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Architecture, Multiculturalism and Cultural Sustainability in Australian Cities

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Abstract: The way that the built environment represents and accommodates people of different cultures is an important facet of developing a holistically sustainable future. Architecture intervenes, maps and signifies and in doing so it constructs identities. It helps to shape how we know the world by mediating power, social relations and cultural values. Events such as the settlement, inhabitation and establishment of diasporic communities involve the occupation of space. Architecture provides the armature of this space, its form and its image. Building is a potent means by which identity can be formed. A most significant part of people's well-being and capacity is their participation in literally building communities. This paper will illustrate this issue through discussion of contemporary Australian cities. The buildings of a wide variety of immigrants to Australia have since the 1950s contributed greatly to the changing nature of its cities. They are the physical manifestation of the great demographic changes that have occurred across the nation during this period. The combination of people of different backgrounds and cultures lends a unique quality to Australian built environments, and this needs not only be understood but celebrated, as they are contributing to the development of Australian urban culture. Increased knowledge and understanding of the impact of immigration and multiculturalism on our built environment will add substantially to understanding of the diversity of Australia's cultural heritage, and the potential of future planners, architects, and members of the general public to create inclusive and dynamic Australian cities.

Keywords: Architecture, Built Environment, Migration, Multiculturalism, Urban Culture, Cultural Heritage

AUSTRALIA HAS A long history as an inhabited land, but a short one as a settler nation. Apart from Australia's indigenous cultures, there is the mixture of settlers that has diversified into a great variety of European, Asian and most recently African cultures. As a result, the nation's contemporary identity cannot be reduced to a particular and distinct set of cultural characteristics, or a singularly authentic folk tradition. The nature of its demography has numerous implications for the cultural sustainability. In particular, this paper will discuss the role of architecture and the built environment. If the past is not the unified and mutual agreed narrative of growing nationhood, and the living present is a multiplicity of sometimes complementary and sometime competing agendas, then what about the built environment should be culturally sustained?

The relationship of a discussion about culture to architecture and the built environment is grounded in the spatial nature of human interaction, as well as the symbolic power of physical surroundings to influence, as well as be influenced by, the actions and intentions of those within it. Henri Lefebvre posits the idea of space as being the repository of creative energy, "stored in readiness for new creations."¹ He also describes the city as exposing

¹ Lefebvre, H., *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (New Brunswick, Transaction, 1984), 14.

meanings, whether political, philosophical or religious, suggesting that its buildings, streets and monuments voice these meanings by playing theatre set to the life that happens within them, whether major events such as festivals and ceremonies or the mundane acts of everyday life.² The implication is that buildings, like the other physical elements of a city, are not filled only by the meanings that their architects or owners ascribe to them, but are social and cultural as well as physical constructions.

Additionally, architecture is permanent, or at least aspires to permanence. Whereas a festival, even one held regularly in a prominent public location, remains ephemeral, architecture embodies the continuity of existence. The notion of permanent settlement is the fundamental basis of cities, manifested in solidly immovable buildings and their defined surroundings, placed and codified by the boundaries of precincts, cities, states and nations. This is not just symbolic. Buildings stand as mute demarcation of territorial ownership. Homelands are defined by the presence of homes. Architecture is not just complicit in these definitions. It is the embodiment of them. The legitimisation under nineteenth century British law of Australia as *terra nullius* was based on the perceived absence of governance of the land by its indigenous people.³ Despite manifest spiritual attachments to the landscape and identifiable relationships with territory, there was a lack of architecture as the British understood it. While pre-colonial indigenous architecture has been since been shown to be considerably more substantial in its extent and construction, this apparent absence was taken as evidence of the lack of ownership of the land.⁴ Thus while a profound relationship with the land remains integral to Aboriginal Australians' identity and culture, their particular sense of belonging can only be imagined by the nation's non-Aboriginal majority. Furthermore, while in the continent's remote regions, Uluru, Kata Tjuta, Nourlangie Rock and other dramatic natural landforms can still evoke a sense of the pre-colonial sacred, this is more difficult to imagine when in the suburbs of Melbourne or Sydney. There are a few tangible remnants of pre-colonial Australia, such as the Wurundjeri people's Burnley Park Corroboree Tree in inner-suburban Melbourne, and more generally the Aboriginal people of Australian cities maintain a spiritual connection with their land.⁵ However, indigenous settlement patterns have otherwise been overwhelmed by the land subdivisions, roads and buildings of Australia's post-colonial settler cultures.

With this history in mind, buildings are critically important when considering issues of cultural sustainability. Buildings express the aspirations of those for whom they are built (as well as for those who design and build them), and collectively they represent the beliefs and priorities of their society through its history. The monumentality of architecture is reassuring, providing observable stability. Architecture relates culture to location, and so over time its characteristics become representative of a locality's cultural heritage. Buildings that are accepted as being local in character are often those which have come to be associated with a place's origins (previous observations about Australia's pre-colonial history notwithstanding). Building in the present day is thus often seen in terms of its contextual relationship with the

'original' stock of a given street, suburb, or city; with its assumed cultural meaning and importance. Negotiating the insertion of the new into existing urban environments is often the cause of contestation, as new buildings are judged on the degree of their departure from, or alteration to, elements that represent an area's putative cultural identity. Newness tends to be resisted, whether it is the work of avant-garde architects or ethnic/religious minorities. However there is a difference. The interventions of architects, while being opposed by some of those in favour of privileging 'heritage', can be argued as being progressive examples of the same architectural lineage as the older buildings around them, but those of more recent non-Western immigrant groups are often aesthetically and symbolically derived from different lineages and cultural histories. The question that needs to be asked is how do traditional criteria for belonging, such as the primacy of occupation, or length of tenure, or identification with the historical majority, stand up under conditions of social and cultural change? What rights do (relative) newcomers have to alter environments that predate their arrival?



Fig. 1: House renovated in 1960s, Richmond



Fig. 2: House renovated in 2000s, Richmond

Much of Australian cities' perceived cultural character has been derived from their inner suburbs. Many of inner suburbs of Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and other major cities were largely working class up until the 1970s, a characteristic embodied in the modest size and close proximity of their residences. Both the status of the occupants and the state of the building stock rendered these areas unattractive to those with greater societal and material aspirations. The reclamation of the inner suburbs, and their more recent championing as examples of 'urban character' have meant that increasing value has been attributed to the inner city as physical evidence of the city's 'heritage'. However, the trend since the 1980s of renovating and inhabiting Victorian-era building stock in Australian inner suburbs was

² Lefebvre, H., *Writings on Cities* (Cambridge, Blackwell, 1996), 113-114.

³ Colonial Office of the British Government *Proclamation of Governor Bourke*, (1835), <http://www.founding-docs.gov.au/item.asp?dID=42> last accessed on 2 December, 2008.

⁴ Memmott, P., *Gunyah, Goondie & Wurley: The Aboriginal Architecture of Australia* (Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, 2007).

⁵ Eidelson, M., *The Melbourne Dreaming: A Guide to the Aboriginal Places of Melbourne*, Canberra, Aboriginal Studies Press, 1997, 18-19.

largely instigated by southern European immigrants who occupied deteriorated building stock in areas unvalued by the dominant society of the time. The prevalent governmental attitude was then disposed towards 'slum clearance'; which in Melbourne, for example, led to the demolition of extant building stock in the inner suburbs in favour of high-rise flats. Italian, Greek, Macedonian and Turkish and other Southern European migrants, due to economic circumstances and perhaps a preference for a denser type of community, pragmatically refitted and adapted them to suit their tastes and ways of life. These migrants provided a practical demonstration of the possibilities of urban renewal, and arguably caused the majority Anglo-Celtic population to rethink their pejorative attitudes towards these areas. The two examples in Melbourne's inner suburb of Richmond shown Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 are indicative of this.⁶ In any case, there has since been a reversal of the flight from the inner city and today these areas have become more generally desirable. With the reinvigoration of suburbs close to the centre of Australian cities from the 1970s onwards, the inner suburbs have become identified with a distinctively local yet cosmopolitan culture.

However, this renewed respect for the architecture has also come with a disavowal of the seminal role of immigrant communities in reclaiming it, and little value has been ascribed to their interventions. On the contrary, alterations completed in the 1950s and 1960s by Southern European immigrants have generally been considered by council planners to be of no historic or aesthetic value, and either ignored or presented as examples of 'what not to do'.⁷ While there is insufficient space here to examine all the possible agendas of the current interest in urban character, it would seem that a dominant 'natural' narrative is being disrupted by the continuing presence of these buildings whose physical characteristics do not fit into their location's preferred history. What the contested presence of houses like the example in Figure 2 indicate are the difficulties of inserting other narratives into a dominant history of place, a factor which needs to be understood in terms of enculturated conceptions of the built environment.

While the beginnings of Australian cities' multicultural identity might have been in inner suburbia, areas like Richmond are arguably becoming less culturally diverse as the second and third generations of migrants who revived these areas have dispersed, and their new inhabitants have gradually 'restored' local buildings to their 'authentic' pasts. However, this does not mean that the multiplicity of cultures that has followed recent migration to Australian cities has vanished. As a glance at their current demography reveals, outer suburbs such as Springvale, Box Hill, and St Albans (Melbourne), Cabramatta, Lakemba, and Bankstown (Sydney), Darra and Inala (Brisbane), Athol Park and Woodville (Adelaide), Leeming and Bull Creek (Perth), vigorously maintain the multicultural vitality of their cities. These areas are not (yet) considered to be fashionably cosmopolitan, and so in a sense the cultural diversification that occurred in inner suburbs in the 1950s and 1960s is now being repeated.

In Melbourne, an area where this development can be clearly observed is the City of Greater Dandenong, a local municipality in the outer south-east of its metropolitan area. Situated 33 kilometres south-east of Melbourne's centre, 62% of the Greater Dandenong's population of 133,000 have a first language other than English, compared to 26% for Mel-

bourne as a whole.⁸ In particular, the area has become a centre for the settlement of Vietnamese, Chinese, Greek, Italian, Bosnian, Cambodian, Lao, and more recently Sudanese and Afghan migrants.⁹ Thus Greater Dandenong provides a useful empirical insight into how cultural differences are being negotiated, and the role of architecture in this process. The following description and images provide a brief illustration.

One of the most obvious signs of multicultural settlement in the built environment is the existence of shops and other businesses catering for different ethnic groups (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4). These are noticeable in a number of locations in the City of Greater Dandenong, most notably in Dandenong itself (Indian, Fijian, Afghan), in Noble Park (Bosnian, African) and especially in Springvale (Vietnamese, Cambodian, Lao). Another noticeable phenomenon is the presence of small Buddhist temples, mosques and churches in the municipality's residential areas, many of which cater for specific ethnic groups. A majority of these have been set up within existing dwellings (Fig. 5).¹⁰ The addition of symbols, signs and ritual elements indicate sometimes subtle, and sometimes emphatic transformations of usage. There are also several buildings that house ethnically-based community groups, though with a few notable exceptions (Fig. 6) these are not as physically distinctive. These examples represent the most evident alterations to the built environment in established areas of Greater Dandenong. However, there are also substantial parts of the municipality that until the last ten or fifteen years had remained undeveloped or rural land. It is in these areas that a number of architectural developments have been constructed that clearly demonstrate the ways in which demographic changes have led to the need for new types of buildings.



Fig. 3: Shops, Dandenong

⁸ City of Greater Dandenong, *City of Greater Dandenong: Detailed Social Information* (2006) <http://www.greaterdandenong.com/Documents.asp?ID=9716&Title=Detailed+social+information&Type=d> Accessed 1st December, 2008; Australian Bureau of Statistics (2007) 2914.0.55.002 - 2006 Census of Population and Housing: Media Fact Sheet, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/7d12b0f6763c78caca257061001cc588/5a47791aa683b719ca257306000d536c!OpenDocument> last accessed on 2 December 2008.

⁹ The opening of the Commonwealth Government Enterprise Migrant Centre in Springvale in 1970 was a major catalyst behind the current diversification of the region's population.

¹⁰ In the more densely settled areas of the municipality, use of an existing premises for a 'Place of Worship' is allowable without council permission in 'Residential' and 'Mixed Use' zones, so there is no apparent problem, for instance, with setting up a temple in an existing residence, with the proviso that there are "no social or recreational activities" (Planning Policy 32.01, City of Greater Dandenong Planning Scheme 2008). http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/planning_schemes/greaterdandenong/home.html last accessed on 3 December 2008.

⁶ Forster, C., *Australian Cities: Continuity and Change. Second Edition* (South Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁷ City of Yarra, *City of Yarra Planning Scheme: Advice on painting buildings, front fences, signs and restoring lost elements to buildings* (2007) www.yarracity.vic.gov.au/Planning/Heritage/Advice.asp last accessed on 3 December 2008.



Fig. 4: Supermarket, Springvale

One such area is a strip of Springvale Road and its environs south of Springvale's business centre. While residentially zoned, frontage on a busy main road and the proximity to the council tip meant that this area had been little developed for housing. However, several substantial new religious buildings have been recently constructed. In quick succession, you can pass by a Vietnamese Buddhist temple (Fig. 7), a Cambodian Buddhist temple and a semi-completed Chinese Buddhist temple (Fig. 8), through which you can glimpse another Cambodian Buddhist temple in the background. Another area that has recently seen the construction of new religious buildings within the municipality is a semi-rural part of the suburb of Keysborough.¹¹ Existing uses in this area include market gardening, horse agistment and other remnant farming uses. To these have now been added a number of new religious buildings for different communities. Amongst others, these include a Sri Lankan Buddhist temple (Fig.9), a Turkish Mosque/School and Community Centre, a Polish Catholic Church and a Serbian Orthodox Church (Fig.10).



Fig. 5: Nhu Lan Vietnamese Buddhist Temple, Springvale

¹¹ The council refers to this area as a 'green wedge' (Planning Policy 22.02: Greater Dandenong Planning Scheme 2008). http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/planning_schemes/greaterdandenong/home.html last accessed on 3 December 2008.



Fig. 6: Cambodian Community Centre, Springvale

These buildings constitute a fascinating patchwork of religions and ethnicised spaces laid onto the flat Australian landscape. While they all represent particular ethnic and theological constituents, apparently within their own supra-national, supra-religious spaces, they also coexist collectively. This coexistence suggests a number of aspects to these buildings that might be productively studied, including the implications of demographic change on local planning and the translation of architectural symbols through migration and their place within the discourse of Australian architecture. In other writings, I have taken the liberty of adopting one of Ghassan Hage's terms and referred to buildings seen here as being 'third world-looking', implying that despite their evident presence in the Australian built environment, they are considered to belong elsewhere.¹²



Fig. 7: Hoa Nghiem Vietnamese Buddhist Temple, Springvale

¹² Hage, G. *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (Annandale, Pluto, 1998), 18.; David Beynon "Melbourne's Third World-Looking Architecture" in C. Long, K. Shaw & C. Merlo [Eds.] (Melbourne, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2005), 68-83.



Fig. 8: Bright Moon Chinese Buddhist Temple, Springvale

Moreover, that 'elsewhere' is outside the civilisational lineage to which Australia imagines itself belonging. The label 'third world-looking' was also intended to provide comment on the place of these buildings within Australia's built environment in the context of an almost complete lack of interest in them from writers and critics on Australian architecture. This attitude is symptomatic of a tendency to regard the impact of non-Anglo-Celtic societies and cultures upon Australia - despite years of diverse immigration and multiculturalism - mainly in terms of how they integrate into a pre-existing and presumably homogenous society rather than how they transform it. Such opinions imply a particular positionality, one in which an assumedly 'authentic' Australian identity is in a position to judge other identities as being un-Australian. It also suggests a persistent tendency to see the appearance of ethnically-based shops, businesses and places of worship as the co-option of parts of Australia for other kinds of identity. Dunn reiterates this point in his account of the local politics of mosque development, noting that mosque proposals constitute 'non-normative' national statements in the opinions of the Anglo-Celts who presume to speak for the national space.¹³

While the White Australia Policy has now been long dismantled and discredited, the fact that Australia still retains the Queen of England as its head of state, and the Union Jack in the corner of its flag suggest that the idea of a British Australia is still central to some conceptions of nationhood. Hage asserts that Australia's identity is "delineated by a discourse of internal orientalism."¹⁴ By way of example, he observes how frequently Australians of visibly non-European origin are in the position of having to justify their identity to European-looking Australians, who, because they are perceived to be the norm, never have to reciprocate with an explanation of their identity. Despite this, change is certainly happening, and the dominant British settler culture has undergone a process of defamiliarisation in the wake of diversified settlement. The existence of the definition 'Anglo-Celtic', a particularly Australian term to describe the dual identity of English Protestant/Irish Catholic that predominated amongst the pre-1970s settler population, is indicative of the diversifying nature of discussions about Australian identity.¹⁵

¹³ Dunn, K. 'Repetitive and troubling discourses of nationalism in the local politics of mosque development in Sydney, Australia, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 23 (2005), 32.

¹⁴ Hage (1998), 17.

¹⁵ Hurst, J. 'National Pride and Multiculturalism', *People and Place*, 2(3) (1994), 2.



Fig. 9: Dhamma Sarana Sri Lankan Buddhist Temple, Keysborough



Fig. 10: Serbian Orthodox Church, Keysborough

However, buildings such as those shown here are not peripheral to the nature of the local built environment, they are central to the ways in which parts of Australian suburbia are evolving. As noted earlier, non English-as-a-first-language, born-outside-Australia residents are collectively in the majority in Greater Dandenong. However no ethnic group constitutes more than 10.4% of the population.¹⁶ Thus if we are talk of architectural or cultural identity, let alone values, we might ask whose identity we are talking about. As the area develops, what is becoming apparent is that there are a multiplicity of cultural histories at work in every building, alteration, and land subdivision. The diversity of buildings that have appeared within the area constitute multicultural Australian architecture in the making. In this regard Hage makes a pertinent comment on the notion of heritage in a multicultural nation in his book on Arab-Australians.¹⁷ He makes the point that a narrow territorial definition of identity is inadequate when the population derives a large part of their history from other places. These other places, the 'towns and villages from which Australia's migrant population has originated' provide ingredients that constitute the multicultural present just as much as any built local built heritage.¹⁸ The lineage of each building in this polyglot environment reveals a rich mix of local and immigrant sources. These might be stylistic, structural, material or spatial, based on mixtures of traditional typologies and local materials to meet ritual and practical needs. Within each there are also the traces of national, ethnic and religious histories,

¹⁶ City of Greater Dandenong, *Detailed Social Information* (2006).

¹⁷ Hage, G., *Arab-Australians Today: citizenship and belonging* (Carlton South, Melbourne University Press, 2002).

¹⁸ Hage (2002), 2.

of allegiances and belongings both past and present. If these can be read, then our appreciation of the unfamiliar forms of these buildings may increase, and more importantly, the means by which the histories of other places and other cultures are being imprinted on the Australian landscape. More broadly, their presence suggests some of the complications posed by questions of cultural sustainability in contemporary cities.

Of course adaptation to new surroundings is not always a willing process for recent immigrants. The fact that Greater Dandenong has the lowest median household income in Melbourne, is indicative that economic and class opportunities are also critical factors in settlement and the development of built environments.¹⁹ As Jayasuriya has suggested, the rubric of Australian multiculturalism has a tendency to use culture as the trope through which all aspects of ethnic community life are understood, and this tends to elide other types of difference.²⁰ Negotiation of building procurement and establishment processes requires knowledge about, and access to, hierarchies of power and influence. Moreover, in terms of culture, it has been argued that most diasporic communities reject the idea of becoming hybrid, and instead seek to reaffirm the identity that they held prior to their migration.²¹ Migration is a traumatic process for many, and some certainties of identity are needed. It could be considered that apart from its indigenous people, everyone in Australia has a diasporic as well as a local identity, and the sustainability of culture as a whole (if it can be considered a whole) is contingent on the consideration of these diasporic identities and their relationship with that of the nation as a whole. Diasporas can be considered transnational 'imagined' communities as diasporic identity is primarily formed by constant reference to a place of putative cultural origin, but it is also influenced by places of intermediate migration, places to which other community members have migrated, as well as places where business is conducted and offspring are educated.²² This definition is further complicated as diaspora can refer to both ethnic or religious groupings, as well as to groups to whom a mixture ethnicity and religion is important. As Anderson reminds us, long before the idea of nations religious affiliations such as 'Christendom' or the Islamic *umma* were the most effective imagined communities.²³ Such diasporic identities present perhaps the greatest threat to national narratives, as when they locate themselves they displace national space. As suggested by the architectural styles of the buildings illustrated earlier, many immigrant communities have affiliations to places other than their place of settlement. They represent the persistence of the idea of a stationary bounded 'home' as a primary anchor for identity, even in the aftermath of centuries of global movement. For diasporas the idea of homeland is a historical trope kept alive through cultural reproductions that have been altered through exile. The diasporic self is constantly being regenerated and retranslated, but it maintains a sense of collective identity and community, as its imaginings are projected back to this 'homeland'. The place of settlement is thus to be rendered like home by the creative exercise of this imagination.

¹⁹ State of Victoria, *Melbourne Atlas*, (Melbourne, Department of Sustainability and Environment, 2006).

²⁰ Jayasuriya, L., *Immigration and Multiculturalism in Australia. Selected Essays*, (Perth, University of Western Australia Press, 1999), 2.

²¹ Docker J. & Fischer, G., 'Adventures of Identity' in J. Docker & G. Fischer [Eds.] *Race, Colour and Identity in Australia and New Zealand* (Sydney, University of New South Wales Press, 2000), 14.

²² Ang, I., *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West* (London, Routledge, 2001), 83.

²³ Anderson, B., *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, Verso, 1991), 12.

However this inevitably incomplete. Traditions are not only disrupted by migration, but also by other engagements with the contemporary world. What sustains culture in a slowly changing traditional society is often unselfconscious, the repetition of quotidian activities that merge work, craft and art. However in pluralistic contemporary societies, ways of life cannot avoid being compared with other ways of life. The impact of (Western) modernity and the access to different world views caused by globalisation has rendered problematic the simple handing down of received conventions. Giddens refers to the state of present societies as 'post-traditional', to describe their self-conscious nature in dealing with tradition in a world of competing and overlapping world views.²⁴ Decisions have to be made as to what to include, what to exclude, that to emphasise, what to replicate faithfully and what to interpret more freely. Culture has become something that might be maintained, but it can also be consciously altered or abandoned. Meanings that used to be assumed, now are revealed as needing a particular context, without which they can be misconstrued, or just understood differently. This is, of course, not a recent process, nor just the outcome of the European Enlightenment as propagated around the world. In the fourteenth century the Moghul Emperor Akbar the Great noted "If traditionalism were proper, the prophets would merely have followed their own elders (and not come with new messages)."²⁵ However, this is not just a simple dichotomy of tradition versus progress. Modernity is not neutral or objective. Modernity has its own traditions, *is* now a tradition. Modern life has its own traditions of socialisation; from the broad imagined community of the nation, to conceptions of family and sexuality.²⁶ Any contemporary society has a high level of reflexivity, and in a society such as Australia, where nearly all traditions are received from elsewhere, this process is heightened. Migration and relocation are life-changing events, and, particularly as generations change within populations of immigrants, ideas of identity will necessarily change as well. To accept newness means to be ambivalent about received culture. On an individual basis it means to accept the evidence of one's own senses rather than readily accepting boundaries, discursive or geographical. The opportunity then arises for culture to be seen as it is, not a unitary thing but the evolving and creative sum of its encounters. The diversity of multiculturalism, in which every culture has its own epistemological boundaries, gives way to an ongoing negotiation. This does not necessarily mean the disavowal of tradition, but a freeing of it from finite definition. Traditions do not have to be 'traditional'. New creations can be rendered in a 'traditional' manner, and 'traditional' elements can be reinterpreted. Newness does not mean the conjuring of substance out of nothing. What is created is part self, part other, integrated rather than fragmented or assimilated. Identity is always in translation, yet, as Rushdie notes; "It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained."²⁷ This phenomenon raises some significant issues for the idea of cultural sustainability. What is it that we wish to sustain, if we have a choice in the matter? How do the freedoms of a contemporary pluralistic society sit with principles of cultural preservation or determination. Sen suggests

²⁴ Giddens, G., 'Living in a Post-Traditional Society' in U. Beck, A. Giddens & S. Lash [Eds.] *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Cambridge, Polity, 1994), 56-109.

²⁵ Athar Ali, M., 'The Perception of India in Akbar and Abu'l Fazl', in Irfan Habib [Ed.] *Akbar and his India* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997), 220.

²⁶ Giddens, G., *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, Polity, 1994), 5.

²⁷ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London, Granta, 1991), 17.

We have to distinguish between the idea of *cultural liberty*, which focuses our freedom either to preserve or change our priorities (on the basis of greater knowledge or further reflection, or, for that matter, on the basis of our assessment of changing customs and fashions), and that of valuing cultural conservation, which has become a big issue in the rhetoric of multiculturalism (often providing support for the continuation of traditional lifestyles by new immigrants in the West).²⁸

As he goes on to argue, cultural freedom also means the freedom for individuals to choose not to continue traditional practices, to question past traditions, and to change their ways of living according to their acquired knowledge of other ways of living.²⁹ Within the Australian context, this is not just a process for immigrant and minority cultures (the degree to which they retain their culture and/or adapt/adopt the majority culture), but also for the ongoing formation of the nation's identity as a whole. Recent immigration to Australia has only provided sharper relief to this ongoing process. What occurs on a daily basis in Keysborough and South Springvale is a complex series of negotiations between multiple communities, all of whom bring elements of their culture from their places of origin, as well as adopting elements from their new environment. The addition of still new ingredients to the mix – be they ethnic community centres, temples, mosques or some yet unknown type of building – enrich but also complicate the process of establishing local identity, and efforts to fix this identity. As migrants from a multitude of cultural backgrounds settle, they contribute to urban landscapes, not just in terms of altering or constructing particular buildings but more fundamentally by shifting the identity of places according to their particular characteristics. The heterogeneity of what is happening in the Greater Dandenong and other parts of Australian cities also suggests that this shift cannot be easily categorised as a movement towards any other singular identity. This is not a simple adaptation from one cultural or societal identity to another – as is often imagined in the media or by governments. It is not the Vietnam-isation or Islam-isation of the suburbs, as has sometimes been simplistically suggested, even in areas where migrants from Vietnamese or Islamic backgrounds may predominate (and as if being Vietnamese or Islamic constituted homogenous cultural identities in themselves).

The presence of these buildings represent an ongoing daily process of negotiation over symbolism, culture, ethnic identity and land usage that is likely become increasingly complicated as future generations continue this process together. The collective built environment that evolves out of these negotiations is the physical manifestation of how Australian culture is developing from the ongoing blending and mixing of a multitude of identities. Hopefully the present multiplicity of places like Greater Dandenong will not in future be elided in favour of the promotion of an imagined pure myth of origin.

Note: All images by author.

About the Author

Dr. David Beynon

Dr. David Beynon's current research involves investigating architecture as a social and cultural practice, particularly in the context of Australia's engagement with Asia and the architectural implications of migration and hybridity. His recent writing on these subjects includes 'Melbourne's 'Third World-Looking' Architecture' in the book *suburban Fantasies: Melbourne Unmasked*, (2005). He is also currently engaged in an ARC Discovery Project 'The Influence of Indian Antecedents on the Geometry of Southeast Asian Temples' and the ARC Linkage Project 'Strategic Assessment of Building Reuse Opportunities'. Dr. Beynon lectures in the areas of Architectural Design, Architectural Practice and Asian Architecture. He is also a registered architect. He received his B.Arch (Honours) from University of Melbourne in 1990, and has practised in Melbourne, Brisbane and Singapore. He maintains a link to practice through AlsoCAN Architecture and Interactive Design, which investigates the design of insertions, adaptations and urban interventions, including shopfront-grafted home-offices, East-West hybrid courtyard buildings, and mobile office-dwellings.

²⁸ Sen, A., *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (London, Penguin, 2007), 113.

²⁹ Sen (2007), 117.