

## ***Contested Values about Migrant Places*** by Helen Armstrong

*The following paper explains the range of contests that have emerged from the Migrant Heritage Places research. Many of the comments occurred at an all-day workshop held in June 1993 at Redfern Town Hall with selected representatives of migrant groups.*

*Helen Armstrong, 2000*

Contested values about place have been the focus of a number of studies (Anderson,1993; Auge,1995; Hewison,1987; Macnaughten & Urry,1998; Pratt,1998; Shields,1991; Urry,1995). In Migrant Heritage Places study, contested values emerged in both the broad overview, evident in the two workshops, and in the in-depth work. It became clear that the application of current conservation policies is likely to meet with opposition when applied to migrant heritage places. While commonalities emerged in in-depth discussions, strong differences were evident when representatives of the migrant groups discussed the issues (Armstrong,1993b). Migrant place values are *political and dynamic* and the values related to some sites are highly contested. In discussions with Greek, Croatian, Vietnamese, Lebanese and Turkish representatives, it is clear that there are complex political allegiances within each group predominantly related to the political issues in the countries of origin at the time of migration. It is important to locate place values in the political context of a particular migrant group. Planning with cultural pluralism is far more complex than the recognition of different nationalities.



Migrant Heritage Places Workshop, Redfern Town Hall, 1993

Competing values held for migrant places by insiders, migrant groups, and outsiders, namely other people who value evidence of migrant groups, raise areas of contestation related to the *aesthetics* of cultural representation. This was particularly evident in the Greek community where conflicting values were held about the addition of Greek columns to houses. Some Greek participants valued such Mediterranean elements while others

considered they degraded Greek culture. Similarly the Paragon Cafe in Katoomba, NSW was seen as representative of characteristic Greek cafes found in Australian country towns and therefore an important element in the cultural landscape. Other Greek participants saw it as an example of 'high kitch' and that it was not an appropriate place to record as Greek cultural heritage in Australia (Armstrong,1993b). Clearly there are differences, both within migrant groups and by outsiders, about the meanings attributed to migrant places.



Greek Church designed by the priest



Greek Church designed by Greek Architect

Other contested values relate to places which have *multi-layering of values*. The current building used by the Australian Chinese Cultural Association in Surry Hills, Sydney was previously the site of the Italian community's first welfare centre in Sydney. During the period of Italian use a benefactor contributed to the creation of opulent Italianate interiors. Now it is an active and highly valued centre for the Chinese community who may find it unacceptable to recognise this building as part of the Italian heritage in Australia. Likewise, King St, Newtown poses problems where examples of 19th century Anglo-Celtic Australian shops with intact interiors have been altered to accommodate cultural expressions in different migrant shops. Cabramatta, Sydney, is currently a Vietnamese centre but until recently had significance for Greeks, Lebanese and Turkish. Most of the physical evidence of these groups has disappeared within the last five years. Multi-layering of values is characteristic of many areas with high migrant populations and this raises issues of what are appropriate ways to manage such urban cultural landscapes.

There are also conflicting heritage values about the conservation management of *housing heritage*, particularly in inner-city areas with altered older housing. If migrant heritage is acknowledged, then the restoration of much of this housing stock will involve the loss of migrant cultural alterations which may now have social significance for that group and others. As well, a number of Greek migrants expressed a desire to restore their houses

to the former 19<sup>th</sup> century Australian character thus removing the changes they had made (Armstrong,1993a).

Issue of management and *conservation* of migrant heritage places are contentious within migrant groups. Many participants in this research felt it was enough to record the stories rather than sustain the physical fabric of places. Others felt the perpetuation of cultural practices was more important than conservation of places. Such concerns are not confined to migrant groups and much of the work on social significance (Johnston,1992) is leading to broader ideas of conservation. Cultural continuity, particularly continuity of uses of places, is the current challenges for heritage planners.



Discussions about Heritage Planning, 1993

The concept of conservation for many migrants raises ambivalent feelings about heritage in their adopted country. For migrants from an Old World, conservation of heritage inevitably is seen in terms of antiquity. Australia, in contrast, is seen as 'a land of opportunity', where property, unfettered by bureaucratic controls, is a means to increased material assets. This is particularly true for post-WWII migrants of the 1950s-60s. It is therefore understandable that heritage conservation, which interferes with property change and development, results in conflict for many migrants.

Issues of *cultural equity* are other contested areas. In Australia, arguments appear to be centred on the empowering/patronising debate, whereas inclusiveness is the issue in the United States. Antoinette Lee's overview on issues about managing cultural diversity within heritage planning in the United States (Lee,1992:36) refers to the management implications when cultural groups view heritage resources in different ways. Spennerman (1993:24) has taken the discussion further by suggesting that individual cultural groups should manage their cultural heritage places. This raises problems for places which Lee

describes as 'multiply-esteemed' (Lee,1992:36). In my study, some migrant leaders considered that there should be affirmative action for migrant heritage places where heritage planners could '*redress the balance of listings and cultural representation*' (Galla in Armstrong,1993b:6). This attitude is derived from the concern that migrant communities do not know what heritage in Australia means and that an active program of information should be implemented. In contrast, other migrant leaders consider empowering migrant communities is patronising. Others feel empowerment needs to be inter-generational because some second and third generation Australian migrants have been denied their cultural heritage because their parents and grandparents concealed such heritage due to the tyranny of assimilation activities (Armstrong,1993b).

Ironically, contested values now arise from the growing interest by the wider Australian community in places which reveal cultural diversity within Australia. Places reflecting the rich encoding of different cultures are now seen as the '*exotic other*' by many Australians. As such, their conservation may be preferred by outsiders rather than the migrant groups themselves. This conflict is similar to the continued problem heritage conservationists face when heritage is valued initially by a small group in the community and not necessarily by the majority. It is only some time later that the greater community recognises the value of such heritage. It can be anticipated that the same process will apply to migrant heritage places.

Apart from conflicting cultural values between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', there is also conflict within particular migrant communities. Paddy's Market in Sydney is a case where the Chinese community values the area as cultural heritage and yet the developer of the site is also Chinese. Many Sydney migrants see the importance of Paddy's and Flemington Markets where migrant groups are both consumers and producers. The market place is a meeting-place, social place, work place and for many migrants resembles the tradition of bazaars in their country of origin. Paddy's Market, however, has been redeveloped as a site for '*yuppie consumption*' (Milner,1993:135), thus changing its migrant heritage significance.



Redevelopment of Paddy's Market, Sydney

*Significant individuals and their setting* pose difficult heritage planning challenges. How does heritage planning address the significance of the Greek delicatessen in Marrickville where a Greek woman has presided for the last thirty years, helping members of the Greek community and now the Vietnamese community? Is the heritage only associated with the woman and her services, or is the physical location of the site the heritage? Under the aegis of social heritage significance, should community counselling continue in that location? Similarly, European migrants have indicated the importance of coffee shops and delicatessens, both as meeting places and suppliers of the food which has been such a strong part of their cultural life. Examples in Sydney include No.21, Double Bay, seen as a cultural heritage place for the Austro-Hungarians, as is Cyril's Delicatessen in Haymarket.



Cyril's Delicatessen in Haymarket

There are many similar examples in other Australian cities, particularly Melbourne and Fremantle. Is it possible to recognise the heritage significance in such places when their significance is so closely aligned with particular owners? What does listing mean in planning

terms? Does No 21 have to continue as a coffee shop and Cyril's, a delicatessen? Can planning codes protect such continued uses?

Finally, there is the complex issue of *sustaining heritage for countries of origin*. There are places in Australia that are seen as European heritage such as the work of outstanding European architects who fled to Australia after the War. This is particularly the case for Czechoslovakia where early work done in Australia by Czech architects is considered to be an outstanding form of Czechoslovakian architecture (Jeans in Armstrong,1993b). Does the AHC's criteria allow for the 'community or cultural group' referred to in Criterion E (Aesthetic Significance) and G (Social Significance) to be in another country? In a similar vein, Australia is the custodian of cultural practices long relinquished in the countries of origin. This important aspect of migrant heritage is not addressed comfortably under AHC Criteria because communities for whom it has most value are communities in other countries.

As with all phenomenological research the deeper one probes into phenomena the more the complexity in the essences of life-world is revealed. This is the case in migrant cultural landscapes. The search for a simple application of a method of identification and management of values will continue to be challenging when dealing with the dynamic situation of cultural pluralism. This leads to the final major issue for heritage planning addressed here, accommodating planning procedures within the 'space-in-between'.

### **Planning Within the Space-in-Between.**

The 'space-in-between' in this study is where the 'particular' is in tension with the 'universal' and where the 'orthodox' meets the 'unorthodox'. Some heritage planning theorists (Armstrong,1994c, Pearson & Sullivan,1995) suggest planning practice should resist the confines of orthodox codes and rules, which have been shown to act against rather than for heritage conservation. Integrated planning is a move in this direction but it does not go far enough to enable planners full engagement with the complexity involved in cultural pluralism.

It is the *space-in-between*, a post-modern space (Meyer,1994; Soja,1996), which allows for flexibility and multiple values and as such eludes rigid planning control. In this space planners can work differently. The research in this study does not provide strategies for planners to work in the *space-in-between*. Instead, it provides a theoretical space for understanding some of the dynamics involved in cultural pluralism. The insights gained from this space should assist planners to resist the pressure for simplistic image-making. It is also



the space to provide opportunities for planners to work with others to achieve innovative heritage planning.

### ***Working with Others: Community Arts as Heritage Planning***

In planning terms there is an important role for community arts and cultural mapping. Marrickville has pioneered the use of community arts as a way to assist migrants to express their values about the localities in which they live. The 'Mapping Marrickville' art project (Young,1995) was seen as a successful method of opening up the process of heritage identification which had previously been the domain of heritage planners. Dolores Hayden (1995) and the Common Ground movement in Britain (Clifford and King,1985,1993,1996) have also explored the role of community arts to identify and sustain locally valued places. Building on the work of Common Ground and Creative Village (Armstrong,1994e), Greg Young has produced a *Guide to Cultural Mapping* (1995). The concept of cultural mapping can be extended to include narrating sites. The writer, Amanda Lohrey, a key speaker at the migrant representatives workshop, reflected

*... my ideas about heritage sites are [that they]are rarely adequately narratised. Such enormous amounts of time and resources – money- goes into preserving, buying, or restoring places and yet if you visit these sites there is not even a simple stand to tell you the history of the place.... The capacity to tell the necessary stories and make the necessary links has been a big problem. ... at the national level there is a process of assessing national narratives. This process and the rewriting and reinventing of these narratives has been accelerated since 1988 and the Bicentennial.... This is characteristic of Anglo-Australians. Anglos in Australia are constantly reinventing themselves and retelling their own narratives or deviate from the standard narratives. Each generation of Anglos tries to come up with a new version of themselves ...*

Lohrey in Armstrong,1993b: 49-50.

This is supported by other cultural theorists commenting on Australian heritage such as Malouf (1998), Manion (1991) and Morris (1993).

Community arts have been shown to be particularly effective in sustaining networks of places which reflect living heritage as everyday life (Clifford & King,1985,1993,1996). The community arts worker in the 'Mapping Marrickville' project, Sue McHattie, suggested

*... the community can make decisions about development in the community. Conservation decisions should be made in the same context as other decisions made in the community. The important issue is how to develop community structures which facilitate such decisions.(Armstrong,1993b:47).*

She also criticised the impact that gentrification, so strongly associated with heritage conservation, has on migrant communities, noting that,

*...some communities choose to leave, but other communities are in a situation where originally they didn't have a choice about coming to Australia...and are*

*now being moved on, again through the process of gentrification. Heritage is one of the things that contribute to that process.*

(MacHattie in Armstrong,1993b:48).

The implications of these different positions highlight how inadequate orthodox planning is for migrant places. There is potential to address these problems by working creatively with the *space-in-between* with its many authored realms of conflicting values. The post-modern status of the *space-in-between*, while providing flexibility and inclusiveness, also makes it vulnerable to other aspects of post-modernity in particular commodification and consumption.

### ***Avoiding 'Image' Planning: Integrity vs Commodity***

The new reflexive theory of place coincides with intense discussion about the role of heritage in contemporary society and the growing phenomenon of the 'heritage industry' (Hewison,1987). Debates about differences between history and heritage surface at a time when former parallel heritage impulses - a concern for rigour, a concern for inclusiveness and a concern to commodify heritage - collide, causing confusion and in many cases a retreat to former orthodoxies. The heritage industry has seen economic potential in the commodification of so-called 'ethnic places' for the tourist industry (Anderson,1993; Fowler,1992; Urry,1995). Thus not only are heritage places multiply-authored, their heritage interpretation are also strongly contested. Distortions of concepts of heritage, described by Lowenthal in his book *Possessed by the Past* (1996), occur in all areas related to heritage, but more particularly at the popular level when heritage is associated with tourism. Migrant cultural heritage is not immune from this phenomenon. The dilemma for migrant heritage places is that many of them are marginal economic enterprises created to fulfil minority cultural needs. They are vulnerable economically and physically, often to be replaced by bigger brighter versions of a commodified ethnicity. As Urry (1995) points out the 'imagined community' has now become a new focus of production for tourism. Migrant places are at risk of losing their subtle and complex identity in order to represent, self-consciously, a simulacrum of their former culture in the form of the 'exotic other'.

Harvey (1989) also explores the issues of time and the consumption of place. He suggests that because of the post-modern time-space compression and the resultant homogeneity in culture, commodity and place, there is increasing sensitivity to the variations in places. As a result, there is an incentive for places to be differentiated in ways that are attractive to capital, migrants and tourists (Harvey,1989). But this is a Faustian bargain. The unselfconscious expression of differences evident in migrant places will be lost once they become part of the image-making process used to lure capital. Migrant places are



complex and require sophisticated interpretation, all of which takes time to be studied. Fowler's work (1992) on the 'invisibles' in the landscape and their subtle relationship to space and time adds weight to the value of working with phenomenological time. It is therefore alarming that superficial aspects of migrant places are becoming sites for consumption, often under the aegis of planning before these places have been fully understood. Fortunately there is other work on the consumption of place which is providing valuable theoretical support for the importance of different approaches to planning.

In many ways, Australia has been the crucible of these issues in the 1990s. Australian society reflects the complexity of the ancient and the modern found in New World places such as United States, Canada and New Zealand but it is both more ancient in terms of its indigenous culture and more recent in terms of cultural pluralism and all that is entailed in the interpretation of the cultural landscape. There are opportunities for Australian planners and theorists to contribute to an understanding of how to work within this complexity.

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