



Culture (Un)Rooted
In Space:
Mass Migration To
Australia

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Front Cover Image: Australian Government Photographer, *Australia's 250,000th refugee migrant*, 1962, Photograph, National Archives of Australia, <https://www.destinationaustralia.gov.au/site/records.php?task=detail&id=11212>, web, [Accessed 30 April 2017].

Abstract

Mass migration causes a de-territorialisation of culture for forcibly displaced people.¹ This essay explores the validity of the idea culture is rooted in one's place of origin. Australia experienced mass migration on a large scale after the Second World War, this makes it a good case study for exploring how refugees and voluntary migrants experienced a change in culture, if there was any change at all. There was a difference in arrival and settlement for the voluntary migrants, who were predominantly British, and the refugees from Europe. The difference between the two created 'inbetween' spaces as talked about by Bhabha that allowed the smaller minorities to create identities for themselves, these identities have a link to the memory of their place of origin, but the culture is not directly rooted there. The dominant Anglo-Celtic culture of Australia eased the settlement of voluntary British migrants because they shared the same culture, but a shared culture does not mean the culture is rooted in the migrant's place of origin.

¹ Ferguson, J. and Gupta, A. *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, 3rd edn, (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1997), p.3.

Within anthropology - the study of humans in society both past and present, there is a debate about culture and where a culture derives from or is discovered. In *Culture, Power, Place*, Gupta and Ferguson discuss the idea that culture is rooted in a specific place, and that the locality of a culture leads to community and identity.² I am focusing on the locality of culture and the idea that culture is rooted in space, particularly a place of origin. If culture – and in turn identity - derives from the place in which one was born, what happens to the identity when people are displaced and settling into a new society.

In the context of rooted culture, I will look at mass migration to Australia post-World War II. Between 1947 and 1985 almost 4.3 million migrants arrived in Australia to populate the towns and develop the country after the war.³ According to the Australian government website, by the late 1970s Australia was culturally diverse, with iconic contributions to the Australian identity made by the post-war migrants.⁴ However, it is contested that social inequality was prominent by the same time because of the governments inadequacy to accommodate for mass migration on such a large scale.⁵ Through research about the different stages of migrant's settlement and the formation of the 'new' Australia, I will explore the theory of rooted culture and debate the validity amongst the case study of displaced people.

² Ferguson, J. and Gupta, A., *Culture Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, 3rd edn, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), p.6.

³ Price, C., 'Refugees and Mass Migration: Australia', *International Migration Review*, 20.1 (1986), p.81, <<https://doi.org/10.2307/2545686>>.

⁴ Australian Government, 'The changing face of modern Australia – 1950s to 1970s' [online], <http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/changing-face-of-modern-australia-1950s-to-1970s>, [Accessed 26 April 2017].

⁵ Mason, R., 'Australian Multiculturalism: Revisiting Australia's Political Heritage and the Migrant Presence', *History Compass*, [online] 8(8), pp.817-827, <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2010.00721.x>>.

Chapter 1

Forced Displacement and
'homeland'

After World War II, a combination of both voluntarily and involuntarily displaced people were fleeing to Australia. Involuntarily displaced people were refugees from Europe after the Second World War where their homes had been destroyed or they were escaping from the communist regimes.³ Voluntarily displaced people included British migrants who had been nominated by a friend or relative already situated in Australia, or individuals who were worth over £500 were permitted settlement.³ The plan was to rebuild the agriculture and industry through funding migrants travel to Australia so long as they were fit to work for the government for a minimum of two years after arrival.³ The migrants moving to Australia came from countries around Northern and Western Europe (to fit with the White Australia policy, discussed later in the essay).⁶ Subsequently, if the definition of culture is the identity one gains from their place of origin, it means the migrants will have come from all different cultures.

Cited in *Culture, Power, place* Bisharat talks about the Palestinian refugees and their longing for home. Bisharat found that the Palestinians identity in their place of origin was one of attachment to land through speech.⁷ This meant that the refugees had a longing for 'home' in the sense of a physical dwelling that they could go back to. However over time the idea of home turned into the more abstract idea of 'homeland' as it became more unlikely that they were able to return to their place of origin.⁷ The idea of 'homeland' was romanticized through memories of what their homes used to be like and through this Bisharat shows that memory is also exiled in the act of forced displacement.⁷ From this Bisharat concludes that there is a displacement of community that was once related to the notions of locality, this leads to the break in the link between community and locality due to displacement and memory.⁷ This idea of culture being attached to a place of origin but forced displacement causing a break in the link between the two can be applied to the refugees that fled to Australia. It could

⁶ Price, C., 'Refugees and Mass Migration: Australia', *International Migration Review*, 20.1, p.82 (1986), <<https://doi.org/10.2307/2545686>>

⁷ Ferguson, J. and Gupta, A., *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, 3rd edn, (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1997), p.10.

be argued that they also lost the notion of locality linked to their identities when they were displaced, so the only thing they have left is the memory of the abstract homeland idea.

An example of this is a story from the 250,000th refugee called Otto Kampe from when he was living in a migrant camp (the segregated areas where new arrivals stayed before being assigned a government job and finding permanent accommodation). Kampe worked as an artist in his migrant camp making traditional Latvian instruments to earn some extra money.⁸ From the idea of culture being rooted in place and as Otto Kampe is making instruments that are traditional to his homeland we can determine that he would still have a memory link to his place of origin. However, the physical displacement of Otto Kampe and his family would mean there is no longer a link to the locality of his place of origin. Gupta and Ferguson go on to reference Karen Leonard, who argues 'the imaginative uses of memory enable people to construct localities and communities,' this highlight's less the continuation of specific cultures but rather the inventiveness of them.⁹ Otto Kampes story could be argued to portray the way that the memory of his homeland allowed him to construct a new locality for his identity within the new setting of the migrant camps of Australia.

Leonard's theory of memory helping one create a new locality for their identity seems to work for the involuntarily displaced people who found Australia a totally new place with no links to 'home'. However, would there still be a break in the link between locality and identity for the voluntary migrants of Britain. Would there be any need to create a new locality when their community is the most dominant in Australian society?

⁸ Australian Government, 'Otto Kampe – 250,000th refugee', Destination: Australia, Sharing Our Post-War Migrant stories [online] <https://www.destinationaustralia.gov.au/site/stories.php?task=detail&id=149>, [Accessed 26 April 2017].

⁹ Leonard, K., Finding one's own place: Asian landscapes re-visioned in rural California, cited in Ferguson, J. and Gupta, A., *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, 3rd edn, (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1997), p.11.

Chapter 2

Place Making Culture

The creation of locality relates to the making of space into place. Tim Cresswell defines place as a space which is meaningful, it is the ownership of a location by a group or individual.¹⁰ In the colonization of Australia, the British claimed ownership of the land and forced the aborigines to move out of the towns, effectively making Australia their place.¹¹ This means the British migrants who moved to Australia post world war II, moved to a community where there was still a link between place and identity, between locality and culture. This created a difference between the way British and non-British migrants would have experienced their arrival and settlement into Australia. The difference in experience in migration is also portrayed through the White Australia policy. Whilst the migration to Australia was large, it was discriminate. Up until 1973, the White Australia policy was being enforced, during this time Australia preferred to accept migrants from Northern and Western parts of Europe so it did not compromise the Anglo-Celtic culture that was dominant in Australia.¹² There were exceptions to the policy for example, few young men from Southern-Europe were allowed settlement on the basis they would benefit the Australian labour industry.¹²

This discrimination of migrants shows the clear dominance of the Anglo-Celtic culture within mid-20th Century Australia. Koptiuch argues the making of spaces into places [by refugees] is implicated by the dominant culture within that region.¹³ Australia aimed to assimilate all of the migrants and refugees into society to make a cohesive and strong national identity after World War II, as early historians accounted it.¹⁴ The fear that Europeans would create groups

¹⁰ Cresswell, T., *Place: An Introduction*, 2nd edn (Somerset: Wiley, 2014), p.12.

¹¹ Australian Government, 'The Changing Face of Early Australia' [online], <http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/changing-face-of-early-australia>, [Accessed 26 April 2017].

¹² Australian Government, 'The changing face of modern Australia - 1950s to 1970s' [online], <http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/changing-face-of-modern-australia-1950s-to-1970s>, [Accessed 26 April 2017]

¹³ Koptiuch, K., 'Third-Worlding At Home', *Social Text*, (1991), pp.87-98, <<https://doi.org/10.2307/466378>>.

¹⁴ Mason, R., 'Australian Multiculturalism: Revisiting Australia's Political Heritage and the Migrant Presence.' *History Compass*, [online] 8(8), pp.817-827

amongst themselves and contribute less to society led Australia, in later years of migration, to create an organisation to help the large amounts of non-British migrants integrate into the community.¹⁵ However, stories from the destination Australia website show that British migrants who had family already over there generally moved into their family's homes whilst they settled, where as refugees had to move into welcome centres, better known as migrant camps because of their cramped conditions and shared facilities.¹⁶ The cramped conditions of the migrant camps meant the refugees from Europe helped each other settle through creating the groups of same-language speaking people that the Australian government so feared.¹⁵ This shows that the segregation of groups of people and even small similarities between them can create new communities. By segregating the migrants upon arrival to Australia and not offering English classes for the first few years mass migration began, Australia created cultural differences in the society. Location of Culture argues that cultural differences and the 'inbetween' spaces allow people to develop their identity. Considering the dominant culture of White Australia, it makes sense for there to be smaller groups of people creating their own identities that fit around the central culture. Bhabha states 'it is the unstable relation of difference' that builds up a culture, this is seen in the different ways the migrants were treated when entering the country which can be described as unstable.¹⁷

<<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2010.00721.x>>.

¹⁵ Australian Government, 'The changing face of modern Australia - 1950s to 1970s' [online], <http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/changing-face-of-modern-australia-1950s-to-1970s>, [Accessed 26 April 2017].

¹⁶ Australian Government, 'Impressions of Greta Migrant Camp, NSW', *Destination: Australia, Sharing Our Post-War Migrant stories*, [online], <https://www.destinationaustralia.gov.au/site/stories.php?task=detail&id=76>, [Accessed 27 April 2017].

¹⁷ Bhabha, H., *Location Of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p.13.

It is argued that the act of place making is about constructing differences rather than discovering them.¹⁸ Australia constructed spatial differences between the existing community and the non-British refugees which led to each group having their own place and aided the small groups to create identities for themselves. As Australia was a constructed society, both from colonisation and the settlement of migrants post-war, the idea of culture rooted in one's place of origin can be disproved. In *Siting culture*, it is argued that the idea of rooted culture is mainly believed in the Western countries where they have nationalist ideals and wish everyone to be part of a united nation in their country of origin.¹⁹ This is similar to what Australia wanted to create, except because it is a society created from smaller societies of 'new' Australians, each with identities originating from all over the world, it was a harder task for Australia to create a national identity from the basis of culture being rooted in space.

¹⁸ Ferguson, J. and Gupta, A., *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, 3rd edn, (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1997), p.13.

¹⁹ Hastrup, K., and Olwig, K., *Siting Culture: The Shifting Anthropological Object*, (London: Routledge, 2012), p.4.

Chapter 3

Post-Mass Migration and Multiculturalism

After the Second World War, it was important for Australia to construct a national identity, their process of doing this was to assist migrants from Europe and assimilate them into the existing Anglo-Celtic society.²⁰ However, the assimilation was not very successful in terms of making the new arrivals fit in with the already existing culture of the 'old Australians'. As seen from theories so far, refugees coming from different backgrounds did not forget their memories of their homeland and in relation to the dominant culture, refugees created their own smaller identities based on similarities between them. This meant Australia developed into a multicultural society, and in the more recent years moved away from the idea of nation-state and a singular national identity and focused on being a nation built on multicultural principles.²¹ The political action to make Australia a multicultural nation, started with a cultural framework based on political issues such as democracy, economy and excluding the framework for requiring uniformity in religion or ancestry.²² This framework allows people to migrate to Australia bringing with them their traditions and cultures, instead of leaving them in their place of origin. There are contrasting views on this political framework, one being that it works well as a dynamic structure, responding to the existing and future complexities of society.²² This is shown through the fact by the 1970s Australia had abolished the White Australia and other policies which discriminated against ethnic minorities.²³ The flexibility of this cultural framework works well with the idea that culture is dynamic for each group of people, based on their histories and life experiences.²⁴

²⁰ Mason, R., 'Australian Multiculturalism: Revisiting Australia's Political Heritage and the Migrant Presence.' *History Compass*, [online] 8(8), pp.817-827 <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2010.00721.x>>.

²¹ Smolicz, J., 'Australia: From Migrant Country to Multicultural Nation', *International Migrant Review*, 31.1 (1997), p.173, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2547265>.

²² Smolicz, J., 'Australia: From Migrant Country to Multicultural Nation', *International Migrant Review*, 31.1 (1997), p.174, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2547265>.

²³ Australian Government, 'The changing face of modern Australia - 1950s to 1970s' [online], <http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/changing-face-of-modern-australia-1950s-to-1970s>, [Accessed 26 April 2017].

²⁴ Brah, A., *Cartographies Of Diaspora*, (London:Routledge, 1996), p.18.

This relates to the many different groups that belong to the Australian nation, each coming from different backgrounds and contributing differently to the multicultural nation which Australia now associates itself with.

The multiculturalism of Australian society allows people to celebrate their cultures of their homeland, this means there isn't as much of a break between one's locality and identity as discussed earlier in the essay. It is positive for society to have such variety of identities living together, Bhabha states it is 'theoretically innovative and politically crucial... [to] focus on moments produced in the articulation of cultural differences.'²⁵ In recent years, it seems Australia has achieved an understanding for the construction of different cultures and created societies that have the 'inbetween' spaces that allow people to develop their selfhood and create an identity which defines the identity of the whole society.²⁶ An example of this is the government recognizing that non-English language speakers settled into Australian life when they were with people speaking the same language. In response, the government set up a special broadcasting system or radio shows, programmes and films in languages other than English.²⁷

²⁵ Bhabha, H., *Location Of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p.1.

²⁶ Bhabha, H., *Location Of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 3-4.

²⁷ Australian Government, 'The changing face of modern Australia - 1950s to 1970s' [online], <http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/changing-face-of-modern-australia-1950s-to-1970s>, [Accessed 26 April 2017].

Conclusion

Mass migration to Australia created a complex and diverse society.²⁸ In relation to culture rooted in space the refugees and migrants could not assimilate into the Australian society properly because they still had memories of their place of origin. The example of refugee, Otto Kampe, shows that even if one is displaced from their place of origin the culture does not remain in that location, it changes with the person and their surroundings but still links to their memories. The memories of the refugee's homeland, help to create new identities in their new countries. The voluntary migrants had a different experience because they were moving to a country where their culture was already dominant in society, making it easier for them to settle. Many support this argument claiming the migrant's cultural roots to Britain were still intact even after they had moved a great distance across the world, because there was minimal cultural difference between the two locations. The Anglo-Celtic culture that dominated the Australian society helped construct smaller culture groups for non-English speaking refugees, even whilst the government was trying to prohibit refugees from forming enclaves. Bhabha reasons with this suggesting that 'inbetween' spaces of a society aid small groups with similarities to build identities for themselves. Eventually, the settlement of the smaller culture groups integrating with the dominant culture created a hybrid-multicultural society, which is Australia as we know it today.

²⁸ Australian Government, 'The changing face of modern Australia - 1950s to 1970s' [online], <http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/changing-face-of-modern-australia-1950s-to-1970s>, [Accessed 26 April 2017].

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