moral ambiguities, hardships and confusions”. Alienation from the structures of meaning and the roles women played in peacetime reveal moral ambiguity “like a kaleidoscope...Turn it one way and see women destroyed by war; turn it the other and find women whose lives were enhanced with new meaning and fulfilment”. Choices—as far as there are any real choices during a wartime occupation—are complex and fragmented. Sebba (p. xxi) argues that the unreal situation of occupation is itself a perverting one, arguably more difficult morally than war itself. Of course there are fewer casualties but “fear, shame, anger and the terrible feeling of powerlessness...”, together with “a complex and heady mixture of hate and self-interest...confuse any straightforward response”.

Within the broad concept of wreckage and salvage, these considerations—moral ambiguity, fragmentation, casting into motion, mute possibility and contestation, hate, self-interest, shame and fear, alongside the soul-easing and redemptive power of friendship—became sub-themes of “Salvaged”.

Historical context

The focus and context of “Salvaged” is the situation the civilian population of Singapore endured for three years and seven months from 1942 to 1945. There are just a few reliable academic sources on the occupation (Akashi & Yoshimura, 2008; Kratoska, 1998; Lee, 2005; Turnbull, 2009) so necessarily I forged an overview from these to guide the research, whilst remaining aware that the main focus of historical studies has been men’s experiences.

The battle for Malaya came to an end on 15 February 1942 when Lieutenant General Arthur Percival, the General Officer Commanding Malaya, surrendered his forces to Lieutenant General Tomoyuki Yamashita, commander of the Japanese 25th Army. The British and Australian allied troops and non-Axis European civilian population were interned. Turnbull (2009, p. 195) writes that for over a century the security of Singapore in British hands had been taken for granted, but “suddenly in a few weeks the hollowness of this seeming power had been exposed”.

Japanese newspapers triumphantly declared the end of white rule in Asia and the birth of the Japanese-led Greater East-Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere in which all Asians would share. The island was renamed *Syonanto* (sometimes *Shonanto*)—“Light of the South”. The year was declared to be 2602, which dates Japanese imperial reign from the mythical emperor Jimmu (660 BCE). Ten-thirty in the morning became noon as clocks were set to Tokyo time (Lee, 2005, pp. 103, 143).

Malay, Indian and Gurkha troops were urged to transfer their allegiance to the Emperor of Japan. Malays who refused outright were executed. An estimated 20,000 of the surrendered 45,000 Indian and Gurkha troops joined the Japanese-sponsored Indian National Army (Turnbull, 2009, p. 196). The rest refused and were imprisoned, tortured, executed or transported under intolerable conditions to far-flung labour camps where up to 11,000 perished (Lee, 2005, p. 234).

The Chinese, the vast majority of the population, suffered immediate reprisals in retribution for the overseas Chinese community’s support for China in its struggle against the 1937 Japanese invasion. Chinese men and women were indiscriminately “screened” and the predominantly male deaths from this screening—in Chinese *sook ching*—have, ever since,

been an unresolved question: “the Japanese admitted to killing 5,000, but the figure was probably closer to 25,000, and many Chinese put the total much higher” (Akashi & Yoshimura, 2008, p. 231; Turnbull, 2009, p. 198). Those Chinese civic leaders who had not fled were ordered to pay \$50 million in “war reparations” to the Japanese (Lee, 2005, p. 138).

The Chinese were suspect because of their perceived loyalty to China, the Eurasians because of theirs to the British. Malay and Indian civilians, ostensibly privileged by their “Asian-ness”, were nevertheless subject to forced service in the auxiliary armies or sent to labour camps throughout the region and notably to work on the Siam–Burma railway (Kratoska, 1998; Turnbull, 1977). Some women, regardless of race, were marked ‘For Military Use’ and forced into sexual slavery in so-called comfort houses (Lee, 2005).

The economy and the fabric of society were disrupted. Since the entrepôt trade on which Singapore depended was shut down, food was rationed and medical supplies for the civilian population dried up. Speculation, profiteering, bribery and corruption became rife.

As the war turned against the Japanese and they dug in, civilians of all ethnicities were pressed into forced labour throughout the region from which many never returned (Lee, 2005; Turnbull, 1977). The local population awaited what they feared would be starvation and a bloody and protracted fight to reoccupy the island. The atom bombs on Hiroshima (6 August 1945) and Nagasaki (9 August 1945) prevented that seeming eventuality, bringing an abrupt end to the war (Kratoska, 1998, p. 299). On 15 August 1945 the Japanese government in Tokyo unconditionally surrendered.

In Singapore the Japanese military retreated to barracks and the 6,000-strong Japanese civilian population moved behind the walls of a camp that had been rapidly built by Japanese soldiers in the west of the island. As communist anti-Japanese forces emerged from the jungles of Malaya to fill the political void, summary trials and executions of those who had supported the Japanese took place.

During the “limbo” period of three weeks between the end of hostilities and the actual arrival of Commonwealth troops (15 August to 5 September 1945), Malaya and Singapore were beset by killings and lawlessness. The Japanese set about systematically destroying the

greater part of their administrative papers and another wave of looting took place (Kratoska, 1988).

On 5 September, Commonwealth troops arrived in Singapore and, a week later, the Japanese military command in Singapore formally surrendered to Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander in Southeast Asia (Akashi & Yoshimura, 2008; Kratoska, 1998; Turnbull, 2009).

Principal characters and brief synopsis of “Salvaged”

The seven principal characters of the novel, though from different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds, met each other in the 1930s, around a decade prior to the occupation, as members of an inter-ethnic troop of Girl Guides. They formed strong bonds of trust and loyalty to each other through the freedoms and egalitarian, feminist and principled ethos and shared experiences of the Guides. Their last time together was soon after Singapore’s initial rupture, that is, a few weeks after the first bombs had fallen on the island and the colony was at war. Six of them—Simone, Kay, Zahra, Anita, Molly and Jenny—attend the socially uncomfortable wedding reception of Teresa, who has married an important leader of the Malayan Communist Party in Singapore. He has been recently released from jail and, in an abrupt British *volte face*, is now required for home defence and about to embark on jungle training to fight the Japanese.

The novel focusses on the final stages of the occupation. When it begins in May 1945, Germany has surrendered. Japan stands alone and the local population in Singapore waits in dread of starvation and a bloody and protracted fight by the Allies to re-occupy the island against an enemy that is not expected to surrender.

Later Kay, leader of Java Force, an armed resistance cell loosely connected to the wider communist-led anti-Japanese forces on the Malayan mainland, discovers and rescues Teresa from the tortures of the principal antagonist, Captain Tsuji of the Japanese *kempeitai*, and makes Teresa a deathbed promise to rescue and protect her baby. For this Kay needs the only people she can truly trust, her long-term friends from the Girl Guides with whom she has lost contact due to the deadly necessities of wartime survival.

Starting with Zahra, who is working at Radio Syonan, Kay reignites the prerogatives of the Girl Guide movement and their bonds of friendship, launching them on a quest. Zahra embraces the quest and reconnects to an initially reluctant Simone who, alongside Anita finds a way to meet Kay on the mainland and take on the dangerous task of hiding and taking care of Teresa's baby in Singapore. This leads the women to Molly, who is secretly connected to the urban underground resistance, and finally to Jenny, whom Simone seeks out to shelter Teresa's baby in the safety of the orphanage of a Catholic convent.

This action lands Simone in prison. She is interrogated by Captain Tsuji who has also been the torturer of Kay and Jenny. Simone is beaten but is spared the worst of tortures by the sudden capitulation of Japan following the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In the end Simone accompanies a member of the British War Crimes Tribunal who is searching for Captain Tsuji to a far-flung island overflowing with skeletal, diseased and dying Japanese prisoners. In a sort of never-ending *quid pro quo* Simone sees that what the Japanese had done to the British is now being done to them. She tries to make sense of it all but what had seemed like a moment of hope and renewal at the end of war is dashed. She, her friends and Teresa's child may have survived but with their entry into the nuclear age Simone senses ominously that this peace is fragile and the future uncertain.

The story is told principally using third person focalised narration, largely from Simone's perspective. A former newspaper reporter, she becomes chronicler of the occupation and diarises the last days of the Battle for Singapore and the British surrender. Simone had spent most of the occupation in the relative anonymity and safety of the Botanical Gardens and the library of the Museum of Natural History and, though she would have preferred to stay there than take risks, the novel depicts her eventual response to requests from other Guides for assistance.

For ease of reference, a summary of primary and secondary characters, their ethnicities, habitation, work, loyalties and roles in the novel, alongside a glossary of terms and maps of the island and street locations mentioned in "Salvaged", is located in the Appendix (pp. 303-310). In addition, a list of eleven oral histories used in my research is tabularised under Method and Process in Chapter Six (pp. 270-289). A short description of the seven Guides follows:

Simone Martel (Swiss Eurasian), assistant, Syonan Botanical Gardens, Museum and Library
Kay Chan (Chinese), leader of Java Force, resistance fighter in the jungles of mainland Johor
Zahra Zahari (Malay), pre- and post-war broadcaster and voice of the Malayan Service of Radio Syonan
Anita Shah (Indian), captain in the all-female Rani of Jhansi Regiment, Indian National Army
Teresa Wong (Chinese), communist resistance fighter in Johor
Molly Salgado (Ceylonese Eurasian), entertainer and manager, part of the urban anti-Japanese underground resistance, Great World entertainment venue
Jenny Chan (Straits Chinese), doctor, hiding in the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus.

Chapters

This essay navigates various complexities of planning and executing a qualitative practice-based creative writing PhD—what Smith and Dean (2009, p. 1) call “the iterative cyclic web”. This is a novel-based research project so that all the research conducted has had the production of a novel as its primary objective. Although I discuss the process of employing literary craft and technique most specifically in Chapter Six, references to and passages from “Salvaged” are integrated throughout to demonstrate the woven nature of the endless “loop” (Kroll, 2018, p. 160) of theory, methodology, data, imagination and writing. To aid clarity, I use italics when citing passages from the novel (part one of the thesis).

This introduction to the thesis has provided an overview of the subject and the background and key motivations for the study, outlined the historical, academic and literary context, pointed to gaps in existing knowledge, discussed the significance of the research, stated my objectives, outlined key data, established my research questions, set out a summary of the principal characters and plot of the novel and noted the iterative aspects of the project that also inform this essay. The following chapters explain the creative research practice, review key literature and discuss theory, methodology and process.

Chapter Two discusses the concept of “artefact-centred practice” and the pragmatic practice of bricolage, which shaped the way I approached and used research data in the service of the novel.

Chapter Three discusses the theoretical framework of feminism, selecting aspects of feminist concern the novel particularly aims to address: women's invisibility in the historical and literary record, the importance of feminisms in the plural and intersectionality, and the role oral history practice can play in redressing these concerns.

In Chapter Four, I explain selected aspects of phenomenological methodology that guide key tasks of this project: the interpretation of the data (oral and textual testimonies) and the writing of the novel, drawing on Mann's (2018) interpretation of Simone de Beauvoir's five aspects of phenomenology.

Chapter Five, which reviews key literature, deals firstly with the absence or paucity of English-language academic studies of the war from an Asian perspective, outlining key works informing this project. I then discuss the development of the Oral History Centre of the National Archive of Singapore (NAS) and its Project on the Japanese Occupation of Singapore. Finally, I offer an overview of the ethnic, social, cultural and political world of Singapore in the interwar years from a feminist viewpoint. This is a period in which both NAS oral history interviewees and my fictional characters came of age. I also discuss the Girl Guide movement in Malaya—which became central to the narrative of “Salvaged”—as an emancipatory and inter-racial organisation.

Chapter Six, on method and process, shows how creative writing, used as a method to investigate women's experiences of the Japanese occupation, has been supplemented by analysis of eleven female oral histories held by the National Archive of Singapore. I establish the self-reflexivity of the interviewees and illustrate how I organised the data deemed of greatest use to the novel. Using examples from the oral histories, key texts and “Salvaged”, I also demonstrate some ways that my sensory experiences and foreknowledge of Singapore—its climate, communities, streets, waterways, buildings, shops, people, parks, flora, fauna, food, sights, sounds and smells—blended with artefactual, literary and historical research, was filtered through my imagination and, via the craft of novel writing, was transformed into a work of historical fiction.

The essay outlines the genesis and development of the novel “Salvaged”, or its matrix of production. By retrieving and exposing what has hitherto been submerged, such a matrix demonstrates complementarity between various forms of research, including the practice of

writing itself, which continually generates new images, thoughts, connections and questions. Overall, the thesis explores aspects of feminist historical inquiry and fiction writing that may prove useful for creative writing practitioners, teachers, students and researchers.

CHAPTER TWO: APPROACHES TO PRACTICE

Artefact-centred practice

There is a quantity of confusing and overlapping terms for creative practice in the academy—for example, practice-led, research-led, performative, research as practice, arts-based and action research. Ultimately, the one that best suited this project was Candy and Edmond's (2018) concept of practice-based research that is based around the production of an artefact, which chimes with Kroll's (2018, p. 160) understanding of a research and creative feedback loop "dictated by the project's needs". Working out what those needs were became part of the iterative process of consultation with the data, reflection and evaluation as the technical demands of the manuscript (plot development, narrative structure, character and world building, etc.) emerged. Creating new scenes or editing drafted ones would throw up different needs, necessitating a return to collected data or a search for new material, and then another stage of evaluation and reflection, writing and editing in a constant feedback loop: "For practice-based researchers, making an artefact is pivotal and the insights from making, reflecting and evaluating may be fed back into the artefact itself" (Candy & Edmonds, 2018, p. 63).

In this "iterative cyclic web" (Smith & Dean, 2009, p. 2), having the artefact central to the process kept the forward momentum of the project manageable for me by skimming over aspects which did not serve the novel and honing in on those that emerged as significant. This pragmatic method of dealing with the data is discussed below as *bricolage*.

In this essay, to suggest the centrality of the novel, I refer to Candy and Edmond's (2018) practice-based research methodology as *artefact-centred practice*. Adopting this practice means that theory and methodology are used selectively to serve the purposes of the artefact—a novel—which becomes a new contribution to the field of literary fiction and to discourse on war, presenting new knowledge in an accessible way, including imagined scenarios concerning the Japanese occupation of Singapore.

Bricolage

In examining various iterations of academic arts-based practice to ascertain and select one or more approaches best suited to this project, I was using a method described in qualitative research literature as bricolage.

Bricolage is derived from the French verb *bricoler* and was adopted in a sporting context to describe sudden unpredictable movements (Hase, 2014, pp. 83-84). A sudden swerve, the odd bounce of a ball or a sudden gust of wind are unexpected and require the use of experience and skill to make an unplanned change to circumstances: “Thus, bricolage takes into account uncertainty and complexity, experience and, perhaps, a certain intuitive sense”.

In the social sciences, the term is attributed to Claude Levi-Strauss (1966) who used it to explain mythical thought and legend which came from an amalgam of a person’s experience and imagination. Levi-Strauss argued that understanding reality involves more than observation—the observer is interacting with the world and is affected by cultural factors and experience in complex ways (Hase, 2014, p. 83).

In qualitative research literature, bricolage has been proposed as an approach that makes it possible to embrace the complexity of the lived world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Kincheloe, 2001, 2005; Kincheloe & Berry, 2004; Rogers, 2012). Generally speaking, bricolage can be understood as a practice based on “notions of eclecticism, emergent design, flexibility and plurality” (Rogers, 2012, p. 1). Bricoleurs “recognize the limitations of a single method, the discursive strictures of one disciplinary approach” (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 681). Rather than sticking to methodological guidelines, they amalgamate different tools, methods and disciplines adapted to the specific demands of the inquiry at hand (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 3).

What artefact-centred practice and bricolage mean in terms of this project is two-fold. First, I could take from the theoretical and methodological approaches I have chosen to use in this project those aspects which suit the specific demands of the artefact as I envisaged it and as it emerged. For instance, in my discussion of feminism, I concentrate on the aspects that most concerned the purpose and the content of the novel—invisibility, pluralism and intersectionality. Under phenomenology I sought out and used a quite recent development of a particular approach to feminist phenomenological practice. Second, both these approaches

suit my practice as a historical novelist, which requires concentration on the centrality of the needs of the novel combined with a nimble approach to the research material.

The researcher as bricoleuse is ideally skilled, resourceful, focussed and flexible. Note the term “bricoleuse” in the feminine. Wheeler (2015, n.p.) states: “the methodologically pluralistic work of qualitative researchers is increasingly being described as bricolage, with the researchers themselves—male and female—being described as bricoleur(s)”. She calls on women engaged in bricolage as research practice to avoid the adoption of the masculine form of the noun as the so-called “gender-neutral norm” and, since French has a feminine form, to adopt the term bricoleuse.

As a historical novelist I apply the skills and experience I have acquired over time and with practice to sort through and accurately locate the information I need in the service of the artefact, to know or discover where to look, to ask pertinent questions and isolate the essence (Brady, 2000, p. 2). I acquire a working rather than a specialist knowledge across a range of subjects and disciplines. I am not, and do not need to be, an authority in any of them. I don’t need to be a historian to make use of historical research, a doctor to read and understand the causes and effects of beriberi or tropical ulcers, a military specialist to understand bomber formations or the use of machine guns, or a botanist to make use of research on allelopathic plants. In my novelist world, for this project, I have a desk covered in notes on “Japanese torture methods”, “Javanese romusha”, “Wartime recipes”, “the Malayan moon”, “Chinese insect mythology”; folders marked “women and war”, “Asian Girl Guides”, “theories of ambiguity”, “Imperial rescripts and Japanese war songs”, “WWII maps”; and photocopies of an array of research articles, all surrounding shelves of history books and memoirs.

It was not as a scientist that I navigated articles about the poisonous plants of Southeast Asia. I ignored the Latin names and other scientific terminology in order to home in on the uses and effects of one plant—the castor bean—that one of my main characters, Zahra, uses to punish and kill her rapist husband (“Salvaged”, p. 177). I rejected all the other possibilities because the mortal dangers of the castor bean, whilst perhaps not familiar to local readers in this urban age would, I knew from previous readings, have been well known to those living in the 1930s when it was often ingested accidentally by humans and animals with deadly results. The castor bean plant grew wildly and was freely available in Southeast Asia; it could easily be incorporated into the grinding of spices and when consumed it works fast, mimics a

violent gastric attack and causes an excruciating death. The castor bean therefore enabled dramatic expression of my character's lethal purpose.

A process of selection and rejection was continuous, occurring each time I began a new scene or evaluated and edited an older one. Sometimes my choices needed to make social, political or thematic points as occurs, for example, in the range of artefacts the novel showcases in the exhibition sequences, or by its depiction of a chipped and moribund statue of Queen Victoria in the opening sentence.

The self-reflexivity of bricolage

A key component of the practice of bricolage is researcher self-reflexivity and positionality (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). Berry explains that is critical for a researcher as bricoleuse to locate herself in the discourses of bricolage: "What the bricoleur selects or does not select and how he/she interprets the text has been influenced by the multiple socializing contexts and discourses through which he/she has passed" (2004, p. 165).

Two research questions posed at the outset of this project are concerned with positionality as a historical novelist and feminist in relation to my lack of empirical knowledge of women's war experiences and how best, as an "outsider", to ethically and responsibly convey their experience in fictional form.³

What bricolage offered me was a way to express that, although these questions might generate different kinds of research responses—historical, theoretical, literary, philosophical, social, cultural, geographic—I could draw upon material within those different research options as needed without claim to expertise in any discipline or field. In addition, I could freely use my personal experience from living for over a decade in Singapore to reflect on the

³ I am aware of the ongoing debate over cultural appropriation, authenticity and representing 'the other' (for example, Shriver, 2016). However, despite the importance and relevance of issues raised, questions of privilege and power in writing are beyond the scope of this essay. My position, briefly, is that creative writers ought to exercise their imaginations, and that creating convincing characters with attributes that we do not "own" (gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so on), is a feasible and necessary undertaking that requires great care and sensitivity as well as sufficient research. I address my position further in relation to phenomenological bracketing on pp. 239-43.

research data and evoke local phenomena—climate, geography, culture, sights, sounds and smells and other elements.

Articulating the process

An essential part of academic bricolage, Wibberley (2012, p. 6) argues, is articulating and exemplifying the process by providing what he terms as “an audit trail of sorts”. Clearly, research informs the writing process for historical novelists but often this research and the manner by which it drives, limits, and shapes the creative process remain “hidden or unarticulated”.

Carter (2004, p. xi-xii) argues that critics and theorists can only describe or rationalise the creative process based on the outcome; they cannot emulate it. The makers of artworks, however, can productively reflect on the creative thinking that makes such works, “integrating this usually unarticulated knowledge with the craft “wisdom” of the artist to retrieve the intellectual work that usually goes missing in translation during the process of making works of art”. Owens (2016) points out that it is not usually evident to readers of historical fiction, for example, which primary, secondary and tertiary sources were consulted by novelists, how they have influenced the research process, or which artistic texts or artefacts may have featured in the process of researching a specific topic, time, and place. Brien (2006, p. 53) argues that “it is as researchers that creative writers can provide valuable insights into the creative process and how creativity can be enhanced both in other academic disciplines and the wider community”.

Kroll and Harper (2013) emphasise that it is particularly important to explain the convergence between the practice of research and the practice of creative writing. In my own practice during the creation of a work of historical fiction, I find there is a natural and necessary convergence which takes place from outset to completion. I see this convergence as a kind of conversation between the data and the writing. The process is one of discovering and considering the data whilst also and often at the same time using my foreknowledge of the history, culture and geography of the setting combined with thinking, imagining, planning, crafting and drafting the manuscript. In this instance the act of writing and re-writing is itself a form of research moving me from the page to the research material and

back to the page in a symbiotic movement as I ask questions of the data to build the world (attitudes of the time, where and how people lived, entertainment, political constraints, fears, shortages, etc.); develop the characters (what they wore, ate, read, thought, etc.); develop themes (power, shame, friendship, hate, fear, loyalty); and sketch the practicalities of the plot (possible needs or obstacles like weather, transport (or lack of), wartime controls on movement, passes, dangers, etc.). It is this constant conversation between the project aims, the writing and the research data, and between reflection and evaluation, that requires the nimble approach of bricolage and concentration on the needs of the novel.

This essay is an attempt to address Carter's "missing in translation" and demonstrate how eclectic as well as orderly research, prior knowledge, drafting, crafting, critical reading and evaluation contributed to the current version of "Salvaged".

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE—FEMINISM

Feminist theory and feminist history analyse multiple intersecting social and cultural hierarchies, their articulations, manifestations and effects. Since the mid-twentieth century feminist theory has grown, according to Ferguson (2017, pp. 165-169), into a sprawling, productive, diverse intellectual and political assemblage. An enormously varied collective practice, it “casts a capacious net across fields” but is nevertheless and despite significant differences rooted in and responsible to universal movements for equality, freedom and justice; characterised by a suspicion of dualistic thinking; generally oriented towards fluid processes of emergence rather than essentialism; and committed to political as well as intellectual enterprise.

By revealing how categories of gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, age, class and other constructions of difference have operated historically, researchers and writers can challenge their continuing operation and legacies. Grosz (2003, p. 17) says the past “must be regarded as inherently open to future rewritings, as never ‘full’ enough...The past is never exhausted...insofar as it is always capable of giving rise to another reading, another context, another framework that will animate it in different ways”. Among forms of depiction, historical fictions potentially encourage a culture to think in new ways, providing a means to critique, to conceptualise, engage with and reject processes of representation (de Groot, 2016).

Feminists agree on one thing, Mann (2018, p. 48) posits, even if we think we do not:

Whilst people called women, or people who call themselves women, continue to exist, and while the category continues to operate quite robustly in our languages and our lived experience (in no matter how contested a fashion), the emancipatory aspirations of the people who are categorized as women or categorize themselves as women—and therefore live as women, however variously positioned or situated—are worth something, are worth a great deal.

This is the broad theoretical and ethical basis of this project.

Using a bricolage approach, the following discussion draws from the “sprawling assemblage” (Ferguson, 2017, p. 165) of feminist theory to focus on three key concerns addressed by “Salvaged”—female invisibility in the historical and literary record, feminisms in the plural and the intersectionality of personal experience in the formation of identities.

Invisibility, plurality, intersectionality

I share with Byatt (2001, p. 11), a novelist, “the political desire to write the histories of the marginalised, the forgotten, the unrecorded”, or what Rich (1972, p. 18), a poet, calls the concept of re-vision: for women “re-vision, the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes...is...more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival”. Rich highlights the immediacy of the historical to the contemporary and a need to redress a female past silenced in the male tradition.

Feminist researchers aim, as far as possible, to “make the invisible visible, bringing margin to centre, putting the spotlight on women as competent actors, understanding women as subjects in their own right rather than as objects for men” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 248). Within Reinharz’s framework, a feminist-based historical novel must avoid dualistic and essentialist thinking—not either/or but both/and—and embrace plurality by addressing the way some women could not be or become competent actors or escape their oppression as man’s subjugated other due to the constraints of their historical and cultural circumstances whilst also showing the way other women fought against their constraints.

I am interested in women’s diverse lived experience and perspectives as the expression of a vast array of thoughts, feelings and activities mediated through the lenses of each individual woman’s family circumstance, race, socio-economic class, sexual preference, ethnicity, religion, age, physical condition and state of mind.

As an individual navigates through the world, she is influenced by a variety of such factors which intersect to form her background and context. Intersectionality was introduced in the late 1980s by Crenshaw (1989) as “a heuristic term to focus attention on the vexed dynamics of difference and the solidarities of sameness in the context of antidiscrimination and social movement politics” (Cho et al., 2013, p. 787). It exposed how single-axis thinking undermines legal thinking, disciplinary knowledge production, struggles for social justice,

and the way forms of concurrent and overlapping oppressions often operate together and exacerbate each other to create a “matrix of domination” (Collins, 1990, p. 553).

The study of the complexities of intersectional identity through the writing of women such as Ahmed (2017); Alvarez (1994); Crenshaw (1989); Evaristo (2019); Lorde (1984); Mohanty (1988) and Trinh (1989) offered a way for me to examine my own preconceptions about the “other” and the varied contexts and subtexts of female oral histories and memoirs.⁴ By this means, I attempted to take account of the particular and possibly changing matrix of oppression and domination operating in each woman’s life prior to and during the war as well as in the later period when they recounted their experience.

In this project I focussed on imagining and evoking a specific human phenomenon, that is, experience of rupture—of war and occupation—where some systems were reinforced, and others broke down or were in other ways compromised or challenged. The option to speak to and interrogate living women (and men) was not available to me. I had to rely on historical accounts and the steps I took to ensure ethical and fair representation and rigour are documented in Chapter Six.

The narrative of “Salvaged” makes visible the largely ignored place of women in various aspects of the wartime activities of occupied Singapore; it also brings women marginalised by gender, ethnicity and social position to the centre of the narrative by deploying multiple viewpoints—seven women with different life situations are written as autonomous subjects. Seven viewpoints offer a representative cross-section of the ethnic make-up of pre-war Singapore—Chinese, Indian, Malay, Eurasian—and respects the diversity of the women’s testimonies that underpin this study, whilst also being manageable in a literary sense (for further discussion of these choices see Chapter Six).

Creating a number of different fictional characters of the 1940s demands consideration of intersecting phenomenological experiences. In “Salvaged”, all the characters grow up in the patriarchal cultures of their various ethnicities within a colonial structure of female oppression on various levels, tempered by some important and progressive ideas gaining

⁴ See also Spivak (1994). In an Australian context see Moreton-Robinson (2000).

momentum in the interwar years (see Chapter Five for discussion of the “modern girl” and the Girl Guide movement).

Simone is a mixed-race orphan despised by her Swiss relatives; Kay is the daughter of a Christian Chinese family that values education and independence for girls and women; Zahra is a girl raised within the patriarchal strictures of Islam who had an unusually progressive father who valued education and opportunities for his daughters; Anita is raised in a wealthy family within the Indian cultural structure of arranged marriages and purely domestic life for women; Jenny is a Straits Chinese girl in a strict patriarchal home but which, during the interwar years in Singapore, was increasingly influenced by more progressive British ideas about female education; Molly and her brother Charles are raised in a wealthy pro-British household by an easy-going, aged aunt; Teresa is a poor slave girl from southern China who gained her freedom from servitude through the actions of European women who agitated for and achieved the Mui Tsai Reform Act of 1932. One of my jobs as a novelist of this era is to illuminate, through literary description, the extraordinary complexity of the socio-cultural world of pre-war Singapore (which is discussed further in Chapter Five) and how it ruptured during wartime and its aftermath.

In Hutcheon’s (1988) concept of “feminisms in the plural”, there is no single definitive narrative of feminism but the potential for many different localised feminisms. Picking up on Hutcheon’s theory, Friedman (1998) encourages contemporary feminist writers to avoid creating the same kind of monological patterns found in the patriarchal narratives that have historically excluded women, and to aim for a feminist historiography that “opens up the potential for feminists to engage in constructing histories in the plural, for recognizing that no single history can encounter the full dimensionality of the Real”. Accordingly, feminist writing aims to produce feminist histories in the plural “so as to avoid the creation of grand narratives that reproduce the totalizing histories of winners in which the stories of losers are lost” (p. 236).

Hundreds of women from Japan and Germany who lived and worked in Singapore during the occupation became, ultimately, part of the losing side. They were also trapped within their own patriarchal system and caught up in events beyond their control. In “the full dimensionality of the Real”, their stories are equally valuable.

In “Salvaged”, two minor characters, Japanese and German—Mrs Sugiyama and Greta Muller—are both in their late fifties, born in the previous century and raised in conservative and traditional male-dominated Confucianist and Christian societies. The exuberant, liberating possibilities of the early 1920s for young women in cosmopolitan cities all over the world, including Tokyo, Berlin and Singapore (which I discuss in the Literature Review in Chapter Five) have come too late for them. From the late 1920s to the early 1940s Japan and Germany were under stifling and violent fascist regimes in which cosmopolitan freedoms were deemed degenerate and women’s primary function—despite the clear use made by both regimes of women’s labour in agriculture and factories—was confirmed and enforced as domestic and reproductive (Cook & Cook, 1992; Passmore, 2003).

By attempting to determine and depict diverse women’s stories, feminist researchers and authors recognise the validity, variety and worth of women’s lived human experiences not only in the present but, vitally, also in the record of the past from which and in which, until the latter half of the twentieth century, women everywhere were excluded, marginalised or denigrated.

Women and history

Until the eighteenth-century women in Western societies were considered to have no selves and no capacity for rational thought (Chamberlain, 2012). Since women were considered to be incapable of reason, they were not allowed to be self-determining, could not be permitted to make decisions for themselves, to be citizens, or own property. “The Self as an Object in Western philosophy is quite clearly a Male Self. Women barely had identities, let alone a claim on an independent and egoistic existence” (Chamberlain, 2012, n.p.). For women there was only a life of the body, and that body in the family was the property of father, husband or son, and in society of the church. Across Asia, similar constraints were placed on the lives of girls and women through the patriarchal strictures of religious doctrines and ancient male-dominated cultural norms and social custom.

In the West, it was not until women began to be educated in the eighteenth century that the question of women being possessed of selves could even begin to be raised. Apart from the political writing of Mary Wollstonecraft (1792), which was not widely promulgated in her

own time, little in the way of formal texts from women entered any canon of academic works until the 20th century (Zinsser, 2013).

Of course there were a great number of women thinkers, writers, artists, scientists, educators, and social activists uncelebrated throughout history (Foxley, 2006; Smith, 2007). The fact that women and their considerable achievements were mostly ignored or irrelevant to the historical record until the late 1960s (Zinsser, 2013) demonstrates the ancient and enduring power and influence of the patriarchy.

Whether as subject, reader or writer, exclusion from recorded history is, as Wallace (2008, p. 2) points out, a “serious business”. Rich (1995, p. 204) puts it more strongly: “In a world where language and naming are power, silence is oppression, is violence”. For Rivken (2004, p. 765): “To be a woman under such conditions was in some respects not to exist at all”. However, eight memoirs by Asian women describing their experiences of the Japanese occupation emerged slowly over a long period from 1953 to 2010—Sybil Kathigasu (1953); Janet Lim (1959); Muriel La Brooy (1987); Aisha Akbar (1990); Swee Lian (2006); Lucie Lum (2007); Rita La Fontaine de Clercq Subli (2007) and Maisie Duncan (2010). Whether or not feminist activities over the latter half of the twentieth century were a direct or indirect influence, those women, at least in later life felt that they had the right and even a duty to tell their stories—harrowing, bizarre, wistful, occasionally comical, often appalling—on their own terms for their families and for posterity.

Lerner’s (1975, pp. 5-9) categorisation of the historiographical patterns of women’s history proved useful to me as I was trying to find my way into drafting the novel. Lerner recognised the worthy early aims of women writers but noted how they fell short. For her “compensatory history”—stories of a few exceptional women who exercised male power; “contribution history”—women who had, one way or another, affected men’s history; and “victims of oppression history”—women confined passively in the constraints of patriarchy, were not enough. However important, such narratives do little to challenge or alter the conceptual framework and criteria of inclusion characteristic of the male not the female world. For Lerner, the real task of the feminist historian of women is to construct the female experience within a male-defined world on their own terms. This “transitional history” as Lerner called it, required new categories and new ways to determine what was and was not significant.

Using Simone de Beauvoir's terminology, Lerner asked "what would the past be like if men were regarded as women's other?"

The concept of men as women's other became an intriguing consideration as I was writing the first draft of "Salvaged". In their separate ways, I wanted all the female characters to come to realise the lie of presumed physical and economic protections offered to women in return for their acquiescence in and continuation of the patriarchal status quo. I wanted to demonstrate in the novel the way that the rupture of society by war throws those false contracts into stark relief. But how far was that true for the female interviewees?

The quantitative method used to analyse and record information from the oral histories and the data's influence on particular fictional aspects of character and plot are discussed in Chapter Six. My purpose in the section below is to outline some of the effects of the occupation on those women's lives, what they did after the war and whether they found a place in a male-defined world on their own terms.

What I discovered is what Sebba (2016) found in her examination of Nazi-occupied Paris—a kaleidoscope of female wartime experiences. Some women discovered freedoms and a certain autonomy. Others were imprisoned. For some it was merely dreary and hard whilst others, despite the hardships, managed to flourish.

For example, for women living secluded in traditional Chinese, Muslim or Hindu homes, there was change. Through necessity or compulsion, they were forced out of their domestic sphere and into the public space. Sarimah binti Dassam (OH8) describes how her Indonesian mother, Maria, living in a conservative Muslim home with nine children, rarely ventured outside. During the occupation this changed abruptly. Maria had to take food to her husband who was working in a Japanese factory making threads from pineapple fibre. He was obliged to agree to Maria going out to get rations and shop for essentials during which time she mixed with other women of various ethnicities in the inevitable queuing lines. Sarimah says this was a heady freedom for her mother who enjoyed her new, more public, life. Clearly for Maria the occupation was a period of a certain domestic liberation. But also for Sarimah who was wed in a traditional arranged marriage in 1940. Her husband was killed in the bombing and in 1943 she married a man of her own choosing.

For Naidu Lakshmi (OH7), an Indian girl who at thirteen had been compelled (without her knowledge or consent) into an arranged marriage and by her twenties had six children and elderly relatives to care for, the occupation meant freedom. Through necessity she found herself running the family's jewellery business. She was also busy with charity work with Indian women, did voluntary work for the Rani of Jhansi regiment of the Indian National Army and fed Indian POWs. Due to cheap wartime labour she could hire people desperate for a roof over their heads to look after her house, children and aged relatives. After the war, she continued to lead a fulfilling public life and taught herself to speak, read and write English.

Elizabeth Choi (OH1), an independent, forceful teacher took care of her wider family after her mother died in childbirth. After the British surrender, she and her husband kept a shop in a hospital that serviced Changi Prison. Here she organised provisions for and passed news to British POWs in Changi Prison for which she and her husband were arrested and imprisoned. She was starved and tortured and barely survived. On her release, weak and in the same dress she had worn throughout her 18-month long imprisonment, with her entire family moved to the mainland, she worked to support herself in a club for Japanese sailors, entirely alone, before finding and releasing her imprisoned husband at war's end. Both she and her husband suffered badly. Post war Elizabeth returned to teaching and was a member of the pre-independence Legislative Council.

Myna Segaram (OH9) became, along with her cousin's husband, the financial support of her family of widowed mother, aunt and grandparents. Through fearful episodes and alongside the hardship, she claims that her experience in the Guides, her excellent education at Raffles Girls School and the emotional support of her family were factors in her ability to get through largely unscathed. After the war she worked for the International Red Cross organising repatriation of Japanese POWs for five years and then went to university. She became a social worker with the Association of the Deaf and also the first non-European District Commissioner of the Girl Guides.

The strange banality of the occupation is conveyed by Eurasian Mabel de Souza (OH4) whose work in a department store became work in a restaurant and, apart from the occasional fearful run-in with a drunk Japanese soldier, barely changed throughout the occupation. Life on the edge of poverty both before and during the war, working and caring for her TB stricken single mother, plodded on day by day. For Mary Lim (OH6), also, after the shock of

surrender, the occupation became a dreary time when she just got on with life as best she could and with no sense of purpose, living in limbo where the past and the future meant nothing. She baked cakes to supplement the family income, dabbled in the black market and married a man of her choice in 1943. She became a teacher after the war.

Chinese loyalist Chu Shuen Choo (OH2) boycotted Japanese goods pre-war and contributed to the China Fund (to support Chiang Kai Shek's Nationalist fight against the Japanese). Trained as a teacher, she was happy to give up paid work after her first child was born. After the surrender she was instrumental in moving the family into the house of a Japanese female friend who protected them and saved her husband from participation in the *sook ching*. Moving from house to house as needed or ordered, in equal partnership with her left-wing husband, who worked two jobs to keep the now growing family afloat (a second child was born in 1943), she took control of the home front using her considerable entrepreneurial skills and energy to set up and run a curry rice/fresh fruit shop. Later, when the Japanese offered Chinese families plots of land on the mainland in order to decrease the food needs of Singapore's population, she was instrumental in creating a family home out of what lay at hand. After the war she returned to teaching and was a committed Socialist.

Whether or not the interviewees, from their varied experiences of the occupation, consciously recognised the false contract of patriarchy or even thought in those terms is difficult to evaluate and perhaps not a fair question, but I felt justified, from the diversity of their experiences and what I saw as increased post-war opportunities for some of those women, in allowing my fictional characters to begin to realise it.

Women and oral history

Feminist researchers embrace oral history and the recording and preserving of women's voices as an important political aim. By the late 1970s oral history was an established practice amongst academic and community historians in many parts of the world, although its value and validity were challenged by traditional documentary historians (Perks & Thomson, 1998). With new understandings arising from post-positivist and post-modernist views on the subjective, patriarchal nature of history writing itself, arguments about the unreliability of oral history were re-evaluated. Oral history's strength lies precisely in its subjectivity of memory because it provides clues about the meanings of historical events as well as

relationships between past and present, memory and identity, and between individual and collective memory. “Oral history tells us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did (Portelli, 1997, p. 50).

For a historical novelist, oral histories offer an indispensable first-hand sense of time and place, of the pleasures and surprises of buried memories remembered, the intimacy of detail—for example, the secret hand code the prisoners used to speak to each other in the prison cells of the *kempeitai* (Elizabeth Choi, OH1); the frustrations of a novice learning how to deal on the black market (Mary Lim, OH6); the unexpected joys of freedom (Lakshmi Naidu, OH7, Sarimah binti Dassam, OH8); reading George Bernard Shaw in the hot boring afternoons of the Japanese workday (Myna Segaram, OH9); being frustrated at bowing and making up derogatory lyrics to the Japanese national anthem (Esme Woodford, OH10); remembering a father who had procured girls for the Japanese and the sudden defensive realisation of what that meant, but also recalling later with a chuckle only learning of the Japanese surrender as a child when she was taken back to school (Helen Chua, OH3).

Women and fiction

How men and women view the past and their place in succeeding generations, Korhonen (2006, p. 9) writes, is not formed solely by history but also by “poetry and fiction”. For women looking for their place prior to the mid-twentieth century history books were of little use. What about fiction and poetry? After all, women have appeared in fictional form since ancient times. In *A Room of One's Own* (1929) Virginia Woolf, a voracious reader, asked ironically “why no woman wrote a word of that extraordinary literature when every other man, it seemed, was capable of song or sonnet”. (pp. 40-41). She opened G.M. Trevelyan's *History of England* (1939), consulted the index under “women, position of” and discovered that in the fifteenth century “the daughter who refused to marry the gentleman of her parents' choice was liable to be locked up, beaten and flung about the room, without any shock being inflicted on public opinion.”

She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words,

some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband. If woman had no existence save in the fiction written by men, one would imagine her a person of the utmost importance; very various; heroic and mean; splendid and sordid; infinitely beautiful and hideous in the extreme; as great as a man, some think even greater. But this is woman in fiction...Imaginatively she is of the highest importance, practically she is insignificant. (p. 41)

Woolf is well aware that the situation for both men and women was more complex and the power structures more diffuse than this passage suggests. She uses her powers of rhetoric to simply and entertainingly make a point about misogyny and the system of patriarchy. There have been many decades of feminist thought between Woolf's time and my own, but her treatise in its authenticity and clarity still has, for me, the power to reveal, explain and move.

How much more so, I thought, for my fictional characters living in the mid 1940s? As Simone ("Salvaged", p. 98) sits in an abandoned library in the silence of long hot afternoons over the days and years of the occupation, discovery of Woolf and her resonant assessment makes a strong impression.

Inspired by Woolf, Simone searches for and puts together a shelf of women writers. The shelf is short and Woolf's words about the level and length of the physical and intellectual hostility of men towards women resound. Surrounded by shelves of fictional books written by men about feisty and passionate female characters like Cleopatra, Rosalind, Phaedra and Becky Sharpe, she recalls Woolf's words and sees how few women are to be found in the history books she has assiduously protected and read and how falsely they are depicted in fiction by men as significant and substantial when the true conditions of their lives in peace or war are evident all around her.

At first Simone writes from her journalistic impulse to record facts. Gradually she begins to realise her own place, her own importance, her own right to voice and expression in the unfolding of this dramatic moment in time and her writing becomes more reflective and takes on a greater and more personal import. Woolf inspires Simone to understand the power and importance of women writing women's experiences so that women can situate themselves in

the continuities of the generations. She begins to see it as an “act of survival” (Rich, 1972, p. 18), and other women in “Salvaged” come to understand this too:

‘You haven’t changed, Red,’ Anita says. ‘Always recording. Writing things down. Those damn newsletters. I once thought it stupid, but now I see it for what it is. The need to make the history of our times. Of women’s times. If we don’t do it, the men certainly won’t, will they?’ (p. 81)

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY—PHENOMENOLOGY

The purpose of phenomenology is to discover and interpret specific lived experiences as perceived by individual actors in a situation, including their thoughts and feelings, and to convey or represent such experience using narration and rich description (van Manen, 1997). In general, a phenomenological approach is well suited for studying “affective, emotional, and often intense human experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 26). The final product of a phenomenological inquiry should induce the reader to say “now I understand what it is like to have experienced that particular phenomenon” (Patton, 2002 as cited in Worthington, 2013).

At the outset of the project, and taking a bricolage approach, I considered those aspects of van Manen’s (1997, 2011, 2012, 2017) phenomenological methodology and practice that suited my twin aims: the interpretation of key data (oral and textual testimonies) and the writing of the novel. On a practical level, the subjectivity of the phenomenological approach was most suited to small samples and therefore fitted the examination and analysis of the eleven women interviewees identified in the Oral History Centre of the National Archive of Singapore. The phenomenological approach also resonates with the creative writing process identified by Smith and Dean (2009) as an iterative cyclic web: one examines the phenomena then writes about the phenomena, considers and evaluates, then writes some more, considers one’s position in relation to the data, writes again, considers the general and particular, writes more and so on.

When developing a feminist phenomenological approach, I found Mann’s (2018) study of the work of Simone de Beauvoir useful. She argues that phenomenological inquiry need not rely solely on those she terms “the father figures of phenomenology” (Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty) and that Simone de Beauvoir’s writings offer a valuable feminist addition.

While contextual exploration and understandings are explicit characteristics of this phenomenological study, enabling inquiry into the role or influence of context on selected women’s voices and silences, my main purpose was to gain insightful descriptions of the way the women experienced the world for the purposes of the novel. This mode of investigation demands of the researcher a “bracketing” of her own taken-for-granted assumptions or perceptions (van Manen, 1997). The bracketing approach came to be modified for this project in two ways: initially by Trinh’s (1989) considerations of the way one’s own lived experience of place can bring a more profound understanding of the data and enrich the writing of a

novel, and later by reflection on Mann's (2018) reading of de Beauvoir's concept of bracketing not as an instant act of will, but as a gradual, neutralising process achieved through practice itself and immersion in the life of the other. The aim is not to examine oneself, but to become aware of one's involvement in the reality of the world, that is, in the constitution of the meaning of reality, and one's attachments to this reality. Merleau-Ponty (1993, p. viii) describes the phenomenological position this way: "Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world's basis. It slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice".

In relation to my research questions, the above considerations regarding the neutralisation of perceptions helped me to think through ethical and responsible approaches to the unavoidable limitations of my knowledge and my outsider position in relation to the lives of culturally different women experiencing a substantially different historical time and situation.

In *What can literature do?* Simone de Beauvoir (1964, translated by Moi, 2009) defined literature as a way of seeing the world—an activity carried out by human beings for human beings with the aim of unveiling the world for them. For de Beauvoir, literature overcomes existential separation and connects us to others. It does so by making both the writer and the reader "taste" another life (Moi, 2009):

This is the miracle of literature, which distinguishes it from information: that another truth becomes mine without ceasing to be other. I renounce my own "I" in favour of the speaker; and yet I remain myself. It is an intermingling ceaselessly begun and ceaselessly undone, and it is the only kind of communication capable of giving me that which cannot be communicated, capable of giving me the taste of another life.

In offering the taste of another life, what is my ethical responsibility towards the interviewed women as I dramatise and fabricate events based around their experiences? Historical writers are obliged to mine experience for material. Novelist Thomas Pynchon wrote: "Unless we were actually there, we must turn to the people who were, or to letters, contemporary reporting, the Internet, until with luck, we can begin to make a few things of our own up. To discover in the course of research some engaging detail we know can be put into a story where it will do some good...is simply what we do" (cited in de Groote, 2016, p. 31).

I take a position that the novels I write should not misrepresent history or the remembered experiences of women who have given interviews or written memoirs. I take facts of history seriously, writing fictions which respect each of my sources, whilst also understanding the unreliable nature of personal memories, for they have something meaningful to say about the social and cultural forces at work at different times. I strive sincerely to understand and negotiate the past whilst making no claim to completeness or truth.

The development of feminist phenomenology

The following discussion provides an overview of the short history of feminist phenomenology, then discusses Mann's (2018) assertion of a particular "critical feminist phenomenology" that she argues is found in five aspects of Simone de Beauvoir's work. Mann's text encouraged insights into the creation of "Salvaged" to emerge as I drafted the novel as well as assisting with retrospective consideration of my writing practice.

Phenomenology is often characterised as getting back to the things themselves, and as describing the structures of lived experience by pushing past the assumptions we tend to bring to experience. But what specifically is feminist phenomenology? Ryman and Fulfer (2013) explain that there are at least two sides to feminist phenomenology. One side consists of feminist philosophers who critiqued phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and Husserl for assuming that the experience they describe is that of a neutral and universal subject of experience—typically white and male. The second side of feminist phenomenology consists of feminist thinkers reinterpreting phenomenological texts and methods and employing them for feminist purposes.

Feminist phenomenology is a relatively new field. Ryman and Fulfer (2013) state that some date it back to the 1950s and include texts like Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) and Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958), though neither of these figures identified as a feminist phenomenologist at that time. Heinamaa (1999, p. 114), for instance, argues that "the core of Beauvoir's writing about sexuality and ethics is a particular understanding of the philosopher's *practice and task*" (italics in the original), and that she shared this understanding with Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. In the case of *The Second Sex*, Heinamaa says that de Beauvoir's main interest is not in explaining women's subordinate position, nor in defending their rights: "Instead of putting forward a sociohistorical theory or a liberalist thesis, Beauvoir presents a phenomenological description. The phenomenon that she

describes is the reality named woman, and her aim is to analyse the meanings involved in this reality” including the radical problematisation of ideas of femaleness, femininity, and women's subordination, as well as those of sexuality, embodiment, and the self–other relationship.

Ryman and Fulfer (2013) claim that others date a feminist phenomenology only to the 1980s, when work that was explicitly feminist and phenomenological became more visible, including by figures like Irigaray, Butler and Young. By 2010, Fisher notes, the discussion had moved beyond early feminist critiques of the phenomenological method as essentialising, universal and inattentive to difference, and she urged feminist phenomenologists to turn-up the volume on applying phenomenological methods to feminist analyses of social and political questions about gender.

Mann (2018), a predominant reference, asserts that a critical feminist phenomenology can be found in five aspects of de Beauvoir’s work.

As a study of the phenomenal constraints of living in the world, feminist phenomenology holds the position that being-in-the-world is not a genderless and abstract condition. It includes but also exceeds the bounds of the body “to encompass the ontology of female life events and asks after woman in her historical becoming” (Mann, 2018). Using a feminist phenomenology offered me a way to analyse and reflect on the different intersecting experiences of the individual women I was studying and to re-imagine them as part of the practice of writing fiction. Practice is paramount here.

De Beauvoir, Mann says, draws on phenomenological methodology in the practice of creating her fictions. This is what Heinamaa (1999, p. 114) sees as de Beauvoir’s understanding of philosophy’s “practice and task”. Van Manen (2019, p. 2) also insists on the primacy of “doing phenomenology”. He quotes Verhoeven (1972) who suggested that philosophical knowledge of phenomenology does not make a person a phenomenologist, any more than studying or criticising poetry makes a person a poet. Doing phenomenology means avoiding assumptions, using lived experience as a basis for research, learning from that lived experience and expressing it in rich and meaningful ways. These perspectives on phenomenology suggest its aptness for a feminist thesis based on the practice of creative writing and the outcomes of this practice.

Further, Mann describes five aspects of de Beauvoir's phenomenological philosophy which I discuss below in relation to my project. Although presented in a sequential manner, in practice each is constantly engaged in a backwards and forwards motion in relation to the data and the creative writing, as expressed in the introduction to this section and in Smith and Dean's (2009) iterative cyclic web:

- An inquiry driven by irritated or outraged curiosity/an inquiry that matters
- Passing through prejudice
- Imaginative variation
- Oscillation between the general and the particular
- Understanding through practice

1. Irritated curiosity

The beginning of an inquiry is often inflected with a kind of irritation, the sense that something is wrong and must be righted. Sometimes, Mann writes, "it is fuming and outraged: as when de Beauvoir spends nine pages at the beginning of her chapter on motherhood exploring the hypocrisy of French anti-abortion politics" (de Beauvoir, 2010, pp. 524-533). Affective modalities belong to feminist philosophy, and they signal that it is a deeply interested endeavour, that something matters in a primary way, for fundamental values are at stake.

By writing "Salvaged" I was expressing my own deep concerns about the invisibility of women (and the diverse plurality of their lives) in the historical record of the Japanese occupation of Singapore, which needed to be addressed via fiction.

2. Passing through prejudice

De Beauvoir does not presume that one can "bracket" one's prejudices at the outset of an inquiry, or that one can in any immediate way neutralise the force of interested, located, particular participation in the ethical background of the inquiry. Instead, one must pass through the prejudices keeping them close at hand and working on them in order to begin the task of neutralising their hold.

Whilst researching and writing “Salvaged”—and addressing my research questions—the issue of “bracketing” was at the forefront of my mind. The precepts of a bricolage approach (Chapter Two) demand self-reflexivity throughout the workings of a project, not to examine myself but to be always aware of my own involvement in the reality of the world. Keeping my own possible preconceptions to the fore, “passing through prejudice” found a response in the third of Mann’s conceptions of de Beauvoir’s aspects of practice.

3. Imaginative variation

De Beauvoir recognises that the imagination is as much a force for binding an individual subject to her limited perspective as it is a force for freeing her from it. De Beauvoir’s imaginative variation takes on the form of a kind of relentless migration between various points of view, each of them bound by particular interests with ethical consequences. This results in the polyvocality of de Beauvoir’s text. For her, imaginative variation involves the perspective of a plurality of others, which she constantly moves into and retreats from. This seemed to speak to the second of de Beauvoir’s points: the practice of placing oneself into a plurality of particular, interested, value-laden perspectives allows for the mitigation or even cessation of one’s own prejudices.

I became absorbed in the experiences of my eleven interviewees. This is not uncommon as I research the background and particular experiences of subjects when writing a historical novel. In fact, I think it is a *sine qua non* for the historical novelist and may be enhanced by years of practice. Absorption in imagined realities of a period not my own, and in the writing of various characters’ points of view, banishes my own world for a time. I need fully to immerse myself in that other world. Immersion in the lives of the interviewees as I analysed their stories and then in creation of characters inspired by them becomes a method intended to address the ethical responsibilities that come with outsider status and writing the other.

Immersion in the plurality of the experiences of the interviewees and the contextual background of the occupation was modified by my own experiences in two ways. The first was my foreknowledge and understanding of place through the experience of living in Singapore. The second was my hesitation when developing the principal protagonist of “Salvaged”, the character of Simone. I deal with both these aspects in Chapter Six.

4. Oscillation between the particular and the general

De Beauvoir's practice involves a certain kind of movement, which Mann calls "an oscillation". This oscillation is from the most concrete, particular, and located events and perspectives to the general features of human experience and back again. De Beauvoir uses the concepts of "immanence" and "transcendence" to explain women's situation: immanence is stagnation within a situation, while transcendence is reaching out into the future, through projects that open up freedom. At times these two concepts have been understood as "body" and "consciousness" respectively, but that, according to Scholtz (2008, n.p.), misconstrues de Beauvoir's philosophy, which suggests "We are all embodied consciousnesses: this is the condition for the possibility of our freedom".

Although every "existent"—or human being—is both immanent and transcendent, some social practices may imprison one in immanence such that one is unable to achieve transcendence (freedom). This happens in all cases of oppression. De Beauvoir, Scholtz (2008) writes, does not think that women are the only oppressed social group. Blacks are oppressed in relation to whites, and the poor are oppressed in relation to the rich. But, in addition to the fact that women have long been oppressed, there is another important difference between the oppression of women and oppression based on class or race. For de Beauvoir, women are complicit in their own oppression. In existentialist terms, women internalise the male gaze, and with it the expectations of the gender. They are conscious of how they are observed, and women's own thinking assimilates this awareness.⁵

Women then strive to live up to this model of the 'eternal feminine'. In other words, they become just what they are expected to become: a transcendent existent trapped in the immanence of being. "De Beauvoir offers a rich account of the 'myths and idols' employed to maintain the image of femininity that women are expected to emulate" (Stoltz, 2008, n.p.). De Beauvoir refers to the start of the menstrual flow as a reminder to a girl of her immanence. Menstruation is a monthly reminder of her attachment to the body as servant to the species via reproduction. Women are subject to the vicissitudes of their bodies in a way that men are not and—as exemplified by Lee Kim San's response to a woman menstruating in the *kempeitai* prison cell (discussed on p. 207), public exposure of this natural process is

⁵ Studies have shown that this kind of internalisation does also exist in other areas of societal power imbalances such as race, class, religion, sexuality, etc. (Anderson & Collins, 1995; Jones, 2000; Sherover-Marcuse, 1986)

frequently a cause of shame or humiliation on the women's part as it is met by the disgust of the male.

In *The Second Sex* (1949/1986, p. 470), de Beauvoir demonstrates the particular in the universal: she puts us into the body of a girl watching her mother do the dishes, crushed by the insight that this repetitious act is the shape of her future. Burke (2018) describes this oscillation between the general and the particular as key in Beauvoir's work as it requires us to remain attentive to both the lived experience of the individual and to the lived experience of the social collective in which an individual finds herself. The work of phenomenology, in de Beauvoir's hands, is "about a consciousness burdened by material interests and experience shaped by situation" (Mann, 2018).

This concept of the myth of the feminine and a transcendent existent trapped in an immanence of being was in my mind when I began to research the Girl Guide movement in Singapore (Chapter Five). The women who ran that movement in the interwar years, it seemed to me, were about the business, in their quiet but revolutionary way, of subverting the myth of the domesticated and demure feminine and opening pathways for young girls to find their own freedoms.

5. Understanding through practice

Doing phenomenological research involves making visible to the reader the feelings, thoughts and attitudes of those who have experienced the phenomena—in this case war and occupation—through the application of language, including the thoughtful writing of a historical novel. Reading, researching, thinking and writing are intertwined and iterative parts of practice. Doing feminist phenomenology involved all these aspects separately and together in order to reveal the experiences of my eleven interviewees while aiming for rich descriptive fiction.

CHAPTER FIVE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Before I began this research, I had not realised how little was recorded about the world of local civilians during the Japanese occupation of Singapore. After all, not only had I been to exhibitions on the occupation in Singapore when I lived there—including a permanent exhibition at the Old Ford Factory on Bukit Timah Road where the British surrender was signed—I had actually guided one. I had plenty to talk about and there seemed to be ample information, artefacts, photographs and personal testimonies in display cabinets and covering the walls. But as I delved closely into the period and the texts and artefacts of those exhibitions, it became clear just how much had been built on so little.

The Japanese occupation, Kratoska (1998, p. 1) writes, has often been described as a major watershed, an event that put an end to the old order and created a new one. However, remarkably little is known about what happened during the occupation, and its significance is often assumed rather than demonstrated. The academic literature on the period, Kratoska (pp. 8-9) continues, is sparse, reflecting a lack of source materials of the period, and it deals for the most part with military activity and the ordeal of Europeans held as prisoners of war or as civilian internees. There are few studies concerning the local population (Kratoska, 1998, p. 1).

Bombing, fire, the scorched earth policy of the British during the battles of Malaya and Singapore, followed by widespread looting of homes and administrative offices by civilians and disaffected soldiers before the British surrender, left little behind. After the Japanese surrender, much the same occurred. The Japanese systematically destroyed the greater part of their administrative papers (Corner, 1981, p. 146) and another wave of looting took place in the “limbo” period of three weeks between the end of hostilities and the arrival of Commonwealth troops (Kratoska, 1998).⁶ This reality is reflected in “Salvaged” (p. 208).

⁶ Many of the materials that survived were subsequently handed over to the War Damage Commission, which, when its investigations were finished, arranged for their destruction (Kratoska, 1998, p.7). For example, in 1953, materials pertaining to banks and estates were marked “Non-Important Books”, taken to the Municipal Dumping Grounds in Kuala Lumpur, sprayed with a chemical to hasten decomposition and buried. In a footnote Kratoska (p. 7, Footnote 10), cited a War Office memo which lists 256 “non important” books.

Scope and organisation

This review outlines the paucity of academic literature about the war from an Asian perspective and key works informing this project, including tertiary, secondary and primary sources. It then discusses the development of the Oral History Centre of the National Archive of Singapore (NAS) and its Project on the Japanese Occupation of Singapore. Finally, it offers an overview of the ethnic, social, cultural and political world of Singapore in the interwar years including the changing attitudes to women through the growing influence of mass media, the rise of the “modern girl” and the Girl Guide movement.

Throughout this review, as indicated in Chapter One, I integrate information from oral histories and memoirs with references to “Salvaged” where appropriate.

The long silence in Asia

Among the major protagonists of the Second World War in the Pacific region literature on the period varies widely. The ultimate victors, in particular Britain, America and Australia, “produced their histories and memoirs early and copiously” (Wang, 2000, p. 12). The Chinese were preoccupied with a civil war that, after the victory of the People’s Liberation Army over the Nationalist forces in 1949, overshadowed the more complicated story of the Sino–Japanese War.

The Japanese, the vanquished, buried the war for forty years. What Cheah (2012, p. 32) calls Japan’s “amnesia” about the war years continued to be maintained by the government until a controversy in 1982 known as the “textbook crisis”. Japanese school history textbooks seemed to whitewash Japan’s record. In the 1982 textbooks Japan was portrayed not as the aggressor but as a victim of circumstance. This drew both Japanese and world-wide criticism with the most vehement coming from China and South Korea.

In his survey of Japanese written accounts of the soldiers’ war in Malaya, Henry Frei (1995, p. 153) remarks that most soldiers “drop their pens when they reach the surrender of Singapore”, choosing not to speak of the massacres and atrocities they meted out during the occupation years. From Frei’s (2004) further account of ordinary Japanese soldiers’ experiences in the Malayan Campaign, I took information about the way the soldiers dealt

with their dead. Unable to do more than a cursory burial or no burial at all, they severed the hands of fallen comrades and ossified them by burning them to the bone in order to return them to their homes. This lengthy procedure, its sounds and smells, which Frei conveys in a description of a group of soldiers “sizzling” the hand of their dead commander in the only frying pan they possessed and from which they had recently eaten their meagre meal, was compelling (p. 136). The hands of the dead sons of Mr and Mrs Sugiyama played a prominent part in their story (“Salvaged”, p. 21).

In 1986, 60 civilian veterans of the Japanese wartime municipal administration of Singapore put together their recollections in a *History of the Shonan Municipality: Singapore during Wartime*. Unfortunately, this work has not been translated into English but Henry Frei (2004, p. xxiii) points out that the book bristles with vignettes showing how 300 civilian officials, who were at loggerheads with the general staff, kept a city of 800,000 going to the bitter end. The former administrative clerks firmly distance themselves from the military and speculate about how different things might have been had the myopic army policy not sullied government with the stains of violence and extortion.

What that actually meant to the local population of Syonan became clearer to me from the oral histories of several women who worked for the municipality. For example, Myna Segaram (OH9), a young Ceylonese Eurasian woman, held a job as a typist in the Industry and Commerce Department of the civilian Municipality based in the former City Hall on the Padang. She describes a highly bureaucratic department with seven sections, seven Japanese heads and over 250 local staff.

I gleaned what the activities of this department were from a recent publication translated from the Japanese about the reports and documents of the *Chosabu*—the Department of Research (Huff & Majima, 2018). Singapore was fundamental to Japan’s plans for Southeast Asia and the realisation of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. The newly captured colonies of Japan’s Southern Empire were a mystery but, expecting to rule over the region for the foreseeable future, Japanese administrators set about gathering data on occupied Southeast Asian economies and societies. According to the *Chosabu* reports (pp. 175-240), much of the Commerce and Industry Department’s job was enumerating, categorising and

analysing the captured and renamed local factories (oil, beer, brick, paint, opium, soy sauce) and the local small traders and sellers of food and other goods and services.⁷

Later, a Japanese civilian pressured Myna and her section head to release her to the Labour Department in Robinson Road for reasons she could not fathom. She had to agree to go but was afraid of this move and distrusted the man she felt was a military officer in civilian clothes. With another Eurasian, Annie, she spent time visiting temples and factories and writing up reports on them. She had no idea what this information was used for.⁸ The man who recruited Myna rarely turned up and, when he did, occupied his staff with picnics and outings for ice cream. However, she says “Fear was always at the back of our minds. (No matter) how good they seemed on the surface, well, we never knew what the outcome would be” (OH9).

This ambivalence was commonplace. Japanese civilians were better mannered and appeared less dangerous on the surface, but no-one could let down their guard as suggested in “Salvaged” by Simone’s run-in with the mild-mannered scientist Yoshio Uehara (pp. 134-135).

Eventually Myna and Annie ended up in the Economic Research Department in Fort Canning. Her job there was to find out current prices of goods and write them up. She recalled that in 1945 the cost of one aspirin was \$44. This collecting of prices took two or three hours a day; the rest of the time she read in a small library of books that had been looted from Raffles College. Bored to distraction, she and Annie would bunk off work without much trouble. In her interview Myna explained that her Japanese boss was shy of women and by this stage of war seemingly demoralised, so that she could manipulate him into believing almost anything she said.

⁷ The seriousness with which the Japanese administration took these tasks is reflected in the minutiae of their tables and charts. For example, data was classified into 47 different trades then aggregated and analysed by ethnic group, family composition, region, length of time in business, capital and sales (p. 196).

⁸ From the *Chosabu* (pp. 243-299) I learned that the Labour Department’s job was to compile reports on the size and composition of the work force (age, ethnicity, gender), demand and supply of workers (including substituting female for male labour), wages, working hours, recruitment and absenteeism, housing, transport and training schemes.

Three months before the surrender, the Economic Research Department suddenly disbanded, and Myna and Annie were moved to a job in an information department typing up news for broadcasting. At the surrender their Japanese bosses apologised, thanked them, gave them six month's salary and told them to take anything they wanted from the offices.

Memories and reflections contained in the oral histories and memoirs gave me a sense of the fear but also a feeling for the day-to-day banality and peculiarity of the occupation, an understanding that some of the Japanese administrators, certainly in the last months, were going through the motions. In "Salvaged", Zahra's easy manipulation of the hapless Yoshida, head of Radio Syonan, her Japanese boss who eats ginger biscuits and gets drunk every day, arose from that kind of insight ("Salvaged", p. 71).

The dichotomy between the behaviour of the civilians and the military is reiterated and confirmed in many oral histories and memoirs. In "Salvaged" (pp. 54-61), Simone is alarmed and afraid when, having lived relatively safely within a community of Japanese civilians for the duration of the occupation, she is confronted by a member of the dreaded Japanese military secret police, the *kempeitai*, in the person of the principal antagonist, Captain Tsuji.

On the other hand, there was little trust either between local people: neighbours and friends reported indiscreet remarks or listening to the radio, which could bring terrible reprisals. The Japanese had two efficient modes of control at the neighbourhood and village level: the auxiliary police (*jikeiden*) and neighbourhood associations (*tonarigumi*) operated by local men. Both were keepers of family registers (recording births, deaths and movements); they were watchers, enforcers and informants (Kratoska, 1998, pp. 81-83). Low and Cheng (1946, p. 48) write of a sense of betrayal that overtook Singapore: "Gone was mutual trust and confidence. We had to learn to smile without sincerity". Chu Shuen Choo (OH 3) says "those who got along with the Japanese had some ulterior motive and usually it was making money". In "Salvaged" (p. 145), Simone fears that someone will signal the sudden presence of an unreported infant to the suspicious attentions of the *jikeiden* and is desperate to remove Teresa's baby from a shed in the Botanical Gardens to the safety of a convent known to take in and care for abandoned children.

In 1992, Cook and Cook published their monumental *Japan at War: An Oral History* which was compiled throughout the 1980s from interviews with hundreds of male and female

soldiers and civilians who gave their personal and poignant versions of the war as experienced at home or abroad. Although it carries little information specifically about the war on the Malayan peninsula or about the occupation of Singapore from a Japanese civilian perspective, it is rich in psychological detail about the Japanese mindset during this period and became a useful resource for developing characters and scenes in the novel. For example, in “Salvaged” (p. 88) the seemingly unquestioning and ant-like obedience to the cult of the Emperor which Simone views as a universal characteristic of the Japanese she encounters may have masked quite different private feelings. In her interview in Cook and Cook (1992, pp. 186-7) Koshino Ayako explains:

My husband died of illness overseas in the army in February 1944. A placard emblazoned with “House of Honour” was put up by the entrance to our house. Because of that, even if I’d fancied another man, it was useless... You had to be afraid of the Kempeitai all the time... We had to worry about what the people around us were thinking. We were completely repressed.

Cook and Cook’s study shows that obedience was to an extent held in place by fear of reprisals or public shaming. Whatever the personal feelings of Mr and Mrs Sugiyama in “Salvaged”, they are obliged to sorrowfully but silently accept the sacrifice of their sons on the altar of emperor worship and national survival. Mr Guan, the Straits Chinese clerk of the gardens and museum, sees this more clearly. Mr Guan and Mrs Sugiyama share an ancient common culture which Simone, a Eurasian living in the more British world of 1940s Singapore, cannot easily grasp (“Salvaged”, pp. 190-191).

I also drew on observations by another of Cook and Cook’s participants for the situation of the Japanese prisoners at the end of the war (“Salvaged”, pp. 201-205). Iitoyo Shogo, a general administrator in Bandung in Indonesia, after living some time in former Dutch POW camps and forced to labour humiliatingly (in his view) before his captors and the local people, was shipped off to an island camp:

There were two islands, Galan and Renpan, about three hours from Singapore. Tens of thousands of men from the armies in Malaya, Burma and Java were being shipped there. I was appalled by the people who met us. With their rotting flesh and oozing pus, I thought they were lepers but... they were suffering from tropical ulcers caused by

extreme malnutrition... Within six days I looked like them... There was no natural source of water. The weather was sweltering... We ate snakes, frogs, anything living on the island. (Cook & Cook, p. 145)

In post-war Southeast Asia, the countries of the region became involved in violent nascent nationalist movements including the Emergency in Malaya (1948—1960). The war and the occupation of Singapore remained only in the memories of those who had lived it as they too became subsumed in the immediate need to survive in the devastation of the post-war economy, violent communist insurgency and political manoeuvring for freedom from British rule. After independence in 1965, the war years appear to have been of little interest to Singapore's ruling People's Action Party (PAP) until the 1980s.

Breaking the silence

It was not until 32 years after the end of the Pacific War that the first history of the time appeared. Turnbull's (1977, pp. 190-219) account of the occupation in Singapore is the first attempt at a coherent overall history of the period. The bibliography (p. 219) shows just how few resources existed and on which she had to rely: that is, early local memoirs (Chin, 1946; Tan, 1946); academic studies on the Malay Regiment and the Indian National Army (Lebra, 1971; Sheppard, 1965); POW accounts (McCormac, 1954; Sweeting, 1957); Japan's role in the incipient nationalist movements of Asia (Elsbree, 1953); the Japanese *Good Citizen's Guide* (Gunseikanbu (Military Administration), 1943), articles from the *Syonan Shimbun* (the wartime edition of the *Straits Times*), English translations of Japanese accounts (Shinozaki, 1975; Takase, 1965; Tsuji, 1961) and unpublished academic exercises by students at the University of Malaya.

An important period in recording the history of the Japanese occupation began in the 1980s and all the following publications rely heavily on the Project on the Japanese Occupation carried out by the Oral History Centre (OHC) of the National Archive during that period and subsequently. During the 1980s, the war period of Singapore's history became of political importance to the ruling PAP and 1985 marks the first exhibition of photographs, documents, artefacts and recently recorded oral histories on the Japanese occupation by the National Archive of Singapore. The original catalogue from that exhibition (Archive, 1985) was subsequently expanded and updated (Tan & Quah, 1996) and from it comes the only mention

in a general history of the period about the role of women in the anti-Japanese underground movement in Singapore (p. 171) which I traced back to the OHC and an interview given by Chew Lee Ngoo (Accession No. 000398). Unfortunately, it is in Chinese but the metadata is in English and summarises the tapes she made. Active in anti-Japanese activities before the war through a patriotic choir and fundraising, when war came she volunteered for the St. John's Ambulance Brigade and the Medical Auxiliary Service. At the British surrender she narrowly avoided rape and worked in a shop during the day and at the Great World Amusement Park at night. She began to take part in underground work pasting anti-Japanese posters, passing information to another women, and raising funds. She was arrested and detained by the *kempeitai* in 1944 and spent the rest of the war in Outram Jail. Clearly, I had a believable role model for the character of Molly and even a place of work ("Salvaged" pp. 138-141). I have located no other mention in any publication of the role of women in the anti-Japanese underground movement in Singapore. In fact, other than in Tan and Quah, I could find no other information about an urban-based resistance movement at all, so their acts of courage appear to have been lost to the historical record.

Khoo's (2004) work recording the oral histories of the women who joined and served the communist cause in the jungles of wartime Malaya was therefore all the more important. One of Khoo's participants joined the Malayan Communist Party aged 15 in 1938 and served in the resistance against the Japanese. Her oral history confirmed women's active participation in the war and informed my depictions of both Teresa and Kay.

Spencer-Chapman's (1949) account of women's roles within the guerrilla camps confirms their presence but is inevitably one-sided. Chapman was a trainer in Dalforce and an agent of Force 136 (see Glossary in Appendix), a "stay behind" man who spent the entire war in the jungle protected by the communist guerrillas. Chapman recalls that the "girls" (approximately six to ten women to 100 men) kept men's sexuality and bad behaviour in check whilst also being uncomplaining porters, ruthless and pitiless soldiers, caring nurses, seamstresses and secretaries. Of course, without a women's account, we have no true idea of what so few women in a large camp of men had to endure, regardless of what Chapman writes. He did not speak their language and was often away from the camps. However, I'm not suggesting that women soldiers could not be "pitiless and cruel" and capable of a vengeful anger. I used that in the characters of the Malay sisters, driven by the massacre of their family to join the guerrilla forces and "crazy with courage" ("Salvaged, p. 4).

I also used Chapman's somewhat romanticised but also condescending and "stiff upper lip" attitudes to women and his war experiences as the model for the supercilious character of English soldier Richie Richmond (Salvaged, pp. 143-144).

Lee's (2005, p. 8) much expanded textual/pictorial history presents a Singaporean and ultimately an Asian view of the occupation which draws heavily on the OHC's early interviews, the articles and photographs of the *Syonan Shimbun* and the NAS's burgeoning collection of photographs and documents purchased from Australian, British and Japanese archives and collections. In 2006 a permanent exhibit on the Japanese Occupation opened in the former Ford Factory on Bukit Timah Road, site of the signing of the British surrender document—an exhibit I visited many times. To accompany that permanent exhibit came Pitt and Leong's (2009) book *Reflections and Memories of War*.

Photographs and texts from all these exhibitions and publications offered me different aspects of the occupation for inclusion in "Salvaged". Some examples:

- Posters and banners (p. 31, 127), propaganda leaflets (pp. 3, 6, 7, 151), newspapers (pp. 22, 128, 181), all conserved by Hatter, Bertie and Simone in the attic of the museum (p. 96)
- The creed of *Seishin* and total worship of the Emperor as a living God (pp. 151-154, 170, 204)
- The theft and occasional distribution of Red Cross parcels (p. 157)
- The Grow More Food campaigns (pp. 160)
- The drive to get civilians out of Singapore to the Malayan mainland (p. 160)
- The neighbourhood watches (p. 145)
- The B-29 bombing raids from late 1944 and into 1945 and leaflet drops by the US air force (pp. 3, 151)

Over a decade after Turnbull's publication, a second academic history (Chew & Lee, 1991) examined Japanese attitudes to the different ethnicities in more detail, drawing on the gradually increasing Japanese scholarship on the subject, whilst using largely the same sources as Turnbull. To commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war, the

Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore held a workshop (Lim & Wong, 2000), the aim of which was to address the relative lack of public commemoration of the war across the diverse communities in Singapore and to discover what private and popular memories remained. The war, Lim and Wong (p. 2) concluded “reveals itself as many, and as different wars, its meaning refracted through varying subject positions and different temporalities bearing testimony to the plurality of meaning and memory with respect to the war”.

I used these two publications to assist my selection of experiences for the seven characters based on Japanese attitudes to and treatment of each of the races in Singapore. In “Salvaged” (p. 56), Simone, in the following passage, lays out with a certain satirical effect, the need by the Japanese military administration to simplify and codify the complex ethnic, cultural and linguistic make-up of their confusing Southern empire into easy categories of good and bad:

The Japanese in Syonan have organised a strict hierarchy of racial suspiciousness. Chinese of all stripes, rich and poor, are on the top because of their loyalty to China and their support of Chiang Kai Shek and the KMT or, even worse, Mao Tse Tung and the communists. Next come Eurasians, like herself, deemed tainted by miscegenation and fawning cronies of the British, their masters. Indians and Malays, as true Asians, are given most favoured subject status.

One aspect of this simplification was the change in dress of local Malayan-born Indian women during the occupation. For the Japanese, the sari was the recognisable indication of female Indian-ness. Peranakan Indian women who might have worn the sarong and kebaya all their lives, immediately took up the sari to avoid harassment or misunderstandings.

Kratoska’s (1988) economic and social history cast the net wider, accessing previously unavailable official documentation as well as scholarly studies from Britain, the United States, Malaysia and Japan. Kratoska’s meticulous work shows in detail a country abruptly deprived of a vibrant economy and struggling in the face of shortages of consumer goods, unemployment, high prices, a thriving black market and widespread corruption. The following from Kratoska also featured in “Salvaged”:

- Dalforce and the “stay behind” parties (pp. 69, 143)

- Lai Tek (p. 130) and the murders of the leaders of the Malayan Communist Party at the Batu Caves (p.131)
- the activities of Force 136 and Operation Zipper (the name of the operation for the Allied invasion of Malaya) (p. 131)
- the fact that the Japanese, eschewing the Geneva Convention, were designated at the surrender not as POWs but as “surrendered personnel” (pp. 201-205), which meant they did not become the responsibility of the British but of their own officers
- I also found a photograph of the Japanese “surrendered personnel” building the jetty on Rempang Island (p. 201)

A key text, which describes the events alongside human detail of what happened and strongly evokes atmosphere and place, was Bayly and Harper’s (2006) *Forgotten Armies*. It breathes life into the events by going beyond a political and military history to tell stories about the armies of soldiers, civilians, laborers, businessmen, comfort women, doctors, and nurses who confronted the daily brutalities of a combat zone that extended from metropolitan cities to remote jungles, from tropical plantations to the Himalayas. By recounting the war through Indian, Burmese, Chinese and Malay as well as British, American and Japanese voices, it provided me with a broad, scholarly, authoritative and thoroughly readable account of pre-war and wartime British Asia.

Bayly and Harper’s vivid depiction of the pre-war, globally cosmopolitan world of Singapore (pp. 50-69) fed my imagination and gave me a sense of that place in that time. By the end of the chapter “The Fortress that Never Was” (pp. 106-155) I had a firm grip on Singapore as a culturally and ethnically rich, glittering outpost of European civilization and modernity on the edge of a crumbling Raj; the vast difference between the rich governmental and entrepreneurial classes and the majority of struggling poor; the ferment of revolt, nationalism and communist activity that rumbled beneath the surface, ruthlessly controlled by tough laws and the actions of the British Special Branch—and above all on the inevitability of the disaster that ensued.

Bayly and Harper’s extensive bibliography led me to vital primary sources that they themselves had used (p. 154), particularly *Times* journalist Ian Morrison’s (1942) indictments

of colonial rule and military failure, which informed some of the diary sections throughout “Salvaged”.

Akashi and Yoshimura’s (2008) work gathered together a variety of translated materials from Japanese and Chinese sources in an English-language volume covering various military, administrative, economic and social aspects of the occupation of Singapore. Of particular use to me was the situation in Singapore at the surrender of Japan (“Salvaged”, pp. 173-174, 198).

In *Wartime Kitchen* (2009), Wong sets out starkly the shortages and constant nagging hunger of the occupation, the lack of rice and the predominant place of tapioca, sweet potato and red palm oil in the diet—symbols of the occupation. Recipes on the radio (“Salvaged”, p. 52) and in the newspapers were an attempt to break the monotony of daily food consumption. Food—getting, preparing, living without it, talking and thinking about it—became an obsession (“Salvaged”, pp. 3, 29, 71, 75). An article in *Wartime Kitchen* (p. 33) taken from the *Syonan Shimbun* reported that an average of 50 babies were left on the doorstep of the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (CHIJ) every month. Many families abandoned babies rather than watch them starve to death. Malnutrition was severe, death from beriberi, directly related to diet inadequacies, increased ten-fold from 1940 to 1944 and deaths of children under one-year-old doubled in 1944 to almost 9,000. The role of the CHIJ caring for abandoned babies and orphan children is in “Salvaged” (pp. 160-164).

Cheah’s (2012) scholarly *Red Star Over Malaysia* is a history of the Malayan Communist Party and the role of the Malayan People’s Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) during and after the war, informing scenes with Kay and Force 136 agent Richie Richmond. Cheah was an important source for information about Lai Tek, head of the Malayan Communist Party, who was a double agent first for the British then the Japanese, a fact that was not confirmed until 1947.

Of the male memoirs consulted, E.J.H. Corner’s narrative (1981) became pivotal to the creation of “Salvaged”. Not all English civilians were interned during the occupation (Lee, 2005, p. 142; Turnbull, 2009, p. 200). Those who were not included the director of the Singapore Botanical Gardens, Richard Holttum; the assistant director, Eldred John Henry Corner, and William Birtwistle, head of the Fisheries Department. A reference in Turnbull

referred to a memoir by Corner. On a research trip to Singapore, I unearthed this memoir, the only extant copy of which is held in the National Library of Singapore and discovered the story of these three Englishmen and their relationship with the Japanese. Corner's memoir became an invaluable resource for the creation of minor characters, setting and plot. The idea of wreckage and salvage had first been suggested by reading Corner's memoir at the outset of my research. It was confirmed by reading Adrienne Rich's (1973) poem *Diving into the Wreck* and the content of that poem ultimately influenced the various titles of the thesis. Taking the two together I decided to pursue the concept of wreckage and salvage in the novel. I discuss Corner's contribution in more detail in Chapter Six.

Other secondary sources consulted were British-authored general accounts of the Fall (Blackburn, 2003; Thompson, 2005). From one (Smith, 2005, p. 473) came the photograph of British soldiers pushing a car into Keppel Harbour ("Salvaged", p, 91); biographical texts (Goh, 2002; Montgomery, 1984; Shelley, 2010; Zhou, 1995) and compilations of oral histories of the period (Chou, 1995; Foong, 2006; Sidhu, 1991). One of the most vivid accounts of the Fall of Singapore—again for its use of memoirs, diaries and personal interviews—is journalist Noel Barber's *Sinister Twilight* (1968). I used Barber's account alongside Ian Morrison's memoir (1942) to inform some of Simone's diary entries and particularly for the character of the editor of the fictional *Singapore Tribune* ("Salvaged, pp. 30, 37, 48, 53, 62, 78).

By bringing together and studying the following published personal histories I was able to gain a detailed understanding of the war and of the daily life of the occupation from diverse points of view. Together with the eight female memoirs described above, of the twenty-six male memoirs I located, eleven are by Chinese (Chen, 1969; Hock Leong Chew, 1945; Chin, 1946; Gwee, 2013; He, 1991; K. L. Lee, 1999; Low, 1947; A. C. K. Tan, 2007; T. L. Tan, 1946; Thio, 1977; P. G. Yap, 1982); four by Eurasians (Baker, 1999; Mosbergen, 2007; Oehlers, 2008; Van Cuylenburg, 1982); two by Malays (Danaraj, 1990; Hussein & Jomo, 2005); one by an Indian journalist (Parapuram, 2016); two Swiss (Crone-Arbenz, 1988; Schweitzer-Iten, 1981); three Japanese (Fujii, 1943; Shinozaki, 1975; Tsuji, 1961) and three English (Corner, 1981; Morrison, 1942; Chapman, 1949).

The Oral History Centre

The beginnings of the original Oral History Program within the National Archive of Singapore go back to an American Ministry of Defence consultant who recommended in 1974 that the Ministry start an oral history program to record the story of the Singapore Armed Forces and possibly other aspects of Singapore's past. He framed this proposal during the growing oral history movement in the US and as part of an incipient research program funded by the Ford Foundation at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore.

Originally part of the Ministry of Culture, the Oral History Unit, established in 1979, was charged by the government to concentrate on the memories of the old guard of the People's Action Party (PAP). The goal was to record the experiences of men who participated in the major post-independence political, social and economic events in the history of Singapore. The Unit initiated three projects focusing on politicians, civil servants and businessmen.

No public printed catalogue of these collections is available, and researchers need hard-to-obtain official approvals to access them. They are, however, used widely in official histories of the period. Blackburn (2008, p. 34) states that it was precisely the old guard's self-justifying memoirs that Lee Kuan Yew and the senior cadres of the ruling party wanted the public to see as history. Contrary voices were hard to find. Members of the opposition who had fled Singapore and feared arrest upon return were not interviewed.

As for the interviews with businessmen, Blackburn found them as self-serving as those conducted with political elites who recorded their "rags to riches" success stories and emphasised hard work and thrift—that is the "Confucian work ethic which the government had embraced as the cornerstone of 'Asian values'" (pp. 35-36).

By the early 1980s the Oral History Centre had moved away from the elite interviews originally envisaged as its *raison d'être* and turned its attention to the voices of ordinary people by beginning a project on the Japanese Occupation of Singapore. In the following years the oral histories would become a go-to resource for recounting the acceptable national narrative in textbooks and exhibitions. Some scholars (Blackburn, 2008; Hong, 1998) are critical of what they see as the undemocratic objectives of the Centre's approach in general, and the project on the Japanese occupation in particular, which sought "not to understand the

lives of the interviewees” but “to fill the gaps or supplement knowledge...in order to add colour to the story of Singapore’s national history” (Blackburn, 2008, p. 36).

However, Morrison (1994, p. 93) points out that this is common to “state-sponsored histories” in many other parts of the world. In fact, the National Library Board (NLB), under whose auspices the National Archive has fallen since 2013, makes it clear that the remit of the NAS is not just to preserve material for posterity but also to play an active role in “nation-building through which it seeks to educate the public on the shared heritage of the people of Singapore” (Tan, 2014, n.p.).

The dearth of records on the Japanese occupation

For the reasons previously described, in the 1980s the war-related collection at Singapore’s National Archive consisted of little more than the English and Chinese editions of the *Syonan Shimbun* (an occupation edition of *The Straits Times*). That these newspapers escaped the wide-spread destruction of documents following the surrender and came to repose intact in the NAS is due to the forethought, vigilance and—since the Japanese punished by death the keeping of all documents and diaries—courage of John Corner and William Birtwistle. Corner writes (1981, p. 151):

In a moment of inspiration in February 1942, I had seen that the only written record, however propagandist or fallacious it might be, of the Occupation would be the newspapers...I arranged for the current newspapers in English, Malay (in Arabic script), Chinese and several Indian scripts to be delivered daily to the museum. No one questioned the daily arrival of the papers or thought of what became of them. At the end of August 1945, the Japanese burnt all their records and papers. That there had been and still might be in the Museum a set of newspapers crossed no one’s mind.⁹

There is little doubt that without Corner the NAS would not possess this irreplaceable record. Initially, I had used trips to Singapore to consult this record in the microfiche library but the

⁹ A former employee of the Straits Times Press, a Mr T. Hope, had also kept a set of the English-language newspapers and offered it for the museum’s archive in September 1945 for a price. Corner, through the generosity of Chua Ho Ann, a Chinese entrepreneur and friend to Corner throughout the occupation, purchased the collection for \$300. Corner makes the point that Chua Ho Ann was never repaid (p. 152).

collection of the English language *Syonan Shimbun*, from its first issue on 20 February 1942 to its last on 4 September 1945, was digitised in 2017 by the National Library Board (NLB) and made freely available online, making research much easier. This was a resource of which I availed myself constantly throughout this project to find articles, advertisements, check dates, generally immerse myself in the atmosphere of the time and, by the lists of food prices and shortages, the punishments and proclamations, grasp the hardships and controls the local population faced every day. Each time I was aware of the debt I owe—and perhaps other researchers and writers in the future will owe—to John Corner.

Recognising the dearth of records, in the 1980s the government, through the NAS, embarked on a project to look for documents, photographs and “all kinds of paraphernalia” related to the war and the occupation (Kwa et al., 2005), and the attention of the Oral History Centre was turned to the voices of ordinary people and their wartime experiences.

NAS Project on the Japanese Occupation of Singapore

According to a submission to the UNESCO International Memory of the World Register (UNESCO, 2012), the first phase of the project lasted four years (June 1981 to December 1985). Potential interviewees were identified through media publicity, organisations like the National Museum, Sentosa Museum, Senior Citizens' clubs, and community centres, and handbills were distributed at pictorial exhibitions organised by the NAS. As a result, 175 persons were interviewed. Thereafter the project continued until 2011 on an ad hoc basis and the number of interviewees under the project title *The Japanese Occupation of Singapore* is currently 279.¹⁰

The submission to UNESCO claims the collection is invaluable and represents a broad range of experiences and perspectives of individuals of different nationalities, ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds based on a single major world event. Commenting on the collection, Morrison (1994, p. 93) makes the point: “In a virtual lacuna of documentation

¹⁰ I limited my feminist-oriented research to women's testimonies under this project title, but a considerable amount of information about the Japanese occupation can be found in the NAS under this and many other project headings. Typing this subject into the NAS database located 3,781 oral history interviews; 659 photographs; 379 audio-visual and sound recordings; 278 speeches and press releases; 12 maps, 136 Straits Settlements, overseas and private records; 42 government records and one poster. The possibilities for other research on this subject are clearly rich and readily available.

contemporaneous with the event, remembrances either spoken or written are, of course, prime documentation”.

Whilst not disputing the unique and important nature of the collection, claims to a broad and comprehensive inclusivity are belied by the fact that of those 279 records only 21 (7.5%) of the interviews record the memories of women. Morrison (1994, p. 93) observes that the bulk of the interviews are not only male but also favour the successful middle and upper classes: “It is difficult to find an account by fishermen, labourers or trishaw/rickshaw pullers”. The ethnic orientation is for the most part Chinese. Morrison says that although a large number of Eurasians and Indians responded to the publicity to be interviewed it is not clear how many were actually interviewed. He also points out that Malays are the least represented.

On a practical level, the project on the occupation is available online, has an alphabetical list of the audio tapes with a brief preview of each in metadata and, for many, there are written transcripts. The project is not digitally cross referenced by gender or ethnic group. From my point of view that meant looking at those designated “Miss” or “Mrs” or consulting the metadata previews to find interviewees described as ‘she’. I identified twenty and after deducting those women who escaped Singapore or those not translated into English, I arrived at eleven pertinent interviews. A list of these interviews, the way I analysed them and the ways they informed depictions of seven main characters and other elements of “Salvaged” are in Chapter Six.

The interwar years in Singapore

Nine of the eleven women interviewed were children or teenagers in the interwar years and in their twenties and early thirties when war broke out in Singapore in 1942. A knowledge of the period was important background information.

In the first decades of the 20th century, Singapore was described as “the Clapham Junction of the Eastern Seas” (Swettenham, 1948, p. 142). Following a brief period of economic recession (1920–1922), with increasing demand for rubber, tin and petroleum, and the rapid growth of government spending on modern infrastructure—electricity, gas, sewerage, communications, transport and health—Singapore’s interwar economy was booming. It was also one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse places on the planet:

What gave Singapore its special glamour was the breadth of its cosmopolitanism. More than Calcutta, London or even New York, it was perhaps the first truly global city of the twentieth century. It was a hub of communications, and a city of infinite ethnic fractions. Arabs, Armenians, Jews, Parsi, White Russians...and the 3,000-odd Japanese residents all contributed in their way to Singapore's general obsession with technology and consumption. Built not only for trade, but also for pleasure, Singapore was obsessed with modernity...and its God was money. (Bayly & Harper, 2006, p. 51)

There was a dark underside to this world. The urban population of Singapore had always been and remained disproportionately male. One aspect of male trade and male pleasure was the trafficking, enslavement and prostitution of girls and women. It was only in 1940 that the trade in *mui tsai*—little girls sold by impoverished parents in China, transported to Malaya and forced to serve as slaves and concubines—was ended. One of the characters in “Salvaged”, Teresa Wong, imported as a *mui tsai*, is fortunate enough to be freed through the offices of Western women's religious and social organisations that found the practice abhorrent and fought to get it abolished (Leow, 2012).

In traditional and conservative homes of every ethnic, social and cultural background—British, European, Arab, American, Australian, Eurasian, Chinese, Malay, Indian, Southeast Asian—most women lived, to a greater or lesser degree, under the strictures of male domination in families, communities and the British colonial structure.

But this is also a period throughout the world that saw a surge in international women's movements and a challenge to traditional patriarchal societies by the rise of the “modern girl”. Lewis (2009, pp. 1385-1489) in a study of the “modern girl” in Penang explains that during the 1920s and 1930s the “modern girl” emerged in cinema, magazines, advertisements and public discourse as feminism surged into mainstream popular culture all over the globe, including in the cosmopolitan centres of Asia: “In a radical departure from a bygone era, women were suddenly seen working, driving, playing sports, smoking and drinking” (p. 1386).

Caught in the image of the flapper with her short shift and bobbed hair, from New York, London and Paris to Singapore, Tokyo and Shanghai, the “modern girl” was a global and

often controversial phenomenon occupying the imaginations of people through the new international media of newspapers, magazines and American cinema. Lewis says (p. 1385): “Amy Johnson and Amelia Erhardt flew airplanes across Asia and the Atlantic while a new casual and lean look in fashion said women were capable of doing anything men could do”.

In 1930s Singapore there was a large corpus of English-language publications produced for a local non-European audience which cut across ethnic backgrounds and was based on the common framework of English language education and cultural references.

An indication of the ongoing interwar interest in the modern girl can be found in a review of the English-language newspapers of 1929 which have 377 references—242 articles about her, 135 advertisements aimed at her and 16 illustrations of her. In 1936 the number was 488 and in 1939, 368 (eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers).

But it was the medium of cinema that had the greatest effect on the greatest number. By the beginning of the war, Singapore was the most modern city in Asia. One aspect of that modernity was the way the city’s population took to the medium of cinema. The first cinema in Singapore opened in 1904, only two years after cinemas opened in America and Britain, and in 1906 there were four. By 1936, an estimated 8,000 viewers watched 20 screens across Singapore each night (Chua, 2012, p. 592). About 70 per cent of the films screened were American and many large Hollywood studios had distribution offices in Singapore. A culture of film consumption was fuelled through fan magazines, the playing of popular soundtracks and songs on the radio, the sale of gramophone records and live performances in the entertainment centres of Great World and Happy World. The widespread availability of electric light made Singapore a thriving nocturnal city and the populace thronged the streets and entertainment venues. What those lively, family-oriented venues were like before the war is recollected by Simone in “Salvaged” (p. 137) as she contrasts it with the sad, lascivious atmosphere of the Great World she visits in 1945.

Once the food stalls were half a mile long and heaving with the smells of spice, hot fat and sandalwood. There were lines of glistening Peking duck; satay roasting on charcoal fires; soto soup and wanton mee; vats of curried chicken; pyramids of rice; cauldrons of nasi padang and giant prawns; piles of durian and mango; small mountains of shaved ice and battalions of cakes and sizzling banana fritters. Once

families flocked here to the food stalls and cinemas, the shadow puppets, street acrobats, magicians, snake charmers and flame throwers, their children running between the feet of the passers-by or sitting on shoulders. Now this is a place only for men.

The vast majority of cinemagoers were young and the films they saw connected with their youthful aspirations, identities and opinions. Debates about the negative influence of Hollywood films on young “Asiatics” played out in the colonial press but only had the effect on the young of seeing cinema-going as a form of rebellion against the older generations. Girls were active consumers of this popular culture through clubs like the Mickey Mouse Club which wrote for the “Girls Corner” in the pro-Asian *Malaya Tribune*. Chua (2012, p. 595) says that during the 1930s a critical mass of girls received education and participated in employment and leisure activities outside the home. The cinema and a growing consumer culture were factors in the dramatic social changes of the 1930s.

One of the female memoirs in my research cohort was Janet Lim (1959), a former domestic slave girl (*mui tsai*). She recounts how she quickly picked up modern fashions from the cinema and magazines and clashed with the strict English principal of her mission school over the wearing of a pair of sunglasses. The influence of cinema on the girls is touched on in “Salvaged” (pp. 95, 120-121).

Another aspect of modernity was the interwar situation in education of local girls. Prior to the First World War, most Asian girls lived secluded, restricted lives. By the mid-thirties the situation had changed dramatically: “The girls have short uncoiled hair, their school uniforms extend to their knees. Stamp collecting and pen friends in distant lands are like diseases and spread faster than measles or chicken pox. The girl of today plays netball, basketball, rides a bicycle, becomes a king or clown in a play, teaches a Sunday school class, eats Eskimo Pie, and nobody even dares to suggest whom she shall marry” (Brownfoot, 1990, p. 55).

Of the eleven women in my interview cohort, though two received no formal education, all the rest were educated in Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist or Convent schools including the Hindu Indian, Buddhist Chinese and Muslim Malay girls.

Whilst the majority of colonial male civil servants were drawn from the same homogenous backgrounds of the British middle and upper classes, the feminine landscape in Malaya was more complex. Brownfoot (1990, p. 45) writes that British and other white women came from a wide diversity of national, religious, educational and class backgrounds—for example women educators, many of whom were active feminists and suffragettes. American and Australian women educators came from a strongly more egalitarian experience and played a leading role in Asian female education through the Methodist Girls' Schools, the Presbyterian schools and the YWCA, alongside French and Irish women in the Convent schools—none of whom necessarily endorsed or promoted the British cause.

Episcopalian Methodists, who founded their Singaporean programmes in 1880 under an Australian, Sophia Blackmore, rapidly established Methodist Girls' Schools (MGS) throughout Malaya. These schools were motivated, according to the Methodist missionary magazine, by “women’s love for her sister women of other hue and speech and faith” (1990, p. 46). Methodist women teachers accepted into the MGS any girls who wanted a modern, even a secular education. In “Salvaged” (p. 24) the Captain of Singapore’s 5th Company, Australian Jean McKenna, has spent her whole life in Malaya imbued with just such an ethos, working as a teacher and a dedicated Girl Guide.

Girls were also encouraged to join the YWCA and the Girl Guides, organised and run in conjunction with educational establishments. Of all the informal education and welfare organisations established by women for women in Malaya, these two were the most important and influential and had the most far-reaching effects for all women. Moreover, each was linked to an international parent body and so formed part of a global women’s movement.

Two of my interviewees were life-long Guides and the influence of the movement on their lives was considerable. One, Elizabeth Choy (OH1), credits her Christian upbringing and her years of activity in the Girl Guides as giving her the physical and mental fortitude to survive the tortures and deprivations of her long imprisonment by the *kempeitai* during the occupation. She also expressed its appeal and its joys:

Oh, every girl possible wanted to be a Girl Guide, you see. Because it gives us a kind of freedom; freedom from the home, away from housework. We learn lots of things and

join a group, like a big family, a big happy family. A Guide is a sister to every other Guide, so in our Girl Guide Company we've got all kinds of nationalities. Chinese, Malays, Indians, Eurasians, Jews...you see we're all like sisters. We're all equal. Europeans and Asians, all equal. All Guides.

The Girl Guides ultimately became the means by which to bring together the seven ethnically and religiously disparate characters in the novel and the glue which held them together with bonds of loyalty and trust. An understanding of its organisation, activities and ethos became an important part of my research.

Begun in Britain in 1909 by Robert Baden-Powell, the first Girl Guide Company in Singapore was formed in 1914. Vociferously opposed to colour and class prejudice, Baden-Powell and his wife Olave saw Guiding and Scouting as a means of achieving social and racial harmony, as vehicles for cementing domestic unity in multi-ethnic, plural societies and as a way of linking the disparate parts of the British Empire into a united, international Commonwealth.

Guiding aimed to develop qualities of comradeship, leadership, self-help, tolerance and community service founded on friendship, love and understanding. It also sought to develop individual character in Asian girls, imbuing ideals of truthfulness, courage, courtesy and duty, using practical, adventurous and flexible methods. Brownfoot (p. 63) says that the emphasis laid on making efficient citizens, good homemakers and mothers, combined with its intensely practical outlook, made Guiding acceptable to a large number of parents of all nationalities, white and Asian, in the conservative world of early twentieth century Malaya.

By 1921 there were enough companies to form the Malayan Headquarters Council. Guiding became increasingly popular and by the late twenties some of the Malay sultans, their wives and consorts gave Guiding their patronage and enrolled their daughters. At the highly successful all-Malayan Camp of 1931, the mixed-nationality patrols included Malays, Chinese, Eurasians, Japanese, Sri Lankans, Indians, British, mainland Europeans, Australians and Americans. They were all "sisters under the skin" (p. 67).

Myna Segaram (OH9) explained that when she joined the Girl Guide company at Raffles Girls School it was an "open" troupe. This meant it also took girls from educational

establishments that had no Guide companies like the Methodist Girls' Schools, Catholic Convent and Anglican boarding schools like St. Mary's Home, the Children's Aid Society and the Zenana Missionary School.

Other girls looked up to us (Guides) because they thought we were special...the lucky ones. Yes, there was homemaking but there was also the outdoors. When I was a girl, that wasn't the usual thing to do—put on a knapsack and go hiking and camping. It was something that was developing. New doors opening to feminism if you want to put it like that.

While she was at college Myna was involved in the leadership of three secular Guide companies and when war broke out in Britain in 1939, the Brownie and Guide companies knitted socks and blankets for children in Britain. This fact is recollected in "Salvaged" (p. 70) during a conversation in the war-ravaged Guide Hut between Zahra and Simone.

For Elizabeth, Myna and others like them, the Guide movement empowered them to strive for goals which may not otherwise have been considered or attainable. The activities, pageants and camps of the Guides were frequently reported in the newspapers of the time and editors praised the image of modern Malayan girlhood that the Guides exemplified and extolled the changes in public attitudes to non-Guide indigenous girls who, they wrote, had "left the seclusion of their homes, throwing off the dusty and heavy mantle of tradition to enter a new world just as their Western sisters had done" (Brownfoot, p. 50).

A news article from the *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* (1938) interested me in respect to three points: the changing views of the roles of girls and women, the role of the Girl Guides, and the Singapore Chinese community's loyalty to and support for China in its ongoing war with Japan (1937-45). Nine scouts and seven guides led by the adolescent Miss Mack Swee Cheng reached Canton in October 1937 for first aid and army training before being deployed for front-line service with the Chinese armies in Shanghai, Soochow and Nanjing. That this gender-mixed group should be led by a girl, that they should be involved in combat and that this should be reported and lauded at length and in detail in the main pro-British newspaper of the time is an indication of changing attitudes within the diverse interwar society of Singapore which the emancipatory ethos of guiding, the modern girl and the world of 1930s Hollywood cinema helped to promote.

This article informed a scene in “Salvaged” (pp. 31-36) at the wedding reception of Teresa and her new husband Harold, both ardent communists. From Wu (2015) came my knowledge of Yang Hui Min and the Shanghainese Guides bravery in China which the fictional characters discuss in that scene. They were fully aware of the bravery of young women, Guides like themselves, which is being admired in the 1938 newspaper article.

This was the world in which my novel’s seven fictional characters came of age—a world, for them, of liberating, proto-feminist thought and action. I wanted the characters to be imbued with that sense of freedom and confidence, a feeling that nothing was impossible in this brave new world opening up before them. Teresa can be a communist and fight for women’s liberation and a new kind of society; Molly can be a singer and fulfil her ambitions; Jenny is studying medicine; Kay has joined Dalforce ready to fight; Zahra is a broadcaster for the Malayan service of Radio Singapore; Anita, loving another, hints at resistance to an arranged marriage and Simone has left the woman’s page of the *Singapore Tribune* to be a war correspondent. When that world became a wreck, I felt I knew them, and I wanted to follow them and discover if those qualities would or would not carry them through the vicissitudes and hardships of the occupation. What would be salvaged at the end of it all?

CHAPTER SIX: METHOD AND PROCESS

The primary method of this artefact-based project is creative writing. To enable the investigation, including via the drafting of a literary manuscript, I also employed other methods, such as literature reviews and detailed analysis of oral histories held by the National Archive of Singapore. The first part of this chapter expands on earlier discussion of oral history resources to focus on the oral history research process. In relation to creative writing, it then discusses the development of the novel from a literary craft perspective. I refer to passages from “Salvaged” to illustrate when and where certain literary techniques—world building, character and plot development, tense, point of view, etc.—became especially important considerations in the drafting process.

Method: Further analysis of the oral histories

An important task of this project has been analysis and categorisation of oral history interviews in the service of the novel. I initially identified twenty female interviews out of the current 279 on record under the Project on the Japanese Occupation of Singapore in the OHC. Of these twenty women, four successfully escaped Singapore before the Fall and two were interned, leaving fourteen that spoke of their daily lives during the occupation. Of these, three were inaccessible to me because they are in Chinese with no English translation. This left for investigation the oral histories of eleven women who spent the duration of the war and occupation in Singapore and whose testimonies were accessible. In the first instance, seeking as broad a sample of the overall population as possible, I categorised these eleven interviews by ethnicity. A racial demographic has been the norm since the establishment of Singapore in 1819 and continues today as the 2020 census shows (Statistics, 2020). The three major categories—Chinese, Indian, Malay—remain while formerly separate categories of Europeans and Eurasians have been subsumed into “Other”. Despite the small number, this sample reflects Singapore’s wide cultural mix and, though limited, provided me with a heterogeneous access to the world of Singaporean girls and women during the war.

Having established the potential value of the OHC interviews to the novel, I considered my approach to interpreting and communicating my research. My project investigates ethical representation of women’s lives during war and occupation, which requires considering my position as a white outsider from a different place and generation who does not share

ethnicity with any of the female characters. In response I first explored the history of oral history practice itself and its importance to women (Chapter Three).

This was a good start to thinking of ways to interpret the interviews in a general sense, but my interviewees were women raised in patriarchal, colonial Singapore, coming of age in war, interviewed between 1985 and 2011—forty and even seventy years after the event. I was concerned that the women's voices might be constrained and muted within a structure and ideology that regulated and controlled women's education and life choices and they might validate their life stories through the experiences and activities of men or in deference to the public record, as some scholars have suggested as a possibility with women's oral histories in general (K. Anderson & Jack, 1991; S. Gluck & Patai, 1991). The primary role of women in the cultures of that historical period was as carers and nurturers of the young and old and they might be less likely to privilege personal stories and more likely than men to situate their experiences within networks of people and to interpret their experiences as contingent and relative to those of others.

Abrams (2017) argues that, through the work of self-reflexive oral practitioners and advances in gender equality, those kinds of concerns (for some Western-educated, first world women) have given way over the last two decades to an environment which enables or liberates rather than silences women's oral histories. She suggests that the post-war Western-educated cohort of women is able to reflect on the ways in which they have negotiated family and societal barriers to advancement and understand and critique their experiences of the past, and as a result narrate an autonomous self that coheres with their identity in the present. These are generalisations and I suspect in Singapore and elsewhere some women even now would not be free in the way she suggests. But it was interesting to look at my interviewees with Abrams' suggestions in mind.

What was the situation in Singapore in the 1980s, when the majority of these interviews took place? I wondered if I would consider the interviewees' voices "confident and authentic", using Abrams' measure, meaning "they have knowledge of the validity of their experiences and life decisions and in turn they interpret these as valid and meaningful in the context of life stories. They do not need to validate their life stories with reference to the experiences and activities of men or to the public record" (2017, p. 3).

What I discovered was, though these women were aged in their sixties, seventies and eighties and speaking over forty years ago in some cases, there was a remarkable synergy with Abrams' criteria. None of the interviewees played down their roles as workers and wage earners, volunteers or caregivers in the most trying of circumstances. On the contrary many were proud, in hindsight, of what they had managed to do. Some willingly revealed gendered and resented experiences—fathers who did not consider higher education for girls worthwhile; being refused certain career paths; marriage and childbirth as the given role for women; threats and violence by soldiery and employers—all the normalised controls of women of the time. With hindsight, they were all able to look with a critical and reflexive eye on their experiences.

Satisfied that I was listening to the authentic voices of the women, I sought out examples of what Sebba (2016), in her study of women's experiences of the Nazi occupation of Paris, calls moral ambiguities, hardships, confusions but also possibilities and freedoms (see Chapter Three).

I then analysed the interviews using the criteria below. A phenomenological analysis seeks “to grasp and make clear the meaning, structure and essence of a lived experience of a phenomenon, of a person, or of a group of people and transform data into findings, including narratives” (Patton, 2002, p. 482). In my case, transforming the data meant re-storying their stories.

Guidance, such as that offered by Mann's interpretation of de Beauvoir, proved helpful for my analysis (immersion in the polyvocality of the data), but in the end the outcome remains unique for each inquirer and dependent, in my case, on the emergent needs of the novel. I used the following criteria. Based on my need to find backstory I recorded name, ethnicity, date and place of birth followed by childhood experiences and schooling. I had identified from a first reading of all the interviews that early experiences had a strong influence over the whole-of-life attitudes so childhood and family were the next category. Others I identified were experiences outside the home pre-war (work, leisure, Girl Guides) and the sense of self-sufficiency and independence that such experiences might have offered the interviewee (or the converse); the attitude to the occupation as they told their stories of the experience; and their accounts of the severity of their individual war experiences.

The table summarises the data analysis and provides a reference point for the following section on the transformation of interview information into fiction.

OHC Accession Number	Name Ethnicity Date and Place of Birth	Date of Interview Age at Interview Age in War	Childhood Family	Schooling Girl Guide	Pre-war Work	War Work	War Experiences
OH1 000597	Elizabeth Choi Chinese 1910 Kudat, Sabah (North Borneo)	1985 75 31-35	Raised by native Kadazans/learned the ways of the jungle. * Father Teacher Mother died after giving birth when she was 18 (1928). Father, baby and siblings moved to Singapore. She took care of them. Married 1941. Miscarried on the eve of war.	Sandakan Mission School CHIJ* Senior Cambridge Yes GG & St. John's Ambulance	Teacher Zenana Mission/St. Andrew's Boys School	Ran Miyako Hospital* Canteen with husband—hospital reserved for locals and POWs. No Japanese.	Uncle beheaded in Sabah. 16-year-old brother missing at <i>sook ching</i> /Father mad with grief/never found.* Accused of passing information to Changi POWs. Prisoner YWCA 18 months Husband prisoner Outram Jail. Both tortured, beaten and starved. Family had all moved to Endau.* She worked at Japanese club restaurant 'til end of war. Found and released husband.
OH2 000462	Chu Shuen Choo Chinese 1921 Mantin, Malaya	1985 64 20-24	Father Planter Grew up in a village working the land. She married in 1939. Two children, one born in 1943	MGS, KL Pudu English School Evelyn Seminary (Teacher training) Not a GG	Teacher MGS, Singapore Dryburgh English School Kuo Chuan School	Asked to teach but didn't want to because of her children. Made and sold curry rice in a coffee shop. Worked farm in Endau	Witnessed looting. Hid with Japanese woman friend and husband avoided <i>sook ching</i> . Husband learned Japanese. He was urged to do propaganda work. They didn't want to be seen as collaborators, so they left for Endau.
OH3 003621	Helen Chua, Swan Neo Straits Chinese 1933 Singapore	2011 77 9-13	Village childhood, free to roam, plenty of friends Well off Father (Teochew) Clerk at V.R. Vick and Co. (Sing) Cosmetics company Mother Straits Chinese Grandfather kept a mistress Grandmother kept <i>mui tsai</i> 7 brothers 2 sisters	MGS, Paya Labar (Sing) 6 years—interrupted by war Not GG	Pupil Liked the British who were polite and kind to her Family had servants before the war so life was easy for her mother. The servants disappeared during the occupation	Young girl, no school, stayed in village. Japanese soldiers lived next door in neighbour's large bungalow Mother hated the Japanese but Helen said the soldiers were kind to the children. Knew war was over only when she started English school	Lost school friend to bombing aged 7. Neighbours died or wounded Got scabies Father cooperated with Japanese so family was left alone and had food. She recalls her father procured girls for the Japanese but hurriedly added that the girls were paid and willing. This felt defensive. The interviewer did not unfortunately pursue this point.
OH4 000393	Mabel de Souza Eurasian 1912 Taiping, Malaya	1984 72 30-34	Childhood poor Only child of a single mother (possibly illegitimate)	Taiping School Standard V Not GG	Shop assistant, Keibaba (Japanese Department Store) 1938	Waitress, Nan Mei Sui Japanese restaurant	Barely changed. Avoided potential rape by Japanese soldier. Took care of her sick single mother (TB). Knew the British were back only when some

			Left school early to work				British soldiers came into the restaurant
OH5 000513	Jenny Gan Chinese 1922 Singapore	1984 62 21-25	Father worked for the Singapore Harbour Board Middle class life	Fairfield MGS Senior Cambridge Not GG		<i>Domei</i> Japanese Broadcasting Monitored Allied Radio Stations	
OH6 000231	Mary Lim Chinese 1922 Malacca	1982 60 21-25	Adopted into a Singapore family. Father worked for Paterson & Simon (Traders) Middle class	MGS Geylang (Sing) MGS Sophia Senior Cambridge Not GG		Married 1943 Worked in hemp factory alongside husband Dealt in black market	
OH7 000266	Lakshmi Naidu Tamil Indian 1903 Singapore	1983 78 38-42	Her own family Arranged marriage at 13 3 daughters 3 sons	No formal schooling Self-taught in English/Malay/Tamil Reading & writing	Child raising/domestic duties Charity work at a welfare club for Indian women	Ran family jewellery business INA volunteer Visited/fed Indian POWs	At surrender Japanese lashed out at her two sons working in a factory. One son's eye damaged. Saw lots of looting and reprisals against Indians by Chinese at surrender.
OH8 003277	Sarimah binti Dassam Malay 1919 Singapore	2008 89 23-27 CHECK	Father Bugis policeman Mother Maria Indonesian 9 siblings 6 boys, 3 girls	No formal schooling as daughters were not educated	Arranged marriage but husband killed in air raid after 4 months Remarried 1943	Housewife Saw British POWs gathering snails	One brother missing after an air raid in 1942.
OH9 000580	Ruth 'Myna' Segaram (nee Pereira) Eurasian 1920 Colombo, Ceylon	1985 65 22-26	Widowed mother Only child Grandparents, aunt, cousins Wealthy, pro-British progressive family	Raffles Girls School Trinity College Yes, GG MAS St. John's Ambulance	Learned shorthand and typing	Typist Municipal Offices Commerce & Industry Labour Dept Information Office	Neighbour's boy disappeared in <i>sook ching</i>
OH10 003267	Esme Woodford (nee McIntyre) Eurasian 1926 Labuan, North Borneo	2007 81 15-19	Father Head of Victoria School Singapore Mother had Japanese mother 10 children Esme married in 1945	Katong Convent Not GG	Took care of her siblings and helped her mother	Housework Queueing for rations Made and sold ragi cakes All got beriberi. Family went to Bahau* and all caught malaria and had lice	Father, sister and brother died of malnutrition and disease. Eldest brother, Tony, was a volunteer, sent to Burma Railway. They were told he caught cholera. Discovered later he was shot and buried at Kanchanburi in Thailand
OH11 000241	Zamroude Za'ba Malay 1921 Kuala Kangsar, Malaya	1983 62 20-24	Father head of Malay Language at Tanjong Malim College of Teachers Later newsreader at MBC Singapore Middle class, progressive	Malay School, KL CHIJ, KL Senior Cambridge	First female Malay broadcaster at MBC Singapore	Clerk, Japanese Police Training School Gave up this job when family moved back to Kuala Lumpur. Didn't hear about the surrender for weeks.	Uncle in Malay Regiment murdered Saw young Malay and Indian police recruits beaten. Father had beriberi but had to walk miles to and from work until he resigned in late 1944. Father obtained permission to leave Singapore and return to KL.

*See Glossary in Appendix (pp. 304-305)

Process: Creative writing

Focussing mainly on two literary devices, world building and character development, and using selected passages from the novel, this section demonstrates some ways that varied research data have been transformed into fiction. It also refers to some further technical considerations aimed at achieving the project's aims, such as point of view, tense, plot and narrative structure.

A word, first, about the epigraph to the novel. Adrienne Rich (1983, p. 33) wrote: "In the midst of battle ... no person, trying to take responsibility for her or his identity, should have to be so alone." This sentiment seemed to sum up the task of my novel's fictional women characters, who try valiantly, against the odds and in the midst of battle, to be heroic, each in her own way. To weep and still be counted as warriors must, Rich tells us, be at the heart of women's worlds, signifying unity in friendship, compassion, vulnerability, courage and resolve.

World building

During the excavation phase of the creative writing process I sift and sort, categorise and analyse, laying pieces of the excavation puzzle out on the table, not only metaphorically, but also physically via photographs, card indexes, drawings and lists, evaluating what is known and where the gaps and spaces are that must be filled in by my imagination. Authenticity is key to works of historical realism. By authenticity I mean accuracy of the verifiable facts and reliable interpretations blended with the verisimilitude of the imagined aspects and the emotional drive of the text. De Groot (2016, p. 14) argues that historical fictions "present something that looks like a past that readers think they know". But they can also present something that looks like the past that readers do not know and are asked, through the art of the historical novelist, to find convincing. This is the smoke and mirrors of historical fiction—within a fictional world comprised of weather, geography, social classes and cultural references, to combine dramatic events with the believable minutiae of daily existence.

Just as in life, each character in fiction has an individual existence filled with personal detail. "History", Attwood (1989, p. 1504) says "may intend to provide us with grand patterns and overall schemes, but without its brick-by-brick, life-by-life, day-by-day foundations, it would

collapse...It may bear a more obvious or a less obvious relation to the world we actually live in, but bearing no relation to it at all is not an option”.

Characters and intensity of detail develop with drafting. What I first needed to do was, by excavation, gathering and collation of different kinds of materials, build a world taking in all the physical, social and cultural aspects of the time and place where the characters were born, raised and live. When building the world, my aim is to build story accurately around the known historical events as, where and when they happened. For example, in the Second World War Germany did surrender on 7 May 1945. Propaganda leaflets regularly fell on Singapore. A group of Japanese and British scientists did work in the Botanical Gardens and the Museum. There was a cat and a Marquis. The Guide Hut was in Buyong Road. There was an entertainment and cinema industry managed, under duress, by Run Run Shaw. The Japanese surrender was sudden, and bloody inter-ethnic reprisals followed. Women and men died in the POW camps. Red Cross parcels were withheld.

Iser (1997) argues that there is an overlap between fiction and “the real” through his threefold model: selecting, combining and disclosing. Writers select elements from the real/referential; combine them in the meaning-making process and disclose them in fictional texts in ways that are believable and even, for a local reader, identifiable and familiar. World building is not just making a place for the characters to live. Recognising in fiction elements of the real helps settles the reader into a believable location, time, atmosphere, society and culture within which believable characters can carry out believable actions.

Iser’s model suggests ways foreknowledge, research and imagination potentially coalesce in the process of drafting. Technically and structurally, the opening scenes of a historical novel usually serve to introduce the principal characters and status quo, orientating the reader. Thereafter characters are launched into disruptive conflicts that carry forward the dramatic tension of the narrative. When drafting what became the opening scenes of “Salvaged”, I knew from personal experience the climate of Singapore as oppressively hot and steamy; I had worked in the Museum and knew the layout and its history. I had viewed the Raffles Natural History Collection. I had seen the statue of Raffles and portraits of British governors some of which became objects in the opening passage (“Salvaged”, pp. 2-3).

Other elements of the real selected for the novel's opening include a statue of Queen Victoria, exhibitions, toilet paper, shoes, dancing at a seafront hotel, galleries of stuffed animals, tropical climate, Shakespearian references, the Old Vic theatre, Japanese Noh theatre, paintings of kings and colonial leaders, bombers, Allies, the Japanese Emperor, Nippon, familiar food in an Asian setting, hunger, leaflets, the surrender of Germany.

From my research I had gathered an idea of the all-pervading atmosphere of the occupation, particularly as it dragged on through 1945. I'd initially read about Paris, that other shocked, surrendered and occupied city, because I wanted to understand what it felt like to be a woman out on the streets living for several years the day-to-day realities of an alien and brutal occupation. In one of the rare female accounts of the time, Simone de Beauvoir wrote: 'I felt like a crushed bug' (2009, p. 25). The bug imagery remained in my mind, perhaps even eventually leading to the presence of cicadas ("Salvaged", pp. 21, 114, 190-191), although this became transformed not from an image of destruction and death but one viewed, through my readings in Chinese and Japanese mythology, as regenerative.

De Beauvoir (2009, p. 28) also wrote, "I felt as if my entire life were between parentheses...suspended outside time and the world". This found echoes in my research: dreariness, moral deterioration, selfishness, hopelessness, betrayal, suspicion and uncertainty were common: "We were stuck like frogs in a well", said Myna Segaram (OH9) more prosaically.

Within as short a space as possible I aimed to imbue real elements with a meaning in context that offers a different—perhaps unknown or unrecognisable—reading. My purpose is to present the status quo in Singapore in May 1945 as a pervasive atmosphere of degeneration. Queen Victoria is not resplendent but, like the empire she represents, mouldy and cracked. Singapore is no longer British like the Old Vic Theatre, but caught in the agonisingly slow unfolding of a Noh play. Toilet paper is writing paper. The museum, ordinarily a symbol of order, tradition and stability, is ruined and neglected. The heat is oppressive, heavy and damp. The stuffed animals are sagging, dishevelled and moth-eaten, much like Simone's blouse and general appearance. Ants reign in these crumbling corridors. Memories of happier times surface but seem pointless. Hunger and disease gnaw at the edges of Simone's consciousness. The delicious lunch is in her imagination, but just possibly might appear through the bounty of a mysterious Marquis. Paintings of colonial leaders, formerly admired,

are stacked and waiting to be used as artefacts of derision. There are bombers but they mean nothing except as they might serve a purpose somewhere in an indefinable future. And then, a tiny glimpse of hope. Leaflets from the sky. The war in Europe is over. But what does it mean for the people in Asia? What does it mean for Simone? The expression of the status quo continues in the following chapters, for example with Kay and Zahra in their different settings, again taking aspects of the familiar and imbuing them with different meanings.

To create “Salvaged”, I deployed imagination and literary and intellectual choices during sustained periods of drafting and revision. Construction of the world of this novel synthesises knowledge gained by prior lived experience of Singapore’s geography, climate, society and culture with rigorous research into life during and after the Japanese occupation.

Characters, point of view, tense, narrative structure

Questions of viewpoint, tense and structure were clarified as I developed the principal protagonist of “Salvaged”—Simone. Below I first discuss Simone and then the other characters according to when they became important to the manuscript. However, the writing process was not as linear or streamlined as this might suggest; in fact, many technical problems were present in my mind at every stage of drafting. Even so, I attempt to show selected moments of decision-making that effectively carried the manuscript forward.

The character of Simone Martel

To begin with, I had eleven interviews from women of four different ethnicities, and I wanted to marry their experiences as closely as possible to fictional characters, but none of them suited my idea for the novel’s principal character. Key questions at the beginning of this project concerned positionality—as an outsider, how could I ethically and responsibly transform the experiences of several women of various ethnicities into believable characters. My discoveries about the Girl Guide movement and societal changes in the interwar years suggested a way to navigate the ethnic separation that typified pre-war Singapore, so I could bring women with diverse lives together. It was valid and authentic to create characters who were part of the growing Girl Guide movement, which I now understood was a space of potential liberation, feminist spirit and solidarity for young women and girls. The exposition

of that backstory (“Salvaged” pp. 23-27) necessarily explains the women’s loyalty and friendship when the quest to save Teresa’s baby (p. 28) is pressed upon them.

Staying close to the experiences of the OHC interviewees was an early choice but for the main character—or at least the one I would write first and who would open the novel—I felt freer to speak with the voice of someone closer in experience to me, albeit living in quite a different place. Simone is British-educated and grows up in a predominantly white world—not mine, of course, but one closer to the 1950s British-influenced cultural landscape of Western Australia I’d grown up with, where Christmas could be celebrated in 40-degree heat while cards displayed robins and snow, neither of which I’d ever seen, a cultural oddity I referenced in “Salvaged” (p. 31).

Simone had to be someone from an Axis or neutral nation whom the Japanese would not intern. When I read the memoir of the wartime Swiss consul to Singapore (Crone-Arbenz, 1988), Simone’s character began to emerge. I had more information on the Swiss experience (Schweitzer-Iten, 1981) than that of other non-interned citizens such as Danes. But my character had to be Eurasian too, and an orphan with no loving guardian to care for her, so that the Guides would become her family.

Eurasians were in an uneasy situation in Singapore even before the occupation. At the crossroads of West and East, Eurasians were exoticized and despised in equal measure. The idea of racial mixture fed the British colonial imagination with phantoms of abnormality and moral and intellectual regression which, for some, was both morally repugnant and shamefully alluring. The Japanese had broadly similar attitudes towards Eurasians, added to which was their constant view of Eurasians as pawns and fawning cronies of the defeated British (Yap, 2011). This attitude is expressed in “Salvaged” (pp. 56, 85, 91).

Into that ambivalence Simone was born and obliged to live. Once orphaned Simone, with her Swiss/Indochinese lineage, was rejected by her Swiss aunt and placed out of sight in a mission school ultimately to be abandoned (“Salvaged”, p. 116,118).

I remembered what Spotts (2010, p. 17) had written about de Beauvoir and Jean Paul Sartre, her lover and companion: “they spent their mornings teaching, their afternoons writing in cafes heated by black-market coal...While Jewish friends and Resistance friends were swept up in dawn raids, tortured, shot and shipped off to camps, the war was kind to Beauvoir and

Sartre.” De Beauvoir has little to say about those acquaintances but writes of her “desperate need for a well-organised society to tell your troubles to” in a Paris suddenly intellectually diminished (2009, p.17). Simone de Beauvoir’s attitude towards her war—keep your head down in a place of trust with people you can tell your troubles to—was explicable yet troubling (what would each of us do in her situation?). I decided to adopt it and her name for this character.

But as the main character through whose perspective most of the narrative would be focussed, she needed something else. De Beauvoir wrote that the only way to collect her nerves after the fall of Paris was to write about the experience and the horror: “It was the first day I came out of my shell, stopped living like a crushed bug and tried to become a person again” (2009, p. 25). In my novel, Simone would be a journalist and ultimately a diarist and chronicler.

An American war correspondent, Martha Gellhorn, visited Singapore in mid-1941 to report on the situation in the East for *Collier Magazine* (Moorhead, 2003). In her autobiography of Gellhorn, Moorhead (p. 214) writes that Gellhorn was scathing about British colonial life: “She marvelled at the daily tea dances at the Raffles and the way everyone insisted on pretending that all was well”. Thompson (2005, p. 5) recounts, “Gellhorn threw a party at the Raffles where she scandalised polite society and the powers-that-be by shouting ‘Balls!’ to a highly-placed civil servant who informed her that Singapore would never be invaded”. In my character notes for Simone I wrote: “A bit of Gellhorn to rub onto Simone’s complacency through her contact with a feisty American war correspondent. She might lose it but will find it again”.

I located two women journalists who, in pre-war Singapore, were working on general news. One of them, Australian Lorraine Stumm, a general reporter for the *Daily Mirror* in Fleet Street, joined a pro-Asian newspaper, *Malaya Tribune*, owned by millionaire lawyer and businessman S.Q. Wong. Stumm garnered the wrath of Singapore’s Governor Sir Shenton Thomas for one of her stories. From Stumm’s experience, recounted in Thompson (2005, p. 36), I created an anecdote about a cheery fire in the governor’s air-conditioned office in Government House:

She’d been ordered into Government House to be verbally rebuked for a little article she’d written about his shabby and spineless leadership, the indefensible paucity of air

raid shelters, the thousands of deaths a day and the collapsing defence of his city...She had learned, not entirely to her surprise, that the Governor always kept a fire in the grate, even in steamy Singapore. It reminded him of Surrey. (“Salvaged”, p. 9)

It was feasible that Simone could be a journalist on my fictional *Singapore Tribune*, a pro-Asian newspaper critical of the British government and also feasible that, due to the absence of male reporters who had left for military training in the auxiliary forces, she could be offered the job of war correspondent and taken under the wing of the editor. This was not an unlikely event. In the memoir of her war experiences an American journalist, Freddie Bloom (1980, pp. 11-12), writes: “I left Penang and went to Singapore where it was easy for me to get a job on the Malaya Tribune Group of newspapers. Soon afterwards most of the men working there were called up for the Local Defence Corps... As more men were called up, so my jobs increased...I worked on the paper until it had a direct hit”.

Simone became the principal narrator and the point of view from which I first began to map out the novel. Simone’s character emerges from imagination, although some of her experiences are garnered from oral histories and female memoirs. For example, her arrest and torture (“Salvaged”, pp. 166-171) draw on Elizabeth Choi (OH1) and Sybil Kathigasu (1959); her life in the botanical gardens, the museum and the library draws on Corner (1981); and her experience at the Shimin Byoin hospital (“Salvaged”, pp. 164-167) draws on He (1991).

Point of view (POV)

After some experimentation, I decided to use third person omniscient as the best way to proceed with the manuscript, focalising principally on Simone’s viewpoint. This is a useful literary device for stories with a lot of historical information to impart and with a plethora of characters. The novelist can relay information to the reader through the perspectives of many characters by depicting their thoughts. This viewpoint makes the complexity of multiple characters more manageable.

In my previous fiction I had used third person focalising on only two characters. The prospect of seven was a new challenge. With a greater word length, I might have created a narrative that focussed on each of them equally, but with 70,000 words seven POVs would be crowded

and none would have sufficient “airtime”. I decided to limit focus to three characters, the central of whom would be Simone. To start, I wrote entirely from Simone’s point of view, concentrating on setting, tone and atmosphere.

However, I wrote a scene quite early on of the women as young Guides bonding together over a crocodile attack (“Salvaged”, pp. 23-27). This strategy gave me a clear idea of the names, ethnicities and different backgrounds, habits and temperaments of the girls. I knew that this chapter would help readers understand choices the characters had made in the past and would make in the present. Determining character traits evident in girlhood—who was bold, who a dreamer, who bossy, who timid—helped prepare for their later activities, choices and responses. After writing that scene, I decided that Kay would be the character who would be the focus of the second principal character. On a battleground I needed a soldier.

I’d written 30,000 words entirely from Simone’s POV when Zahra suddenly emerged as the (as yet undeveloped) third voice. Of course, it was my decision but sometimes inexplicably it feels like a character just suddenly steps out of the shadows and into the light. Now I had three characters—Eurasian, Chinese and Malay—whose experience under the Japanese would be quite different. The four other Guides would be developed as needed by the plot, but they too would represent different ways that women dealt with the occupation.

Tense

I used present tense in a previous novel (*Finding Maria*, 2017) for memory scenes as a contrast to past tense for the main narrative. In that novel I wanted the reader to feel the present-ness of the past, the way certain memories can suddenly emerge in our mind and feel immediate.

For this novel, present tense was my first choice for two reasons: atmosphere and immediacy. My research told me that years of struggle, betrayal, hunger and sorrow produced for much of the population an all-pervasive suspicion of one another, fostered not only by the Japanese but by those locals obliged to serve in the surveillance and coercion of the local population, or who willingly collaborated with or prospered by the occupation. This caused a retreat into interiority. There was also a widespread feeling of time suspended. Incomprehension and fear of a brutal and capricious oppressor required constant adjustment and daily deference, as well as suspension of human sympathy and empathy or even reaction to visible daily horrors of starvation, suffering and death. Stretches of boredom and banality were interspersed with

moments of fear, loathing and terror. I wanted to evoke that stifling sense of powerlessness, of being stuck in limbo.

The use of present tense, fostering a sense of immediacy, allows readers to witness the women's lives as if in the moment. In war, with bombs falling or torture and death imminently possible, in the struggle for food and simply to survive in a constant state of uncertainty, there is only the moment to moment, the day to day. The present tense also allows the reader to experience a character's change as it happens; for example, the resolve to take action may generate mixed emotions of fear and exhilaration.

Structure

After I'd drafted a third or so of the novel in scenes told only from Simone's point of view, both the plot and the structure of the novel became bogged down. When I was trying to decide how to open "Salvaged" after a few false starts, I'd found inspiration from Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See* (2014). In Doerr's novel the first scene is set at the very end of the war in France. American planes drop leaflets to warn the citizens of St Malo to leave the town because of a cataclysmic bombardment. That opening scene instantly resonated. I went back to Doerr's novel to look at his structure. He had laid out his novel, which regularly switched points of view, with clear indications of time and place in the headings. By adopting this same method, I could clearly indicate where the chapter was taking place and from whose point of view. With that in mind I decided to introduce each of the three main characters consecutively in the early chapters to establish their current situation and feelings and began to consider where to insert a dramatic turning point that would drive their lives in a different direction—and what that turning point would be. I also began to consider diary fragments that could be interspersed throughout the early part of the novel to provide additional information and context from Simone's perspective.

The character of Kay Chan

At this point, with a third of the manuscript providing Simone's point of view, I began to develop the character of Kay, which is based on Elizabeth Choi (OH1), one of the best-known women of the Japanese occupation. Elizabeth's childhood—born in Sabah, raised by the native Kadazans, understanding the jungle and its edible plants, fearing nothing and pelting crocodiles with rocks—allied to her robust and lifelong Girl Guide experiences

inspired the formation of Kay, although I made Kay a lot wilder. Elizabeth never carried a gun in the jungles of Malaya, but she and her husband did supply the POWs in Changi with supplies and the most forbidden things of all—radio parts and news of the war. This later resulted in both of them being arrested and tortured. In the same manner, Kay’s courier activities result in her arrest and torture.

In contrast to Simone hiding away in the gardens, Kay is in the jungle fighting the Japanese. Having introduced Kay’s physical courage and leadership qualities early in the manuscript, I felt the reader would find her work as an anti-Japanese resistance fighter credible.

Plot

Once the status quo of Simone, Kay and Zahra had been developed and they were unified with the leaflet drop, I turned to the inciting incident and the turning point of the plot. These are literary devices which normally occur near the beginning of a play, novel or film the purpose of which is to disturb the status quo and set a protagonist or protagonists on a different, usually difficult and dramatic, path. It is a call to action. The inciting incident can be given tension by adding elements of time constraint or urgency; it can raise questions in the mind of the reader (what will happen?; how will it happen?) and, by showing how a character reacts to the inciting incident, demonstrate values, goals, strength and weakness. Acceptance and active engagement in the call to action is the turning point. Both these devices are used to drive the action of the plot forward.

A consideration of possible inciting incidents brought me to reflect on the role of Teresa who until then had been absent. Where could Teresa fit in the narrative? I realised that although I had a good idea of each of the characters by now, I needed a further backstory to their relationship as the colony entered the war and their lives as young women were all about to change. Where were they all in February 1942 and how could I get them together? The answer came from recalling my reading of Mary McCarthy’s *The Group* (1966). Her novel begins with a gathering of multiple characters (student friends at college) who attend the wedding of one their number, using this location to set out their lives and thoughts before they head off in different directions. The wedding of Teresa (“Salvaged”, pp. 31-36) to her communist activist husband became the means by which I set out Teresa’s engagement with the fight for equality and what will be her anti-Japanese activities, but also address the other women and their differing views as their lives were thrust on the path changed by the war.

Teresa's chance rescue by Kay from the grasp of Captain Tsuji offered me the place to introduce early on the main antagonist (and I had, for a long time, struggled to find that place); the opportunity to suggest Kay's past tortures at his hand; and show the reader the depth of her feelings for Teresa ("Salvaged", pp. 12, 28, 39,). The rescue is the inciting incident, the moment the status quo is jolted. Kay's acceptance of the quest to rescue the dying Teresa's daughter ("Salvaged", p. 47) becomes the turning point of the novel. From it flows other decisions: Kay to involve Zahra; Zahra to involve Simone; their subsequent search for Anita, Molly and Jenny; the entire flow of the plot moving forward.

The character of Zahra Zahari

The character of Zahra was formed from the amalgamation of three oral histories: that of Jenny Gan (OH5), Myna Segaram (OH9) and Zamroude Za'ba (OH11). Zamroude Za'ba was the primary influence: her father, a teacher and a part-time radio journalist, put her forward to be considered as a broadcaster at the Malay Service of the British-run Radio Singapore six months before the start of the war. This seemed to me remarkably liberal for the time and Zamroude also reflects on it as an unusual and initially alarming prospect which, nevertheless, she quickly adjusted to and loved. After the British surrender, her father didn't want her to return to what became Radio Syonan. Zamroude was sorry about this as she would have liked to continue in broadcasting, even under the Japanese. Myna Segaram mostly worked in a Japanese-run civilian government department but, in the closing months of the war, was typing up information for broadcasting. Jenny Gan worked for the Japanese, monitoring allied radio stations and for *Domei*, the official news agency for the Empire of Japan.

Zahra's spirit, despite the violence of her forced marriage, never quite leaves her. At war's end Zahra's actions, both in rescuing Teresa's child and dealing with her personal situation for the benefit of herself and her sister by the decisive despatch of her violent 'husband', have restored all her old confidence in herself. In the face of all that the occupation has thrown at Singapore, she feels no compunction in the task of facing down a disparaging and insulting British officer, parachuted in to take over the radio station.

'Is there no one else?' the British broadcaster says staring at Zahra. 'Can't have a woman read out such momentous stuff.'

Zahra waits. She's glad she didn't clap the raising of the Union Jack. What the hell has changed?

'Read out all the Japanese muck, did you?' He stares at her with barely disguised disgust.

'Read out the British muck, too, when Singapore was falling,' she says.

He sways as if she's slapped him. ("Salvaged", p. 194).

Zahra's attitude to the returning British is merely a reflection of what many of the oral histories and memoirs contained—the smashed image of British invincibility and right to rule, a change in attitudes so fundamental that, despite the relief of the local population at the end of violence and a return to reason and peace under the British, ultimately it was impossible to ever fully restore.

The character of Teresa Wong

The character of Teresa Wong was developed primarily from the memoir of Janet Lim (1958), a young Chinese girl sold into slavery through the *mui tsai* system and eventually rescued by the Mui Tsai Ordinance of 1932 and placed in the Zenana Missionary School. The hardships of Teresa's life would lead her to become a member of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). Her role in the MCP, her marriage to a leader of the Party, the birth of her daughter and her death would become pivotal in the creation of the plot.

The character of Anita Shah

The character of Anita was influenced by the experiences of Lakshmi Naidu (OH7) who worked in a voluntary capacity for the all-female Rani of Jhansi Regiment of the Indian National Army. This and the story of the Regiment were supplemented by Hildebrand (2016) and the oral history of Dr (Colonel) Lakshmi Sahgal, the Indian female national who was the commander of the Regiment in Singapore (Accession No. 001182). From Sahgal's interview I discovered that the Regiment had no direct contact with the Japanese:

What is remarkable is the extent to which Japan has been excluded from this room. No portrait of the Emperor hangs here, as it does in every other military and civil building in Syonan. No Japanese soldiers or heiho guard the establishment. The women do that themselves ("Salvaged", p. 79).

Sahgal also talks of the way that older women, like Lakshmi Naidu, worked for the Regiment voluntarily in many capacities. Sahgal also had a cousin in the broadcasting station, a factor I used in the novel—Anita’s cousin works with Zahra at Radio Syonan. Anita explains the varied composition and motivations of the women of the Regiment in “Salvaged” (pp 79-84).

The character of Molly Salgado

This character is drawn primarily from Myna Segaram (OH9), a Ceylonese Eurasian from a well-off family who attended the elite Raffles Girls School in Singapore. The character of Molly, however, is supplemented by my imagining Molly’s life in Singapore as carefree. She studies music and her handsome brother Charles makes Malay movies. Though seemingly a dreamer, during the occupation she finds her inner steel, rescues her brother from prison and makes a life for them in the entertainment business of Syonan. Under the cover of managing a restaurant and cabaret, she arranges to syphon food off to the needy and conspires in the anti-Japanese underground (“Salvaged” pp. 138-141).

The character of Jenny Lim

This character is an amalgam, like much in “Salvaged”, of my analysis of oral history, study of the centuries-old Peranakan culture and language (see the Glossary for a full explanation), my experience guiding the Peranakan Museum in Singapore and the interview with Helen Chua (OH3) a Peranakan woman. Something of that unique culture is expressed in “Salvaged” (p. 34):

The Straits Chinese liked to think of themselves as the keepers of some ancient heritage yet, at the same time, defenders of a modernising China. Sun Yat Sen’s portrait certainly occupied the hall of Jenny’s house as it did almost every Straits Chinese house in Singapore.

Peranakan families were intensely loyal to China and when the Japanese invaded that country supported Chiang Kai Shek through the China Fund which raised millions for anti-Japanese weapons and causes. Many of their sons and daughters went to China to fight. The Straits Chinese who contributed to the China Fund were well known to the Japanese and the first to be targeted at the occupation. This is the experience of Jenny’s family (“Salvaged, p. 162).

Though her studies to be a doctor were interrupted by war, Jenny is important to Simone as she searches for someone she can trust to care for Teresa's baby.

Minor characters

E.J.H. Corner's (1981) memoir became an invaluable resource for the creation of "Salvaged". Corner's memoir included his relations with a variety of people, many of whom I fictionalised (see Appendix, Botanical Gardens, Museum and Library for a list of characters). Apart from Jumairah Othman and Guy Medoc, all the secondary characters are drawn from Corner's memoir. In addition, so are the characters of Jeremy Roche ("Salvaged", pp. 199-200) and Katsu-san, the cat (pp. 9-11). Corner (1981, p. 109) recounts the story of the cat and William Birtwistle whom everyone, for the linguistic ease of the Japanese, called Mr Birt:

A stray cat had joined Mr Birt in the room where he slept at the back of the Museum... The cat enjoyed his old felt hat and, in that cosiness, brought forth a litter. In his diary he notes that on 1 December 1942 he was approached by Miss Ohmori (the Marquis's secretary at the Museum) who asked permission to take the cat and kittens to the Marquis's house. Loath to part with her, for she was a comrade and ratter, yet knowing she would get a better home, he consented.¹¹

It is unlikely that Mr Birt had the slightest choice in the matter but, in any case, both the cat and Miss Ohmori, in the guises of Katsu-san and Mrs Sugiyama, found a place in "Salvaged" (pp. 10, 21). The cat came to serve several useful purposes. She became my conduit to provide information in a quick and entertaining way. With her multiple owners, names and identities the cat could also stand for the multiple names and identities of my characters and of Singapore itself. I added her different-coloured eyes in a later draft to hint at her possible appeal to the Marquis and as a physical representation of the ambivalent nature of the whole occupation. She also functions as a repository of hidden loyalties. Katsu-san lives with a succession of Japanese after losing the Governor, but it is to Bertie and Simone that she cleaves. This seemed to be the attitude of most of the population of wartime Singapore who

¹¹ By unearthing Corner's memoir from the archive, I discovered the existence of two further (and missing) diaries, those of the Chief Clerk of the Gardens, Quan Ah Gun, and William Birtwistle. I made this known to the Head of the Singapore Botanical Gardens and the National Heritage Board. I suggested they may still exist in the collection of Corner's daughter and could be pursued as valuable additions to the occupation. I myself tried to contact Corner's daughter without success. To date I do not know if that information has been followed up by authorities in Singapore.

paid necessary lip-service to the Japanese whilst disguising their loyalty to other entities—the British, Kuomintang China, Communism, Malayan and Indian liberation movements.

Corner's memoir of efforts to preserve, amidst the destruction of war, the cultural and natural collections of the Gardens and Museum suggested the concept of wreckage and salvage (human and material) that become my novel's predominant theme. Among many passages, Corner's (pp. 118-19) account of the saving and positioning of Raffles' statue in the museum as well as visiting Japanese reactions to it found an early place in "Salvaged" alongside, in a later passage, the general salvage and preservation of books, documents and artefacts by Corner and Birtwistle. Other examples from Corner are the vast store of provisions abandoned by the surrendered Australian troops ("Salvaged, p. 54), the slapping of the Malay gardeners by the pro-Japanese Mrs Arbenz, wife of the Swiss consul—the fictional Greta Muller ("Salvaged", pp. 58-59, 87, 102-103)—and the unflattering description of the Japanese governor of Johor, which I applied to his fictional son ("Salvaged, p. 106).

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

This artefact-based thesis investigates and communicates by means of a novel and essay some diverse female experiences of living through the Japanese occupation of Singapore.

For reasons I have outlined in this essay, the Asian experience of the Pacific War—and the Japanese occupation of Singapore—has gone largely unwritten. The predominant patriarchal narrative of the last 75 years has been forged by Western historians, academics and prisoners of war. In that narrative women are virtually invisible. In the same manner, since the 1980s in Singapore, the patriarchal state-controlled narrative of the occupation has been singular and androcentric, ignoring the diverse experiences of the women of Singapore's multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society.

This thesis identifies gaps and silences that need to be addressed. These include the strategic household, wage-earning, food-supplying and charitable roles that women played in the increasingly dangerous and difficult situation of the occupation but also the ignored or marginalised active participation of women in Singapore's pre-war anti-colonial movements, support for and armed participation in anti-Japanese activities in China as well as in the jungle-based guerrilla militias in Malaya, and the urban anti-Japanese underground in Singapore.

The contribution of this thesis is to demonstrate a way to redress those historical and literary gaps in knowledge about women of the period, challenge patriarchal narratives of the past and, through the power and accessibility of historical fiction, offer a more diverse, multifaceted story to the general reading public.

There are limitations to this project. The works I have referenced are in English as scholarly works on the Japanese occupation of Singapore in languages other than English, like some of the oral history interviews in Chinese or Malay, are inaccessible to me. The vast destruction of British and Japanese documentation contemporaneous with the event means that reliable academic historical accounts of the period have been few, and the main focus of those studies has been men's experiences. As a feminist researcher and creative writer, I sought out and relied on local women's oral and written remembrances as prime sources. Oral histories have been criticised as unreliable, but in the absence of women's voices in the historical record in

any other form, feminist researchers embrace oral history and the recording and preserving of women's voices as an important political aim. It is also important to retrieve those voices that do exist from the archive and bring them to light, and I located for critical analysis the hitherto neglected oral histories of eleven women of diverse ages and ethnicities recorded by the Oral History Centre of the National Archive of Singapore for a Project on the Japanese Occupation of Singapore (1981–2011) together with eight ethnically diverse female memoirs that had emerged over six decades (1953–2011).

Key questions of the thesis concern ethical responsibility and unavoidable outsider authorial positionality in relation to context and sources. This essay explains that to address these issues I used an intersectional feminist framework and a phenomenological approach to the data and writing, engaging in a reflexive creative writing process throughout the project or what Smith and Dean refer to as an “iterative cyclic web” (2009, p. 2). An intersectional framework was important given Singapore's multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society of Chinese, Malays, Indians and Eurasians, each with their own backgrounds, practices and identities. By taking a feminist phenomenological approach I was able to immerse myself in the diverse plurality of particular remembered experiences of each of the interviewees, considering their stories against the historical literature (including newspapers of the time and the memoirs of men) and the tapestry of my experiential knowledge of the physical, cultural and social world of Singapore, including its geography, climate and ethnic makeup. Literary and intellectual choices transformed data into fiction: aspects of selected memoirs and oral histories were deployed for plot and character development, while gaps needed to be filled by imagination. Throughout this process I negotiated potential bias of the different genres, speakers and writers in order to create an ethical fictional narrative based on women's accounts of their past lived experiences and inscribe them in the historical and literary record.

By weaving the creative thinking and practical processes of “Salvaged” through a discussion of literature, theory, methodology and practice, the essay contributes to a matrix of production, illuminating that which is usually hidden in the making of literary works.

The Pacific War and the Japanese occupation of China and Southeast Asia are historical realities from which women's stories have been almost completely excluded. If other women's voices lie hidden in archives throughout the region—and elsewhere—these offer a source of untapped potential for feminist researchers and writers of history and historical fiction to do the same.

Women seeking, finding and writing women's stories are, as Adrienne Rich says, not only chapters in cultural history, they are acts of survival.

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APPENDIX

Principal Characters of “Salvaged”

5th Company Singapore Girl Guides

Jean McKenna (Australian), Captain

Halcyon Patrol

Kay Chan (Chinese), Patrol Leader—Java

Zahra Zahari (Malay), Patrol Second—Blue

Simone Martel (Swiss Eurasian)—Red

Anita Shah (Indian)—White

Teresa Wong (Chinese)—Gray

Jenny Tan (Straits Chinese)—Blackie

Molly Salgado (Ceylonese Eurasian)—Woody

Botanical Gardens, Museum and Library

Japanese

Marquis Fujimoto, Honorary President, Chief Advisor of Malay Affairs and Civilian Governor of Malaya

Dr Ueno, Lepidopterist

Professor Haneda, Botanist

Lieutenant Uehara, Zoologist

Mrs Sugiyama, Secretary to the Museum

Mr Sugiyama, Head Gardener of the Botanical Gardens

Singaporeans

Mr Guan (Chinese) Head Clerk of the Gardens, the Museum and the Library

Mrs Guan and two daughters

Carlos Pereira (Ceylonese Eurasian) Head of the Herbarium of the Botanical Gardens

Simone Martel, Librarian and Secretary

Jumairah Othman (Malay) Gardener and keeper of the staff compound

British & Australian

John Hatter, Botanist and ex-Deputy Director of the Botanical Gardens, POW

Bertie Bradshaw, Scientist and ex-Head of Fisheries, POW

Guy Medoc, Australian soldier, POW

German

Greta Muller, Widow of Swiss Consul of Syonan

The cat—Winnie, Neko-chan, Katsu-san

Java Patrol (Resistance)

Kay Chan (Chinese) leader—Java
Ravindar Singh (Sikh Indian) deputy
Yuan (Chinese) radio operator and network organiser
Uma Nair (Indian) doctor

Others

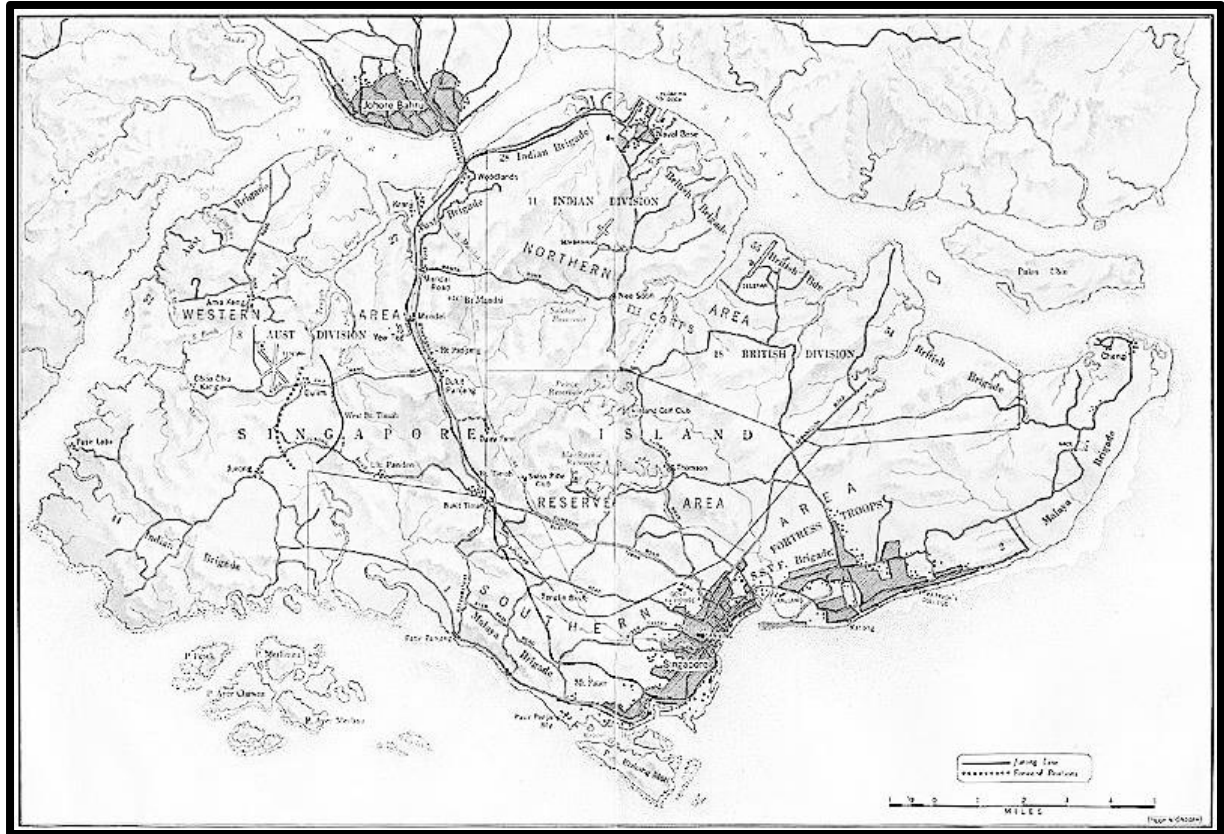
Li Jun (Chinese), underground resistance fighter
Captain Richie Richmond (English), Special Operations' officer
Jeremy Roche (New Zealander), the “monuments man”
Samad Shariff (Malay), Deputy Director of the Kao-Kunrenjo, Japanese Leading Officers' Training Institute
Fatima Shariff, Samad's sister
Captain Junichiro Tsuji (Japanese), Kempeitai officer
Noor Zahari (Malay), sister of Zahra

Glossary

ARP	Air Raid Precaution
Bahau	An agricultural settlement established by the Japanese in the Malayan state of Negeri Sembilan. It was also known as Fuji-Go, which means “Fuji village” or “beautiful village”. The settlement was specially set up for Eurasians and Chinese Roman Catholics in November 1943 to remove them from Singapore in order to alleviate food shortages in the town. However the land was unsuitable and mosquito-ridden and it is estimated that as many as half of the settlers died of disease including the Catholic Bishop of Singapore.
BMA	British Military Administration
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CHIJ	Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus
Dalforce	Singapore Chinese communist volunteer army unit led by British Commander John Dalley
Endau	Endau Settlement was a 300,000-acre agricultural settlement in Johor set up in 1943 during the Japanese Occupation for Chinese settlers in order to ease the food supply problem in Singapore. Under the scheme, the Chinese population in Singapore was encouraged to resettle outside Singapore, in areas where they could farm and live off the land. Endau Settlement was also known as New Syonan Model Farm
Force 136	Special Operations British and Chinese supply and infiltration unit based in Ceylon
Heiho	Malay auxiliary soldier of the Japanese Army

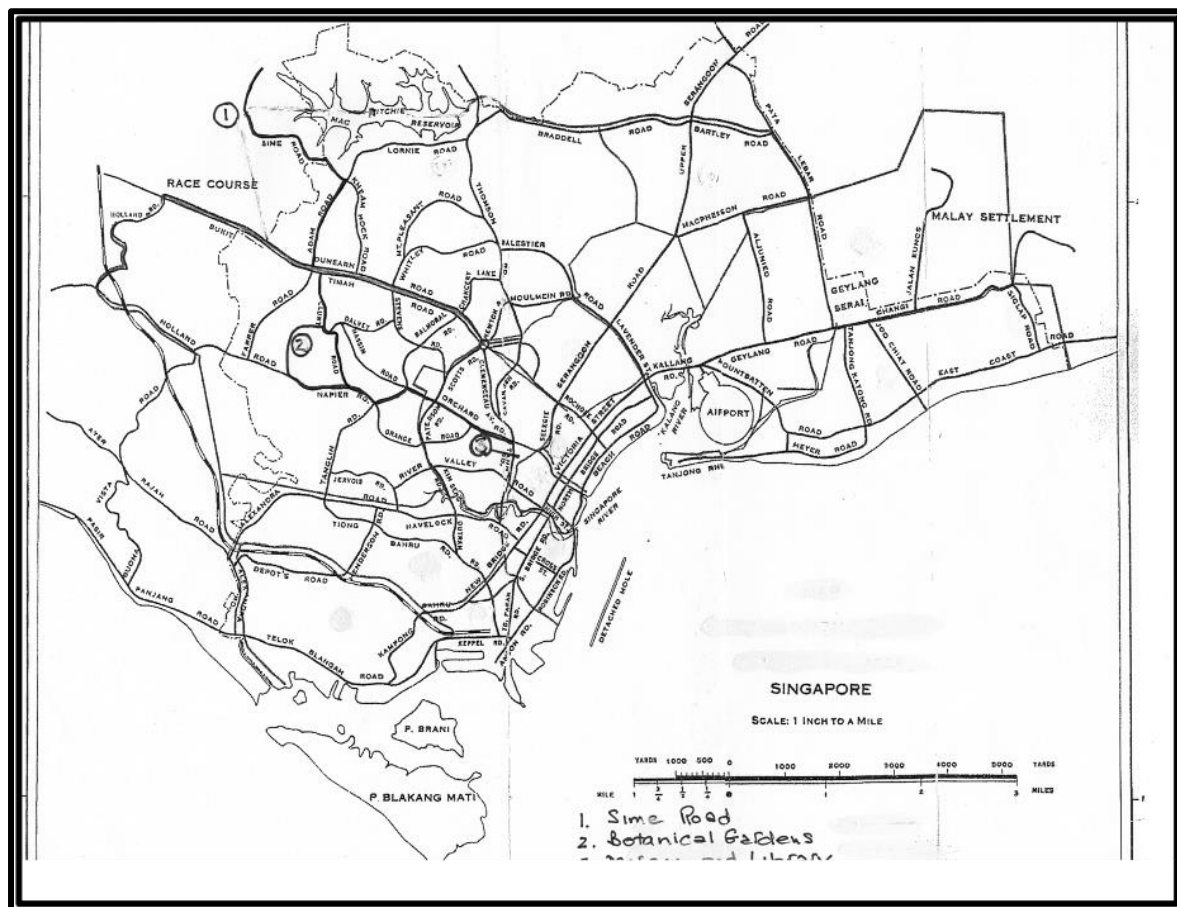
IIL	Indian Independence League
INA	Indian National Army (pro Indian independence)
Jikeidan	Auxiliary police neighbourhood watch
Kadazans	Native people of North Borneo
Kempeitai	Military police of the Japanese army
KMT	Kuomintang (Nationalist Government of Republican China)
MAS	Medical Auxiliary Service
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MGS	Methodist Girls School
Miyako Hospital	Former Woodford Mental Hospital
MPAJA	Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army
Mui Tsai	Chinese slave girl
Peranakan	The Straits Chinese, or Peranakans (locally born), are a people of mixed Chinese and Malay/Indonesian heritage who trace their origins to 15th-century Malacca where their ancestors were thought to be Chinese traders who married local women. The descendants of those original Peranakans became vital and trusted interpreters of the Chinese-controlled trading world of Southeast Asia for the British administration. They were elite, English-speaking, influential and wealthy merchants, their sons educated in English schools and universities, their clubs and association modelled on British clubs, honoured with English knighthoods. They were commonly known before the war as The King's Chinese and supported British governance of Malaya. Though no longer speaking any form of mainland Chinese (their language was an amalgam of Hokkien dialect and Malay called Baba Malay), they were intensely loyal to Republican China.
Romusha	Javanese male and female forced labourers
SEAC	British South-east Asia Command based in Ceylon
Sook Ching	Great Cleansing. Roundup of Chinese men 16-60 for "inspection". Number of deaths disputed—Chinese sources estimate up to 50,000

Maps

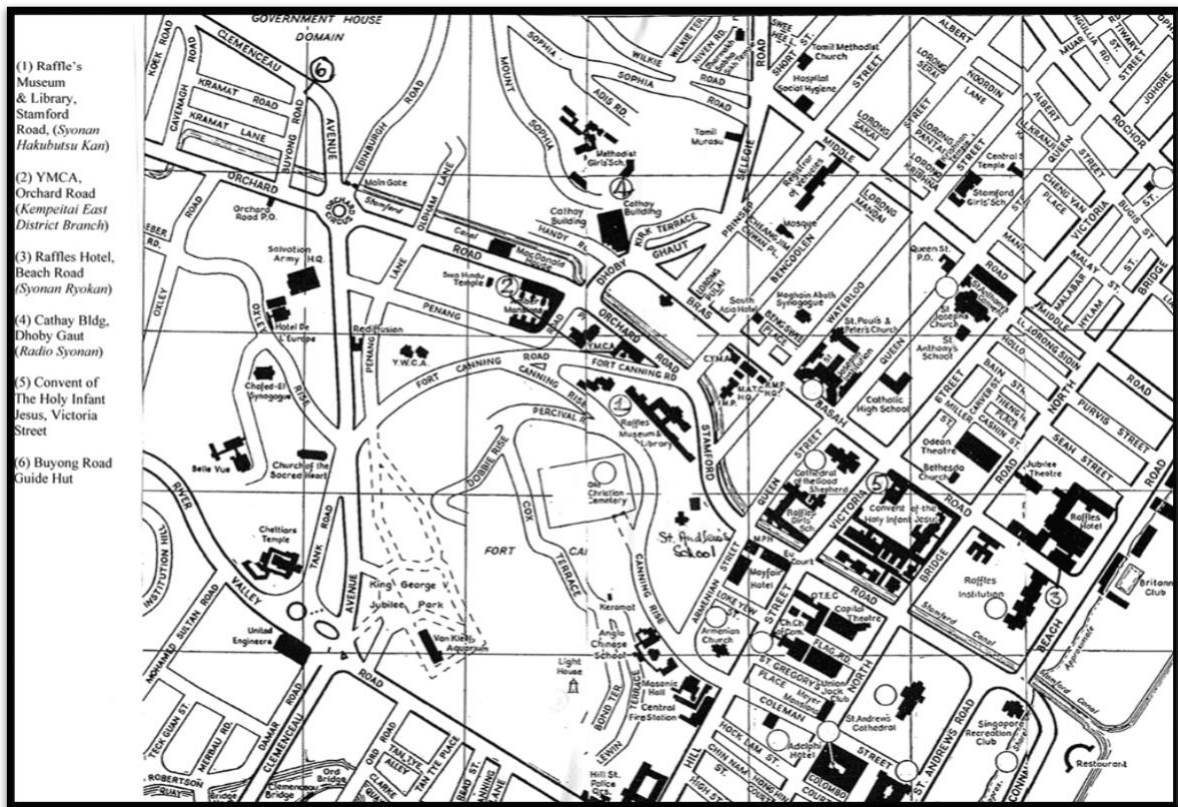


Map of Singapore island showing Allied positions on the eve of the Battle of Singapore, February 1942 (Wikipedia Commons). From *Australia in the War of 1939-1945, Volume IV, The Japanese Thrust* (1957), Australian War Memorial.

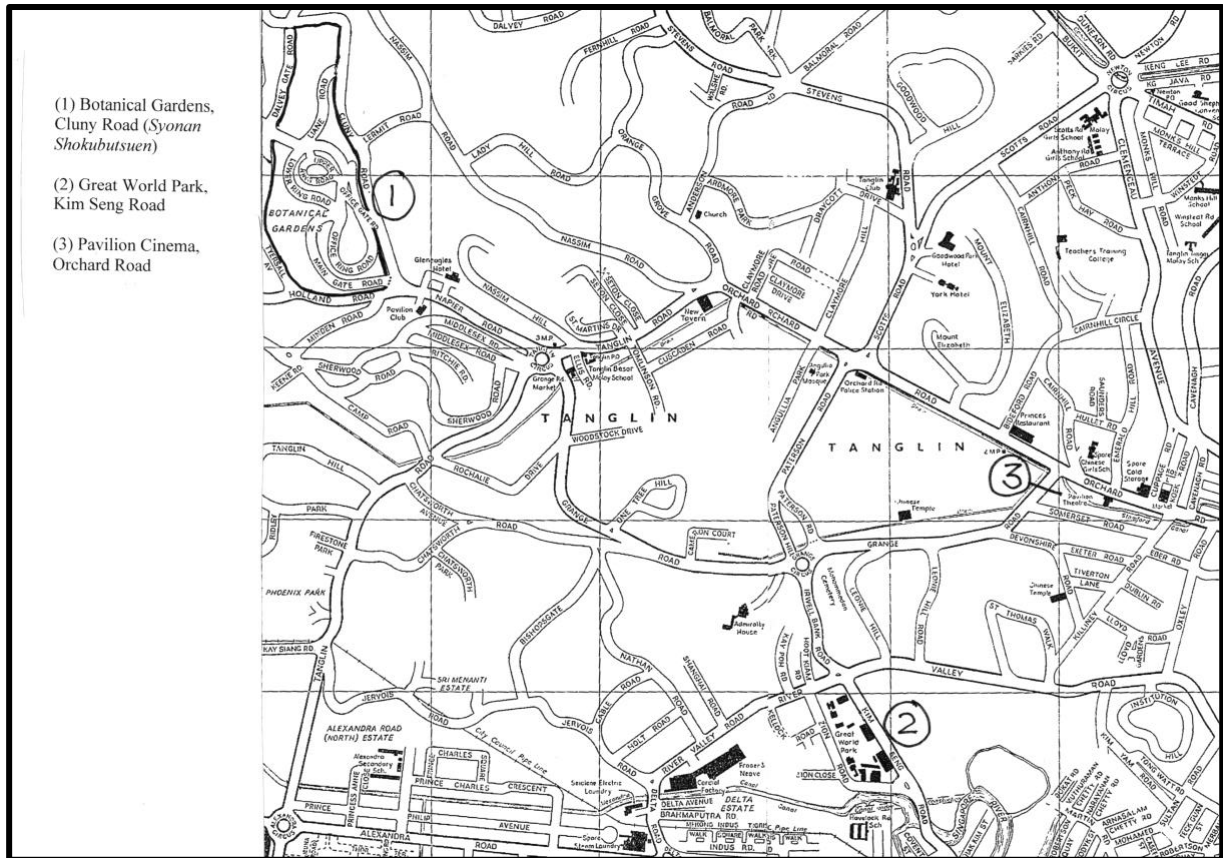
The maps which follow are from the Singapore Street Map Directory, 1958, (with permission from the Singapore Land Authority). In 1958, the geography and infrastructure of Singapore was fundamentally unchanged from 1945 and pre-war and occupation maps of the time were visually difficult to interpret or hard to obtain.



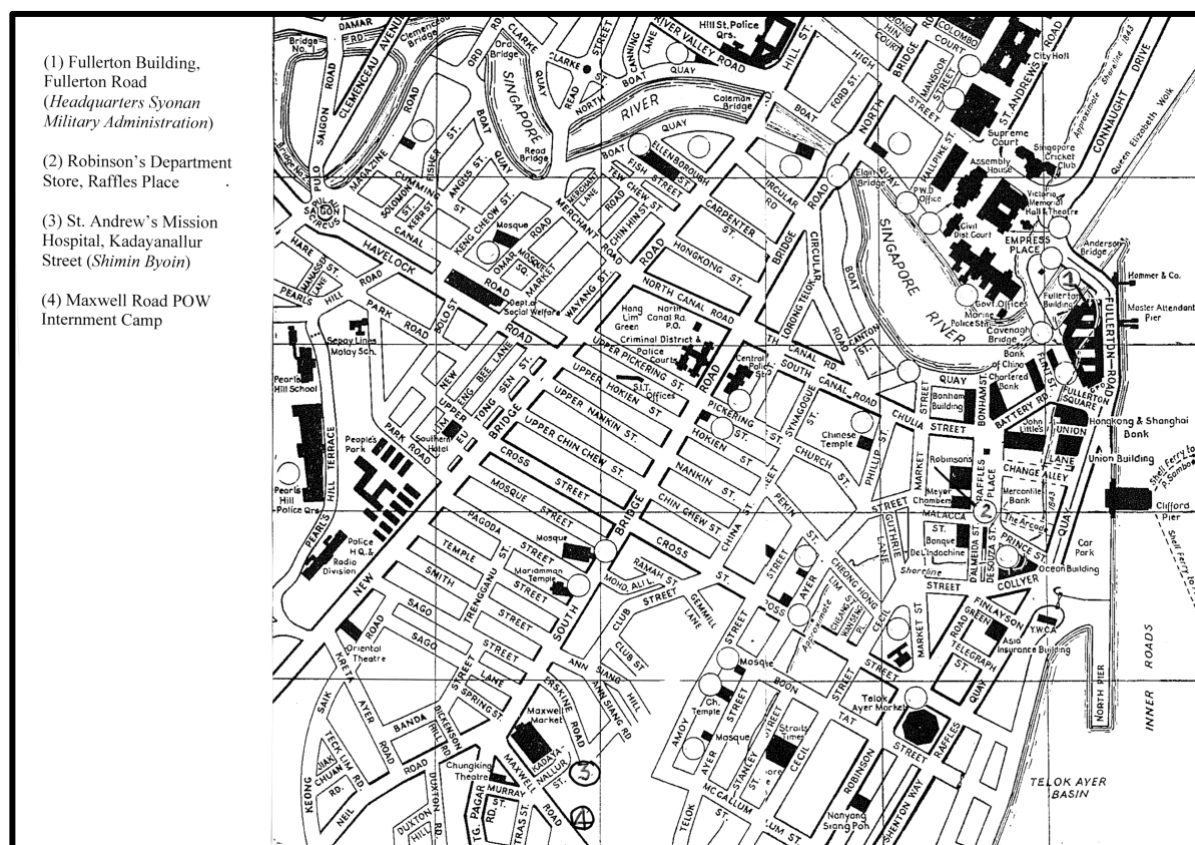
Southern part of Singapore island and the town showing the location of (1) Sime Road and MacRitchie Reservoir, (2) The Botanical Gardens and (3) Raffles Museum and Library



Street map of Singapore town showing the location of Raffles Museum and Library, YMCA, Raffles Hotel, Cathay Building, Convent and Buyong Road Guide Hut



Street map of Singapore showing the location of the Botanical Gardens, Great World Park and the Pavilion Cinema



Street map of Singapore showing the location of the Fullerton Building, Robinson's Dept. Store, St. Andrew's Mission Hospital and Maxwell Road POW Internment Camp