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**Making the Unfamiliar Familiar: Research Journeys towards Understanding Migration and Place.**

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*Abstract: Understanding the ways people respond to place in an intercultural context is a rich and rewarding process. The knowledge-discovery journey can involve different modes of transport and multiple and various routes. The qualitative vehicle, although soft in its steering and often circular in direction, provides opportunities to explore landscapes that one rarely sees in single trajectory intellectual travel. This paper, using hermeneutics and phenomenology with a particular focus on metaphors and tropes, will describe a number of conceptual journeys related to researching the experience of migration. It will explore the difficult state of being 'between place' and how this becomes manifest in real places. The journeys show that only by traveling circuitously can one arrive at a multi-faceted form of awareness of the experience of migration and place.*

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## **Making the Unfamiliar Familiar: Research Journeys towards Understanding Migration and Place**

### **Introduction**

Understanding migration and place is becoming increasingly urgent in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century where information technology has enabled a globalised form of communication, within which ‘spin doctors’ manipulate the conceptualization of issues and images of people. In this era of misinformation, rapidly and pervasively disseminated, research which delves deeply into inter-cultural human concerns is critically important.

This paper explores how qualitative research methods can be used in inter-cultural research. It focuses on researching the way migrants relate to place, both places of origin and new places. It suggests that different qualitative research methods are needed in order to reveal the complex and multifaceted ways the experience of migration is related to sense of place.

Researching the depth of meaning involved in such issues means that researchers need to leave the spaces of certainty associated with Cartesian ‘knowledge’ and entering a confusing ‘thirdspace’ of liminality, interpenetration and negotiations (Soja,1996). In inter-cultural research, ‘thirdspace’ questions Cartesian binaries such as ‘mainstream’ and ‘marginal’. Instead, it is a space with porous boundaries where there is slippage between concepts and a myriad of contradictions requiring constant negotiation. This is not a safe research place. To research in this space involves taking methodological ‘risks’.

As qualitative researchers, even rigorous forms of coding and triangulation can only address certain aspects of inter-cultural research. To work inter-culturally, one has to deal with a double subjective, one’s own subjectivity and the subjectivity within other cultural groups. One has to leave a well-lit research space where, through immersion in data, one can see emerging patterns, and enter the black box of the psyche. To shed light in such a space, one needs to draw from the creative skills of artists as well as profound but often contradictory positions held by philosophers.

The paper argues that inter-cultural research, particularly as it relates to place, if it is to be inclusive, cannot rest solely within tried and tested methodologies. Answers derived this way will always be partial. The paper is presented in three sections, described as 'journeys'. The first section discusses a number of challenging aspects about understanding place in terms of inter-culturalism. In the second and third sections, two examples of the author's research in Australia are used to explain the layering of values about places that occur as a result of migration. The second section is a broad comparative study of an inner city suburb of Sydney, where qualitative coding methods were used with Greek, Lebanese and Vietnamese migrants. The third section is a deeper hermeneutic study using one cultural group and the ways their place values have been translated to Australia.

### **Turbulent Theoretical Journeys: Negotiating Contested Positions.**

To begin, there are theoretical challenges. There are multiple ways of studying place, added to which, values about places are often contested. This paper suggests that an understanding of how places reflect the experience of migration needs to focus on those theoretical areas that address sense of place, belonging, knowing one's place and the cultural complexity found in Australian places.

#### *Sense of Place*

'Sense of place' in Australia is a highly contested concept, ranging from pre-history, history, aesthetics and meanings (Armstrong,2001) and yet it is the trope that many use to describe why they value a place. Confining ourselves just to the twentieth century, studies into sense of place, although located in the main in humanistic studies, have varied in their approach, initially within cultural geography where sense of place was linked to places rich in the history of human contact (Sauer,1925) and atavistic experiences (Appleton,1975), later in architectural history where theorists sought to explicate elements of place (Norberg-Schulz,1980), and more recently in cultural studies where the focus is on meanings embedded in place (Cosgrove & Daniels,1988, Carter,1992).

There are also debates about whether sense of place refers to local places or places of world significance where sense of place is conflated with aesthetics of landscape derived from the ancient concept of *genius loci* or spirit of place where superhuman forces have created places of awe and wonder (Andrews,1999). This position has been challenged by the new critical cultural geographers drawing from the philosophical works of Heidegger whose writings about everyday life or ‘being-in-the-world’ indicated that humble and familiar places were seen to embody an equally profound sense of place (Heidegger,1953). Other philosophers, particularly Bourdieu (1990) and Lefebvre (1991) and humanistic geographers such as Relph (1976) likewise have provided important insights about how to understand valued places that reflect our everyday lives.

If sense of place can include such divergent phenomena as spectacular landscapes, places which are rich in allegory, history and heritage, as well as places that reflect our everyday lived world, how then do we encompass this spectrum of values when we undertake inter-cultural research?

### ***Belonging***

Another way of thinking about conceptual journeys related to place is to consider the phenomenon of ‘belonging’. How do we belong in a place? How does a sense of belonging persist in a rapidly changing world? Again philosophers such as Heidegger and Bourdieu, have tried to explicate concepts such as Heidegger’s (1953) hermeneutic exploration of ‘being-in-the-world’ and Bourdieu’s (1990) structural-semiotic analysis of the traditions of *habitus* as ways to explain a sense of belonging or dwelling. Today many writers about urbanism (Sudjic,1992, Zukin,1995) consider concepts of ‘belonging in place’ urgently need to be understood because ‘belonging’ has become a confused concept under the homogeneity of globalization, to which can be added plight of recent refugees fleeing their homelands in order to find new places in which to dwell. Thus the concept of ‘belonging’ is particularly pertinent to migration studies.

Qualitative researchers also have issues about belonging. To understand the world of the people we research, it is suggested that we need to participate in their world. We need to

dwell in the life-worlds of our participants subjectively and in the process change our language from 'they' to 'we' (Herda,1999:79).

### *Knowing One's Place.*

Within the concept of belonging, there is also the trope of knowing one's place. In place studies, this usually involves identifying the qualities that we value in our localities; however other aspects of the trope include experiencing marginality (Shields,1991) or individuals searching for identity through deep introspective journeys about place (Jellico,1983). For many, such internal journeys can be filled with fear as much as they can be safe and familiar; topophilia and topophobia co-existing in disconcerting and uncanny ways. The sense of the 'uncanny' has opened new ways of understanding place, evident in the writings of Vidler (1992) and Gelder & Jacobs (1998).

### *Cultural Complexity and Place*

Knowing one's place becomes much more complex, however, when one is dealing with colonized places or places generated by successive waves of different migrant groups. In colonized/occupied places such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the occupiers, unlike the indigenous owners, do not have ancient or continuous connections with place. Their conceptual journeys about place tend to be bi-cultural where there is a sense of place related to the 'fatherland' or 'mother' country and another sense of place related to the new place. How long does this persist? Until the 1970s in Australia, four generations of Australian children were brought up with the childhood literature of England evoking a palpable nostalgia for a place never visited. This is in strong contrast to the original peoples of these countries with their place-based oral cultures.

If we continue to focus on Australia, the cultural relationship to place is far more complex than biculturalism. As a country with one of the largest immigration programs in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia has multi-layers of cultural complexity. How do we begin to understand what sense of place means to the many migrant groups who have lived in Australia since the 1940s? How long is a migrant's conceptual journey about place? How long does a migrant occupy the 'space-in-

between' places? In this 'thirdspace' of 'betweenness' and hybridity, what kinds of conceptual changes occur as a result of living in the new country? *And more importantly why do we need to know?*

The last question is most important because understanding people and place helps us rethink what is happening in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world and perhaps provides us with conceptual assistance to research in areas that relate to control of changes to place rather than witnessing, after the event, the impact on communities and place as a result of late-capitalism and globalization. If we could understand more about how we relate to 21<sup>st</sup> century 'place' – our dwelling environments and where we belong – then perhaps we could come up with new ways of dwelling, such as more humane 'community of strangers' in public places (Greenbie,1981) or 'dwelling places of connectedness' in local places (Armstrong,2003).

#### **'Wicked Problems' in Cross Cultural Research**

Research into these areas needs to draw from the inherent creativity and subjectivity in qualitative processes because these are 'wicked' problems (Comerio,1990, Schon,1983). There are often hidden ambiguities within inter-cultural research, particularly studies about migration.

Nikos Papastergiades, in his book *The Turbulence of Migration* (2000) states that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century '*the experience of movement [of people] has produced novel forms of belonging and stimulating shifts in our contemporary culture*' (2000:5). Unlike the post WWII migration program, the significance of migration in 21<sup>st</sup> century society is different and will not be understood if it is limited to studies of physical movement and social settlement. Studies in this area require re-invigorated qualitative research methods which allow researchers to take more risks conceptually. Papastergiades points out that there is a restlessness in modern society so that the boundaries, or what defines a community, as well as a more general sense of belonging, have changed radically. Are current research methods adequate for such issues?

Papastergiades' work reflects Bhabha's (1990) challenges about simplistic concepts of 'the excluded other' in that he maintains explanations of 20<sup>th</sup> century migration, for example in Australia, have led to two questionable stereotypes; the migrant as victim and representations of the migrant from a fixed repertoire of stereotypes reflecting places of origin.

This author supports Papastergiades' critique of the concept of 'the migrant as victim', instead research has shown the high degree of agency and self-determination in migrants arriving in Australia from the 1950s on (Armstrong,2000). However, the paper questions Papastergiades' second position and suggests the potency of the culture of the country of origin in determining much of the responses to and making of place in the new country can not be dismissed. As well, the issues today contrast with research in the 1990s on Post WWII migrants because, to quote Papastergiades (2000:19), '*migration has never been so multidirectional...and the experience of displacement has never been as multidimensional as it is today*'.

Papastergiades talks of the transformative effect of the journey. The journey and the figure of the stranger for many cultural theorists is a metaphor for modernity. As the post-structural literary theorist, Iain Chambers (1994), points out it is the migrant who exemplifies the modern metropolitan figure. The metaphor of transforming journeys is richly explored by many contemporary artists. Hermeneutic analyses of the art works of Imants Tillers and Juan Davila (Australian artists with migrant background) as well as Aboriginal artists such as Gordon Bennett, Tracey Moffatt and Lin Onus, are as insightful about inter-culturalism as the writings of contemporary philosophy.

### **A Research Question: How Is The Turbulence Of Migration Inscribed In The Landscape?**

By using migration studies as a way of understanding inter-culturalism, one can ask 'is the experience of migration inscribed in the landscape?' To return to the metaphor of the journey, Papastergiades(2000:11) questions the focus on migration as having a beginning

and end, rather he suggests it is an *'interminable process'* where migrants oscillate between different states, coming to rest within a form of hybrid identity.

Through studying migration it can be seen that cultures do not need to take root in one place but *'fragments of culture can survive in multiple places, [and] cultural meanings may leap across generations and transform themselves across the gaps of time'* (Papastergiades,2000:123). The experience of migration and how it is evident beyond vernacular places deserves deeper study. As Papastergiades (2000:123) suggests and the third section of this paper shows there is a certain *'resilience of the old in the form of the new'*. There is an *'unconscious repetition of previous habits in current practices'* which becomes a *'subtle translation of traditional values in contemporary norms'*. Such tantalizing research threads and *'subtle translations'* are explored in the third section of this paper.

Globalization and the *'deterritorialization of culture'* pose new questions for research on migration and *'place'*. Papastergiades (2000:105) suggests that conventional studies of culture and identity obscure the porous boundaries between groups. As a challenge to current research, he states *'classical ethnographic definitions of culture now seem inadequate to the task of explaining the current flows between diasporic and dominant cultural formations'* (2000:105).

Papastergiades (2000:111) explores the intersection of cultures stating *'attention to the slippage and non-correspondence between cultural codes does not suggest that the process of exchange is undermined by difference.'* Rather, the differences that remain can work as catalysts to reach for *'unexpected horizons'*. His question *'How can traditions mutate in order to be meaningful across generations which are separated not only in a temporal perspective but also in vastly different relationships to place?'* (2000:121) is revealed in intriguing and unexpected ways in the third section of this paper.



### **Journeys as Research Exploration – language, cross-culturalism and translation**

Journeys as a metaphor for research exploration, particularly inter-cultural research, raise important issues about language and translation. Qualitative researchers have mined language as the vehicle for understanding, however when working with migrant groups, one uses language differently, becoming familiar with the cadences and rhythms of a language in translation and the particular figures of speech or tropes used by different cultural groups. But it is the significance of discourse and narrative that is essential to bring out in inter-cultural research. The ‘throwness’ that Heidegger (Herda,1999) describes becomes even more important if one is trying to communicate in a second language and from a different cultural background. Drawing from Heidegger’s belief that humans dwell in language, the qualitative researcher, Herda (1999:61), points out that in the act of speaking, two concurrent phenomena occur, the actual utterance which is a linguistic communication but, as well, there is the person’s ‘internal history’ or the layers of self that shape the way the utterance is delivered. Inter-cultural communication requires some understanding of this internal history. Just as in psychoanalytic and contemporary art theories, it is the use of metaphors and tropes that provides views into such internal histories.

Translation raises another set of issues. It is not the mere communication of meaning from one language to another, rather translation can be seen as a ‘*dynamic interaction within which conceptual boundaries are expanded and residual differences respected*’ (Papastergiades,2000:131). The translation presented in this paper is a research journey investigating the translocation of culture and how it becomes manifest in a new place. But there is also the phenomenon of how the experience of migration becomes translated into places, both as physical artifacts and as values and memories.

In this first section, the discussion has merely opened the door to the complex and slippery concepts that need to be worked with in research on migration and place. In the next two sections, two different research processes or journeys are discussed to bring out some contradictory concepts and to convey the open-endedness of this work; initially a

sweeping horizontal journey, a comparative study, followed by a deep vertical journey penetrating many layers of meaning.

### **The Horizontal Journey.**

The horizontal journey was circuitous and involved a number of people, including members of the Greek, Lebanese, Vietnamese communities. The journey is described as horizontal because, as a comparative study, it covered a wide conceptual area, with continuous loops backwards and forwards. The journey was undertaken in a well-tested qualitative research vehicle, i.e. focus groups and coded textual analyses. It began by determining what mainstream culture valued in places. This was done through an examination of all the heritage studies of localities done by local government since it became a formal planning requirement in Australia in 1980 (Armstrong,1990). A review of a decade of studies plus an intensive survey of local government planners indicated that the only understanding of heritage places by the early 1990s was an Anglo-Celtic one, with some acknowledgement of Aboriginal prehistory and natural environmental heritage, these two being linked together. But no mention of other cultural groups was evident in the studies or the survey responses. A comparative study in one inner city Municipality in Sydney, Marrickville, renown for its cultural complexity since the 1940s, was then undertaken (Armstrong,1994). This involved using the study undertaken by heritage planning consultants and reviewing its conclusions with three migrant groups who represented a time line of migration; 1950s, the Greeks, 1970s, the Lebanese, and 1980s, the Vietnamese. Through a process of semi-structured discussions, the heritage places were reconsidered in terms of the migrant groups' lived experiences of Marrickville, namely being a migrant in an Australian city.

A cultural landscape reading of the migrant experience in Marrickville supports Lowenthal's observation that in Australia, heritage is represented less by '*generational continuity*' than by '*tableaux of discrete moments*' (Lowenthal,1990:15). Another contribution to understanding comes from Relph's (1976) work on different levels of empathy associated with places. Marrickville provided the static setting, whereas the life-world experiences of the Greek, Lebanese and Vietnamese migrants living in

Marrickville provided insights into activities in the place. The phenomenological process of working with descriptions given by different migrant groups allows the ‘*unselfconscious intentionality*’ involved in place-making to be understood (Relph,1976:43).

As the main intention of this paper is to discuss inter-cultural research methods, sadly much of the richness of all the data gathered has been condensed into just a few stories. The stories have been selected to show aspects of the research methods rather than to record migration to Australia from 1950-1970s. Greek data is used to provide an overview of themes and Lebanese data to explore inter-generational perspectives. Only a summary of Vietnamese themes is included but their stories are equally rich and revealing.

The research process began with the 1950s migrants, a Greek group, residing in Marrickville. Using orthodox research methods (Strauss & Corbin,1990), textual data derived from transcriptions of the group discussions were coded into themes which encompassed the phenomena embedded in the experience of migration. Table 1 summarises the themes; a distillation of the rich data. Selected themes and associated phenomena, all of which were linked to places, are briefly explored in terms of the points made earlier, in particular the contradictions in concepts of marginality, the unselfconscious expressions of *habitus*, and the difficult concept of ‘belonging’.

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Phenomena</b>
<b>Perceptions of the New Country</b>	Heritage as a pioneering spirit New Worlds as lands of opportunity
<b>Being a Migrant</b>	The language barrier Hardship and humiliation Assimilation
<b>Settling -in</b>	Establishing essentials. Sustaining cultural life. Creating new Greek places
<b>Emerging Place Values in Australia</b>	Greek heritage as a gift to Australian culture. Earlier Greek pioneers. Belonging

Table 1: Greek Migrants’ Themes  
Source: Armstrong, 2000:149

## **Perceptions of the New Country**

Briefly, 'perceptions of the new country' and the phenomena 'the heritage of a pioneering spirit' and 'New Worlds as lands of opportunity' highlight the issues of imagined communities explored by Anderson and Gale (1992) where members of the Greek group describe themselves as imagined pioneers in an emerging nation (Armstrong,2000). As explained later, this contrasts with how the Lebanese saw Australia.

## **Being a Migrant in Australia in the 1950s**

The second major theme relates to the range of phenomena associated with being a migrant in Australia in the 1950s. These include 'experiencing the language barrier', 'hardship and humiliation', and 'experiences resulting from enforced assimilation'.

### ***The Language Barrier***

The phenomenon of being isolated by language is true for many migrants. Different members of the Greek group described how the isolation of the language barrier persisted long after first arrival. Descriptions of the value of Marrickville emerged as a place where one could speak Greek in shops and in the street and feel free from the sense of isolation. It would appear the sense of stigma associated with marginality was eased in enclaves where the language of the marginal group was the dominant one (Shields,1991).

### ***Hardship and Humiliation***

Many of the group spoke of the hardship of having to leave everything behind, starting with nothing; and working long hours in factories regardless of qualifications. The phenomenon of 'humiliation' is closely associated with the phenomenon of hardship. The image and stigma of marginality was compounded by rural people working and living in poor urban conditions. As Shields (1991) points out, this stigma destabilises the migrants' former sense of identity in their home country.

The research issue was how such experiences of humiliation and hard work could be expressed as place values? While Relph's (1976) 'empathetic insideness' allows for emotional involvements with places, it is not clear whether this includes negative

emotions. A more pertinent representation of these experiences lies with Low's (1992:166) typology of place attachments where negative experiences of place fit into her '*linkage through loss of land or destruction of continuity*' .

### ***Assimilation***

The phenomenon of assimilation is highly complex. All the migrants of the 1950s experienced enforced assimilation due to government policies (Jupp,1996). As a result, the places associated with experiences related to this policy form part of the 1950-1960s migrants' cultural heritage in Australia. Interestingly, the migrants did not perceive themselves as assimilated, rather they felt acclimatised.

Their comments provide an enlightening insight into the fact that, for this group, white Australians were also seen as migrants and therefore to the Greeks, Australians had a similar 'existential outsider' status in the new country (Relph,1976). Allied with this, the sense of frontierism, which the Greeks considered to be a shared phenomenon with Australians, was an important aspect of place-making for the migrants of the 1950s. If mainstream Australians were also migrants and equal partners at the frontier, this suggests an intriguing paradox about who is in 'positional superiority' (Said,1978).

The phenomenon of assimilation is highly complex, but for the purposes of this study, official assimilation resulted in migrants concealing places which reflected their different cultural practices. Drawing from Bourdieu's concept of '*habitus*' which argues that '*spatial practices are cultural structures*' (Bourdieu in Shields,1991:32), the assimilation process involved the migrant groups in a process where they came to understand the *habitus* and *dispositions* of the mainstream culture and the required codes of spatial behaviour in the context of social situations in the 1950s.

### **Settling In: Establishing Essentials**

The third major theme, settling in to the new country, is most significant in terms of sense of place. How people affiliate themselves and adapt to new situations involves processes which transform 'space' into 'place' by embedding culturally meaningful symbols into shared environments (Low,1992). The discourse about their lived-in-the-world

experiences revealed that for the Greek group there was a particular sequence of phenomena which reflects attempts to re-instate their *habitus*. Their cultural structure or *habitus* generated the impetus to make the unfamiliar Australian environment into a version of their everyday life in Greece, however, *habitus* is not only durable, it is also malleable (Shields,1991). As a result the qualities of everyday life became mediated in the process of acclimatization, forming new hybridities.

From discourses about the process of settling in, a rich tapestry of places, both hidden and obvious, was revealed that told the story of being a Greek migrant in Australia in the 1950s.

### **Emerging Place Values in the New Country**

The final major theme consisted of a number of phenomena, each of which is highly reflective, revealing the complexity of place attachment for migrants in the host country. Low (1992) indicates that for place attachment to occur there must be a symbolic relationship between the group and the place. In terms of the Greeks in Marrickville although there are shared experiences in places, it would appear that there was an ambiguous attitude to attachment. Phenomena associated with this theme include 'Greek heritage as a gift to Australian culture', 'earlier Greek pioneers', and the phenomenon of 'belonging'.

#### ***Greek Heritage as a Gift to Australian Culture***

The phenomenon of Greek heritage as a gift to Australian culture was apparent in the consistent discourse on pride about being Greek. Greg, a member of the group, pointed out that although there have been important Australian influences on him, the Greeks have influenced Australians. He expanded on this by pointing out that the Greeks changed their houses, changed the suburbs they lived in and created a more cosmopolitan atmosphere and that now Marrickville had '*the spirit of the Greeks*' (Armstrong,2000:165). Such a trope is laden with significance and deserves a return research journey to explore this in depth.

### *Belonging*

The phenomenon, 'belonging', reveals a dilemma for all migrants. Divided loyalties immediately become obvious when migrants are asked about whether evidence of their presence in Australia is sufficiently important to be considered Australian-Greek heritage. As Chambers (1994:3) indicates, being a migrant involves a discontinuous state of being and a 'journey of restless interrogation'. This divided sense of belonging suggests concepts of *habitus* are more complex than making the unfamiliar familiar. The state of being-in-the-world as an 'inter-cultural' persists, possibly over generations.

Changing times result in different attitudes to migrants. The horizontal research journey included migrants arriving in the 1970s, the Lebanese, and 1980s, the Vietnamese. These comparisons were not only inter-cultural, they also revealed what is common for all migrants, what is culturally-specific, and what varies as a result of changing attitudes within the mainstream culture.

#### **The Lebanese in Marrickville.**

The Lebanese group provided invaluable insights into the migrant experience for children. Most Lebanese came to Australia in one of three waves; the 1890s, the 1950s, or the 1970s. The 1970s third wave resulted in a massive increase in the Lebanese in Australia. They were refugees, predominantly Muslim, who were fleeing civil war. Typically Muslim Lebanese came as large inter-generational families. Thus places reflecting the Lebanese migration experience included schools, local swimming pools and local parks. The discourse about life-world experiences as Lebanese migrants confirmed similar themes to those of the Greek migrants, Table 2 summarises the themes and phenomena.

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Phenomena</b>
<b>Perceptions of the New Country</b>	Expecting Manhattan
<b>Being a Migrant-as an Adolescent Girl</b>	The language barrier. Young motherhood.
<b>Being a Migrant – as an Adolescent Boy</b>	School harassment Adolescent leisure
<b>Settling In</b>	The role of the scout Creating an enclave Sustaining cultural life
<b>Emerging Place Values in Australia</b>	Valuing Australian built heritage Frontierism Egalitarianism Pragmatism

Table 2: Lebanese Migrants' Themes  
Source: Armstrong, 2000:169.

## **Perceptions of the New Country**

### *Expecting Manhattan*

The phenomenological perceptions of a 'First World' country reveal some interesting contradictions about who patronises whom. Just as the Greeks in the 1950s had certain perceptions about Australia which were dispelled soon after arrival, so too did the young Lebanese. They expected to find a Manhattan-like city of high-rise buildings. Instead from the plane they saw a low-density sprawling city of cottages with red tiled roofs. A member of the focus group, Hassan, arriving at age 15, expressed his disappointment. *'I was disappointed, which is true. Because I am coming to an industrial country, I am going to see Manhattan or something.'* Whereas Ali and the others were more intrigued. Ali states,

*My impression is when I first landed in Australia, when I am still up in the sky – because I came from [a] city and I was living in high flats, I said “Gees, this is meant to be an old city – you know- you see where is the, where is the buildings?” [group laughter]. ‘It is like a village!’ Hala exclaimed. Ali continued ‘When you think of Sydney, you think “Ah, Australia, this is a modern country – straight away you think high-rises, flats and apartments and all that” – and I was so surprised’(Armstrong,2000:170).*

Beirut and Tripoli are compact cities made up of 10-12 storey apartments and commercial buildings. This was the group's concept of an 'old city' whereas essentialist



imaginings of modern industrial countries appear to be modelled on North American cities of high-rise buildings.

### **Being Migrants as Adolescents**

As with the Greek migrants, the second theme that emerged from the Lebanese group's life-world experiences related to phenomena associated with 'being migrants in Australia'. For this group, however, phenomena reflected young adolescent experiences in the 1970s.

#### ***Being an Adolescent Lebanese Girl: the Language Barrier.***

The young Lebanese adolescents who came to Marrickville were expected to learn English quickly so that they could act as interpreters for their parents. The expectation that children would learn English at school and thus teach their parents was an early immigration policy of the Australian Government (Murphy,1993). Memories reveal how distressing this was. As adolescent girls, Zawat and Inaam described their high school experiences. Zawat reminisced.

*We dress nicely to [go] to school – people teasing you, pulling my hair. You didn't know what to say. I used to cry a lot. But my brother[Ali] used to push me all the time [saying] "one day you have to take your kids to the doctor. There are things you have to learn." I wanted to stay home and not go back.*

Inaam added,

*...When we went to high school it was really hard because we couldn't understand the language very well and yet they gave us all the assignments to do and all that - and we didn't know what we were doing - and like, there wasn't anyone that could help us or that we could turn to. I didn't finish high school because I found it really hard to struggle, because of my language. To be in high school, even kids that are born here, they find it hard. Imagine the people that didn't understand the language. I used to hate it ... I left school. (Armstrong,2000:172)*

Others have researched the impact of school on migrant children. . Eva Hoffman (1987:105) describes how school experiences for migrant girls often involved the loss of one's name,

*... these new appellations, which we ourselves can not yet pronounce, are not us. They are identification tags, disembodied signs pointing to objects that*

happen to be my sister and myself. We walk to our seats, into a room of unknown faces, with names that make us strangers to ourselves.

The schools where the young Lebanese experienced such hardship and humiliation have similar social heritage significance to the factories for Greek migrants of the 1950s. They are heritage sites laden with memories of pain.

### ***Being an Adolescent Lebanese Girl: Young Motherhood.***

As a result of school difficulties and their relatively restricted lives, girls left school early and worked in family-owned shops until they made early marriages and started having children. The local neighbourhood and baby health centre became a place where young women could meet. As young mothers, they joined existing Greek knitting and sewing clubs, also in the centre. Zawat explained,

*... we used to come here [the centre] – I mean all the women and get the kids like a playgroup and we used to do sewing, knitting. But [it] was for the Greeks not the Lebanese ... I used to come here, twice a week ... But now they don't have it because the Greeks didn't come and we lost it' (Armstrong,2000:173).*

Descriptions of how young Lebanese women followed Greek women bring out Pratt's concept of intersecting grids of difference. Pratt (1998:27) claims that places are not bounded, but permeable. She points out that the desire to map place as bounded ignores the fact that places inter-connect over time. As a result, she is suspicious about mapping cultures onto place, because multiple cultures can inhabit a single place both at the same time or sequentially.

### ***Being an Adolescent Lebanese Boy: School Harassment.***

Phenomena associated with being a Lebanese boy in Marrickville in the 1970s included similar language difficulties and similar discrimination. Fred described his introduction to high school in Marrickville.

*At school hardly anyone speaks your language – only three or four people and they are all in different classes – other kids, they all had long hair. I had short hair – they start picking on me. First day [they] picked a fight of my shoes with high heels. They weren't in fashion here. Four to five picked on them –[I] slapped him –[they say I] fight like a woman. [They] hit my head on the locker... only stay at school three months (Armstrong2000:174).*

Fred’s story, like Inaam’s and Zawat’s, is painful but the pain is deeper than physical taunts. Richard Rodriguez (1983:28), a US migrant from Mexico, describes how the process of going to school and learning English, the public language, meant the loss of his intimate home language. These descriptions add further weight to schools as heritage sites of social significance, showing how migrant adolescents suffered hardship, humiliation and profound displacements associated with being ‘between language’ (Kaplan,1994:63).

Phenomena related to adolescent leisure for boys were different in that they had more freedom in their leisure time. Interestingly, the swimming pool became a gathering place for young male Lebanese adolescents. Sam and Ali explained the significance of Marrickville Pool for Lebanese men and boys.

*Marrickville swimming pool is really- is really - heritage for us. Because when we came in 1977, a large group of youth came at the same time ... and they came to Marrickville... to the area surrounding this swimming pool. And there were at least fifty young male people go there at a time. Marrickville Pool was the Lebanese pool, really! ... It is a heritage thing ... the Marrickville Pool. By the way, it used to be the Lebanese Pool, now it is ... the Indo-Chinese Pool [Vietnamese] ... Each generation [of migrants] they will enjoy this little swimming pool (Armstrong,2000:175).*

Unfortunately, there is not the space to discuss the other Lebanese themes or the Vietnamese experiences which were both similar and different as a result of culture and benign attitudes to migrants in Australia in the late 1970s. Table 3 has been included to show the comparative themes and phenomena for the Vietnamese group. Each phenomenon relates to specific places.

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Phenomena</b>
<b>Being Vietnamese in Australia</b>	Being spiritual people Vietnamese warrior inheritance
<b>Being in Exile.</b>	Fleeing the home country Selecting Australia Remaining separate
<b>Pioneering the Vietnamese presence in Australia</b>	The pragmatism of exile Locating first communities Creating community
<b>Keeping Community Together</b>	Growth of organizations

	Accommodating Unification Celebrating Vietnamese events
<b>Marrickville as a Vietnamese Place</b>	Site of Transition Heritage as culture rather than place.

Table 3: Vietnamese Migrants' Themes - Source: Armstrong,2000:194.

The horizontal journey resulted in an interesting typology of places which describe migration to Australia, however understanding inter-cultural values about place are much more complex than generic categories. As Herda (1999:19) points out in her discussion about *Research Conversations and Narrative*, qualitative approaches to research such as grounded theory, ethnography, and case histories where language is used to present life worlds is essentially located in logical positivism. It is a Cartesian approach which presumes that law-like generalizations will be discovered in the data and that these can be the basis of deductive explanations and predictions. Through Grounded Theory the author was able to saturate the categories of phenomena and establish significance. From this research one could say that there were places in the urban landscape which reflected the experience of migration to Australia, but such conclusions seemed to be somewhat brittle, given the richness of the data.

As a result a second research journey was undertaken. This journey, called a vertical journey, was undertaken to gain a deeper, culturally-specific understanding of how culture is transformed in the new country. The challenge was to find a way to interpret migrants' cultural heritage as living heritage using hermeneutics to achieve deeper engagement.

### **The Vertical Journey**

Unlike the horizontal journey, this deep journey, in the best Humanities tradition, produces as many questions as it does answers. Using hermeneutics as a form of research investigation is particularly pertinent when meanings encountered are not immediately understandable. In the first journey, phenomena were derived from people's unstructured descriptions of their experiences. These phenomena were then used heuristically to show relationships between people, experience of migration, and place comparatively.

In the second journey, a form of ‘gleaning’ of meanings occurred (Herda,1999:46). But before starting, the journey’s direction was not clear. First, which hermeneutic theory? Were layers of meaning to be uncovered as Dilthey would suggest, namely by staying outside the text using a form of Cartesian logic (Herda,1999:52). Or was the researcher trying to study the nature of ‘being-in-the-world of migration’ – a Heideggerian approach? Heidegger’s discussion on human ties to history suggests that there is an ‘inauthentic’ and an ‘authentic’ being-in-the-world, which in this study is called an ‘unselfconscious’ and a ‘self-conscious’ existence. The ways in which the focus groups were structured in the horizontal journey brought out aspects of ‘unselfconscious’ being-in-the-world.

In contrast, Heidegger calls an ‘authentic’ existence one which is free of ‘lostness’. This is not a state of being outside the world we occupy. Instead it is closely engaged with understanding. *‘The authentic individual grasps the cultural past as a heritage...a shared or communal destiny’* (Dreyfus & Hall, 1992:10-11). Heidegger describes the relation of the authentic individual to the past in terms of an openness to the possibilities this holds. He suggests that we are always choosing from the range of cultural possibilities within our cultural background.

By interpreting interactive and in-depth discussions about culture and place, it is possible to see different perceptions of cultural identity. In some cases this evolves out of everyday life, in other cases, it is the continuity of ancient cultural myths, expressions of which become altered in the new country. In this study, the hermeneutic process became a group process, designed as formalised steps which employ the hermeneutic circle (Patton,1990). By moving around the continuous circle of interrogation where understanding parts enables understanding of the whole, further facilitating understanding of the parts, a sense of coherence and depth emerges. For such analyses, analogies, metaphors and tropes play a key role.

Metaphors can be most effective when they appear incongruous. As Geertz (1973:210) points out, metaphor has *‘a stratification of meaning, in which an incongruity of sense on*

*one level, produces an influx of significance on another*'. By engaging analytically with metaphors one can uncover significant meanings, particularly in a discursive environment where statements can be explored reflectively.

Clearly the nature of the discursive environment becomes paramount. Given the subtlety of the issues involved, it was considered legitimate to build on familiarity with the project by using one of the discussion groups used in the comparative study. The Greek group was not considered appropriate because there were language difficulties for some of the elderly members. It was decided not to use the Vietnamese group because the settling process has not yet become thickened by time. Thus through a process of elimination, the Lebanese group was deemed suitable, providing cohesion, familiarity with the concepts and the added advantage of working across generations. This was possible because the extended family structure allowed the inclusion of some non-English speaking parents.

A particularly fascinating aspect of this work related to how unselfconscious actions, drawn from many centuries of cultural practice, intersect with a new culture, issues highlighted by Papastergiades earlier. To render such unselfconscious actions explicit required a new set of discussions which allowed for understanding to unfold with time. As Herda (1999:57) points out '*Human understanding is circular...Understanding does not take place in a culminated achievement but is an unfolding in time*'. Based on the specific fields of knowledge needed for hermeneutic analyses in this study, four meetings were designed, each intended to deepen interpretations but also to provide multiple ways of seeing. This is summarised in Table 4.

<b>The Meeting Sequence</b>
Meeting One: Understanding Heritage Concepts
Meeting Two: Mapping Lebanese Places in Australia
Meeting Three Heritage as Cultural Practice and living Traditions
Meeting Four: Interpreting Heritage Significance of Lebanese Places in Australia.

Table 4: The Discussion Sequence, Source: Armstrong, 2000:227

In the following discourse analyses the key points emerging from the meetings were considered, first as simple dialogue, then in terms of layers of significance. As well the meetings were examined as ‘reflections-in and on-action’ (Schon,1983). Thus there are two processes happening, one the interpretation of Lebanese heritage places in Australia, the other a critical review-in-action of the effectiveness of the process.

### **Meeting One: Understanding Heritage Concepts**

Understanding the concept of heritage is already complex (Lowenthal,1996). Research shows that values of heritage and place are often conflated with concepts of culture and identity and that most Australian heritage theory has Eurocentric biases (Armstrong,1989). Thus if cross-cultural examples are introduced into an already hazy set of values, it become essential to identify the specific cultural context within which heritage concepts are located.

### **Understanding Lebanese Cultural Heritage**

Discussions about the special heritage of Lebanon revealed two categories, both related to places; those places remembered as part of their everyday life in Lebanon and places embodying appropriately ‘noble’ qualities.

#### ***Heritage as Everyday Places in Lebanon***

Many of the places discussed reveal how closely they are integrated with life in the Lebanese landscape and as a result are less able to be directly translocated to the new country. Using only one example, Sam explained the significance of the ‘coffee houses’ as,

*... the value of these men's ‘coffees’ [houses] is that they are very simple - very humble - everyone can go and they play traditional -very, very old games ... There is a ‘coffee’ in Tripoli that I would like to be considered heritage. This is very old ... it goes back to the Ottoman Empire (Armstrong,2000:229)*

For Sam, heritage places needed to be old and have significant history. In trying to explain the significance of the coffee houses, the group drew an analogy with the ‘Aussie

pub' where men relax after work. The trope 'Aussie pub' provides an insight into the cultural benchmarks the group used for everyday places in Australia.

### ***Heritage as Lebanese Cultural Inheritance***

Because of the strategic location of Lebanon on the Mediterranean Sea, many of the places described evoked the sense of ancient traditions. Inaam left Tripoli aged nine. As she grew up in Australia, she was constantly drawn to the image of the 'fort' on Lebanese money. She explained,

*... it was printed on the Lebanese money... To me that is the heritage. Coffee lounges and things like that, they are sort of common; but with the Fort, it is very rare. (Armstrong,2000:230)*

For Inaam, heritage places needed to be noble and rare, echoing traditional concepts of heritage derived from antiquarianism. Sam, however, saw heritage value in the meanings places carried. He described the Port of Tripoli as having heritage significance because,

*... the Port is a place for us because this is where we departed Tripoli. It is also a place which had very historical periods. When we have wars, the Port is all the paths to escape and when there is peace ...[it is] the place people go to another island [for pleasure] (Armstrong,2000:232)*

Places of departure and arrival evoke strong significance in the migration experience. Description of changing meanings associated with the Port show how some places are layered with meaning including symbolic meanings.

### **Reflections-on-Action**

The key to this hermeneutic procedure is that everyone is engaged in the research process. Instead of the traditional hermeneutic approach where researchers work with completed texts, the vertical journey seeks to show the interactive and iterative process of working with spoken 'text' as a form of 'reflection-in-action'.

### **Mapping Lebanese Heritage in Australia**

Having set the context for perceptions of heritage by considering what was valuable in their home country, the group was then asked to focus on migrating to Australia, and how they saw the new place 'through Lebanese eyes.' The question was designed to assist the



group to reflect further about culturally-specific ways of seeing. Inaam was drawn to the implications and significance of 'seeing the world through Lebanese eyes'. She mused thoughtfully,

*... I just can't think off the top of my head, I have to think about it [more] because you are in two different cultures - you have to sort of adjust to one or other to be able to give the right answer. (Armstrong,2000:232).*

This evocative description of her state of transition was echoed by Sam who added concerns already expressed by the Greek group. He commented,

*This question raises the point - are you loyal to your culture as Lebanese or do you become different? As Lebanese you have the values of your family, your values as a man or woman. But you come to Australia and you find it is your life, because after the years, you get familiar with this society, to this way of living. So after years, you are becoming Australians and this is the hard part (Armstrong,2000:233).*

The phrase 'this is the hard part' implies both a sense of loss as well as the difficulty of being able to sustain a Lebanese world-view.

### **Reflecting-in and on-Action**

During the opening meeting, the group consistently reflected with the researcher about the process. In part, this was attributable to the shift in ownership of the project but it was also related to the fact that the group fully comprehended the research question. This confirms the value of inter-subjectivity in this research, namely, where the researcher, through empathy, seeks to understand the group, and the group is engaged in understanding the research. This interpersonal knowing transcends the gulf between 'insider' and 'outsider'.

The group constantly reviewed whether the process was achieving the goals. They assumed responsibility for the process by initiating discussions about the relevant language to be used, in particular the use of 'big words' when many Lebanese in Australia had been unable to complete school.

At other times, the group responded in a highly analytic mode, using analogies, tropes and metaphors to explain phenomena such as coffee houses being compared with the role

of the Australian pub. Thus by actively seeking to ensure that the researcher understood, they were taking on the role of experts in their field, namely, the knowledge of the phenomenon of 'being Lebanese'.

### ***Contextualizing the Australian -Lebanese.***

The next phase in this journey was to contextualize the Australian-Lebanese by bringing out the seamless presence of the Lebanese in Australia. This was achieved by encouraging the group to reflect on stories about the Lebanese who came before them. A further prompt was given by encouraging the group to discuss special Lebanese people in Australia. Through this process, it was hoped that the group would see the value of anecdotes as a way of revealing collective memories thus determining social heritage significance (Johnston,1992).

### ***Early Australian-Lebanese History***

The group considered the different Australian-Lebanese written histories were able to supply adequate contextual information, so they focused on the significance of special food given to travellers for the long journey by boat and the translocation of traditional village ways of trading.

Ali described the significance of food from the homeland indicating,

*...when they used to come ...the Mums and Dads used to give them a supporting life on the early trip via Alexandria through the Suez Canal ... one of them is 'shangleish' [the cheese] and the other is oregano.(Armstrong,2000:237)*

The metaphor 'supporting life' applied to special food given to the traveller is a symbol of family love. Likewise the trope 'Mums and Dads' implies the care and concern felt for migrants as they embarked on the journey. The need to find food with which one was familiar was a prime concern for migrating people.

### ***Special People***

Discussions about special people revealed different frames of reference between the researcher and the group. The researcher anticipated that they would talk about the

Australian-Lebanese writer, David Malouf, however they did not mention him. Instead they spoke of the Dahdah family because they ‘*owned the Penrith Panthers* [a football team]’ (Armstrong,2000:238). Content analyses of discussions highlighted that particular Lebanese families such as the Abboud, Gazal, Mansours, Scarfs, Dahdah, and Moubarak families were ‘special’ Lebanese people. Interestingly all these families were successful in the textile industry. The group suggested reasons for the Lebanese success in the clothing manufacture area could possibly be traced back to early traditions of silk production, but also to travelling traders who carried fabrics to Lebanese villages, a practice they continued as migrants.

According to the group, trading traditions, described by Sam as ‘*the Phoenician trading tradition*’, (Armstrong,2000:239) were continued in Australia by early Lebanese migrant families, who started trading as ‘hawkers’ in country areas in the early 1900s. The ‘Phoenician trading tradition’ is a trope heavily laden with multiple meanings. It implies ancient connections with the sea as well as exotic Middle East trade in spices and silks. Reflecting on this significance, Sam recognised the depth of cultural meaning embedded in this expression. He said,

*...one thing I would like to tell you – maybe deeper than history – is that in Lebanon, all the mountains used to be very famous in silk production – many thousands of years... (Armstrong,2000:239).*

### **Reflections-on-Action**

The recognition that there are phenomena that are ‘deeper than history’ raises intriguing hermeneutic possibilities. The heritage implications opened up by the discussion of ‘special people’, namely linking the current Lebanese involvement with textile and clothing manufacture with Lebanese silk heritage and Phoenician trading traditions, confirms the value of open-ended discussion. Hermeneutically it was possible to determine how these places had distinct Lebanese significance, rather than merely expressions of migration.

## **Interpreting Heritage Significance of Lebanese Places in Australia:**

### **Hermeneutic Reading of an Historically Valued Place.**

The aspect of Australian-Lebanese heritage, namely translocating the 'Phoenician trading tradition' to Australia and its transformation from the early 'hawkers' working in Australian country areas, to drapery shops in country towns and ultimately to the successful factories and retail outlets associated with heavy duty textile and clothing manufacture, was not easily addressed within the current heritage assessment procedures.

Valle and Halling(1989:55) discuss the process of transformations in qualitative interpretations. They suggest that this is accomplished by two processes, 'reflection and imaginative variation'. Reflection involves immersion in the concept, a process already clearly demonstrated. Imaginative variation requires that the researcher intentionally alter the meaning through imagination and analogy. Thus by intentionally altering the meaning of 'hawking' to 'Phoenician trading tradition', a cultural connection could be made between ancient cultural myths and contemporary everyday life in a new country. Drawing from this, it was possible to move from a trope, '*the Phoenician trading tradition*', to identifying places which embody this meaning in a new country.

Despite this, the group, as Lebanese, struggled with the concept of a clothing factory being a Lebanese heritage place. The group finally suggested that there should be an extra criterion of heritage significance for migrant places. Ali suggested it should be a place which reflected '*pride and success*' (Armstrong,2000:262), a concept strongly endorsed by the group. Because of the uncertainty about this aspect of Lebanese heritage, it was agreed that the prime researcher would consult an accepted leader of the Lebanese community whose family had been in Australia since the 1920s. He confirmed that the interpretations of Australian-Lebanese heritage by the group were correct and he identified the site of the first Lebanese clothing factory in Australia.

Thus the vertical journey included finding a 'language' to interpret migrant heritage by addressing three issues; the use of hermeneutics in migrant studies, inter-cultural

understandings of heritage and the development of an effective process to reveal the many layers of meaning involved in the experience of migration.

Hermeneutics is an art and skill as well as the theory of interpretations. In the process described, perceptions and meanings can shift as migrants move from one culture to another, but also ways of seeing can remain culturally-specific. This state of 'betweenness' is part of the 'language' needed to interpret migrant places. It is here that one can unravel the complexity of the experience of migration and the way this is manifest in certain places.

### **Conclusion**

The paper has argued that inter-cultural research, if it is to be inclusive and insightful, cannot rest solely within tried and tested methodologies. In explaining this, it has presented a comparative research project about migration and place which used accepted forms of qualitative research to derive a typology of places that tell the story of migration to Australia, in that the places embody various phenomena associated with making the unfamiliar host country become more familiar.

The outcomes of this research made a significant contribution to the understanding of migration and place in Australia in the mid 1990s. However, the richness of the data begged for deeper forms of exploration. Added to which, new theories about contemporary culture, including new writings about migration, suggested that the issues were far more complex and needed to be studied within the concepts of 'thirdspace' and 'hybridity'. New writings also suggested that there was a certain urgency for research into the contemporary plight of migrants. The challenge then lay in how to explore such issues.

This paper presents just one way to work at a deeper level with the topic, namely using hermeneutics. In presenting this research method, Heidegger's concepts of 'inauthentic' and 'authentic' states of being-in-the-world have revealed the significance of including

the people whose values are being researched into an 'authentic' engagement with the topic.

The paper has been presented in three sections, described as 'journeys'. The first journey flagged the turbulent travel involved due to the contested positions associated with contemporary place theory. It suggested interpretations about inter-culturalism and place need to engage with some slippery scenarios, such as cultural hybridity, existing in the thirdspace of liminality, blurred boundaries and slippage between the more commonly accepted concepts of mainstream and marginal.

In the second part, selected migrant voices, extracted from the qualitative data, have been used to bring out the misconceptions held by both the migrants and the mainstream community where migrants are often represented as marginal and stereotyped 'others'. The themes and phenomena in the comparative study show high order thinking in migrant groups about Australia and themselves as migrants, that go beyond the common representations cultural difference as 'food' and 'music'.

In the third part, metaphors and tropes provided clues to deeper layers of meaning and unusual cultural translations. As well, the process of reflection-in and on-action shows that in inter-cultural research, key participants in the research journey need to be members of the specific cultural group under study.

The use of hermeneutics in research ensures that the process of understanding and interpretation is never-ending nevertheless, to bring this journey to a resting place, it is important to re-iterate that inter-cultural explorations of place are complex and require research approaches that are open and allow for multiple ways of seeing.

Given the urgent issues about displaced people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, research that goes beyond socio-political demographics can provided some humanitarian understanding and respect for the wisdom embedded in cultural difference.

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