MUSEUM MEANINGS

Recent decades have seen migration history and issues increasingly featured in museums. *Museums and Migration* explores the ways in which museum spaces – local, regional and national – have engaged with the history of migration, including internal migration, emigration and immigration. It presents the latest innovative research from academics and museum practitioners and offers a comparative perspective on a global scale, bringing to light geo- and socio-political specificities. It includes an extensive range of international contributions from Europe, Asia and South America as well as settler societies such as Canada and Australia.

Museums and Migration charts and enlarges the developing body of research which concentrates on the analysis of the representation of migration in relation to the changing character of museums within society, examining their civic role and their function as key public arenas within civil society. It also aims to inform debates focusing on the way museums interact with processes of political and societal changes, and examines their agency and relationship to identity construction, community involvement, policy positions and discourses, ethics and moralities.

Laurence Gouriévidis is a senior lecturer in Modern British History at Blaise Pascal University, Clermont-Ferrand, France. Her research interests concentrate on the interaction between history and memory, exploring the way societies and individuals construct their past and their heritage. She has written on museums and heritage with a particular focus on Scotland and the Scottish diaspora and is the author of *The Dynamics of Heritage: History, Memory and the Highland Clearances* (2010).

MUSEUM STUDIES

MUSEUMS AND MIGRATION

HISTORY, MEMORY AND POLITICS

LAURENCE GOURIÉVIDIS
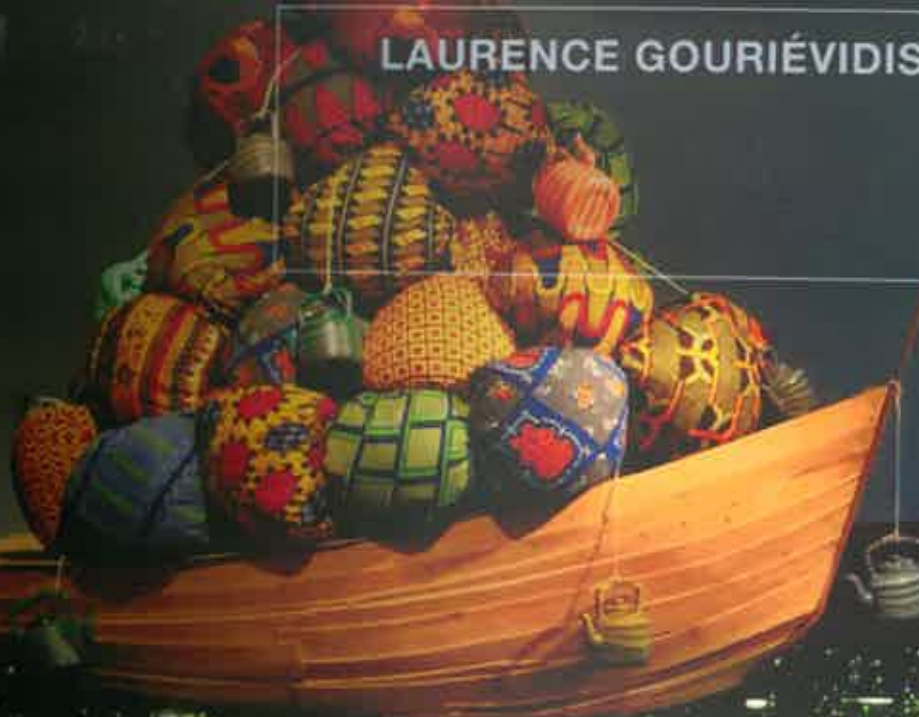
MUSEUMS AND MIGRATION

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MUSEUMS AND MIGRATION

History, Memory and Politics

Edited by
Laurence Gouriévidis

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Marco Giudici recently obtained his Ph.D. in History from Bangor University, defending the thesis 'Migration, memory and identity: Italians in Wales, 1940–2010'. He previously obtained his MA in Modern History from the Università degli Studi di Milano, with a dissertation on Italian migration to the US. He has published articles and book chapters on migration history and identity and is now working on a monograph on the history of the Italian community in Wales.

Tamara Glas obtained a Master's degree in Museology at the Reinwardt Academy and is now a Ph.D. student in Sociology at Université Paris 7 Denis Diderot. Her fieldwork focuses on issues of authentication and heritagization in relation to the concept of social inclusion. She is also secretary of MINOM (International Movement for a New Museology).

Laurence Gouriévidis is a senior lecturer in Modern British History at Blaise Pascal University, Clermont-Ferrand, France. Her research interests concentrate on the interaction between history and memory, exploring the way societies and individuals construct their past and their heritage. She has written on museums and heritage with a particular focus on Scotland and the Scottish diaspora and is the author of *The Dynamics of Heritage: History, Memory and the Highland Clearances* (Ashgate, 2010).

Julie Higashi is a professor in the Faculty of Social Sciences, Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, Japan. Her recent publications related to museums include 'The Spirit of War Remains Intact: The Politics of Space in Tokyo and the Yasukuni Shrine' in *Cities into Battlefields: Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War*, edited by Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene (Ashgate Publishing, 2011). She is a research project member of *'We the People' in the Global Age: Re-examination of Nationalism and Citizenship*, sponsored by the Japan Center for Area Studies, National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka.

Mary Hutchison is a visiting fellow at the Research School of Humanities and the Arts, Australian National University. Her research interests include practices of representing Australian migration history in relation to social and cultural diversity. As well as publishing articles in this field she has curated museum exhibitions and developed heritage site interpretations, often in collaboration with community groups and individuals.

Christina Johansson is a senior lecturer in International Migration and Ethnic Relations at Malmö University. Besides studies on museums and migration, she has published books, articles and reports on the relationship between state, nation and migration policy, and the representation of migration.

Francesca Lanz holds a Ph.D. in Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design and an MS in Architecture. Since 2009 she has taught Interior Architecture at the School of Architecture and Society and has worked as a post-doctoral researcher in the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, both at the Politecnico di Milano. She is currently involved in the EU-funded MeLa* Project, serving as assistant project coordinator, dissemination manager and researcher.

Bernadette Lynch is an academic and museum professional with twenty-five years' experience at senior management level in UK and Canadian museums. She has a reputation for reflective, ethical and innovative museum theory and practice, specialising in issues of public participation, and is particularly interested in conflict as central to democratic dialogue and debate in museums. Formerly Deputy Director of the Manchester Museum, Dr Lynch is now a freelance museum writer/researcher and consultant, as well as Honorary Research Associate at University College London.

Kylie Message is Associate Professor and Head of the School of Archaeology and Anthropology at the Australian National University. She is author of *Museums and Social Activism: Engaged Protest* (2013), *New Museums and the Making of Culture* (2006) and co-editor of *Compelling Cultures: Representing Cultural Diversity and Cohesion in Multicultural Australia* (2009) and *Museum Theory: An Expanded Field* (forthcoming). She is chief co-editor of the journal *Museum Worlds (Advances in Research)*, managing editor of *Museum and Society*, and exhibition reviews editor of *Australian Historical Studies*.

Eithne Nightingale has worked in the community, education and cultural sectors, including as Head of Equality and Diversity at the V&A, a post she recently left to pursue a Ph.D. in Children, Migration and Diaspora at Queen Mary University of London, part of the Child in the World AHRC-funded Doctoral Collaborative Programme with the V&A Museum of Childhood. She has written extensively on the arts and diversity, co-editing a recent publication for Routledge – *Museums, Equality and Social Justice* (2012). She is also a photographer. See www.eithnenightingale.com.

Fabien Van Geert has Bachelor's degrees in Art History and Education from the Université Catholique de Louvain (Belgium). He obtained a Master's degree in Cultural History Management at the University of Barcelona, where he is now pursuing a Ph.D. in Museum Studies and Cultural Heritage Management, funded by the Catalan government. He is a member of the research group Heritagization of Culture and Nature, funded by the Spanish government

Andrea Witcomb is Associate Professor and Director of the Centre for Cultural Heritage for Asia and the Pacific and Deputy Director of the Alfred Deakin Research Institute at Deakin University in Australia. She is the author of a number of books and book chapters, including *Re-imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum* (Routledge, 2003), and is co-editor with Chris Healy of *South Pacific Museums: Experiments in Culture* (Monash University e-press, 2006). Her research interests include relations between museums and communities in which the theme of the representation of migration figures large. She has also curated exhibitions with migrant communities.

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MIGRATION EXHIBITIONS AND THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY

Reflections on the history of the representation of migration in Australian museums, 1986–2011

Mary Hutchison and Andrea Witcomb

Introduction

The longstanding and diverse nature of Australian museums' engagement with the history of migration[1] offers a rich case study for those interested in the history of the representation of migration in museums and the ways in which it intersects with public debate and policy concerning immigration and living in a multicultural society. It is our hope that a discussion of these relationships in Australia and the types of exhibitions and curatorial strategies that have developed in response to them over the last thirty years will offer a useful basis for international comparison across countries, including those with similar settler histories as well as those experiencing more recent migrations and challenges to the ways in which they have thought about their identity.

Our chapter is based on our understanding that Australian migration exhibitions are, at heart, concerned with the cultural identity of a settler society founded as a British colony but whose population is largely the result of 200 years of immigration from all corners of the world. On this basis, the representation of migration in Australian museums is unavoidably a political project that reflects the tension between public recognition of Australia as a culturally diverse rather than an Anglo-Celtic society and the need to articulate a national identity that projects a culturally cohesive nation. Our analysis reveals how public debate and government policies have influenced the collection and exhibition of material concerning migration over time, and the strategies that museums have developed to reflect and indeed contribute to public discourse. In teasing out the detail of museum exhibitions of migration in relation to identity issues, we suggest a typology of exhibition practices associated with a number of curatorial strategies. Our discussion is based on individual and joint research, and is specifically based on a project looking at the relationship between Australia's collecting sector and changing understandings of cultural diversity and citizenship funded by the Australian Research Council and led by Andrea Witcomb.[2]

We begin with a brief historical background to the Australian context of migration and multiculturalism. This is followed by an outline of the key types of exhibitions and curatorial

strategies we have identified and a detailed exposition of their characteristics, their immediate context and the issues with which they engage, through a number of examples. While our discussion is structured chronologically and our exhibition types can be understood as responses to particular moments in recent history, they do not supplant one another in a clear chronological and evolutionary pattern. The Immigration Museum in Melbourne, for instance, has examples of both of the key exhibition approaches we identify within its exhibitions as well as a number of curatorial strategies. This is partly due to the longevity of some of its displays but also because different exhibitions and galleries perform different aspects of the museum's mission. The typology provides the basis for a conversation between approaches across and within time-frames.

An important factor in our discussion that we want to note at the outset is the tension between ideas about cultural diversity that have developed as part of a policy of multiculturalism associated with migration, and the place of Australia's Indigenous peoples and history in relation to this. As Ann Curthoys (2000) has argued, there is an 'uneasy conversation' between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people[3] concerned with land rights and multiculturalism as a policy most directly related to migrant groups. As a result, cultural representation of Indigenous Australians and migrant groups in museums has tended to occur in parallel. However, under the aim of fostering an inclusive approach, there have been, from the beginning, some exhibitions within a 'migration' context that include Indigenous history and culture. In these cases Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not only seen as part of the cultural mix of contemporary Australian society but as having always engaged with the 'newcomers' and having acted with agency in the context of colonial oppression.

Historical background

Australia was established as a British colony in 1788. Its contemporary population, with the exception of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, are descendants of immigrants, whether they arrived in the early colonial period or at some time over the next 225 years. In addition to the British colonists during the nineteenth century there was a significant range of people from Europe, other British colonies, Asia and the Pacific islands. However, one of the things that united the Australian colonies when they federated in 1901 was the desire to ensure a *British* Australia based on the 'crimson thread of kinship'.[4] The Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 was particularly designed to restrict Asian immigration. Over the following years, new Asian arrivals were effectively stopped and any attempts to encourage migration focused on Britain. This policy was known colloquially as the 'white Australia' policy.

After the Second World War the federal government initiated a massive and unprecedented immigration programme to fulfil its post-war reconstruction aims to boost the population and develop Australian industry. But it was soon discovered that immigrants would have to be sought from countries beyond Britain if population targets were to be met. Consequently, migration agreements were made with the International Refugee Organization and over time with an increasing range of European countries. By the 1970s immigrants from the Middle East were also being accepted. Over this period it was understood that people from non-Anglo backgrounds would assimilate into Australia's predominantly Anglo-Celtic culture rather than maintain their own traditions, cultural values and mores. (See Jordens 1997 and Jupp 2001 for histories of Australian migration.)

The post-war changes in migration to Australia eventually produced a social climate in which Australians became more willing to end racially discriminatory immigration regulations and to entertain the notion that Australian cultural identity might comprise more than Anglo-Celtic cultural values and practices. These ideas came to the fore with the election of a Labor government in 1973. By 1975, eligibility criteria for immigration on the basis of country of origin had been abolished (Jordens 1997: 225) and the Minister for Immigration, Al Grassby, had proposed Australia as a 'multicultural' society.

In the context of Labor reformism of the time, this proposal essentially entailed a migration settlement policy designed to redress past inequities through a range of social, economic and cultural measures (MacPhee 1981). The vision, as Grassby suggested in a 1973 speech, was that the Australian nation should be like a family – the 'family of the nation' – in which members are committed to the common good while retaining their distinct individuality (Grassby 1973: 3). Within this general framework, the idea of Australia as a 'mosaic' of cultures became a popular shorthand description for Australian multiculturalism (e.g. Jordens 1997: 225).[5]

By 1988, when Australia celebrated its bicentenary (200 years from the first colonial settlement), there was broad acceptance of the country's multicultural nature. As literature of the time published by the Office of Multicultural Affairs proclaimed, 'Australia is a culturally diverse nation' (Berzins 1989: 110). The end of discriminatory immigration policies also meant that the ethnic mix of the population was broader, with significant numbers now coming from Asia, including tens of thousands of refugees from Vietnam, who first started arriving by boat as asylum seekers in the late 1970s.

Creating a space for the maintenance of culture within multiculturalism

Key to the principles of Australian multiculturalism of the 1970s and 1980s, in strong contrast to the previous policies of assimilation and integration, was the value placed on the cultural traditions and historical experience of non-English-speaking newcomers. Throughout the period this change in orientation resulted in funding for a variety of cultural initiatives. For instance, multilingual broadcasting services became a feature of community radio stations and a national broadcasting organization, the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), was established. SBS comprises both a television and a radio station dedicated to broadcasting programmes that combine cultural services for migrants with the promotion of awareness of the multilingual and multicultural nature of Australian society (Ang, Hawkins and Dabboussy 2008; Jordens 1997: 229–30). Another cultural initiative was the Australian Ethnic Heritage Series, inspired by Immigration Minister Grassby. This published sixteen books between 1983 and 1987 which aimed to communicate the histories of specific ethnic communities and their contributions to Australia alongside a discussion about the difficulties these communities faced in accessing social, economic and cultural resources (Price 1960; Zubrzycki 1960; Martin 1978).

Australian cultural institutions, also influenced by broader 1960s and 1970s developments, such as the 'new museology' and 'history from below', were willing participants and leaders in the establishment of a 'multicultural' Australian historiography. As we highlight in our detailed discussion, libraries began to collect books in foreign languages for their migrant audiences, archives began to document migrant communities, and museums began to represent migrant cultures.[6] With this, the seed was sown for an entwined relationship between the representation of migration in museums and changing narratives of national identity in relation to the existence of culturally diverse groups in Australian society.

Types of exhibitions and curatorial strategies

Our research identifies two central concerns in Australian museum engagement with the theme of migration. One primarily seeks to represent Australia's cultural diversity as integral to its national identity through collection and exhibition strategies that focus on the value of different – that is non-Anglo – ethnic cultures. The other focuses on how cultural diversity has been experienced, understood and used, and what this means for how we engage with one another. One way of characterizing these approaches is that in Australia the representation of migration occurs in the form of exhibitions that typically are predominantly concerned with either culture or history. Taking our analysis a step further, a first glance suggests that those dealing with the representation of different ethnic cultures tend to be celebratory while those dealing with the history of how difference has been experienced tend to be more critical in their orientation. However, the political valences of these strategies are not absolute and change according to the political context at the time of their use.

Our argument is that approaches which focus on representing the cultural practices and traditions of various ethnic groups emerged largely in response to the multicultural policies of the 1970s and 1980s in the spirit of equity and opportunity for non-Anglo-Celtic migrant groups. Exhibitions in this context were designed to celebrate Australia's cultural diversity in support of the pedagogical intention to encourage an understanding of Australian identity as multicultural rather than essentially British. In step with broader policies, they took up the intention to accommodate ethnic communities into Australian identity by highlighting migrant contributions to the Australian economy and society in cultural terms. In doing so they frequently used what has been identified as a cultural 'enrichment' narrative (Hage 1998; McShane 2001). While such exhibitions were part of a general 'progressive moment', from a critical perspective they could also be seen as a 'handmaiden' to government policy (McShane 2001; Witcomb 2009) or even as a reinforcement of the 'other' in white Australia (Hage 1998; Ang and St Louis 2005; Ang 2009). However, in the more politically conservative era of the twenty-first century, with its more restrictive immigration policies, in which diversity needs to be defended and fought for all over again, the celebration of diversity may once again be seen as progressive, or even oppositional, albeit with an eye on past critiques. As we shall argue, cultural diversity is no longer understood simply as functioning like a mosaic. Instead, there is a much more sophisticated understanding of the power relations inherent in our models of cultural diversity.

The approach which historicizes Australia's cultural diversity can also be read as either celebratory or critical, depending on context. When multiculturalism was an important plank of governmental agendas at all levels of Australian government, the critique of past immigration policies served to support more open policies and was thus part of the celebration of Australia as a multicultural society – a society that had shaken off past prejudices. When multiculturalism fell out of favour, however, such historical approaches could be, and were, read as critical of both Australian society and the conservative government that came to power in the mid-1990s.

Within the historical approach, we further identify several different curatorial strategies. The first, which developed at the same time as the cultural approach, is simply a recognition

of the history of migration and an attempt to critique the notion that Australia became multicultural only in the post-Second World War period. We would argue that this strategy takes up the new vantage point for viewing diversity across modern Australian history provided by the move from an assimilationist policy, which expected new migrants to become Australian by taking on British values, to multicultural policies, which naturalized cultural diversity as part of the social fabric. As such, it forms part of the 'celebratory' moment which, as indicated above, has achieved a renewed connection with progressive politics – in this instance as a history in tension with a desire to value what is seen as the fundamental Anglo-Celtic nature of Australian society.

The second strategy, developed at a time of enormous public debate within Australia about the country's immigration policy in the context of the 'War on Terror' and the increasing arrival of asylum seekers by boat, takes the form of a critical engagement with the history of Australia's immigration policy. Until 2001, this approach could be seen as extending understanding of the history of Australian migration in the spirit of well-established multicultural policies. However, it began to take effect in exhibitions at precisely the same time as Australians, and the Australian government, began to lose their faith in multiculturalism. The result was that some Australian museums were identified as undermining Australian values as they were expressed in an increasingly conservative context. Thus began Australia's own version of the 'Culture Wars' – known as the 'History Wars'.

The third strategy is the attempt to develop exhibitions that use Australia's migration history to develop more nuanced understandings of how cultural diversity works in the present as well as how it worked in the past. Characteristically, this strategy involves interaction between cultures and highlights cultural change. It is also the most curatorially complex. It includes looking at personal experiences of living with cultural diversity in a particular place over time; seeking to dissolve national boundaries and embed Australia in a transnational history in which people, objects and ideas are moving constantly between places; and using aesthetic and poetic devices to create imaginative forms of dialogue across cultural difference.

Exhibitions may feature more than one of these approaches – or indeed a mixture of all three.

Celebrating multicultural Australia – culture and history

In 1986, Australia's first migration museum, the Migration and Settlement Museum, opened in Adelaide, South Australia. It was the culmination of a chain of investigations that started with a Grassby-inspired survey of local ethnic collections and resulted in a museum that collected and exhibited the cultural material of specific ethnic groups and provided a history of migration since European settlement. Recent research shows that it was not the first institution in Australia to collect and exhibit ethnic material and the history of migration, but it was certainly the first to do so as its sole focus and with a government mandate.[7]

The museum pursued its interest in representing migrant cultures primarily through the use of temporary exhibitions created in collaboration with various ethnic groups. The effect was a strong celebration of South Australia's cultural diversity and a clear message that Australia's ethnic groups were worthy of inclusion in the state's (and, by implication, the nation's) story. The opening temporary exhibition was *Textile Traditions: Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia*. It comprised a display of costumes and household textiles in keeping with the new museum's mission to create displays 'about the history and cultural traditions of all the different communities which make up South Australia's multicultural society' – 110 groups in all (Szekeres 1989: 73). As well as carrying the broad pedagogical concern of multiculturalism, *Textile Traditions* exemplified the intention to redress, as first director Viv Szekeres (1989: 79) said, the 'Anglo-Celtic bias' in Australian collections by exhibiting previously unrepresented material and working cooperatively with the relevant ethnic communities to develop displays of that material (Anderson 1986: 4).

Textile Traditions is a model of what became a longstanding and widespread approach to representing migration through culture – particularly 'different' cultures. But the Migration Museum also provided historical context for its celebratory temporary exhibitions. This took the form of a permanent display of a chronology of Australian immigration that included the dispossession of Aboriginal people (focusing particularly on South Australia), and other permanent exhibitions focusing on particular periods of immigration. Together these showed Australia as a land of migrants from a variety of cultural backgrounds from the beginning of colonization. Highlighting the more critical view provided through the historical record, Viv Szekeres wrote that she felt the museum had a clear political mission to bring to light the difficult and often traumatic experience of being a migrant in Australia, as well as the devastating effect of colonization on the Indigenous peoples (Szekeres 1989: 73–9).

In the 1980s period of maturing multicultural policies, the Migration Museum was at the forefront of celebrating Australia's cultural diversity and announcing that Australian national identity was now more complex and open. Szekeres's understanding of her role as the museum's director also reflects the new generation of historians and social history curators who were keen to address the erasures created by earlier historians in their narratives about the past. Among the many new cultural and historiographical projects of this 'Bicentennial' decade, a signal event in 1988 was a conference of museums and libraries hosted by the Victorian Branch of the Museums Association of Australia and Library Council of Victoria to discuss 'new responsibilities' in 'documenting multicultural Australia'. The intention of this gathering was to influence historical collections policy directly on the basis that the official record did not include documentation of the 'presence in, and contributions to, Australia' of Indigenous peoples and immigrant communities with diverse languages and cultures (Loh 1989: 1). Participants included national collecting institutions and the Migration Museum as well as ethnic organizations and Aboriginal groups who reported on how they were collecting and housing their cultures and histories. The conference's aim clearly indicates that its focus was to celebrate the 'contribution' of ethnic groups to Australian society, whether through their cultures or a history of their presence in Australia. Significantly, it included Aboriginal people in this frame of reference at a time when there was not only a growing movement for reconciliation between the Indigenous population and the colonizers but a strong critique of Australia's founding moment as 'Invasion Day' – the beginning of Indigenous dispossession. (See Bennett, Mercer and Carter (1992) for a collection that critiques the narratives that underpinned various representations of the nation during 1988.)

At a time of inclusive refiguring and re-presenting of Australian history,[8] the involvement of Indigenous people in the conference may be seen as a determed bid to find a way through the 'uneasy conversation' between them and multicultural initiatives. An interesting and influential historiographical approach that emerged through the Ethnic Heritage Series was one which assumed that Australia was a nation of immigrants in which Indigenous people were the 'first people'. The strongest use of this 'peopling of Australia' approach was in *The*

Australian People: An Encyclopedia of the Nation, its People and their Origins, first published with the support of the Australian Bicentennial Authority in 1988 (Jupp 2001). It designated Indigenous people as the 'first settlers' – followed many thousands of years later by others who also successively became settlers – and included the histories of 107 ethnic communities in Australia, giving equal status to all, including the English, the Irish, the Scots and the Welsh.

In 1988, the idea of the peopling of Australia also provided the frame for an exhibition at Sydney's new Powerhouse Museum[9] – *Australian Communities*. In contrast to the celebratory exhibition of Australia's cultural diversity which identified ethnicity and culture with non-Anglo-Celtic groups, *Australian Communities* explicitly explored migration and a more inclusive understanding of Australia's multicultural identity by initiating a conversation between Indigenous peoples and all newcomers since 1788. As a result, in this exhibition there was a sense in which the Australian community as a whole was defined by cultural diversity in ways that made diversity 'something in which we all participate, rather than a special addition, like icing on a cake' (Witcomb 2009: 56).

Another development signalled in this exhibition was the combination of the pedagogical intent to value cultural diversity with critical reference to the history of Australian immigration policy. A pamphlet accompanying the exhibition stated: 'Regrettably, well-entrenched negative attitudes towards Asians, left over from the 1800s and World War II, still exist. Despite the rich contribution of Asian immigrants, some parts of the Australian community continue to express resentment and hostility towards them' (Douglas 1991). While the critique remained implicit, it seemed that the history of the peopling of Australia could provide a space in which to draw attention to the issues of anti-Asian 'white Australia' policies, and assimilationist policies which expected new arrivals to forget their own cultures and become 'Australian'.

Above all, representations of multicultural Australia during the 1980s, often associated with Bicentennial activities, highlight the contemporary concern with cultural equity by seeking equal representation for all. Significantly, in terms of our typology for understanding the various approaches to museum representations of migration and its imbrication with an understanding of Australia as a culturally diverse society, there are exhibitions that use history as a device to enable and encourage a conversation around issues – whether the dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or the exclusion of people by race from Australia. Here we read an aim to extend the mission of the museum beyond a celebration of diversity to some kind of political engagement involving a critical standpoint on Australia's past and, by implication, a defence of the policies of the time.

In the years after 1988, the notion that all settlers were migrants was, however, far from established. In 1991, for example, the Australian National Maritime Museum (ANMM)[10] in Sydney took up the migration theme in a permanent exhibition which dealt with the migrant experience within the frame of sea travel 'from the convict period to the present day'. The exhibition was called *Passengers*. The description of 'migrants' was reserved for those who made the journey as part of the post-war migration scheme. Those who came before the Second World War were simply 'settlers'.

Cultural difference as the focus of the 'culture' approach to exhibiting migration also continued as a regular methodology. For example, *Chops and Changes: Food, Immigrants and Culture*, developed by the Migration Museum in 1996, extended the *Textile Traditions* model into a celebration of the contributions of diverse cultural traditions to Australian life by

focusing on the impact of a cornucopia of different food on what Australians from an Anglo background considered 'dull old Australian chops' (grilled lamb chops served with boiled potatoes and a green vegetable such as green beans). An unanticipated effect of seeking to establish the value of cultural diversity in this way, however, was to locate non-Anglo cultures as a colourful addition to Australian society rather than self-determining members of it (Hutchison 2009). In other words, despite the aim of inclusion, they were never really equal and they were always separate. As Ghassan Hage put it:

> if the exhibition of the 'exotic natives' was the product of the power relation between the coloniser and the colonised *in the colonies* as it came to exist in the colonial era, the multicultural exhibition is the product of the power relation between the post-colonial powers and the post-colonised as it developed *in the metropolis* following the migratory process that characterised the post-colonial era.

(Hage 1998: 160–1)

New developments: histories of migrant experience and cultural change

In the context of the dominant migration exhibition mode – and critiques of its focus on culture as a static characteristic of certain groups – alternative approaches in the 1990s were perhaps less visible. A significant development, however, was the emergence of exhibitions which engaged with diversity as an *interaction* between cultures. Both of the exhibitions we discuss here brought the distinct history and culture approaches together by using history to open up the theme of how different groups shared a place and by examining, rather than simply documenting, the impact of interaction between cultures, through the experience of history. In other words, culture became dynamic and history became something that was experienced, as well as a context. *Bridging Two Worlds: Jews, Italians and Carlton* was a 1992 exhibition made possible through a collaboration between the Melbourne Jewish Museum, the Italian Historical Society and Museum Victoria and held at the Museum of Victoria. It explored the experiences of two migrant groups who had lived in Carlton, an inner suburb of Melbourne, since the nineteenth century. It was clearly a celebration of the contribution of Jews and Italians to the development of a more cosmopolitan culture in Australia, but it was also attentive to another issue – the question of how we accommodate cultural difference and become multicultural. By looking at everyday life in one place over time, including reference to its colonial beginnings, the exhibition showed change occurring as a result of cultural interaction in a particular location. Place and time thus became key characters in the story, with a productive and enabling force. Another element in this exhibition was the evocation of migrant experiences in Carlton through personal testimony and the novelist Arnold Zable's often informal and expressive text. For instance: 'Learning Australian: The local school. This was the melting pot. This was where the children of Carlton – Europeans, Aussies and Asians alike – came together. Sometimes they fought and taunted each other. Sometimes they fell in love' (Zable 1992: 23). Unlike expository text which creates a distance between the author and the reader in order to invite critical examination, this approach, which owes more to the devices of creative than expository prose, closes the distance. It draws the reader inside the experience of multicultural Carlton, enabling it to be felt.

Sweet and Sour: Experiences of Chinese Families in the Northern Territory, developed by the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory and the Chung Wah Society in 1996,

also focused on a single place – Darwin. The Chinese experience in Australia has its origins in colonial times, and in this case, as well as celebrating the maintenance of cultural traditions, the exhibition dealt with the difficulties Chinese families experienced as a result of discriminatory government policies (Healy 1996: 3). The exhibition included displays of traditional objects and histories of Chinese families, bringing historical experience in Australia together with traditional culture.

In both *Bridging Two Worlds* and *Sweet and Sour* we see not a history of Australia's cultural diversity as in the 'peopling' approach, but the experience of cultural diversity in action through the historical experience of ethnic groups in the wider cultural context of a particular place. Such exhibitions are not simply celebrating diversity but engaging with the more difficult question of how racism, as well as good will, have shaped the way we are.

As we show in our discussion of more recent exhibitions, this 1990s' intention to look at culture as dynamic rather than static, through the experience of history and in association with a particular set of cultural strategies, has re-emerged in more recent times.

Migration exhibitions in the context of political challenges: history and culture

In 1998 Australia's second migration museum, the Immigration Museum, opened in Melbourne. The new museum's displays were in many ways updated versions of the South Australian Migration Museum's initial 1986 approach. Displays of culture were framed by a chronology of 200 years of settlement that included its impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the 1992 recognition of Indigenous land rights known as the 'Mabo Case'. A community gallery provided a space for displays developed with ethnic community groups which included the more recent waves of refugees from South America and Africa and over time came to include Irish and Scottish groups as well as non-English-speakers.

Rather than taking the long-term 'peopling' approach to settlement, which included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the settling process, the Immigration Museum emphasized the connection between all those who had arrived since colonization. In its opening booklet, the museum's patron, the Governor of Victoria, wrote: 'The story of immigration is essentially the story of all non-Indigenous Australians. Over the past 200 years millions of people have settled in this country, bringing with them diverse cultures and beliefs' (Immigration Museum 1998: iv). In some of the displays the connections between the experience of different cultural groups were drawn out poetically through personal stories and expressive text. While the idea of the contribution of 'our immigrants' persisted in this museum, it did so alongside an intention to focus on the interaction between cultures in the creation of contemporary Australia. The clear message of the Immigration Museum in 1998 concerned both culture and history as things we all might share: 'We need to acknowledge our history with all its shades of light and dark, and celebrate our rich diversity' (Immigration Museum 1998: 24).

While the approach of the Immigration Museum could be seen as well rehearsed and holding no surprises in the context of advanced Australian multiculturalism, in retrospect its 1998 celebratory rhetoric signalled a clearly progressive politics in the midst of a conservative turn. It opened in the middle of a tumultuous public debate about multiculturalism, sparked by the election of a conservative federal government in 1996, that mirrored concerns about social cohesion in other multicultural Western societies at the time. One sign of the times

was the sharp rise in popularity of Pauline Hanson's One Nation party. In her maiden speech in the Federal Parliament, Hanson (1996) railed against 'special privileges' for both Indigenous Australians and migrants, especially those from Asia, Africa and the Middle East, many of whom had come as refugees.

In this new context, the South Australian Migration Museum took its consistent intent to educate audiences about the experience of migration into direct political engagement. It provided a strong counter to uninformed criticism of refugees, particularly those arriving as asylum seekers, through a travelling exhibition called *Survivors of Torture and Trauma*, which aimed 'to help people understand the experience of torture and trauma'.[11] The exhibition invited audiences to walk through an installation which recreated the refugee experience of being caught with nowhere to go. It also moved people through the process that refugees have to undergo in order to reach Australia as part of its humanitarian intake. In our story of the history of various curatorial strategies used in representing migration in Australian museums, this exhibition is important because it extended the evocative power first demonstrated in *Italians and Jews in Carlton* to an attempt to engage with poetic strategies aimed at immersing visitors in the world of the 'other' rather than maintaining boundaries. The aim here was clearly to engage the potential for empathy among those who attended the exhibition.[12]

Concerns about terrorism, asylum seekers and social disintegration were a far cry from the 1988 celebratory approach to cultural diversity. As well as including refugee groups in migration exhibitions and dealing with the refugee experience directly, museums responded to the times by highlighting history as a means through which to examine migration and cultural diversity, using it to renew their intention to educate Australians about their multicultural society. The clearest and most contentious example of this approach was the first permanent exhibition at the new National Museum of Australia, which was opened by the Prime Minister as a major Centenary of Federation event. This exhibition explicitly revived the Bicentennial's 'peopling of Australia' theme. It was called *Horizons: The Peopling of Australia since 1788*. Strikingly, its interest in history extended beyond the idea of waves of immigration from colonial times to the present to cover the history of immigration policy. Individual experiences of migration, told largely through objects, were located in the context of key policies, such as populating Australia's empty spaces and restricting that population by race. For example, one display focused on the Vietnamese asylum seekers who travelled by boat across the China Sea to the 'top end' of Australia in the late 1970s. Personal objects from one such perilous boat journey were juxtaposed with some of the polemic that greeted these 'boat people' (as they were often derisively called), such as a newspaper poster declaring, 'Sink them!'

Such strategies provide room for a strong affective response of discomfort, which, in turn, may lead to some level of critical insight. Another affective device, using a more poetic approach, was also provided in *Horizons* in an artwork expressing the peopling story as the layers of an Aboriginal midden.[13] In the top few centimetres, above layers of sand and shells representing thousands of years, shoes, leather and glass appeared among the Aboriginal artefacts, pointing to the cultural exchange that inevitably followed the moment of contact. In a simple use of the art of installation, visitors were confronted with the politics of land-ownership in which it is clear that 'migrants' or 'settlers' or 'pioneers' – all terms used to describe the arrival of non-Indigenous people but with different political connotations – are but sojourners in comparison with the original inhabitants. At the same time, the radical differences between the two cultures and the implications of those differences are also suggested.

While there was some public debate about the Migration Museum's *Survivors of Torture and Trauma* exhibition, *Horizons* suffered a much more dramatic reception. It received very poor press from conservative critics and from a conservative review panel that called for the gallery to be shut (Commonwealth of Australia 2003; Message 2009; Witcomb 2009). In 2009 it was replaced by a still-current exhibition called *Australian Journeys*, whose interest lies in tracing Australia's 'interconnections with the world'.[14] In this exhibition the focus is on objects as an expression of transnationalism rather than either culture or the history of migration or immigration policies. Histories of travel, trade and migration – the main themes of the exhibition – are implicit rather than explicit and there is no central narrative or any other device to provide a point of view. The movement of ideas, people and objects in and out of the country is captured in rich detail but nothing is offered about what this may mean in terms of cultural diversity, Australia's position in the world or Australian identity. What remains is a space of flows and exchange. For example, one of its many objects is an Irish dancing costume designed and sewn by the Australian designer Rachel Franzen. Franzen is not Irish, although she has a passion for Irish dancing. She now lives in and runs her business from Dubai. The design of the costume blends Irish and Arabic decorative motifs. While it might speak to transnational flows and movements of people, it cannot be taken as either an expression of cultural identity on the part of an ethnic group or of their migrant experience. Instead, it speaks to the global flow of people, to the hybrid nature of contemporary cultural identities and perhaps to a depiction of Australian society as cosmopolitan from its very beginnings. The frame of the nation and the problem of defining its cultural identity has all but disappeared.

By contrast, in 2003, the Melbourne Immigration Museum opened a new permanent exhibition called *Getting In* with the clear pedagogical intent of trying to reclaim some of the ground now lost to conservatives. Taking up what *Horizons* started, it provides a history of Australian immigration policy within the larger 'peopling' frame, declaring that 'More than 9 million people have migrated to Australia since 1788.' The exhibition includes an interactive installation that invites visitors to interview prospective migrants and make decisions about their eligibility on the basis of the criteria of the day. It is a process that invites comparison with current policies. It also seeks to educate the public on the difference between migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in a bid to generate more understanding of the plight of the latter two groups.

In *Getting In* a historical framework is used to show how cultural diversity has been understood and managed in Australia over time. Other migration exhibitions in this recent period also seek to drill into cultural diversity rather than retreat from it and have drawn on embodied affective interpretive methods as well as a strong eye on history in order to do so. Another development in *Getting In* is the move away from the ethnic community experience to that of individuals and approaches that seek new ways of bringing Indigenous people into the conversation.

Culture, history and place

Since 2003 there have been a variety of examples of exhibitions that seek to engage with the experience of cultural diversity and to include Indigenous people within that frame. One approach has been to return to the themes of cross-cultural experiences within a place, first explored in *Bridging Two Worlds: Italians and Jews in Carlton*, in combination with a more

complex understanding of the ways culturally diverse groups have contributed to Australia. A striking example among more recent exhibitions was one which reclaimed ethnic experience in the context of history and place – the 2007 South Australian Museum travelling exhibition *Australia's Muslim Cameleers: Pioneers of the Inland* (Jones and Kenny 2007). At a time of controversy about Muslim Australians, this exhibition showed the long history of Muslims in Australia and their contribution not to cosmopolitanism but to British settlement of the country's interior. Documents and objects bore witness to work and skill rather than heritage, and highlighted the complexity of the interactions between the cameleers and both British and Aboriginal people. While archival documents conveyed a history of discriminatory immigration policy, they also highlighted the respect that British explorers had for the camel drivers who enabled much of their exploration. Aboriginal artefacts using camel hair and others depicting camels and turbaned figures revealed further forms of cultural interaction. The exhibition was lightly framed by history. Visitors came across the stories of interaction and experience through discussion of the particular items displayed within headlined sections. It was the power of the objects and images to inculcate a sense of place and experience with minimal explanation, rather than an explicit narrative, that carried the pedagogical intent.

Another example, also with a strong history and place framework, is *Migration Memories*, curated by Mary Hutchison as part of an Australian Research Council project about exhibiting cultural diversity (2005–8).[15] In two exhibitions with communities in small regional locations she explored the nature of migrant experiences, using the history of migration in each place as a frame. The experiences featured were not those of ethnic communities, but of individuals, including those from English-speaking and Aboriginal cultures. Their histories – which might extend over generations – reflected local migration history from the colonial period to the present and its impact on local Aboriginal people, including forced migrations. Hutchison's research was informed in part by curating exhibitions at the National Archives of Australia, whose collection of government records includes detailed personal documents as well as documents concerning policy and its implementation. She used these to show the relationship between personal and historical/political histories very sharply.

One of the lessons from *Migration Memories* was that focusing on migration in the context of locality highlights the possibilities of seeing it in terms of migrations within Australia as well as from overseas, and in terms of displacements/movements both out and in. In this way *Migration Memories* reopened and extended the potential interest of migration history as a theme for migration exhibitions.

Two other aspects of *Migration Memories* reflect emerging characteristics of exhibitions seeking to address cultural diversity. One is that it explored ways of inviting audiences into a conversation with cultural diversity in their place by engaging forms of communication such as personal stories in the words of their tellers and through expressive and first-person texts that, like Arnold Zable's in *Bridging Two Worlds*, work to draw the reader into an experience. The other concerns the inclusion of Aboriginal stories in the frame of migration history, not so much as a story that precedes but as one that continues and is part of the present context of cultural diversity. In practice, this exploration inevitably called up the 'uneasy conversation' and perhaps because of this often had a particularly strong impact on local audiences and the individuals who shared their histories for the exhibitions.

In its most recent (2011) exhibition, the Immigration Museum in Melbourne also explores the meaning of living in a culturally diverse society. *Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours* breaks the link between the representation of migration to Australia and representing Australian identity

as shaped by its cultural diversity (see Witcomb (2013) for a fuller discussion of this exhibition). The focus is not on migration, but on what it means to live in a culturally diverse society. As such, the intention is to counter the growing presence of racism, particularly among young people, who form the main audience for this exhibition. It attempts to explain the process of identity formation and the implications of this for social relations, including the processes by which we exclude people from belonging.

The exhibition begins by making each visitor the subject of the display through a video installation that invites visitors to reflect on and question their own positions as members of a culturally diverse society by confronting them with images of people from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds that alternate between welcoming them and pushing them away simply by their body language. After this introduction, the exhibition goes on to explain how our identities are expressed through our use of language, clothing and jewellery, eating customs and so on. This is followed by a series of personal stories in which people from a wide variety of backgrounds (but sadly not Anglo backgrounds) use objects and cultural practices to negotiate their cultural identities, which always turn out to be complex and not reducible to a single ethnicity.

From this starting point based on individual identity, the discussion moves to questions about how a society defines its identity by defining boundaries between self and other. For example, a room full of passports from around the world speaks to our ability to exclude people *and* to welcome them. Practices of exclusion are then explained through a history of racism in Australian popular culture in which the 'white Australia' policy looms large. Display items include games, advertising and political ephemera as well as documentation of everyday practices, such as the bullying of those who are 'different'. Unlike previous exhibitions in which the recognition of self was meant to lead to validation, here this recognition leads to an uncomfortable questioning of one's responses to racist situations.

In *Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours* migration history and cultural diversity have parted company and are no longer conflated. The exhibition is not about the experience of migration but rather what it means to live in a culturally diverse society where identity is multiple and hybrid. Difference is back on the agenda – not as a spectacle or a colourful addition, but as something embedded in a conversation about what kind of people we want to be as Australians. Audiences are invited to engage in this dialogue through their own experiences and feelings.

Conclusion

What is clear from this history of the ways in which migration has been represented in Australian museums is that the close relationship between the histories of multiculturalism and the representation of migration in Australian museums provided a very limited frame from which to approach the more complex question of how to address cultural diversity. The close association between culture and ethnicity made it particularly hard to represent the experience of living in a culturally diverse society. While a more historical approach made some inroads into this problem, particularly when it was centred in a place, allowing diversity to emerge from within, more recent exhibitions, such as *Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours* and *Migration Memories*, point to new configurations between culture and history. Rather than representing the past, for example, *Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours* deals with the legacy of the past in the present. It does so by representing individuals rather than communities, pointing to their multiple allegiances and creating a space for affective, embodied and personal stories.

Questions of identity here are not simply to do with static understandings of culture. This creates a space in which it is possible to question received understandings based on fixed cultural understandings. Likewise, *Migration Memories* uses personal experiences to break the mould of group identity while allowing historical contexts to come through. In these spaces it becomes possible to engage across former divides between Indigenous, settler and migrant groups and create a space in which it might be possible to start the process of making 'uneasy conversations' more comfortable, without eliminating the tensions.

Notes

1 The South Australian Migration Museum opened in 1986, making it the first museum of its type in Australia. The Immigration Museum in Melbourne and the Migration Heritage Centre, New South Wales, were both established in 1998 (the latter now has a primarily online presence). As well as these dedicated museums, many of Australia's national and state-funded museums have permanent exhibitions about migration. There are also a number of established museums which focus on the history of particular ethnic/cultural groups in Australia, such as the Chinese Museum in Melbourne, the Polish Hill River Church Museum in South Australia, and Jewish museums in Melbourne and Sydney. Temporary and touring migration exhibitions have also been staged regularly.

2 Other team members include Kylie Message, Ian McShane, Simon Knell and Arne Amundsen. The project is DP120100594 and we wish to acknowledge the funding provided by the Australian Research Council.

3 In Australia, the preferred term for Indigenous people is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to specify the differences between them and avoid homogenization. 'Aboriginal' covers the continent and Torres Strait Islander, the islands of the Torres Strait to the north of Australia.

4 Henry Parkes made this argument for the federation of the Australian states.

5 The development of Australian multicultural policy by Grassby and his successors took place in the context of a wider discussion about social and cultural equity that had become increasingly influential from the late 1960s. Grassby was significantly influenced by both the Canadian multicultural policies of Pierre Trudeau (an influence discussed by Zubrzycki 1995) and the work of Professor George Zubrzycki, a sociologist who was a post-war Polish migrant to Australia (MacPhee 1981: 1).

6 These activities are clearly documented in the papers from a 1988 conference entitled *New Responsibilities: Documenting Multicultural Australia* (Birtley and McQueen 1989).

7 As part of the ARC project, Karen Schamberger at Deakin University is uncovering the existence of collections dealing with non-Anglo-Celtic settlers and migrants in Australian museums from the nineteenth century. These collections are not extensive or systematic like those underpinning the exhibitions discussed in this chapter, but they raise interesting questions as to why they were collected and how they were used. Also, no more than a handful of ethnic-specific museums emerged before the 1970s.

8 The history series *A People's History of Australia since 1788*, edited by Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee, is another example of a project which capitalized on the Bicentennial to take a fresh look at the 200 years since the first colonial settlement.

9 The Powerhouse Museum opened in 1988. It was based on the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, whose own forerunner had opened in 1880. The addition of a Social History Department was one of the differences from the museum's previous incarnations.

10 This museum was meant to open in 1988, but this was delayed until 1991. *Passengers* was one of its opening suite of galleries and it remains in place today, with its curatorial vision largely intact.

11 www.history.sa.gov.au/migration/galleries_programs/community_access_gallery/survivors.htmweb (accessed 21 February 2007).

12 For a discussion of the ethical difficulties involved in such immersive strategies, see Witcomb (2013).

13 A midden is a term used by archaeologists for a site where a particular community deposited domestic rubbish over many years. In the case of Indigenous people in Australia, a midden on the coast would typically include thousands of shells from shellfish, bones from fish and birds and so on.

14 www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/australian_journeys/ (accessed 15 January 2014).

15 http://rsh.anu.edu.au/migrationmemories/ (accessed 15 January 2014).

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