

MIGRANT CULTURAL LANDSCAPES: COLLISIONS OF CULTURE IN AUSTRALIA'S PLURALIST CITIES by *Helen Armstrong*

When we lived in Bourke St, Riley St, Crown St, (we didn't live in Palmer St) Sydney, they were all terraced houses. Well - of a night, after tea, everyone came outside there. It was nothing to have twenty - all with their chairs and sit out there ...We would all sit out there and that is why when I went to Malta for 13 weeks and I thought it was fascinating because it was like how I was brought up[in Sydney]. I used to think 'Oh this is good'. Not like when we moved to the suburbs. I used to say to my mother 'It is like a cemetery!' But when we lived down in Woolloomooloo, East Sydney - everyone - we all sat out there and we knitted and crocheted...

Mary, Feb. 1996

This quote evokes the urban cultural landscape for migrants in Australian cities in the period immediately after the Second World War. The cultural landscape of cities can be both *self-conscious* - created by designers, politicians and corporate bodies - and *unselfconscious*, namely the landscape of everyday life, as it is lived in our cities. Australian cities at the close of the 1990s are vibrant places reflecting a complex model of cultural pluralism. Australia's celebrated multicultural cities are, however, the result of changes in attitudes towards migrants from the 1940 - 1960s discriminatory policies of 'assimilationism' to an ambiguous policy known as 'integrationism' and ultimately to the policy of 'multiculturalism'.

Because of such shifts in values, the migrant landscape in Australian cities exists as both hidden places and clearly visible places which tell the story of the massive Post World War II migration program. It is a complex story much of which is still unknown. In this light, it is somewhat alarming to witness the celebrated life of our multicultural cities in the 1990s either being lost in new developments or being appropriated by the tourist industry. In both processes, many of the unselfconscious qualities of these places and their hidden stories are being lost.

Much is made of migration, race and ethnicity in other world cities particularly in North America, France and Britain and although there are some similarities to Australian cities, there are also some important differences. Writers exploring migration, race and ethnicity in the design of North American cities (Fernandez-Kelly, 1994) suggest that cities with unbridled immigration are associated in the American mind with crime, racial discord and a lack of morality; in other words the 'other' which is outside the American dream. Fernandez-Kelly (1994) suggests American cities are being designed and redesigned by the barrios and the migrant ghettos where the migrant is seen as the under-class. This is true to a lesser extent in London (Keith & Pile, 1993) and Paris, but is not true of contemporary Australian cities.

The Australian cities of today were not always so inclusive. In fact, the very forces which drove migrants into secret or discrete places to sustain their culture - to hide their difference from Anglo-Australian eyes which demanded that migrants become Australian - are the forces which have resulted in the rich multicultural expressions today.

The bulk of the migrants have come to Australia since the Second World War. In the post war boom period United States, Canada and Australia were actively seeking work-forces to drive the new industrial developments. Australia, in the late 1940s, was a deeply conservative society living out the remnants of a British colonial cultural system. The government of the day recognised the inherent conservatism and the sanctity of the 'Australian way of life', so they reassured the voters that most of the migrants would be British (Murphy. 1993; Jordens. 1995.). Australia however, was not the first choice for British migrants, most going to United States or Canada. The government, already heavily committed to the new industrial projects and fuelled by the post war rhetoric of 'populate or perish', opened the possibility of accepting migrants from the Mediterranean countries. They reassured the Australian voters that such non-English speaking migrants would become Australian under the policy of 'Assimilation' assisted by the well meaning but

completely uninformed volunteer organisation known as the 'Good Neighbour Movement'.

The very policies aimed at ensuring that the non British migrants blended into Australian cities resulted in migrant enclaves where people could speak their own language (albeit in whispers in the public streets). Such enclaves consisted of hidden places where people could practice their spiritual worship and back gardens where community cultural practices could be sustained and food could be grown which was similar to the migrants' original countries. It is ironic that the seeds of cultural pluralism in Australian cities today lay in the discriminatory practices of fifty years ago.

It is interesting to contrast the difference between Australian and American urban migrant enclaves. Since the 1950s the particular migrant issue for US cities has focused on the internal migration of Afro-Americans from the southern states to the north and the migration of middle class white communities to the suburbs; whereas Australian cities have absorbed the impact of immigrants and internal migrations of Aboriginal communities differently. Non Aboriginal Australians have tended to live in cities and sustain the vigour of inner suburban/urban areas by new waves of immigrant groups and middle class gentrifiers. Also unlike American cities, the immigrant areas have tended to accommodate different immigrant groups as well as Anglo-Australians. There has been a persistent heterogeneity. Divisions into specific immigrant enclaves have been superficial. Coburg in Melbourne might be seen as Italian but it is a mixed area. Similarly in Sydney, Marrickville may have been considered Greek but it was always and continues to be a mix of different immigrant groups. Leichhardt while superficially Italian is an interesting mix of working class Anglo-Australians, Italian Australians and now the new gentrifiers who are a mix of second generation immigrant Australians and Anglo-Australians. Aboriginal Australians in Newtown in Sydney include groups who have lived in the area for a number of generations and the new middle class gentrifiers some of whom are Aboriginal Australians. The inner areas of Sydney and Melbourne are peopled by the

true multiculturals where connections to various countries of origin are blended and mixed to form the late 20th century Australian (Armstrong. 1994b).

Whether this will be true of Australian cities of the future depends on how much we can draw from our difference, so that migrants within Australia continue to contribute to Australia's cultural pluralism and not become a post-industrial under class as many are in the US. In this climate it is timely for Australians to understand the pulses which created the cities of today so that the 'multicultural' - probably most non-Aboriginal Australians and even some Aboriginal Australians - is not an objectified 'other'.

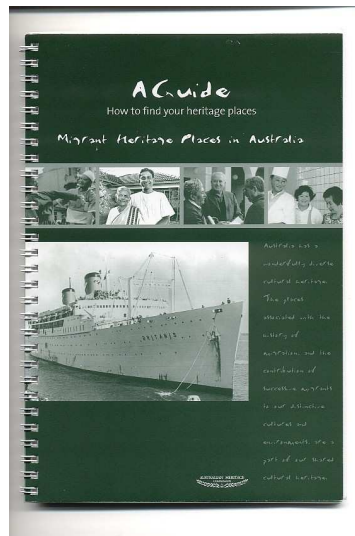
The *collision of cultures* referred to in the title can be considered as the intersection of the traditional colonial British values and their subsequent evolution into an '*Australian way of life*', the values associated with the *migrant cultural landscape*, and the homogenising values of *global cities*. The cultural landscape of global cities is easily recognised and most Australians are familiar with the Anglo-Celt Australian urban cultural landscape but many of the migrant cultures are not fully understood. How can the cultural landscape resulting from the experience of migration be read in Australian cities?

Identifying the Migrant Cultural Landscape

The migrant cultural landscape reflects the experience of migration and the process of settling in to a new country. Since 1993 research has been undertaken in collaboration with different immigrant groups in Australian cities to determine immigrant places which have value for such groups (Armstrong. 1994a, 1994b, 1995, 1997.) In the process of this research it has become evident that the nature of places created by immigrants in Australian cities closely reflects the changing policies related to the acceptance of difference by the Anglo-Celtic Australian community.

The history of migration from 1945 to 1996 is one driven by three distinct phases in government migration policies. The first phase was known as the Period of Assimilation and extended from 1947 to 1964. Subsequent phases were known as

Integrationism (1964 - 1972) and Multiculturalism (1973 - present). A particular type of migrant cultural landscape developed during each of these periods.



A Guide to Identifying Migrant Heritage Places by Helen Armstrong

Migrant Places Associated with Assimilationism

During the 'Assimilation' period, perhaps the most significant places for migrants were the *points of arrival*. In the period between 1947-1965 migrants arrived by ship, so wharves in major cities were places redolent with memories of arriving in a strange place, being greeted by little known relatives or migrant agents, and being subjected to the procedures which determined where migrants would go after arrival. The wharves are now derelict and there is pressure for their demolition. In Sydney there are a number of conflicting values held about the wharves, particularly Woolloomooloo Wharf. Many landscape architects and former politicians would have liked it to be demolished in order to create a continuous waterfront promenade. Woolloomooloo, as a cultural landscape, has always been a vibrant part of the theatre of Sydney life and the migrant story plays a central role.



Woolloomooloo Wharf



Bunnerong Power Station

During the 'Assimilation' period migrants were taken to 'reception centres' where they were processed and in many cases dispersed to sites of employment related to the new industries. Refugees were required to work for two years in places nominated by the government. Many were sent to the Snowy Mountain Hydro-electricity Scheme. Other Europeans were sent to major industrial centres such as remote steel mines as well as steel mills and ports. These *sites of work* can be considered important aspects of migrant history and therefore part of the migrant cultural landscape. Their significance relates to the role the migrants played in building the industrial strength of Australia but they were also places of great humiliation. For non-British migrants there was no recognition of professional qualifications and most were bonded to work in industry for two years.

The non-British migrants who had paid their own passage were expected to find accommodation in Australian cities which, at that time, were experiencing severe housing shortages. As a result, the sponsoring relatives and immigrant groups developed networks to provide immediate accommodation. In some communities where migrants were predominantly single men, a system of *boarding houses and clubs* grew up in tightly knit neighbourhoods. Sites of the boarding houses and clubs and the inner city precincts are part of the urban cultural landscape reflecting Australia's non-British immigrant history. Apart from the British migrant hostels and a few pubs, places which reflect the British migrant experience have been less easy to discern.



Maltese Boarding Houses in Darlinghurst

The non-British migrant places which reflect this period are heavy with memories associated with discrimination (Armstrong.1998a). Because of this, immigrant groups

sustained the cultural practices of their countries of origin in hidden places. It is only in the 1990s that the larger community is beginning to find out about the 'hidden Australia' of the 1940s and 1950s. These are elusive places, as many of the stories about this time are spoken about in languages other than English. The early migrants are now elderly and their stories may die with them. Marc Auge in his book, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, states that in Africa an old person dying is a 'library on fire'(Auge.1995.9). This is also true of the migrants who came here in the 1950s. The particular tragedy about assimilationism was that many children of immigrants were brought up 'protected' from the knowledge of their parents' culture and the humiliation of discrimination. This was done so that the children could be 'new Australians', unfettered by practices associated with different cultures. Second and third generation migrants now seek to know about this lost heritage.



Pizza Oven in Italian Back Garden, Petersham Greek Men's Club, Marrickville

The hidden places where immigrant groups sustained their cultural practices away from the gaze of the Australians include *back gardens* which became productive farms including vineyards and bakeries. They were also *local halls* which were inconspicuous places of worship and rooms above shops which became *men's clubs* for card playing and drinking coffee. Most of the cultural landscape reflecting the migrant experience in Australian cities at this time is unknown to the mainstream culture (Armstrong. 1997). All these places need to be documented as part of the collective heritage of Australia before the sources of knowledge are lost.



The Roxy, Parramatta – a place for the Maltese in Pendle Hill

The Period of Integration - 1964 - 1972

By the mid 1960s it was clear that there were problems with the assimilationist policies. The migrant project was certainly building Australia's industrial strength. To that extent the project was successful. But the desire to make migrants into Australians who would be absorbed into the fabric of Australian society was not working. Migrants had been brought in to work in industry with no provision for housing and minimal provision for English tuition, so it was inevitable that immigrant enclaves formed around industrial areas and in inner city areas where housing was cheap. Such enclaves had particularities which were different to the concept of ghettos in North America (Jupp et al. 1990). Unlike US ghettos, the enclaves were not associated with crime, however, there were a number of social problems for the immigrant groups who were becoming increasingly isolated and marginalised by the mainstream society. Thus migrants, disenchanted with the lack of fulfilment of promises for a better life, were returning to their original countries. Although the British were returning because of improved conditions in Britain, other emigrants such as the Italians were not going back to better conditions in their own country. They were leaving because they were not enjoying their experience in Australia as migrants. The Australian bureaucrats realised that the migration project was losing some of its certainty, in particular the belief that newcomers were assured of a better life in Australia. Concern about this at government level prompted new migration policies under the umbrella of 'Integrationism'.

By the early 1960s the government was competing with other countries for immigrants. As a result, migrants from areas previously excluded because of their perceived difficulties in assimilation, were now considered. In the process of negotiating on a world stage for immigrants, Australian government officials became aware that their policies were considered anachronistic and backward. Australia was not respected for its 'White Australia Policy' which particularly acted against Australia's desire to forge links with Asia. During the period of 'Integrationism', Australia accepted immigrants from Lebanon and Turkey as well as India, Malaysia, China and South America. The implications of the need for more equity for migrants meant that Australian society had to acknowledge its diverse composition, the very phenomenon that Australia had tried to avoid. For Australians, the 'Australian way of life' was still a sacred icon.



Greek Church, Marrickville



Greek back garden, San Souci

In the light of these changes it was clear to immigrant groups that, by the mid 1960s, mainstream Australian culture was ready to accept the presence of non-British migrants and to accept evidence of different cultural practices. This resulted in new forms of migrant places. There was suddenly a growth of *immigrant clubs* with a highly visible presence. Greek clubs, Italian clubs, Yugoslavian clubs and so on were built in styles designed to exhibit difference. Similarly immigrant *places of worship* particularly those associated with Eastern European faiths, were built in forms which were similar to those in the countries of origin. But perhaps the most obvious and interesting migrant places for the mainstream Australian culture were the *local immigrant shopping centres*. These places had been relatively inconspicuous during the period of assimilation, but by the 1960s the shops were clearly catering for

specific immigrant groups. The shopping precinct invariably contained food shops, bridal shops and travel agents. Above the shops were lawyers and tax accountants who assisted the immigrants with official documents. Language was one of the fundamental barriers for non-English speaking immigrants. Assimilation policies had been inflexible about the necessity for migrants to speak English but offered minimal services. This inevitably led to people gravitating to where their language was spoken as people went about their everyday lives. Migrant shopping areas were and continue to be fundamental elements of the migrant cultural landscape.



Chinese Market Garden, La Perouse

Apart from the large migrant clubs, the specific places of worship for immigrants and the local immigrant shopping centres, other migrant places were becoming clearly differentiated. A number of immigrants were now free of their obligation to work in the factories and had started their own businesses. Many European migrants bought land on the fringes of the large cities where they established *market gardens*. As a result, the tradition of Chinese market gardeners, who had provisioned the east coast Australian communities for most of the second half of the 19th century, changed and the main market places were now centres of both European and Asian vegetable merchants. Sydney has virtually lost the inner city markets but Melbourne's markets are highly valued as part of the richness of the urban landscape.



Middle East Picnic, Cabarita Park

Also during the 1960s the migrants had developed particular *recreation places*. The parklands associated with the harbour beaches in Sydney became sites of large Italian or Greek picnics, while in the cities individual northern Italians had established sophisticated restaurants and night-clubs. The migrant presence was both embracing the Australian way of life and being embraced by the Australian community in terms of growing acceptance of new foods, a more sophisticated night-life and the new sport, soccer. Such a cautious acceptance of the migrant presence while maintaining the Australian way of life, continued until 1972 when Australia moved into a third set of policies about migrants; the 'Period of Multiculturalism'.

The Period of Multiculturalism (1972 - 1995).

In 1970, the Australian Labour Party (ALP) saw that non English speaking background migrants were predominantly working class and therefore potential ALP voters. The ALP wooed the migrant vote and their success in the 1972 elections was in part attributable to this vote. In 1973, along with the change in government there was also a major global change resulting from the recession in world trade following the slump in oil prices. As well the plight of refugees from Lebanon and Vietnam had to be addressed. This was to have a marked impact on immigration issues in Australia. Firstly it brought to an end the economic boom which had been the rationale for the immigration policy and secondly Australia accepted its obligation to take in refugees from Asia and Lebanon.



Vietnamese shops and gathering places, Cabramatta

During the period known as 'Multiculturalism', migrant places took on yet another dimension. Because of the heightened awareness of the exotic aspects of immigrant cultures stimulated by the programs on SBS television, mainstream Australians began to use the *migrant shopping centres as recreation*. As well the migrant groups no longer felt they had to conceal the evidence of their cultures and so self-conscious expressions of ethnicity became evident. As a result there was a growing commodification of ethnicity for the tourist market. This was particularly evident in the *revitalisation of Chinatowns* in Sydney and Melbourne and in the creation of new Chinatowns in other cities purely for the tourist market (Anderson. 1993).

Meanwhile the intake of refugees from Lebanon added to the existing Middle East communities and resulted in areas of Sydney developing centres for Muslim worship with highly visible *mosques* and audible calls to prayer in the streets. As well the Vietnamese community established a commercially successful *Vietnamese retail centre* close to the hostel they had used on arrival in Sydney. The centre, known as Cabramatta, became the focus of local government initiatives to highlight the Asian qualities by installing ceremonial gates as entries to new street plazas. Also many of the earlier migrants had now consolidated their assets and were building *large houses* in the outer areas of the older cities. Associated with the relocation of these groups, new *immigrant clubs* were built with exotic representations of their former countries. Other aspects of multiculturalism are still emerging. Older commercial centres for the Italians and Greeks have become restaurant strips with commodified representations of Italianness and Greekness. Along with the hyperreal representations of a stereotyped form of Italianness or Chineseness, there is also an unselfconscious blending of cultures. This is evident in a number of aspects of

cultural production and is possibly the most interesting aspects of Australian multiculturalism (Armstrong. 1998b).



Assyrian Club, Western Sydney



Greek House, Arncliffe

Lost Migrant Places – A Disappearing Cultural Landscape

During the 1980s the urban redevelopment in the cities resulted in the loss of many of the immigrant places associated with the early post war period. Many of the early migrant specialist shops were located in low rent inner city areas. The first shop to sell coffee, the Greek restaurants, the Italian owned night clubs, the luxurious ballroom in the centre of Sydney, the 1930 art deco cinemas which screened migrant films, are just some of the places which disappeared in the new urban site amalgamations which enabled high rise towers. Even the changed urban design guidelines of the late 1980s requiring continuous street facades did nothing to save buildings containing migrant heritage because 'heritage' at that time only reflected Anglo-Celt history. Similarly the growth of suburban shopping malls resulted in the loss of immigrant shopping centres new and outer suburbs containing market gardens have disappeared under new housing developments, often made up of mansions built by the immigrants of the 1950s. Such is the contested nature of the migrant landscape.

Meanwhile in the late 1990s the major industrial projects in the older cities, the result of migrant labour, are now derelict and in the process of being demolished. Associated with such post industrialisation is the loss of work. This has resulted in the loss of the former meaning of the migrant cultural landscape where work places reflected the relationship between work, home and community. The new sites of employment are often in the tourist industry where ethnicity has been commodified. The Chinatown redevelopments are often carried out at the expense of the history

of the Chinese in such areas. This is also happening in the older Italian areas. Not all the Chinese or Italians agree with the appropriation of their heritage by entrepreneurs, although many do and have actively participated in the process. These are sites of contested values and as such are most interesting cultural landscapes. (Anderson. 1993., Armstrong. 1997, Lechte & Bottomley. 1993.)

The Collision of Cultures: an Australian Landscape Design Ethos

In the redefinition of the Australian identity, there a growing debate about what is the most appropriate design ethos for Australian cities. The issues have focused on whether Australia should sustain its environmental iconography by representing Australianness through the extraordinary landscape and the management practices of the indigenous Australians. This position is put forward by Flannery in *The Future Eaters* (1994) and Tacey in *Edge of the Sacred* (1995). The other design ethos for Australian cities embraces cultural pluralism either as stereotyped ethnicity or as the new hybrids of cultures. The hybrids are emerging at both the vernacular level and the professional level. Vernacular places are unselfconscious places which are kaleidoscopes of migrant, Anglo-Australian and indigenous cultures. At the professional level, the architects, landscape architects and other designers also reflect a hybrid of cultures. Some are migrants, some are children of migrants and they come together as design teams combining a collage of cultural values. There are significant places emerging in this design environment which reflect intriguing aspects of Australia's cultural pluralism. These are quite distinct from superficial representations of ethnicity (Armstrong.1998b).

To conclude, the concept of Australian migrant cultural landscape is a fluid one. It represents the changing nature of places created by migrants during the different periods of the migrant project. It also represents the changing concept of the Australian identity where new landscapes celebrate cultural pluralism. Today migrant cultural landscapes exist in that uncertain space between commodifying sense of place, the hyper reality associated with the postmodern, and unselfconscious authenticity. The migrant landscape also reflects a history of contested values and cultural collisions related to the acceptance of difference. The

debate about an appropriate landscape design ethos for Australia continues to be challenging and unresolved (Van Schaik. 1995.). Many Australian designers are keen to take up the challenge and explore ways to represent an inclusive Australian cultural landscape.

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