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Divided histories of the Pacific War: Revisiting "Changi's" (post) colonial heritage

Although built in 1936 and used as a convict (criminal) prison for most of its history, Singapore's Changi Prison gained notoriety not because it housed legendary criminals, but due to its use as a prisoner of war (POW) and internment camp, part of a complex of seven camps that held upto 52,200 Allied prisoners of war and 3,500 civilians captured during the Japanese occupation of the island between 1942 and 1945 (Nelson 2012:10; McKenzie 1945: 451). This history receded with the demolition and repurposing of the wider camp geography and the postwar reinstatement of the criminal prison, but remained the primary association through which 'Changi' was known internationally. As other dispersed sites associated with the period of Japanese occupation reverted to their former uses or gave way to urban expansion, Changi as a distinctive and tangible artefact of that period grew to become an exceptional signifier of wartime history and a place of extra geographical pilgrimage and commemoration for Second World War veterans, ex-POWs and their families from overseas – largely from Britain and Australia. However, the peculiarity of commemorating a working prison as an extra-national and colonial heritage marker placed specific pressures on the site and its memories. The demolition of the prison, broached in 2003, raised protests from local conservationists and, due to the large numbers of Australian servicemen held captive in wartime Singapore, from Australian veterans organisations and the Australian federal

government, but, to no effect (Vijayan 2004: 2; Baker 2003).[1] The prison was torn down in 2004. As argued by Jean Beaumont

> The trans-national significance of the prison was asymmetrical; the past was not a single narrative shared by Singaporeans and Australians. In such circumstances then, perhaps inevitably, the priorities of the local custodians of the site took precedence over the claims of those outside the nation state (2009: 313).

Twelve years later when the Singapore government belatedly gazetted its last physical remains as the nation's 72nd national monument, it appeared to be a case of "too little too late".[2] The site had been redeveloped as a billion-dollar prison complex and all that was left of the colonial prison was a 180 metre stretch of perimeter wall, a gate and two turrets.

During the years preceding its demolition, Changi Chapel and Museum, a nearby facility related to the prison's history, established under the Singapore Tourism Board in 2001, assumed the dual role of commemorating both POW and local histories of the war. In the aftermath of the state's resistance to conserving the penal facility, and in order to develop sensitivity to this history in Singaporeans, the museum's curators have assiduously localised its range of displays (Muzaini and Yeoh 2016: chap. 3, 47-67). But unlike subsequent museums created to convey Singaporean wartime experiences at the Old Ford Factory (2006) or Bukit Chandu (2003), among the two most prominent Second World War related museums on the island, they insinuate the local into Changi's global history. In doing so, they

[1] They were gazetted by the National Heritage Board's Preservation of Sites and Monuments Division.

[2] This question was put to me by the journalist Melody Zaccheus when interviewing me regarding the prison in 2016.

uncover unresolved postcolonial anxieties within national heritage stories still pertinent to Changi's numerous stakeholders including former colonisers and competing ethnic lobbies. By approaching Changi as a 'postcolonial' heritage site, one where colonial histories determine its reception, and national processes seek to obscure these values, this paper links contestation over Changi's wartime memory to colonial, racial and spatial divisions that were inscribed in penal architecture and inverted as the prison spread across a much larger POW and internment camp geography under the Japanese Imperial Army (JIA). As the representative site of these dispersed and ephemeral memories for various claimants on their history, Changi's erasure or resuscitation appears to mirror and intensify their collective fates. But because Changi was retained as a working prison long after these other sites were destroyed or repurposed, it still remains the symbolic repository of their collective histories, somewhat to the detriment of its own more particular institutional heritage. Vexed responses to the demolition of the prison are further frustrated by more generalised postcolonial ambivalence towards colonial or imperial heritage and to penal institutions in particular, which are not viewed sentimentally. In fact, these two entangled threads of ex-POW's and former internees' wartime social memories and the institutional history of a colonial prison present very different expressions of postcolonial heritage. The social memories are artificially compressed into a three-and-a-half year period during the Japanese occupation, whereas the institutional history from 1936 until 2004 seems comparatively elastic. Architectural significance as a modern penitentiary adds value to Changi's institutional heritage demanding particular attention to its design and construction during the early nineteen thirties. While seemingly incongruent, these various historical forces become co-dependent due to gaps and silences caused by contestation over national memories.

The contested memorial strategies that historicise wartime Singapore [for Singaporeans], scholars argue, are over-determined by post-independence nation-building narratives (Muzaini and Yeoh 2016; Blackburn and Hack, 2012). But even in their scholarly analyses of contemporary constructions of the wartime "Changi Story", a story first attributed to a book by former POW, David Nelson (2012), the physical and material content of these histories is inadequate. While the Changi chapels have been reconstructed or simulated for memorial strategies, little is known of the penal architecture, the military barracks or timber huts of the POW geography (see Chang 2016: chap. 2. 51-93 on military barracks). Hence, Changi Prison's postcolonial incompatibility appears threefold. Built by the British colonial government to discipline and control local 'Asiatic' settlers in an environment where social relations were asymmetrical and divisive, the prison's program was insalubrious and its Asian occupants both before and after the war were unheroic. Conversely, the audience for its heroic affective memories were extra territorial and dispersed in former imperial nodes such as Britain and the Netherlands, or in British dominions like Australia or New Zealand which honoured that colonial relationship. Moreover, Changi Prison was an imperial artefact whose colonial architecture was too hybrid to provide an exemplar of a building type worth saving. These various dissonant strands locate the site's physical heritage outside the preferred framework for either national or imperial memory. In uncovering the prison's divided history we see the complex entanglements of a hybrid field of memorialisation, symptomatic of its postcoloniality.

The divided prison

Changi Prison was developed in 1936 as a second convict or criminal prison that might meet the demands on the criminal justice system created by the ever-expanding population of

regional settlers in Singapore. Overcrowding at the Outram Road Prison, the 19th century civil prison (1882-1963), located in the town centre, prompted a move to a rural site some 11 ½ miles from Singapore town (Probert 2006). The prison building was based on modern designs for cellular confinement already tested in Europe and America and introduced in the colonies only decades after their conception in the late 19th century. The scale and isolation of such buildings, built for segregating disease or criminality, distinguish them as "total institutions", a term introduced by sociologist Erving Goffman (1968: 17, 22) to describe a place of combined residence and work for a group of persons that is separated and formally administered with enforced routines and schedules. Indeed by this period, prisons were designed with several integrated functions emphasising the health, recreation, vocational training and spiritual lives of the prisoners. The telephone pole plan of parallel pavilions linked by a central corridor and partially adopted for Changi was first developed by Edmund DuCane, a surveyor general of military prisons and director of convict prisons at Wormwood Scrubs in London (in 1874-1891) (Johnston, 2000: 95-97) in a scheme devised for preventing communication between prisoners of different classes or categories. The pavilion design typology was already in use for hospitals buildings in the tropics (Chang, 2016: 97), and had been tested by the Singapore government architect, Frank Dorrington Ward – the architect responsible for Changi. Changi Prison with its high walls and turrets, its compact four storey ward blocks and its voluminous industrial workshops was a complex urban institution fashioned for prisoner reform (Fig.1). But even as it emulated European models and incorporated advances in electrification and sewerage, Changi's design exemplified colonial racism.

<Figure 1 near here>

The segregation of Europeans from 'Asiatics' and the relatively larger proportions of their cells added levels of complexity to even the simplest of colonial penal designs. These complexities were further calibrated according to the ethnic and religious dietary requirements of a culturally diverse population of inmates: The Chinese favoured pork, the Malays were forbidden to consume it and the Hindu-Indians were mostly vegetarian (National Library of Australia, Straits Settlements Blue Book 1936, Prisons, 759-60). The entire complex accommodated 568 prisoners and had one two-storey cell block for Europeans and two four storey cell blocks for Asiatics, each with their separate workshops and yards (National Archives-UK, Straits Settlements Annual Departmental Reports 1934, Buildings and Miscellaneous Works, 599; *The Malayan Architect* 1936: 84-85). These were supported by kitchen and laundry blocks, hospital block, recalcitrant and punishment blocks all accommodated inside the prison walls and divided between Europeans and Asiatics as was the staff quarters constructed outside this wall. Extra mural activities such as printing, book-binding, tailoring, carpentry, washing, weaving, shoe-making or basket making, and the selection of cooks, orderlies and clerks from the upper grade of prisoners continued a tradition of reforming Asians through productive labour for which the Singapore prison was exemplary (Jarman, SS Annual Report 1937: 70/277).

Changi Prison's construction was far more advanced than the masonry penal complexes that had been previously built in Singapore. The 'Asiatic' cell blocks and service blocks had steel framed structures, while other buildings were constructed in reinforced concrete with hollow block panelling. The total institution covered an area of nearly thirteen acres and was surrounded by a 3000-foot long and 24-foot high reinforced concrete wall. Hollow concrete blocks, steel grills and sanitary fittings were supplied locally, while structural steel work was imported from England. An "Immense electrically operated portcuilis…the glare of powerful

searchlights and brilliance of electric lights of the porch" impressed the local spectators at its opening (*The Straits Times* 1937: 14). The inclusion of a mosque, temple, school and club house for warders and their families pointed at their ethnic heterogeneity.

This was also true of the construction process. Although designed by the architects and engineers of the Public Works Department, the prison's various facilities were sub-contracted to ethnically Chinese contracting companies between 1932-36. Woh Hup, a contracting outfit with a growing reputation in government projects was selected for the majority of the buildings, as evident in tender details published in the newspapers (*The Singapore Free Press* 1934: 2).

The divided city

The prison could be regarded as a microcosmic representation of the colonial city. From its inception in the early 19th century, the town plan for Singapore had demarcated racially distinct spatial allocations (Pieris 2009, chap.2) (Fig.2). This was achieved by the allocation of land on an ethnic basis with disproportionately large entitlements to Europeans following a pattern symptomatic of colonial urban planning. In India and Africa these divisions were marked as "black town" or "white town" with their asymmetrical spaces – the generous grid of the colonial city and the cramped indigenous quarters – indicating the unequal distribution of social privilege. Singapore's Asian settler populations were dispersed across marshy low-lying areas at the town periphery, with separate districts for the Chinese, Malay, Indian and other groups assuming the plural political structure discussed by J.S. Furnivall (1944); ethnic groups were segregated by street or by district and came together for commerce. While no colonial city neatly adhered to these distinctions, due to levels of ethnic or cultural mixing, it notionally prevented their political collaboration and divided colonisers from colonised.

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In 1936 when Changi prison was approaching completion, Chinese settlers were the majority at 706,935, exceeding local Malays or those from the immediate region (at 293,520) and Indians (at 129,065) who were already ensconced in the greater British Empire (Jarman 1998: 10). Their spaces, culturally distinguishable due to their ethnic concentration had by the early 20th century developed variations of contiguous shophouses modelled after the southern Chinese urban housing typology. Europeans and Eurasians who at 25,070 comprised 2% of the population typically lived in bungalows on generous suburban land parcels indicative of their relative privilege (1998: 10). These too were racially divided between the colonial family and their service staff who lived in 'servant's quarters' at the back of the house.
By the early 20th century, the higher ratios of settler populations to Europeans and the growing affluence of Asian merchants led to a blurring of spatial and class boundaries and increasing representation of Asian interests by their elites. But the outbreak of the First World War and threat of a second reinforced racial divisions along military lines. New military precincts and housing estates were introduced in Singapore's outlying suburbs during the 1930s, as the island fortified itself against the impending Japanese attack. The new naval base and Changi cantonment opened up the rural outskirts for facilities like the prison. Four barracks complexes built by the Royal Engineers introduced new road and rail connections, plumbing, sewerage and electrical services, gun batteries and buildings (Probert 2006; Report of the Gillman Commission 1927). As argued by Jiat-Hwee Chang, designed for nurturing healthy colonial troops, barrack environments were spaces of exception and exclusivity; they demonstrated Britain's military power to the subject population (2016: 51-93). The prison's property was proximate to the expansive military facility.

Changi Prison offered a microcosmic tableau of colonial racism as experienced by its most recalcitrant subjects; social divisions that intensified once war broke out in the Pacific. What had once been a boundary between ruling and subject races converted to an imperial border between Europe's southeast Asian territories and Japan's eastern empire. This transformation was felt at Changi, which would temporarily hold Japanese civilians before their deportation to India in 1941 (Imperial War Memorial 11359: Fukuda). In this manner, the prison became an incipient political stage for the imperial contest. When Singapore fell on 15 February 1942, it converted to a major theatre of the Pacific War incarceration story.

The carceral geography

The spatial transformation of Singapore under the occupying Japanese can be characterised by two features of increased social congestion caused by the influx of refugees from war-damaged sections of the city or neighbouring Malaya, and by the proliferation of refugee and POW camps. From among these the most populous were the seven camps that occupied the cantonment adjacent to the prison building where solid masonry barrack facilities and hastily constructed 100-metre long timber and *attap* (woven palm fronds) huts were adapted to receive captive allied prisoners (Nelson 2012). The POW camp complex for 52,200 prisoners of war included the Southern Area that consisted of Kitchener Barracks and Changi village; the 18th Division area and India lines; Roberts Barracks; Temple Hill; Selarang Barracks and Birdwood Camp; Head Quarters Malaya Command and Garden and Wood Area, which were each encircled in barbed wire, and divided again by barbed wire from Changi Prison (Tett 2002: 20-22; Nelson 2012: 10). Captives included the British, Australian, US and Dutch troops, local Indian troops as well as the colonial civilian populations, including men, women and children who were confined in the prison building.

A drawing by H.E. McKenzie, publicised in *The Illustrated London News* of 27 October 1945 detailed the distribution of civilian internees in 1942 in the 'Asiatic' cell blocks of Changi Prison as 408 women and 2598 men (Fig.3). They would remain there until May 1944, when 4,510 civilian internees were moved to the Sime Road Camp to make room for 3000 POWs. By the last phases of the war 11,700 allied POWs, including Australians, would be concentrated in the prison and its surrounds, an area less than one quarter of a square kilometre (Havers 2003: 137-65). The functional inversion of British military architecture for holding allied POWs reconfigured them as prisons under the JIA, but also reproduced the experience of extreme congestion that had been hitherto associated with the 'native' districts. Objects of authority became sites of subordination, and 'native' architectures that had been used for 'native' troop or coolie quarters in the past housed the former colonial masters.

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POWs were soon distributed in work camps throughout the island, where they were forced to repair war damaged infrastructure and build facilities for the Japanese. They made temporary use of many available buildings. The postal historian David Tett provides an approximate account of several facilities (2002) as do mail distribution records (National Archives-UK: WO361/2230, 1942-45). Some of these work camps were institutions like St Andrews College on Serangoon Road, while others at Kranji, Woodlands Hospital and Blakang Mati used existing masonry or 'native' barracks. River Valley Road and Havelock Road camp had large *attap* roofed buildings originally used to shelter refugees. At Sime Road there were timber huts with proper roofing built as the Far East Headquarters of the Royal Air Force (Tett 2002: 27). At the Bukit Timah Race Course, extant buildings and shops were repurposed while at Adam Park and the Caldecott camps, soldiers crowded into modern

colonial bungalows. Where ready-made accommodation was unavailable, the JIA provided building materials and prisoners built temporary huts. Towner Road Camp was a group of native huts on swampy ground. Work units at Keppel Harbour camped on the docks (29).

The ubiquity and diversity of carceral facilities mirrored the military penetration of Singapore during the years immediately preceding the war. We could argue that the war had been foreshadowed across the island and that the city had already commenced its conversion to a camp. With the spatial dispersal of POW work camps it came to resemble a "carceral geography", a term used by Michel Foucault (1979: 297, 307) to describe the proliferation of power relations across a continuum of disciplinary spaces.

Incarceration and forced labour in POW work camps made the subjugation of allied soldiers public. Their humiliation, desperation and impoverishment were legible as imperial strategies of oppression ironically exposing human characteristics of vulnerability and disempowerment, familiar to the colonised. At the end of the war when Japanese POWs were forced to perform similar menial tasks, the cycle was repeated, and imperial opponents were reduced through labour.

A divided history

Imperial politics produced a peculiar condition where the history of Singapore was compartmentalised according to the logic of power. Each ethnic group had a different view of the conflict according to their place in the colonial hierarchy. None of these many carceral spaces were fully visible to any one group – whether British colonials, the regional settlers or the Japanese. All of these spaces were relatively new to the Australian and other troops who

had arrived in Malaya just weeks before the invasion and knew only their battlefields and barracks. The urban divisions of the colonial city, the carceral nature of the prisoner of war camps and the opacity of the Changi Prison created lasting physical barriers to a shared wartime heritage. The colonial government which resumed power following the defeat of the Japanese in August 1945 seemed unsympathetic to the generalised trauma of the settler population, focusing instead on war crimes. Oral histories by Singaporeans, many of them critical of their betrayal by the British, emerged following a hiatus of several decades and through efforts by the national archives to record them (National Archives of Singapore, oral history interviews). A 1992 exhibition "When Singapore was Syonan-to" for the 50th anniversary of the Fall of Singapore opened up the space for their collection and compilation into increasingly comprehensive histories (National Heritage Board 1996, Kratoska 1995, Lee 2005). "Syonan" (light of the south) was the Japanese name for Singapore. The efforts of curators, archivists and scholars and the outpouring of accounts on wartime tribulations created a new academic focus on Singaporeans' wartime memories as national history, claiming that space from British and Australian social histories of Singapore's war.

There are many dimensions to these oral histories, distinct from those I have related above. Asian settler populations experienced high levels of displacement and absorption of refugees during the war. They suffered collateral damage. Immediately after the Japanese assumed power, several thousands from among the Chinese population suspected of anti-Japanese activities were arrested and shot. The action described as the Sook Chin (cleansing) purges (Blackburn and Hack 2012: chaps. 4 & 5, 53-134) opened up a different geography of oppression across places for the interrogation, concentration and detention of locals. The Chinese High School- Bukit Timah Road, the Hill Street Police Station, the YMCA on Stamford Road and Outram Road Goal are among several such urban sites associated with

the brutality of the Kempetai (Japanese Military Police Corps/secret police). Rural sites including open fields and beaches were associated with acts of genocide.

Another dimension of this history are the forced labour camps for Asian workers that were distributed across the wider penal geography and whose details and casualties outnumber those of the British and Australian POWs (Krakotska 2005: 237-264). Added to these were tales of everyday penury, of quotidian adjustments to the Japanese administrative and work regimes and the divisive strategies by which the new rulers split the ethnic communities. In every one of the ethnic groups segments were singled out for reward or punishment, in some cases as with the Indian population - creating new recruits for the pro-Japanese Indian National Army, while relegating pro-British loyalists to the worst of the POW camps.

POW and settler spaces overlapped as did their use of the prison facilities. Outram Prison was particularly notorious for holding locals and POWs suspected of treasonous acts. But whereas camp histories receded after the war, once the facilities were decommissioned and demolished, the prison buildings and their functions prevailed. Following their capitulation, Changi Prison held Japanese POWs and hosted executions, advancing the allied prisoners' claims for justice. It did not resume its pre-war function as a civil establishment until October 1947 (*The Singapore Free Press* 1948: 5). The decades leading to independence saw the prison used for detaining political activists and after independence for holding communists in an environment divided by the Cold War. By then, the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960), a conflict between communist guerrillas of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) and the Commonwealth Armed Forces saw the resumption of British colonial oppression in neighbouring Malaya. The communist guerrillas, mainly Malayan Chinese whose anti-Japanese activities aided the allies during the war now sought to overthrow the post-war

British colonial administration and were brutally quashed. The callous behaviour of troops and hardline adopted by the government eroded the goodwill won by the allies upon defeating the Japanese and coloured local attitudes to colonial history and heritage.

Commemorating the war

Memories of wartime precarity and the spaces associated with them were suppressed due to these several political upheavals delaying attention to war-related histories during the 1960s. The related social and political divisions persisted until political independence in 1965. Apart from permanent structures like Changi Prison and the brick and masonry military barracks little remained of the extended carceral geography of temporary hut facilities. Evidence of all of these was collected incrementally by overseas (largely British and Australian) archives. In the absence of JIA records, due to their large-scale destruction at the war's end (Tanaka, Australia-Japan Research Project), the carceral experiences of 'Changi' (e.g. Kitching 2002; Moore 2006; Allan 1999) were gleaned through POW and civilian internee reports, diaries, memoirs and letters at the Australian War Memorial and the Imperial War Museum in London, institutions geographically distant but historically connected to Singapore via the Commonwealth of former British territories. The prison is a persistent backdrop in these accounts, its sensorial affects conveyed to us in artworks on the various activities that occupied the prisoners, including the workspaces designed for the convicts. These are well-depicted in the paintings of Murray Griffin, the official artist for the Australian Imperial Forces (Fig. 4). They are conveyed to us as strategies for survival; for maintaining civility. Yet, these various activities, which aptly illustrate the ingenuity of prisoners and their vocational preoccupations, are disturbing adaptations of the prescriptive strategies for prison reform. These forms of employment, anticipated in the design of the integrated penal

environment became useful for sustaining the colonial prisoners of war. The main difference was that these prisoners chose to engage in practices derived from their own cultural perspective and used them to maintain their cultural cohesion and sanity. Their memories and longings took them back to their far away natal geographies. They were also literate, unlike the many Asian criminals who preceded them, with the time and compulsion to record the injustice of their incarceration. Consequently, stories of Changi's civilian internees and POWs as related by David Nelson and reassessed by R.P.W. Havers (2003) and many British and Australian social historians create an unorthodox subfield of social history where the details of confinement in a colonial prison are recorded by soldiers and colonists.

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Changi's heritage significance was an outgrowth of these personal memories and extraterritorial pressures exerted by visiting war veterans and the then postwar colonial government to provide a unique commemorative facility to represent them. This prompted the creation of a dedicated chapel inside a portion of the Changi prison hospital in 1953 (Blackburn and Hack, 2012: 87). Ex-POW visitors would seek special permission to visit the prison and the adjacent military camp. After Singapore gained independence in 1965 and the British military withdrew in 1967, the cantonment and the barracks became part of a Singapore military base. In 1988, due to security reasons, the chapel was closed to visitors and the Singapore Tourism Board built a replica outside the prison walls reminiscent of the many timber and *attap* chapels built in the camp by POWs. In 2001 (89) when the redevelopment of the prison was under discussion, the Changi Chapel and a small museum attached to it were moved to a new purpose-built complex one kilometre away from the prison. The chapel within the museum was a symbolic replica produced in response to the

needs of visiting overseas veterans to hold religious services. As the country focused on other forms of national heritage construction, heritage objects such as these sat incongruently within it.

Divided heritage

Muzaini and Yeoh describe how, initially, after independence, many war-related sites were neglected, demolished or re-adapted, effectively erasing war memories (2016: 31) because the war was not "their war", Asians were "spectators to, and victims of" the war, and the Japanese vision of Asian co-prosperity was instrumental for decolonisation (32). This desire to forget the past was part of an official policy to move beyond the ethnic unrest that had marked the independence era. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) saw history as potentially divisive; a sentiment that gave way to public ambivalence during the 1980s leading to nostalgia for the early nation-building decades by the 1990s (Tarulevicz 2009, 402; George 2000, 189). War memories were reinvented during this period for very different purposes – as grounds for a shared national heritage. This was not easily achievable. Chinese, Malay, Indian and other identities – politicised by the nation state as ethnic entitlements acted as the primary containers for intersectional wartime experiences (Blackburn and Hack, 2012). Divergent political loyalties within these ethnic groups – to Malay rulers, to China's struggle against Japan and to the Indian independence movement – split immigrant interests producing ethnically self-contained notions of their collective pasts. Apolitical representations of individual heroes or victims and appeals to universal human values (Muzaini and Yeoh, 2016: 56-57) diverted attention from troubling histories of their 'collaboration' or 'atrocities'.

Arguably, representing the imperialists' war was problematic at several levels. Britain was an undemocratic colonial power and Japan while advocating regional co-prosperity was culpable for atrocities against Asians more severe than those experienced by the European enemy (Kratoska, 2005). Both nations had an innate belief in their cultural and racial superiority and the inferiority of the local Asian settler populations. Each ethnic group in the plural society had a different relationship to and treatment under their oppressors that produced competing memories of the war (Blackburn and Hack, 2012). State-led heritage practices such as those at the Old Ford Factory and Bukit Chandu museums sought to unify these divisive wartime memories retroactively, by highlighting the common suffering and individual heroism of local Asians, such as the Chinese resistance fighter Lim Bo Seng. Both these museums were located on sites significant during the battle for Singapore, and were thereby experientially connected to the memories of the local population.

Commemorating the prison proved difficult because its institutional history lacked general appeal. Changi's story was developed between 2001-2007 by The Changi Museum Pte Ltd (TCMPL), an associate company of Singapore History Consultants Pte Ltd (SHC) that undertook the management of the building under the Singapore Tourism Board (and later under the National Heritage Board). Their exhibit was seen as a conduit to Singapore's divided wartime history. The consultancy catered to two audiences, visiting war veterans from overseas and the Singaporean public (interview with Jeyathurai Ayadurai, Director of Changi Museum on 17 January 2017). They recognised that Changi's stories had complex transnational resonances that far exceeded the island's borders or its public's expectations. Until other local museums like the Ford Factory, Bukit Chandu or the Battle Box provided supplementary narratives, Changi museum was the core representational site of POW experiences in Singapore alongside Kranji, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

cemetery. It was also significant in a trail of sites across Southeast Asia including Hellfire Pass, the River Kwai and the Kokoda Track, visited by veterans and their families, among which Changi Museum provides the more sophisticated discourse. The museum's immediate task was to integrate these transnational features with 'Singaporean' experiences of the war in a strategy Yeoh and Muzaini call 'localisation', where displays emphasise local experiences and universal values (2016: 56-57). They discuss the heavy grill gate at the entrance, and the *Kampong style* restaurant and tropical planting on the site as design strategies for emplacing the exhibits. While individual POW stories produced an incipient industry in exhibits, memorabilia, memoirs and websites, conveyed effectively in the soldiers' natal geographies, the museum and the chapel served among their most poignant situated memorials. For-ex POWs and their family members who's home governments had downplayed the sacrifices of former captives, the retention of the physical facility was an affective anchor against the erasure of this history (Blackburn & Hack 2008; Twomey 2007). These competing claims on the prison's memory resurfaced when demolition was imminent in 2003.

Demolishing the prison

As some 14,972 Australians were among the incarcerated POWs, making Changi the largest prisoner of war camp for that nation (Australian War Memorial: Australian prisoners of war, online), Australians were at the vanguard of diplomatic efforts pleading for the prison's preservation. Their pleas had little impact. Architectural heritage as substantial as a prison is largely immovable and in the case of Changi, the Singapore state had greater claims to its physical property than the federal government of a former British colony whose subjects had fought on behalf of Britain in another British colony. But Changi's past had extraordinary resonance for Australians, particularly the 8th Division Australian Imperial Forces (AIF). In

fact, one of Changi's many chapels, the Our Lady of Christian's Chapel built for them by Lt. Hamish Cameron-Smith, an architect in civilian life, was marked for conservation by the Australian War Graves Registration Unit in 1945, dismantled by a group of surrendered Japanese personnel (National Capital Authority: Changi Chapel, online) and crated to Canberra. The dismembered parts were stored in the Australian War Memorial for a further forty years before the efforts of the army saw it re-erected in 1988 at the Royal Military College at Duntroon (National Capital Authority: Changi Chapel, online; Cordingly 2013). It would prove to be the only intact architectural segment from the Changi story, apart from a few posts and roof frame that had to be replaced. The chapel's function changed quite significantly as it served as a national memorial in its new displaced context.

Changi was also attached to other sites and memories in Singapore that could be reclaimed through physical remains. In a land scarce nation, honouring such heritage claims raised alien cultural memories, but as Singapore reinvented itself as a global city in an environment charged with anniversaries of the Second World War, such claims needed to be revisited. By then, previous negligence had impacted the authenticity of many artefacts. The Changi Chapel at the museum was a facsimile of several buildings (Fig.5) and the preserved section of the prison's perimeter wall had been modified to include the front gate. Following the demolition of Changi Prison in 2004, the Singaporean government gifted several parts of the prison building to various bodies. A cell door received by Australia was relegated to the war memorial's storage facility at Mitchell, revealing that that nation, despite its protestations, had no equivalent museum facility for its POW memories. In fact, the prison's architecture gained little attention until its remains were gazetted in 2016.

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The destruction of Changi Prison in 2004, while pragmatic, was also possible due to the general public's ignorance of its symbolic value and physical history. This was unfortunate because as representatives of its total architecture, the physical remnants of the Changi prison convey many complex layers of social history – of the colonial racism embedded in punitive structures, the imperial belligerence that redeployed these for civilian internment and the local histories of criminals and political activists yet to be fully researched. These many political dimensions of the one group of artefacts were likewise interpolated by the multiple post war national claims on aspects of its heritage. The transnational significance of Changi's heritage had been tamed and reinterpreted so that the Singaporean public might have a stake in that history.

Conclusion

State constructions of wartime public memory in Singapore recast the experiences of the once-subject populations as more substantial than those of imperialists. They project a plural and shared destiny for Singaporean nationals rooted in the history of wartime tribulation in very selective ways. As the tourism benefits of war memorialisation became apparent to state bodies, the wartime functions of buildings have been salvaged and reinvented for staging histories that compete with those at Changi. These new museum facilities further domesticate the global conflict.

When we consider the fertility of social research on Changi, which is comparable to studies on the German Stammlager (Stalags) or Japanese American incarceration, the focus on national history is reductive. And while other penal institutions, similarly associated with

POW memories, like the Kuching Gaol, and Kuala Lumpur's Pudu Jail, have suffered similar fates, many more penal histories of the colonial prison system, of POW camp geographies and decolonisation are folded into the story of Changi. These various threads and their associated materialities form a substantial historiography for collective memories interwoven with the numerous, every day, war-related sites across Singapore and the region. The demolition of the prison building diminishes this narrative by removing the lynch-pin of this story, albeit a site with exaggerated affective content for Western visitors invested in Second World War legacies. The diminution of its physical presence while erasing unpalatable histories of social division also neutralises its enlarged colonial wartime heritage which has so far competed with Singaporean recovery of war-related national stories.

Changi Museum's amalgam of national and transnational heritage has placed it outside this competitive statist framework, and its curators have worked hard to cultivate multiple audiences for its divided histories. They have striven to create a history without boundaries – of nation, ethnicity, or time (Jeyathurai, interview 2017). But as a museum at the boundary of a discourse on national sovereignty recounting events related to its genesis, it is ideally placed to interrogate politically sensitive issues on the nation's divided pasts. The problems of imperialism, the futility of war, the travails of subject populations and the geographies of incarceration all can be entered through the histories of Changi. As part of the itinerary of battlefield study tours, the museum's pedagogy is a ready stage for reflective postcolonial heritage practices.

By offering an earlier history of the colonial prison than that activated for post war memorialisation, this paper has converted the war into an episode in the colonial project, capable of uncovering the inequities of colonialism and its punitive institutions through their repurposing by the Japanese. By doing so it asks that alongside critiques of the nationalistic

decolonisation of wartime memories, external stakeholders might also recognise POW victimisation as prefaced by colonial privilege. By showing how a colonial artefact's original divisive purpose was subverted for wartime projects of criminalisation, Changi uncovers multi-dimensional political struggles over the island's geography. Although this paper has not ventured further into its post-Independence politics, this too is an attribute of the building's heritage with its own trail of perpetrators and victims. Finally by centring the prison in a broader carceral geography, this paper uncovered a dispersed camp network that brought the humiliation of the former colonisers within sight of their Asian subjects. This action opens-up the commemorative field to the asymmetrical social contacts that enrich Singapore's spatial pasts and pressure its heritage practices to address organic, multi-vocal asymmetries still resonant within the urban landscape. Their dialogic interactions over 'postcolonial' heritage, a heritage accepted for its conflicts and divisions but rapidly losing its original material substance, will only strengthen this hermeneutic field.

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