ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the assistance of many people. First and foremost, I would like to thank the many women of AWARE who generously gave up their precious time on many occasions during the past decade to talk to me about their feminist activism, but who, at their own request, remain anonymous. Special thanks must go to Constance Singam, who, as President of AWARE during the first stages of fieldwork, helped to open many doors to me. Thanks also go to Hedwig Anuar who was able to find many of the documents and articles that I required, and who remains a constant source of inspiration.

The manuscript has benefited from the insights of many readers over the years, including Meg Coulson, Mike Donaldson, Chilla Bulbeck, Rosemary Pringle, Kay Ferres and two anonymous reviewers, and the wonderful copy-editing skills of Nandita Sinha. Special thanks go also to Rebecca Albury, Rose-lyn Melville, Trish Vezgoff, Anne Ellen, Michelle Webb, Mary Medley, Janine Chipperfield, George Magdulski, Maryanne Dever and Jindy Pettman. The fieldwork on which this research is based was supported by grants from both Griffith University and the University of Wollongong. Vineeta Sinha first suggested the Social Sciences in Asia as a medium for publishing my research and it was her faith in the merits of this project that finally sees it published. My family were a constant source of strength and support, even if they never quite understood what it was all about! The final writing of this book, however, owes as much to the love and encouragement of my husband, David Bomba, as it does to my own efforts. Without his never-ending patience, constructive advice and reminders to ‘take a break’, the task would have seemed insurmountable.

Writing this book has been a personal journey across geographical and temporal space. It began in 1992 when I first joined AWARE as a Singaporean Permanent Resident, living and working in Singapore. My experiences of belonging to AWARE shaped my thinking about feminism and challenged my textbook understandings of ‘western feminism’ (gained in large part from reading the books in the AWARE library!). As I struggled to make sense of theory and practice, I
became increasingly interested in feminist debates around the ‘politics of difference’ and wondered what this meant for an organisation such as AWARE. So, in 1994 I returned to Australia to embark on doctoral research addressing that very question. The bulk of the data presented in this book was gathered during fieldwork between 1995 and 1997. Being a member of AWARE has shaped my understanding of myself as a feminist, and sustained me through many difficult years.

AWARE has grown and matured over the past decade as its activist agendas have developed. It is a dynamic organisation that provides room for many different women to ‘be’ who they are—to be feminists, activists, volunteers and telephone counsellors, as well as parents, spouses, workers and friends. For almost 20 years, it has advocated on behalf of women in Singapore and achieved substantial success. I recognise that just as my relationship to AWARE is acutely personal, so it is for hundreds of other women—many of whom may not see themselves in these pages, or if they do, may disagree with my conclusions. It is difficult to write a book about an organisation that continues to play such an important role in Singapore’s civil society, often under very difficult circumstances. This isn’t a definitive ‘history’ of AWARE but a collection of very personal stories from women who, as AWARE members in the late 1990s, struggled to understand their own relationship to feminism. For me there are many ‘AWARES’: the circle of friends that sustained me when I lived in Singapore; the activist organisation that I studied as a graduate student; and the women’s rights association that continues to advocate for women in Singapore today. The views expressed within these pages remain my own and do not reflect the position of either the AWARE Executive Committee or individual members. I hope that it will be received, however, with the same generosity of spirit on which it is based.