

*Researching the city and walking with street dwellers:  
Recreating urban encounters past and present*

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**Abstract:** The art of recreating cities imaginatively and the critical act of reading urban fiction involve processes of research and learning that often include encounters with specific cities and their dwellers, prompting reflection on the forms and ethics of such encounters. Whether carrying out historical research into the past or observation of the rapid transformation of contemporary cities, writers and critics often combine the acquisition of documentary and experiential knowledge of urban spaces. Taking two different categories of writing by Simone Lazaroo, on the one hand her texts on past relations between Singapore and Australia, and on the other her current stories on global cities after the Great Financial Crisis, we explore the processes of learning before and through representation, and the ethics of human interaction in the contact zone of the global urban where, increasingly, the world's *expelled* have become street-dwellers.

**Keywords:** urban fiction; Simone Lazaroo; Eurasian; expulsion; Sassen

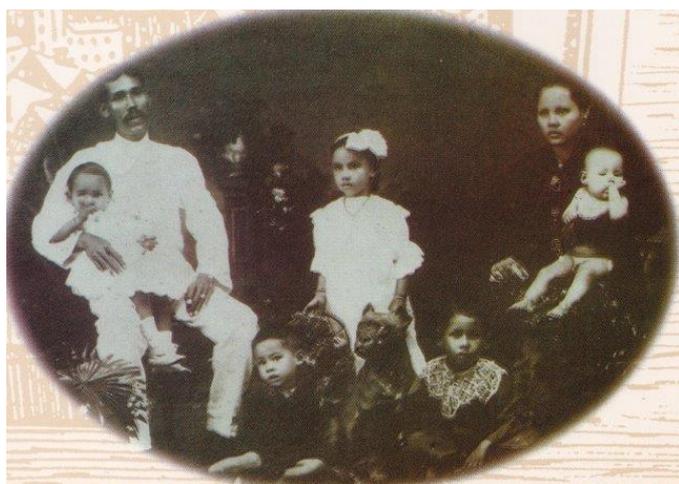
*To Veronica Brady, exceptional traveller, faultless pedestrian.*

The research carried out by writers prior to producing their texts, and fiction in particular, is most often discussed in terms of archival work and historical documentation. Acknowledgement sections (personal credits aside) tend to include visited archives, books and documents used, exchanges with experts. This is particularly true of historical or historicised fiction, and of writing about geographies outside the author's context. Direct observation of worlds and people is at times more obliquely recorded in the text itself, through figures such as the eavesdropper or observer turned narrator, producing classic figures such as the *flâneur*. Perhaps because travel has become so accessible and migration a more extended experience, transnational urban writing today makes use of a

multiple method approach to research, which involves, among others, archival and historical work, diasporic memory and embodied encounters in the cities, an approach which requires critical modifications of figures such as that of the classic, modernist *flâneur*. Focusing on the writing of Simone Lazaroo, and alternating the perspective of writer and critic, we will discuss a writer's practice and poetics when researching contemporary cities for the purposes of writing, first, (post)diasporic memory fiction and, second, contemporary stories of exclusion, foregrounding the ethical positionings and knowledge production involved. We relate this learning and creative process to the reverse, yet sometimes parallel, voyage of knowledge undertaken by readers and critics, focusing particularly on the analysis of transnational urban writing and the recurrence of embodied ethical encounters in a context of growing urban exclusion.

## **1. Researching post/diasporic narratives: a writer's perspective. Simone Lazaroo**

Most of my writing has in some way explored individuals searching for belonging and



meaning at the juncture of cultures. My interest in writing about such individuals stems partly from my parentage. My mother's parents were Australians of mostly Anglo-Saxon and some French ancestry; my father's parents were Eurasians from Malacca and Kuala Lumpur, most likely descendants of sixteenth century partnerships between Portuguese sailors or merchants and Malay as well as possibly Indian women. One of my paternal

great-grandfathers, Joseph Marbeck, was a Eurasian from Indonesia, possibly with some Dutch or German ancestry.

A family photograph taken in the early 1900s, most likely in a Malaccan photographer's studio, shows my paternal grandmother Rose, the oldest child in the photo, with her parents and the rest of their young family. My paternal great-grandmother, Dolphine, is dressed in her sarong kebaya; but her husband Joseph and their children are in Western dress, apart from the baby naked and nappyleless on Dolphine's lap: it's easy to imagine that Dolphine, then in her early twenties, might have been even more stressed than the photographer about timing whilst this photo was taken.

Sometime after my father's parents Rose and Daniel married, they migrated from Malaya to Singapore. Both countries were then part of the British Straits Settlements. During the British colonial era in Malaya and Singapore, British expatriates sometimes referred to Eurasians as 'in-betweens', partly because of their mixed European and Asian ancestry

and culture, and partly because of their role as intermediaries between the British colonial government and locals who didn't speak English.

Some characters in my novels reflect my paternal great-grandfather's and grandfather's experiences of working for the British colonial government. However, anecdotal accounts indicate that despite their ability to speak English, my grandfather and other Eurasians of *Portuguese* descent were generally considered of lower social standing than those Eurasians with English forebears, and found fewer opportunities for higher status jobs with the colonial government. Some of my published novels and my current work in progress, provisionally titled *Bodies of Water*, have referred to the effects of such historical circumstances upon Eurasian individuals. I'll refer initially to my second novel *The Australian Fiancé* (2000), which explores the relationship between a young Singaporean Eurasian woman and a privileged Western Australian heir in post World War II, and to *Bodies of Water*, my text about a Singaporean-born Eurasian migrant woman Evangelia Oliveira's attempts to recover, in Australia and Singapore, the story of her divorced elderly parents' courtship, marriage and her own origins. Both these texts could be categorised as writing which explores diasporic topics such as home and belonging. Later, I'll discuss how my most recently published short stories "Duty Free" and "Those Who Grasp Lose" (2016), which are about travellers in contemporary cities, also reflect my interest in writing about belonging and home.

I will discuss first the approaches to researching details that enabled me to write *The Australian Fiancé* and *Bodies of Water*. Like many other writers of literary fiction, I build my story drafts upon detail drawn in some way from the "real world." This usually involves detail drawn from my own direct observation, including encounters and memories of people and places; but details are also often drawn from diasporic memory informed by narrative fragments from family members, pre-existing texts, photographic images and other archival material.

The kinds of research undertaken have varied from fiction project to project. For my novel *The Australian Fiancé*, set mostly during the years following World War II, researching archival and other textual sources was necessary for obvious reasons: in old photos, maps and texts, I found details of that era's geographical and social settings that are often no longer very evident in those cities. But visiting Singapore in the 1980s, I found traces of the old city, its people and their occupations in Chinatown, Little India and around Arab Street, and in colonial buildings such as the Raffles Hotel. These informed my representations of post-World War II Singapore in *The Australian Fiancé*, supplementing the images of that era that I found in photos, archives and other published texts. This novel was also partly set in post-World War II Broome in Western Australia and drew on photos, texts and archives about Broome and wider Australia during that era, including texts about the administration of the White Australia Policy and post-World War II Australian parliamentary debates about the minimum percentage of European blood so-called "part Asians" should possess if they wanted to migrate to Australia. A minimum of 50% was suggested in federal parliamentary debates at one point; this intriguing suggestion informed a passage in *The Australian Fiancé*.

My more recent project *Bodies of Water* traces the trajectory of Eurasian migrant Evangelia Oliveira's parents' bi-cultural partnership after her father Francis meets her mother Elspeth Green at university in Perth, where he's sent to study water supply after he receives a post-war Commonwealth scholarship. This last detail reflects the experience of my father, who was one of several Singaporeans of his generation trained in Australian universities to help build the post-war infrastructure of Singapore.

Such familial memories were usually relayed through anecdotes or narrative fragments, sometimes accompanying old family photos which also informed my representations of fictional characters. Post-war photographs showing my now deceased father and uncle as young men, and family anecdotes about them, indirectly informed some of my representations of Francis Xavier Oliveira's appearance, habits and aspirations in *Bodies of Water*. During the process of writing such pieces of fiction, details drawn from "real" people are altered in various ways, partly out of respect for privacy, partly to serve the story better, make characters more engaging and relevant to the story and its themes, or other narrative reasons. For example, I incorporated and exaggerated my father's and uncle's fondness for swimming and eating ice cream into the representation of the youthful Francis Oliveira:

Francis hadn't aspired to saintliness as his mother had hoped when she named him, but he had become swimming champion of his school in Singapore after taking up the sport to build his muscles following his war-time malnutrition. He'd developed an interest in pools, reservoirs and other bodies of water as he looked for places to train.

He did push-ups three times a day in front of his poster of Charles Atlas, and he fortified himself with Milo and Dutch Maid powdered milk after double helpings of nasi lemak and kuey teow from Singapore's street hawkers. He bought himself a small serve of Singapore Cold Storage's ice-

cream when he could afford it, to alleviate the heat, hunger and other unnameable cravings rising in him.



Texts, familial anecdotes and maps have all been crucial to writing *Bodies of Water*, complementing my personal memories and observations of Singapore made during visits. I pored over maps from my deceased father's 1950s Singapore Street Directory to get a sense of the streets and sites my character Francis Xavier Oliveira might have moved through after the war. I roughly based the location of Francis Oliveira's parents' house, between the city reservoir and jungle reserve, on family narratives about the location of my grandparents' post-war house, which was bulldozed after their death to make way for a multi-storey shopping centre. Later in *Bodies of Water*, I described a similarly altered Singaporean streetscape, changed

to the point of being unrecognisable from the one Francis and his new Australian wife Elspeth had left behind when they migrated to Australia with their newborn Evangelia in the early 1960s. This dramatically altered streetscape underscores Evangelia's sense of dislocation from her birthplace when she revisits Singapore as a middle-aged woman for the first time:

She wandered through the gleaming white shopping centre interior. Copy watches, mobile phones, vinyl accessories and women's clothes from China, way too small for her. She bought herself pork dumplings and a can of chrysanthemum tea from the food stall next to McDonalds, its posters advertising hamburgers with satay sauce.

She carried them across the car-park to a bench seat overlooking the reservoir, silver as a mirror under the overcast sky (...)

Evangelia turned again to the map of the area in her father's 1957 street directory, tried to align his hand-drawn lines and writing with the streetscape in front of her. Roughly where McDonalds now stood, the heads of hungry civilians might have been stuck on fence palings by Japanese. Somewhere beyond that, she would've been conceived in her grandparents' last home, Generosa, screened by the orchard where trees from the East and the West bore fruit ... And she remembered the long drought in her parents' Australian garden before their divorce, and saw for the first time that some of the biggest changes in history were unmappable.

Perhaps, as Evangelia apprehends by the end of the story, her parents' relationship might be metaphorical for the relationship between Australia and Asia: Australia doesn't fully understand Asia, and vice versa, yet the two nonetheless remain complexly conjoined. This is implied in the extract near the end of their story when Evangelia takes her mother Elspeth to visit Francis decades after their divorce, as he's dying in a northern suburban Perth nursing home:

Taking the watch her father had been awarded by his British colonial bosses for helping install all those water pipes in Singapore after the war, Evangelia backed through the doorway into the corridor. But she couldn't stop herself from eavesdropping on her parents.

'Francis,' Elspeth confided. His eyes widened with the effort of acknowledging her. She lowered her voice. 'I am sorry I was never any good at it.' Evangelia had to concentrate to hear her mother's words. 'Something terrible happened to me when I was a child, you see, which caused me pain when we... made love. Uncle Arthur...' She glanced up, saw Evangelia listening, stopped talking.

Evangelia took a few steps back. The corridor was warm with the end of another summer day, but she couldn't help shivering. She closed her eyes, but couldn't shut out the war medals swinging from Uncle Arthur's chest against her face.

Her mother murmured something to her father she couldn't hear.

'Why... didn't you... tell me... all those...years...ago?' her father rasped.

'I thought you wouldn't want me if you knew,' her mother replied.

Their murmuring stopped. Evangelia peered through the doorway again. In the dim room, their gaunt old faces were only just visible. But she

saw that Francis Xavier Oliveira and Elspeth Green understood each other more than they had when they were married. Through the window behind them, she thought she could just make out waves rising and spending themselves on the shore before returning and merging with the Indian Ocean.

‘So much... we haven’t... told each other,’ her father finally said.

‘How many of our stories stay untold because we’re ashamed of them?’

Her mother patted the back of his hand.

‘Some histories ...never... end ...’ he replied. In the long pause, Evangelia heard his watch ticking again.

## **2: Reading and walking Singapore, with *The Australian Fiancé*.**

**Isabel Carrera-Suárez**

Historical documentation, needless to say, is a vital exercise for the critic and reader’s understanding of texts. My own knowledge of the Eurasian community in Singapore was non-existent prior to reading *The Australian Fiancé*, but what seemed immediately crucial from a theoretical and analytical perspective was the localised specificity of this bicultural community and its borderline status as (aspiringly) “British” colonial hybrid. As explained by Simone above, the European side of Singaporean Eurasians was often Portuguese, the Asian Malay, and they constituted a distinct, named social group in colonial Singapore, whose specificity demanded located research. The sophisticated theorising on hybridity, in-betweenness and liminality, from Bakhtin to Bhabha, was an uncomfortable fit for the reading of a novel where the crossover relationships are made difficult by deep racialization and exclusion, and even more critically, war rape trauma. The brutal history of Japanese abduction of young women for sexual slavery during World War II informs the story, as do the stark facts of the White Australia policy at its peak. Feminist studies of forced sexual encounters, which deconstruct the idea of an abstract and “happy” hybridity, offered a more useful tool for understanding, as did situated studies of Australian-Asian cultural relations, such as the work of Ien Ang on Chinese diasporas in the Australian context (2001) or insights into the proximity of urban encounters (Ahmed, 2000).

Whatever the critical approach adopted in reading *The Australian Fiancé*, however, its wealth of urban detail, the protagonists’ constant and significant traversing of Singapore neighbourhoods, together with the powerful visual basis of the narrative, turn the understanding of the city’s layout and inhabited spaces into an imperative. My own early archive was a large format book, *Singapore, A Pictorial History, 1819-2000* (Liu, 2001) which contains 1200 historical photographs of the city, and whose publicity claims to show how “In less than two centuries, Singapore has transformed itself from a small seaside kampong into a modern metropolis, growing first into a thriving colony, then a Straits Settlement, and becoming in 1965 an independent nation,” and to tell the story of “a nation of mainly immigrant stock and the island they transformed from fishing village to a global city state” (Liu, 2000, back cover). The latter part of this transformation, from colony into independent nation, and beyond nation into global city, is the time period of *The Australian Fiancé*, which foregrounds the charged relationship between Australia and Singapore. The wealth of visual information contained in this *Pictorial History* allows good insight into the historical world recreated in the novel. The next essential

step, however, prior to interviewing Simone in Perth for the first time, was to walk, in a parallel journey to her research trip, Singapore's historical urban neighbourhoods, and to look back through its museums and visual archives. My own route, in contrast to Simone's family photos and narratives, was proposed by a crucial image from Liu's book, not a photograph but a *map*, the famous "Jackson Plan," also known as the "Raffles Plan" or "Plan of the town of Singapore," seemingly drawn in 1822, three years after the establishment of the colony. It transpires from historical records that the founder of the colony, Sir Stamford Raffles, had given specific instructions on allocation of land in the town, but returned to Singapore in 1822 to be displeased by "the haphazard growth of the settlement" ("Raffles Town Plan," NLB Singapore), thus creating a town Committee to revise the layout of the city and giving Lieutenant Philip Jackson the responsibility of designing the plan. Following this crucial design, the colony was divided into functional subdivisions arranged in a grid pattern, with segregated ethnic residential areas: Government; Europeans and merchants; Chinese; Malays; Indians.

This most colonial of city structures, the grid, thus recomposed the "disordered" (mixed) expansion of life into *segregated* and stratified areas; it seems to have failed, however, to curtail the resistant interaction that followed nevertheless, represented in its complex fluidity in *The Australian Fiancé*, a novel which works as much through story-telling as through visual recreation, through an extended metaphor of photography and precise spatial evocation. It excels at bringing to life the socially determined spaces in Singapore and Broome, streetscapes and interior enclosures, as well as the passageway, limbo locations of the ship and the boat. The Eurasian woman, always caught in-between, must finally renounce desires made impossible by such confinements and return "home" to construct a new self in Singapore. When in later life she dreams of the past and of her former fiancé, she sees him in two types of places:

the neighbourhood of hunger [in Singapore], the one she knows best, kampongs and shophouses scanty with shared taps; plywood and tin walls behind which you have to keep your desire muffled, through which desire might be heard easily. Where longing grows the stronger for being denied.

or, conversely,

a neighbourhood of affluence [in Broome], where imported exotic plants tended by Aboriginal servants flourish in symmetrical groupings and chase out the shadows of the desert; where houses are so big you can barely hear the sounds of desire from room to room.

In both places, she has to keep herself hidden from the neighbours. (202)

While few of the original dwelling places were left in my visit to Singapore in 2005, two decades after the author's research visit, the visible traces the original layout, present in Chinatown, Arab Street, a few kampongs and colonial buildings such as the crucial Raffles Hotel, were unequivocal entries into colonial memory. Such spaces are of course in contrast with most post-war Singapore architecture, which develops the dream of the island-state as world finance city, a global dream of affluence. The varied manners in which cities change and reinvent themselves are a major theme in urban theory and literature, as writing on many other cities such as London, Toronto or Sydney, shows.

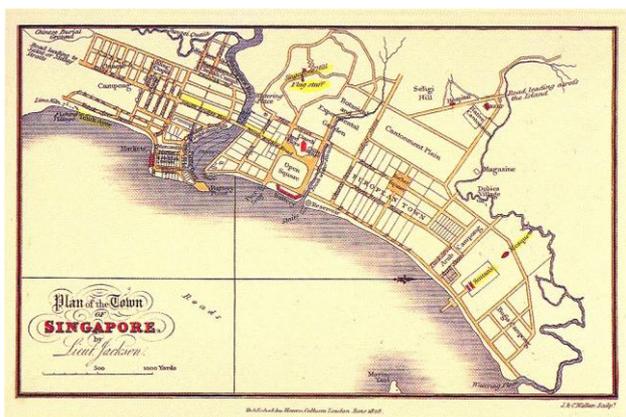
The link between present urban forms and colonial or past history also constitutes the subject of analysis in both fields, with creative writing focusing, as Simone Lazaroo's fiction does, on the lived, human experience accompanying such transformations.

In *Bodies of Water*, Evangelia meditates matter-of-factly how "Roughly where McDonalds now stood, the heads of hungry civilians might have been stuck on fence palings by Japanese soldiers." A similarly gruesome revelation in her earlier novel also emphasized the invisibility (and relevance) of alternative knowledges: when the Australian fiancé takes the young Eurasian woman to the luxurious, emblematically white Raffles Hotel, where their first skin-to-skin encounter (in Sara Ahmed's term) will take place, she silences her own geo-historical wisdom:

The hotel rings daily with the sounds of forgetting. Along the corridor for their suite, the doors are ajar on haughty bathrooms being re-tiled and re-painted. She doesn't mention to him her native's knowledge of what's gone on behind those doors, before, of defeated Japanese soldiers disembowelling themselves on the old tiles and the claw-footed baths. (59)

One of the running themes in the novel is precisely knowledge and its desire, the power of certain knowledges, the wisdom but danger of other, subaltern, knowing. Creative fiction, in its dose of reality or speculation, feeds into and often anticipates critical work and theorisation. Simone's Lazaroo's fictionalised, historically grounded version of alternative knowledge predates theoretical insights into the subject such as Saskia Sassen's recent reminder that the spatial knowledge sustained by the "expelled" inhabitants of any city is a one we ignore at our cost (2014a). The fiancé in the novel is guilty of such blindness throughout. The Eurasian woman, on her part, desires his technical (photographical) know-how only to enable the agency of her own subaltern information. Her final reinvention of herself as an ethical observer/artist is a key example of the *embodiedness* and significance of a transformed, gendered *flâneur* figure, represented in a significant number of texts on postdiasporic metropolitan cities, a figure which I have analysed elsewhere (Carrera Suárez 2015). According to visual critic and photographer Marcia Meskimmon, the concept of the *pedestrian* is about

the condition of knowing space through embodiment... Conceptually, the pedestrian differs from the *flâneur* in locatedness and physicality... She is not a disembodied eye like the theoretical *flâneur* who wanders through the city 'invisibly' and untouched, but a sentient participant in the city. (Meskimmon 21)



This sentient, participant artist is fleetingly but crucially represented at the end of *The Australian Fiancé* by the Eurasian woman, now long established back "home" in independent Singapore, photographing people in the street but returning the images to their owners: "You are really something," she tells them, resisting the practice of her former fiancé-tourist, whose

possessive, objectifying photography captured and owned its subjects while screening off the world through the camera lens. Reversing the use of the coveted technical knowledge first acquired through his camera, she returns self-image and speech to her fellow citizens in 1980s Singapore. This figure of an *embodied, sentient participant* in the city will have an echo in later work by Simone Lazaroo, in the aspirations of the travelling woman and amateur photographer Sheila, protagonist of the contemporary stories collected in *Duty Free* (2016).

### **3. Walking the streets in search of a subject: the ethics of pedestrianism. Simone Lazaroo**

As a literary researcher, I often find myself doing more than noting details of city inhabitants and streetscapes as I walk through them. During the very process of wandering through streets, I begin to construct, inwardly or in my notebook, reflections, journeys and events that become the basis of main characters' stories, thoughts and voices. Individuals and streetscapes encountered thus generate ideas for fictional scenes that bring together representations of characters within *specific* physical, social and cultural settings. I begin as an "eavesdropper / observer" (Carrera-Suárez 2015), but sometimes also begin to narrate stories to myself as I undertake this research. Often, firsthand encounters with people in city streets prompt this narration. So for me, being "an embodied, located researcher" is crucial to the construction of stories involving "embodied, located" *fictional characters*.

The critic James Wood alludes to the sense of being overwhelmed by the sheer abundance of detail encountered whilst wandering through the streets of large cities:

...detail really does hit us, especially in big cities, in a tattoo of randomness  
... In life, we can swivel our heads and eyes, but in fact we are like helpless cameras. We have a wide lens, and must take in whatever comes before us.  
(Wood, 47)

I'd concur with Wood: at least during the earliest stage of walking to research new cities and their inhabitants, my focus is broad and unselective, and I find the range and density of detail in them difficult to process. During the early stage of walking to research cities for my short stories "Duty Free" and "Those Who Grasp Lose," published in 2016, it sometimes seemed more like aimless wandering than research, but in fact was neither aimless nor passive. The initial stages of this kind of research involve constant attempts to "read the signs": on streets, buildings, and in other people's appearances and behaviour. I've long agreed with twentieth-century American critic and writer E. B. White's dictum "Good writers report the details that matter," but during early research walks through cities, it's not clear in advance which details *will* "matter" to my writing. At that stage, I'm trying to locate myself not just spatially, but in terms of what my stories' focus will be, and therefore it's crucial to make an effort to be a "noticer" of as much around me as I can. Although in some ways I am no different to most travellers walking through a city for the first time, this "noticing" entails practising a kind of conscious receptivity to people and places. It requires awareness of the potential of often unexpected encounters for enlarging my sense of a city and its residents, and for helping me to "represent in the

imaginary” people who mightn’t be well represented in other kinds of texts about that particular city.

None of my prior reading of tourist websites or guidebooks about San Francisco, New York and Paris, the cities that later informed my short stories (*Duty Free* 2016), had prepared me for what turned out to be perhaps my most enduring memory of those post-Global-Financial-Crisis cities: the many people begging and often homeless. My first instinct was to keep my distance from, ignore or “screen out” these individuals, partly because I was disconcerted and shocked by their presence, partly because I hadn’t seen so many people homeless or begging back in Perth at that stage, and partly because they didn’t seem to “fit” my preconceived ideas and research plans for those cities. But the more I walked those streets, the more I realised that I could not do justice to writing about post-GFC cities without including some representation of these street dwellers. In San Francisco, New York and some European cities, the sidewalks and tourist sites seemed to be sites of cross-cultural encounters different to the ones I’d written about before. These new cross-cultural encounters seemed most often to be between poverty-stricken, sometimes homeless individuals and relatively privileged tourists and residents. An example of this was the woman I saw begging from tourists queuing outside Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. Despite the multi-lingual welcome sign near its entrance, beggars were NOT welcome around Notre Dame: most tourists disregarded her, and I observed police taking her and another beggar away in police cars.

I confess that whilst walking through North American and European cities, I succumbed to eavesdropping and spying on tourists’ responses to the beggars. One tourist informed me, when I gave money to the woman begging near Notre Dame, that “Most of those beggars are just working for pimps who they have to give all our donations to.” Another warned me, “Don’t give all your money away, you never know when you’ll need it yourself in this place.” These tourists’ comments and some of their gestures, such as shooing beggars away with a wave of the hand, as they would insects or perhaps stray dogs, indicated clearly that many visitors and local residents found the beggars a pest or inconvenience. Indeed, while I was in San Francisco, the San Francisco Chronicle bore a headline reading *Panhandlers drive tourists away*.

Observing other tourists’ responses to beggars, I saw we had a lot more in common than I’d first admitted to myself. Noting my own touristic behaviour and thoughts was useful to writing both “Duty Free” and “Those Who Grasp Lose.” When I began writing about my main character Sheila Smith’s affective responses to her encounters with people begging, I often based them on my own: relief, embarrassment and shame when I hurried past street-dwellers or gave them only meagre small change, despite the money in my wallet for buying food and souvenirs; apprehension or fear if the beggars behaved in a confrontational way. And like Sheila, I also initially perceived some of the beggars as dangerous, and tried to minimise contact with them. In this paper, I will not explore further my own experience and how it translated into Sheila’s story, but will just add that, for some literary researchers, there are at times additional anxieties and fears of real or perceived danger that complicate our ability to communicate with some strangers; the fear of receiving unwanted sexual advances, for example, or of sexual assault. I hinted at these kinds of anxieties in my accounts of Sheila’s interactions with homeless men. There are also anxieties associated with ethical issues raised by this observing of people experiencing hardship. When writing fiction based on my observations and encounters

with such people, I avoid identifying them.. Yet I'm still uneasy about benefitting, artistically if not financially, from such observations.

The begging and homeless strangers encountered during my research undertaken whilst walking, were significant to me for a number of reasons: because they challenged my preconceived ideas about those cities and their inhabitants; because they challenged my ideas about myself as both traveller and researcher; because they helped me represent embodied, located characters; and, finally, because they suggested to me new insights into city streets, sidewalks and tourist sites as places where people of divergent cultural and socio-economic backgrounds encounter and sometimes confront one another.

In San Francisco, New York and some of the cities of Europe I visited a few years later, I came to see sidewalks, parks and tourist sites as places where some people struggle for connection, food, money and sometimes shelter. In a sense, this is an extension of my earlier novels' exploration of people living and searching for meaning and belonging at the juncture of cultures. My encounters with those strangers in North America and Europe enlarged my sense of the ways in which individuals strive for physical and psychological survival at these sites. I hope my fiction about contemporary cities and those who dwell in them will at least trigger in readers some kind of acknowledgement and empathy for "real" individuals and their predicaments, even as we make our way through the apparently increasing inequities and turmoil of the world's cities today, and regardless of whether those cities and people are familiar or strange to us.

Some of the issues discussed so far are reflected in the following extract from my short story "Duty Free" (2016):

The beggar-woman wasn't there under the *Welcome* sign. Sheila scanned the square, but the woman was nowhere to be seen. Maybe the police had locked her up the evening before.

As Sheila rounded the corner into the street of souvenir shops and cafes, she collided with a slight, plaid-scarved figure hovering between the sidewalk tables. Small metallic pieces jangled dully as they hit the pavement.

'Merdel!' the beggar-woman swore under her breath as she scrambled to pick up the coins, the lines on her forehead and either side of her mouth deepening, her dark eyes hard and piercing. She smelled faintly of urine. She'd changed her paper Starbucks cup to a foam McDonalds one.

'Sor-ry!' Sheila apologised.

'Parlez-vous anglais?' The last syllable revealed dark gaps in the woman's top teeth. 'Give me your coat.' The woman murmured softly, but her grip on Sheila's arm was firm.

'I need it. The cold.'

'You have two coats. You have a nice warm *otel* room to sleep in, non?' The woman held out her cup. 'And you took of me some photographs, and you did not pay for them.'

'Sorry.' How many times had the woman noticed Sheila aiming the camera at her? Sheila scabbled around in her coat pocket for the spare change from *Galleries Lafayette*. She'd probably forget to use it before she returned to Australia, anyway, and it was a hassle adding up all those unfamiliar coins in the middle of shopping here. They sounded like plastic game tokens as they fell into the beggar's cup. She prodded Sheila's handbag.

'You 'ave more.'

'No.' Sheila tugged her handbag back under her coat.

'Lies, non? Where you from?'

'Australia.'

'Australienne, ah? I met many Australiennes here. So much space there to, to, how you say? To *fuck-up* in, non?' As Sheila hurried across the road, she heard the woman shout derisively: 'And to run away.'

...

(...) at Charles de Gaulle airport, Sheila felt the dull pain in her left side, couldn't tell if it was her heart aching or the mastectomy scar. Paris cost too much, in more ways than one. (...) Had the beggar-woman too packed up her meagre takings from the city of love and begun her return to a solitary place she called home?

#### 4. Contemporary urban exclusion: the ethics of close encounters

Isabel Carrera Suárez

While the racialised, gendered and sexualised subject was a key figure of literary and cultural analysis in the final decades of the twentieth century, recent years have foregrounded new actors and historical events. Aside from the rather excessive body of writing on 9/11, with its very specific American trauma, and the shifting of fearful racialization to undefined "Muslim" features, there is a growing body of writing on asylum seekers and collected refugee narratives, often the stories of those prevented from accessing urban nodes at all, interviewed in detention (Herd and Pincus, 2016). Early in the new century, amid a certain indifference, many Western or metropolitan cities found their social landscape deeply affected by the so-called "Great-Financial-Crisis," and an increasing number of those who, in Saskia Sassen's terms, are "expelled" by a brutal profit system, which disregards any human or ecological rationale. The expelled, are, according to Sassen, "people being (usually *permanently*) cast out of what had been their lives" by permanent unemployment, urban plans, land buying, war, human beings who are becoming *invisible* in the process (2014b). Sassen advocates the need for a different language to represent the scale of such actions, their permanence and structural novelty, hence her use of the term *expulsion*. Simone's recent stories of travelling encounters foreground some of these expulsions resulting from a failing capitalist context. The narratives bring other manners of in-betweenness to the fore, the living on the "systemic edge," in Sassen's term (2014b), in the invisible position of no return. Such are the characters encountered by Sheila in Simone's stories "Duty Free" and "Those Who Grasp Lose" (2016).

Dealing with breast cancer and its scars, Sheila is also a markedly embodied street walker, whose "strange encounters" (Ahmed, 2000) are anxious and ambiguously unequal. Not wealthy, but wealthier than the homeless, she is nevertheless physically and psychologically less confident. She walks the streets of mythologised cities, the quintessentially European Paris, the urban symbols of the US --New York, San Francisco-- as a gendered, embodied pedestrian, whose desire for contact is nevertheless curtailed by her corporeal self-consciousness and her geography of fear, real and perceived. Her close urban encounters are shockingly contemporary, exposing the breach of trust in the

narrative of progress and urban affluence that had dominated the final years of the twentieth century.

Like the now prominent figure of the refugee, the beggar or street dweller in the West has unexpectedly ceased to be a faceless outcast, the once romanticised embodiment of freedom, and has turned instead into a warning of what may come, or what we may become, a pervasive example of extreme expulsion, in the cycle described by Sassen: expelled from land and jobs, then from homes, then from the streets (“bad for tourism,” “bad for security”). Writing on contemporary cities has analysed spaces of transit and microspaces, train stations, airports, cafés, “non-places” as traits of modernity (Augé 1995). But the sidewalks portrayed by Simone’s stories have become spaces of dwelling, of negotiation, of undesired but eloquent urban speech (Sassen 2013). By occupying what Manuel Castells called the “spaces of socialisation, “ those needed for a cohesive social life, for leisure or social organization, and increasingly, the areas of transit and tourism, the homeless demand recognition of the existence of those alternative stories, not told by GDP figures or macroeconomic narratives. This implicit demand for acknowledgement, which Simone has referred to above in terms of ethics and empathy, prompts multiple responses in the recreation of urban discourse. Returning to the ever inspiring Henri Lefebvre, the “right to the city” also assists street dwellers and Sassen’s *expelled*, as they refuse disappearance from the spaces and the narratives of global cities, exclusion from the right to representation. Simone Lazaroo’s stories in *Duty Free* show the extent to which reading and writing the contemporary urban demands a ground level, embodied journey through modified streetscapes, confronting human narratives we often (would rather) ignore.

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#### **Bio Note:**

Isabel Carrera Suárez is Professor in English at the University of Oviedo, Spain. She has published widely on the intersections between feminism and postcolonialism, particularly as reflected in contemporary women's fiction. Among recent publications are *Reading Transcultural Cities* (coedited, 2011), and her discussion of the aesthetics of pedestrianism in post-diasporic cities (*Interventions* 17.6; 2015). Her contribution to the Oxford History of the Novel in English is forthcoming (2017)

Simone Lazaroo has won awards for her five published novels and several short stories exploring individuals living at the intersections of cultures. Her current writing projects explore contemporary experiences of travel, home, homelessness, belonging, loss and memorialisation in cities during the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis. She is a senior lecturer in creative writing at Murdoch University, Western Australia.