

Death in Borneo: Australian National Identity, War and the Transnational Imagination

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Accounts of Sandakan and the Death Marches have recently come to light in Australia's never ending quest to solidify its place in history and create national memory. Sandakan is now a landscape of memory for Australians, and a place for the continuing reaffirmation of national identity. The events are perpetuated in a series of memorials, museums, cemeteries and other concrete manifestations of national trauma in and around the Sandakan district. This paper examines material and aesthetic manifestations of the Australian national memory at two memorial sites: the Sandakan Memorial and the Kundasang Memorial, in light of their socio-cultural and political contexts. The investigation makes evident the political terrain of a nation's quest for constructing and memorialising identity.

Local, global and transnational imaginaries

In 1942 Imperial Japanese forces occupied North Borneo as part of Japan's World War Two military strategy. Some 2,434 Allied servicemen who had been taken prisoner were forced to march 260 kilometres from the town of Sandakan to Ranau. Of the men imprisoned at Sandakan, 1,787 were Australian; only six survived the march (Silver, 1999: 10-12). The story of Sandakan and the Death Marches is well rehearsed in the Australian national memory. It is lodged in the national psyche as one of the worst atrocities ever committed against Australian forces, and is a key event in the development of Australians' self-awareness of heroism, mateship and indomitable spirit as quintessential elements of the national character. Sandakan is now a landscape of memory for Australians, and a place for the continuing reaffirmation of the national identity. The events are perpetuated in a series of monuments, museums, cemeteries and other concrete manifestations of the national trauma in and around the Sandakan district. As the site of material manifestations of the national memory, Sandakan is linked to a global network of sites in which grief, heroism, and cultural identity converge, extending from France to Papua New Guinea.

It is now well recognised that spaces of cultural production are simultaneously located in the global and the local, and able to transcend national borders. The interaction of the global and the local is characterised less by rigid divisions, and more by shifting interfaces between local, national and global imperatives. The negotiation of these sites of overlap is contingent on the activation of a transnational imaginary (Wilson & Dissanayake, 1996). One way to engender and perpetuate this transnational imaginary is through its expression in the material reminders of cultural memory. This may best be examined through a focus on a specific site in which cultural memory has been transplanted and in which the material and concrete articulate the fluid and the ephemeral. Our focus in this article is, therefore, on the material and symbolic in its intersection with national identity and the transnational imaginary. The imagining of national identity, even in the space of the nation is however vulnerable to contestation; how much more difficult is it then to maintain an unassailable and coherent narrative of nation when the site in which it is materially represented is culturally and geographically distant?

The district of Sandakan in North Borneo (now the state of Sabah in Malaysia) is one such site. As the scene of the deaths of a number of Australians during World War Two, it plays a significant role in Australian history and in the national memory. The memorials at Sandakan contribute to the construction of Australian national identity through images of heroism, suffering, masculinity, militarism and a range of culturally specific symbols all developed and located outside of the nation itself. Australians' understanding of these symbolic regimes relies on an expanded consciousness, or what sociologist, Ulrich Beck (2006) describes as an imagined presence of geographically distant others and worlds, leading to a dialogical imagination as a way of thinking outside the monologic imagination of the national space. Sandakan is a space of national identity for both Australians and Malaysians. With a focus on Sandakan, this discussion considers the ways in which the transnational imaginary allows for the creation of diverse meanings in a site where concrete symbols of Australian nationhood engage with an Asian modernity with its own commercial and cultural imperatives, and its own national identity. A range of disparate cultural, economic and political currents converge in a space in which an Asian society struggles to come to terms with its own history, now located within an ongoing, modernising agenda of development and commercialisation.

Collective memory and national identity

The meanings of the memorials have been both shaped by, and contribute to, the construction of the collective national memory and nationalism in Australia. Ideologies of nation and national identity are inscribed through the memorials as texts of nation, or what Roland Barthes (1972) has called "cultural texts", in which are embedded not just the realities of war, but also expanded fields of meaning which have implications for the continuation of national identity. The meanings with which these material objects are invested were a response to specific historical realities, but are also contested by changing spatio-temporal conditions and the political and economic climates in Australia and Malaysia. The material expression of Australia's national trauma and the creation of a sacred space of nation in a distant land is confounded by the intrusion into the Australian national imaginary of the exigencies of everyday life in Malaysia: the sacred collides with the profane in a field of experience, which locates the visitor simultaneously in the past of Australian trauma and the future of developing Sabah.

The purpose of this article then is to examine the intersection of, on the one hand, the material manifestations of Australia's national identity and collective trauma in a global context, and on the other hand, the quotidian imperatives of the local. Our focus is on two memorial sites in Sabah: Sandakan and Kundasang. The next section will give a brief overview of the context of Australian memorialising and the importance of material reminders of the past, followed by a discussion of local imperatives; following that, we discuss each of the sites in turn, focusing on the physically designed aspects of the memorials in their interaction with local landscapes. Material expressions of national memory may engender powerful affective responses, but might also have to compete with the ordinary imperatives of daily life.

The establishment of studies of collective memory through classical sociology has been a lasting legacy of twentieth century thinking. Social memory is now regarded as a constitutive feature of national identity. The work of philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1992) is an important catalyst for the emergence in the social sciences of collective or social memory as a central concept, and contemporary studies of the means by which communities imagine the past, including ways they remember and forget. Social memory and national identity are closely linked, and Mieke Bal (1999) and other cultural theorists have noted

that memory is a cultural phenomenon. Many scholars have recognised the importance of the First World War for understanding the development of memory studies and the links between cultural memory and national consciousness (Olick & Robbins, 1998; Winter & Sivan, 1999). George Mosse's (1990) work on soldiers lost in The Great War points to the importance of consolation being carried out publicly. Personal memories came into the public and were collectively refashioned into a sacred experience (Olick & Robbins, 1998: 119). Sandakan is an important site for highlighting the connection between social memory, war and national consciousness.

In his *Lieux de mémoire*, published in English as *Realms of Memory* (1996), French historian, Pierre Nora argued that with the loss of environments of memory such as the village, the need has arisen to replace these places with new repositories of memory such as concrete spaces, gestures, images and objects. His key premise is that modern collective memory relies on the archive, the trace and the image—that is, the visual and the material (Nora, 1988; 1989). The national memory relies on the physical, spatial, and temporal effects. In the case of Australia the *lieux de mémoire* are linked to locations, not only in Australia, but to other memorials commemorating the war experiences scattered across Asia, the Middle East, North Africa and Europe. National and group identities are articulated and perpetuated through memorials as “figures of memory” (Assmann, 1995: 125).

Australia's memorial mania

Australia is experiencing what cultural theorists and historians describe as “memorial mania,” or a national obsession with issues of memory and history and an urgent, excessive desire to claim—and secure—those issues in public culture (Doss, 2008; Senie, 1999; Young, 2001). The resurgence of national sentiment has resulted in the establishment of a number of new commemorative sites including twenty Australian memorials commissioned in overseas locations from 2001 to 2007. Of the many new memorials marking the Australian war experience on a global stage, twelve are in Asia. Ten of these are commemorative World War Two sites and two commemorate the Vietnam War. Australia's economic links with Asia were given a fillip with the establishment of the APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) forum in 1989, of which Australia is a key member.

The nation's emotional and affective connections to Asia, however, have a much longer history and are informed by Australia's involvement in a series of wars which took place in the Asian region. Apart from World War Two, Australia was involved in the Korean War (1950-1953), the Malayan Emergency (1950-1960) and the Vietnam War (1965-1975). More recently, Australia has come to see itself as being on the front line of the “War against Terror”, because of the bombing of a popular tourist nightclub in Bali and the death of a number of Australians in 2002. There are Australian war dead buried in Papua New Guinea, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Japan and Korea. Only the dead from the Vietnam War have been repatriated to Australia. War has turned many locations in Asia into geographies of emotion for Australians, but the sentiments invoked by a visit to the landscapes of memory are confounded by other forms of cultural, political and above all economic engagement with the region. Asia is both Australia's past and its future.

The Sandakan Memorial site is a part of this resurgence and should be seen in the context of this complex and contradictory field of discourses. The material expressions should also be understood in light of contemporary memorial design conventions, aesthetics and

national imperatives. It was commissioned and operated by the Office of Australian War Graves (under the Australian Government's Department of Veterans' Affairs), a branch in Australia of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, an organisation established by Royal Charter in Britain in 1917, which now oversees some 2,500 cemeteries in 150 countries. The Kundasang Memorial is a private memorial commissioned by an Australian expatriate community and operated by local citizens. Both memorialise the fate of 2,700 Australian and British Prisoners of War interned by the Japanese from 1942 to 1945. The commemoration of the nation's war dead and the reforging of interconnections with countries in the region, with which Australia both does business and memorialises a common trauma, helps to sustain a transnational imaginary.

Spatial and conceptual memorial practices

Australian war memorials have common spatial and conceptual typological frameworks, and despite there being notable variations, architectural historians (see for example, Inglis, 2005; Hamilton, 2003) generally agree that they encompass the following key characteristics:

- They tend to embody physical narratives and much like their literary equivalents, their meanings unfold in time and through space in a linear fashion;
- They have distinct spatial sequencing. Many are comprised of an entry gate or beginning point, a sequence of internal transitional spaces, a crescendo of space(s), and an exit point;
- Their designs are generally literal. The histories that Australian war memorials represent must be legible to a range of visitors through a variety of means;
- They must commemorate individuals as well as a collective sense of history;
- They ascribe meaning to space and place;
- Australian war memorials accommodate reflective, contemplative spaces as well as celebratory spaces;
- They incorporate intimate scaled spaces as well as monumental spaces and include spaces for public commemorative events;
- They are as much about remembrance and respect as they are about educating future generations.

To be effective as reminders of the suffering of the trauma of war, memorials should incorporate two significant features in addition to their material aspects: firstly, they must provide not just a physical map, but also what Jameson (1991) calls "a cognitive map", that is, a form of scripting which preempts knowledge and emotional response. The cognitive map, partly learned in the home country, is discursively produced and reinforced by interpretations offered in signage, recognisable symbols of the nation, and texts that prompt the appropriate affect. Displays at the museums located at many of the sites of war memorials, and other discursive inscriptions, prepare the visitor for the emotional journey around the sites. The cognitive map or emotional map is not just translated into certain kinds of spatial practices, but is also reflected in the aesthetics of the military and of suffering and death; secondly, the site should ideally be a heterotopic space (Foucault, 1967) which can be marked off as sacred. This space must incorporate the material reminders of war.

Malaysian and Australian imperatives in commemorating Sandakan

Most of the efforts to commemorate the deaths at Sandakan were driven by people from within Australia. Unlike a number of other sites in Asia, which celebrate Australian heroism

and suffering (such as Hellfire Pass in Thailand and the Kokoda Track in Papua New Guinea), the sites of the Sandakan Death Marches were largely forgotten until the late 1990s. In 1997 Bruce Ruxton, the president of the Returned Services League (an organisation of former and current armed services men and women), began a campaign to preserve the prisoner of war camp site at Sandakan and to prevent the encroachment of contemporary development. The memorial site was rededicated in 1999 and a Sydney architectural firm, Prendergast Architects was commissioned to design the master plan and a centre, which would serve to provide information about the site (Braithwaite & Lee, 2006: 7-9). More importantly, its task was to orient the tourist both spatially and emotionally. Such centres at sites of Australian war memorials all over Asia, which “map” and discursively construct the site, can mobilise affect and circumscribe emotional responses.

Led by its tourism board in 2001, the Malaysian Forestry Minister and the Sabah State government leased the remains of the Sandakan camp to the Office of Australian War Graves in perpetuity. Information about these negotiations is available through the closed meeting minutes of various stakeholders and government entities, but a contributing factor to the acquiescence of the Malaysian government this scheme was almost certainly the potential for increased revenue through the emergence of memorial tourism in addition to growing forms of ecotourism. A focused investigation of the commodification of history and nature is outside the scope of this discussion; however, it should be understood that one powerful impetus for the development of heritage sites and commemoration locations has been their attraction to tourists, particularly in the context of memorial mania and the resurgence of national feeling in a post-September 11 environment. Since many of Australia’s memorial sites are in tropical Southeast Asia, eco-tourism is a key feature of promotional activities particularly in connection with species survival and the conservation of orangutan habitats.

According to Doris Wong (2008), the Sandakan Memorial site manager, about 20,000 visitors come to the memorials each year. For instance, in 2006 the total number of foreigners was 16,781 and locals 7,568. The busiest time for memorial tourism is between April and September. By far the most popular time for Australians to visit is ANZAC Day, April 25. ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) Day is one of Australia’s most significant national occasions. It marks the anniversary of the first major military action fought by Australian and New Zealand forces during the First World War and is conventionally acknowledged as the marker of Australia’s coming of age as a nation. Simultaneous ceremonies in Australia and Sabah link the locations both temporally and emotionally and create a deterritorialised space of nation where national meaning is relocated far from the nation itself. The other important event is Sandakan Memorial Day on August 15, the day designated by the Malaysian Government to commemorate the deaths of Allied soldiers in the district. In a reimagining of the intersecting of the national imaginaries of both Malaysia and Australia, it is also intended to commemorate what the Sabah government in its promotion of the celebrations describes as the “deep bond” between Sabah and Australia.

Many of the locals who visit are school children and youths undergoing the *Program Latihan Khidmat Negara* (PLKN, or Malaysian national service), while most of the foreigners are Australians attending ceremonies managed by Australian officials. In an inadvertent acknowledgment that discursive constructions encompassing eco-tourism and global concerns about species survival intersect with public and private grieving and memorialising, Wong said, “They visit here, in addition to the orangutan and proboscis

reserves. In addition to the ‘public’ ceremonies numerous private family memorial services take place and shade shelters have been donated by families” (2008). While the ethnicity and numbers of visitors as well as peak visitation periods can tell us about the general usage patterns and interest in the memorial, the data does not allow us to explore the ways in which the site and its objects convey meaning and how the spaces are experienced; nor does it tell us about how the profane impinges on the sacred. The following analysis of the physical spaces, and the management of experiences and emotional responses at Sandakan, illustrates the collision of the transnational imaginary in its material form with local housing and development imperatives.

The Sandakan Memorial

The Sandakan Prisoner of War Memorial is located well away from the city centre (15 km) and major attractions. It is accessed by the same road that leads to the orangutan sanctuary (20 km) and is about three kilometres from the airport, originally built to facilitate Japanese control of the region in 1942. The POW camp and memorial, the sacred spaces of nation, are almost surrounded by “new” Sabah suburbia incorporating multi-story apartment complexes, duplexes, and semi-detached housing. The struggle for meaning that has emerged out of this encroachment of the everyday exigencies of housing in a developing society onto the sacred spaces of nation is one reason for the formalisation of the POW camp as a memorial site and the attempt to impede this invasion with the use of the material.



Figure 1: Aerial photograph of Sandakan POW camp and surrounds.

These are fairly recent developments and, as discussed earlier, were a prime motivator in formally recognising and establishing the memorial facility. The spatial contexts and physical adjacencies of this memorial make it highly unusual as a historical memorial due to its location within a living contemporary, suburban landscape (See Figure 1). Its physical adjacencies mean that it offers the possibility to engage a range of users beyond a memorial program. While it is designed as a memorial and a landscape of commemoration, it functions far more laterally and flexibly, consistent with the demands of the local economy.

The Sandakan site contains a highly sequential series of spaces with several thresholds, where the most symbolic and “powerful” places are located on the highest points of the site. Visitors enter the site from a low point where they come into the gates from a busy street. Immediately in the foreground is a large lily pond, with two previous memorial markers to the right and a bridge leading into a covered structure to the left. Visitors must cross this body of water, which is symbolic of the cleansing of the soul—a common feature of nineteenth century memorials—to reach the base of the memorial trails. There is a very large sign just past the bridge and before the hill, which instructs visitors in both Malay and English about the memorial grounds and provides the cognitive map. To the right there are three terraced levels each with their own memorial objects and signifiers that lead the visitor to proceed up the switchback ramps to the main building (See Figure 2). The main memorial building is an A-frame exposed beam type structure with decorative doors and a commemorative stained glass window. All of the building materials are Australian, although local contractors constructed the work. The original design for the structure was meant to have an *atap* roof (that is, thatched with the leaves of the nipa palm, a type of mangrove palm traditionally used in small scale constructions in Southeast Asia); however, the Office of Australian War Graves rejected this, on the grounds that it would not be robust enough to endure for several generations.



Figure 2: Memorial pond and base of memorial trail.

The interior of the building has an extensive amount of information both in English and Malay. It describes life in Sandakan POW camp, the death marches, the treatment of the Prisoners of War, the treatment of the local peoples, and various aspects of the surrender and trial of the Japanese. There is substantial focus on local citizens who risked their own lives to help POWs. There is fairly detailed information with extensive pictorial representations such as archival photographs and drawings depicting the atrocities committed here against both local citizens and foreign soldiers. There is also a scaled model of the POW camp in its entirety which is strangely disorienting. Since the current arrangements of memorials and structures are not located on the original site, it is difficult for a visitor to gain a sense of the overall terrain of horror.

Behind this building is a large, black granite monument set into a circular paved surface inscribed with the symbol of Sandakan. This marker is where the commemorative ceremonies take place; however, it is still intimate enough not to be intimidating when visitors find themselves alone in it. The path winds around behind the site where the original gate once stood. As visitors follow the path a series of apartment blocks comes into view and intrudes on the contemplation of the suffering of war. The path eventually circles back on itself to return to the base of the hill back at the edge of the pond. As visitors come full circle around the entire site, they are constantly reminded not just of the traumatic experiences of the war, but also of the harsh realities of everyday life. The contrived peacefulness, a significant part of remembrance, is disturbed by the sounds of the living.

Wong (2008) estimates that it is Australians who spend the most time in the memorial. They seem to come for the specific purpose of experiencing the memorial, while many English and Americans are merely stopping by on their way to the airport. Cognitive maps are provided by extensive interpretive signage in the memorial building and a pamphlet which provides information as the visitor journeys around the site. The material structures and physical layout provide an embodied simulation of the POW experience.

The Australian compound and much of the British compound, however, are now enveloped by suburban housing. While remnants of the central core of the POW camp remain, such as a central meeting area and the Japanese officers' quarters, much of the rest of the original site is no longer intact. There are some original slabs, footings, and "roads" but almost all of the original structures have been destroyed. The Japanese kitchen store and the water tanks are the only structures visible. Some machinery, a boiler, excavator, and other material remains of the camps, are still on site and are strategically positioned as a part of the memorial walk. Cognitive mapping of the sort described by Jameson is, therefore, all the more important since it is difficult even to imagine that this place was once in the middle of a jungle. Lack of dense vegetation in the area helps diminish an imagined hostile environment. The surrounding noise of ever more building construction and the presence of suburban housing reduce the sense of history, and transform a place of past suffering to a place of the future of families.

The heterotopic space of the memorial cannot exclude local realities, no matter how powerful the material articulations and tangible elements are. The emotional landscape can never fully escape incongruous juxtapositions. The cognitive map provided by discursive constructions of the imagined presence of Australia cannot fail to conflict with the exigencies of the quotidian. Figure 3 demonstrates just how much Malaysian daily life impinges on the space of the sacred. This site is not "sacred" to local inhabitants, who appear to have relinquished much

of the anger of previous generations towards the Japanese. While this site is designed as a space of nation for Australia, it is routinely used for family picnics. These intrusions mean that the Sandakan memorial can only partially meet the intentions of the Office of Australian War Graves when it commissioned the memorial. The highly audible call to prayer five times a day from the nearby mosque is one reminder that this is a deterritorialised space of nation that can never really fulfil its promise of a sacred place for the nation.



Figure 3: Adjacent views of suburban living from Sandakan Memorial site.

Kundasang Memorial Garden

At the other end of the route of the Death March just outside of Ranau is the Kundasang Memorial Garden. Initiated by Major G.S. Carter, D.S.O. (Toby Carter), who was a New Zealander employed by Shell Oil Co. (Borneo), the memorial was designed by local, expatriate British architect, J.C. Robinson in 1962. Initially this site was located inside the Mt. Kinabalu National Park (1962), but in the early 1990s, the National Park boundaries were relocated and it is now located 8 kilometres outside of the National Park. It fell into a state of disrepair from the time it was moved out of the park and was abandoned until 2004 when local retiree, Sevee Charukus, decided to make it his project. The memorial was supported entirely by donations until recently (April 2008) when the Office of Australian War Graves dedicated \$300,000 to its management and maintenance.

Unlike the Sandakan Memorial which attracts a lot of Australian and British visitors, the vast majority of visitors to the Kundasang Memorial Garden are Malay, since it is quite out of the way for international tourists, does not feature in most tourist guides and is difficult to find. It is not, therefore, as extensively mapped, nor as discursively presented as the Sandakan memorial, and is not accompanied by such a powerful cognitive map.

It can be reached from both Kota Kinabalu and Sandakan in an arduous three-hour trip along substandard roads. Visitor statistics from 2006 indicate that of the 32,000 people who visit, 75 per cent were Malaysians and only 25 per cent were overseas visitors. The Kundasang War Memorial Gardens are situated on a hill and resembles a fort located immediately behind the vegetable wholesale stalls. The lack of directional signage and remote location suggest a place of mournful remembrance and isolation for local residents. Kundasang is not a landmark that is opportunistically marketed to lure tourists. It offers neither the memorialising nor reaffirmation of the Australian national identity, nor the chance to engage in fashionable eco-tourism.

On arrival at the Kundasang Memorial, visitors pass through a gate (See Figure 4), then travel up the hill to an information centre that displays newspaper clippings, personal mementos, and a video screening of an Australian television documentary program featuring Sandakan.



Figure 4: Entry gates for Kundasang.

Just past this first outdoor enclosure, visitors arrive at the Australian Garden. This is the first of four interlocking but separate gardens, which symbolise the homelands of those who died in the death marches. Each garden is simple but deeply imbued with national symbolism and meticulous details. The fact that each garden contains soil from the home country adds to the sense that one is in a deterritorialised space of nation. On display in the Australian garden is an immaculate lawn and a native Australian bush shrub border complete with Banksias and Eucalyptus—well loved and immediately recognisable symbols of Australia. In its centre, the Australian continent is depicted with white quartz rocks, commonly used in suburban Australian gardens (See Figure 5). This garden is a site saturated with national icons, embodiments of national memory. The white quartz and the lawn are powerful reminders of the conventional Australian dream of owning one's own home and garden. This reminder of hopes and dreams makes the memory of trauma and suffering all the more poignant. It is a material reminder of the commonly understood narrative of nation that Australian soldiers died so that the nation could be free to pursue the dream unhindered.



Figure 5: The Australian Garden at Kundasang.

Walking past the Australian garden, the visitor encounters on the next terrace a formal English rose garden. While the white lattice trellises and a gazebo appear somewhat clichéd, the incongruity of such a powerful symbol of England in a landscape of tropical jungle makes yet another poignant statement of a dislocated home and the importance of the material and the aesthetic in the transnational imaginary of grief (See Figure 6).



Figure 6: The English Rose Garden at Kundasang.

On the third terrace is the Borneo Garden. This garden is an interesting mixture of dense native, sub-tropical flora, wildflowers from Kinabalu, and a rare orchid collection. In contrast to the structured order of the attempt to control nature which characterise the Australian and the British gardens, it is informal, curvalinear and offers many intimate small sites (See Figure 7).



Figure 7: The Borneo Garden at Kundasang.

The fourth and final terrace is reminiscent of many western memorial gardens. It contains a symmetrical, formal rectilinear reflection pool, with Roman columns forming a pergola and bronze honour roles lining its sidewalls. The garden terminates with a perfectly framed view of Mount Kinabalu (See Figure 8). This has been the object of contested interpretations and a struggle for meaning. Many former POWs who have visited the area have been upset that they could not escape the sight of the mountain—for them a potent symbol of pain and suffering—while they contemplate the deaths of friends. Locals believe, however, that the clouds which surround the mountains harbour and protect the souls who have died in its shadows.

This memorial garden is very much of its period, however what makes it distinctly different is the inclusion of the Borneo section. It is highly unusual to include indigenous deaths in commemorative spaces and would not have occurred without the development of a postmodern aesthetic and multi-cultural, pluralistic attempts at new forms of memorialising which emerged in the 1980s. In addition, as noted previously, the spatial hierarchy, which puts the local garden on a higher plane than the English and the Australian gardens, is as controversial an aspect as the inclusion of Mt. Kinabalu in the spatial and visual experience. The very significance and poignancy as a site of the nation's blood sacrifice renders it susceptible to the contestation of national identity and the site for the struggle for meaning. The two sites we are examining are key sites for ongoing contestations and opposing interpretations. Where the Sandakan POW memorial is designed from an Australian or western typological framework,

the Kundasang memorial allows a Borneo or South-East Asian overlay of meaning. The text at Sandakan attempts to bridge the cultural gap between Malay and English, whereas the Kundasang memorial adopts less prescriptive iconic symbols and spatial transformation. The material culture is manifested in both memorials through various historic objects and ruins, cultural practices of memento collection and memorial displays, as well as deliberately designed and constructed experiences of commemorative gestures and intent.



Figure 8: View of Mt. Kinabalu.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to probe the complex interrelationship between Australia's national identity and the collective memory of war experience and national trauma in Asia. The investigation has focused on the monuments and architectural structures, and the landscapes in which they are located. Considering the aesthetic values of these memorials, the symbolism and structural features, and the physical experience of the memorial landscape, we have investigated the memorials' incorporation into the specific cultural settings of their locale. Sandakan and Kundasang are not just part of the imaginary landscape of the Australian national memory; they are also real landscapes invested with meaning for local inhabitants. Many of them are now not only war memorial sites, but significant sites for the development of new housing and for the emergence of the burgeoning eco-tourism market. The memorials themselves now combine Australia's remembrance of its past through commemorative ceremonies, annual treks and commemorations of the death marches with commodified eco-tourism practices.

The memorials might also be thought of in terms of Nicholas Bourriaud's notion of relational aesthetics. He defines this as: "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather

than an independent and private space” (Bourriaud, 2002: 113). Relational art recognises that artworks create a social environment in which people come together to participate in a shared activity and in which the audience is envisaged as a community. Rather than the artwork being an encounter between a viewer and an object, relational art produces intersubjective encounters. Through these encounters, meaning is elaborated *collectively*, rather than in the space of individual consumption. We argue that the Kundasang memorial site embraces relational aesthetics through its designed spaces whereas the Sandakan memorial has simply a contextual, spatial adjacency. And while both memorials are heavily scripted sites where meaning is manifested spatially and aesthetically, the Kundasang memorial offers simpatico with its cultural context. The Sandakan memorial gestures to local Malays through text and interpretative signage but in a very Australian or Western memorial construct. The adjacent local suburban fabric and the call to prayer serendipitously imbues the Sandakan site with Malaysian meaning but it is not a welcome nor planned intrusion. The Kundasang memorial is designed with contested meanings and embraces them through spatial juxtapositions. However, specific Malaysian memorial practices while embodied in memorial events at the site are largely absent here as well. Both memorials suffer from a cultural imperialism and colonial attitudes towards local memorial practices.

It is possible for a place distant from the nation to be imagined as a space of nation. This can happen through the material manifestations of the national memory. It is also augmented by discursive representations which provide a cognitive map and a guide to appropriate emotional and affective responses. If the imagining of the national identity in the geographical space of the nation itself is fraught with difficulties and vulnerable to a range of contestations, such as gender, racial, religious and class interpretations, then the meanings invested in a space so far removed from the nation are all the more precarious. War memorial sites and spaces of nation in foreign lands constitute heterotopic spaces, but they cannot exclude the intruder no matter how powerful the material articulations. The sacred space can never fully resist the intrusion of the profane, nor be secured against physical or emotional interference. Sandakan and Kundasang, along with other sites of memory for Australia and other nations are sites of the struggle for meaning located in the material.

Post-September 11 there are now new landscapes of trauma, such as Bali, and a new generation, which finds itself facing conflicts that must be remembered within the context of an outward-looking globally oriented Australia. This has precipitated the attachment of new meanings to memorials, new commemorative practices, new ways of remembering and new relationships. Memorials of war may be the concrete embodiment of loss, and the spatial and concrete focal point around which the nation can mourn collectively, but they are also sites of changing meanings, feelings, and sites for the interpretation of historical events. While, as Hobsbawm contends, new events can be referenced to and understood in the context of previous engagements, the converse is also true: recent events, such as the Bali bombings, may prompt a reconsideration of past events and new modes of experience of established landscapes of trauma such as Sandkan and Kundasang (Hobsbawm, 2007: 78-80).

Since the September 11 terrorist acts over 500 memorials gardens have been commissioned across the United States with hundreds more throughout the world. According to cultural theorist and art critic, Erika Doss:

Security narratives evoking national unity, innocence and heroic sacrifice are central to American terrorism memorials. Assumptions of innocence have long been central to American national imagination, liberating the nation and its citizens from a legacy of historical and moral misdeeds and sustaining a state of blissful ignorance. Tropes of national innocence permit a lack of culpability in matters requiring adult moral agency and encourage a self-righteous consensus that pits American exceptionalism against an evil and dangerous “outside” world. There is, of course, an enormous difference between the trope of national innocence and the actual murder of innocents. The people who died in the bombing of Oklahoma’s Federal Building and the people who were killed in the Sept. 11 attacks were innocent victims of horrific acts of terrorism. Yet from the moment of their murders, their deaths were manipulated to sustain politicized assumptions of national innocence and to legitimize national security agendas of revenge and recovery—including the war on terror (Doss, 2008: 17).

Australian Prime Minister, John Howard’s *Their Service - Our Heritage* program sought similar outcomes in the commissioning of recent memorials in Asia to past wars. Since Australia was not attacked directly, the Howard government needed something to galvanise its population into supporting or joining with the American forces. So what better legacy and mythology than the national and patriotic stances towards ANZACs in predominantly Muslim countries? Indeed, memorials that utilise Australian conventions often promote the fact that Australia *supported and saved* Borneo (now Malaysia) from the Japanese.

Lastly, if memorials are intended to serve as painful reminders not to repeat certain atrocities then the Sandakan and Kundasang memorials have largely failed. One need think only of Abu Ghraib Prison or Guantanamo Bay to be reminded of this. There is no doubt that memorials are inseparable from politics, but war memorials are the most visibly public sites where nations remember the victims of violent acts of extremism. For family members and survivors, they are sacred sites of bereavement and, often, burial. For politicians, they are ideological rallying grounds, but for millions of tourists, they are “authentic” destinations marked by tragic death and traumatic loss. For local inhabitants, they are often reminders of colonial attitudes that showed little regard for indigenous memorial practices.

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