

New Cultural Geographies in Australia: the Social and Spatial Constructions of Culture and Citizenship

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Background

There is now a widely accepted understanding that cultural geography has experienced a substantial shift in orientation over the last decade and a half. The changes have been of sufficient proportions to justify being described as a paradigm shift and there has emerged the idea of ‘new cultural geography’. It was in 1987 that the British geographers Cosgrove and Jackson announced the arrival of the new cultural geography. They spelt out how it would differ from the old cultural geography, associated with Carl Sauer and others of the Berkeley School. As with the earlier change in cultural geography, from environmental determinism to the Berkeley School’s cultural determinism, a revised understanding of culture lay at the heart of the change (see Winchester *et al.* 2003). The first aim of this paper is to trace the influence of this new cultural geography within Australian scholarship.

The paradigmatic changes within cultural geography have not been confined within that sub-discipline. The changes of approach have had force and currency throughout human geography. As a consequence, many have talked of a general “cultural turn” within human geography. One of the criticisms of new cultural geography, and more widely of the ‘cultural turn’ within human geography, has been that it has generated a less politically engaged form of geography (see Badcock 1996, Harvey 1996, Martin and Sunley 2001, Rodriguez-Pose 2001). However, Australian ‘new cultural geography’ is deeply political. I have described the political contributions of that scholarship in an earlier review (see Dunn 1997). Nonetheless, there is always scope for enhancing the political project of cultural geography. A second aim of this paper is to suggest how a stronger and more accessible politics would be facilitated through a more rigorous discussion of citizenship. The paper concludes with a commentary on measures or indicators of citizenship and how they may advance the politics of cultural geography, and human geography more broadly, in Australia.

Conceiving of culture

A handful of key characteristics of new cultural geography are said to demarcate it from old cultural geography (see Winchester *et al.* 2003 for a detailed outline). Key among these is the rejection of a superorganic view of culture, a conceptual basis of old cultural geography (Duncan 1980, Jackson 1989: 16-9). A superorganic perspective conceived of culture as an unchanging container. People were born into a culture and they lived their lives, interpreting their world and performing, according to the dictates of that culture. The assumption was that cultures change very little. Furthermore, the people within each

cultural group were seen as culturally homogenous. This view was most clearly articulated by Zelinsky.

culture can be regarded as the structured, traditional set of patterns for behaviour, a code or template for ideas and acts ... it appears to be a superorganic entity living and changing according to a still obscure set of internal laws. Although individual minds are needed to sustain it, by some remarkable process culture also lives on its own, quite apart from the single person (Zelinsky 1973: 70-1).

The superorganic view of culture had clear epistemological benefits. It allowed geographers to identify, count and map groups of people. Indeed, one of the contemporary challenges posed by 'new cultural geography' is whether and how we should now go about doing those tasks.

The anthropologist James Clifford made some of the foundational statements against static notions of culture. He argued that cultures continually evolve and are contested (Clifford 1986: 18-19). This thinking was clearly behind the founding statement on new cultural geography, made by the British cultural geographers Dennis Cosgrove and Peter Jackson (1987: 95) where they emphasised "the contingent nature of culture". The intellectual criticism of superorganicism has been associated theoretically with the rise of constructivism: a theory that understands culture as a provisional social construction. The foundation of a social construction approach is that cultural groups – whether they are based around race, ethnicity, class, sexuality or gender – are outcomes of human thought and action. Groups are not seen as natural.

A second foundation of social constructivism is that researchers should trouble or unravel constructions (Kobayashi & Peake, 1994). The aim of such deconstruction is to reveal the politics of representation, including the ideologies that inform social constructions, the key players and powerful institutions involved, and an identification of who benefits and loses through such constructions (see also Waitt *et al.* 2000: 98-99).

A brief lineage of ethnic and racial studies in geography provides one example of the paradigmatic shifts from environmental determinism, through superorganicism, and into social constructivism (see Table 1). Over the last century, the emphasis has moved from an analysis of how landscapes give rise to 'races' (environmental determinism), through the mapping and measuring of 'racial' groups (old cultural and social geography) to examining the construction of 'race' as a category (new cultural geography) and exposing influential ideologies and powerful interest groups (see Bonnett 1996; Kobayashi and Peake 1994).

Australian geographies of culture

The changes to geographical scholarship with indigenous people in Australia also demonstrate the paradigmatic shifts in cultural geography (Table 1). One of the founders of Australian geography, Griffith Taylor, undertook some of the first geographical research on indigenous Australians. The works he produced reflected his environmental

determinism. He drew heavily on the notion that there were natural and real categories of race, making links between environment and variations in skull morphology, stature, and nose shape. Taylor (1949: 51-67) drew links between degrees of skin colour and average temperatures, mapped “zones of pigmentation”, and examined the geography of skull morphology. His endeavours were saturated with an assumed racial hierarchy, which was itself seen as environmentally determined. Those ‘races’ originating in circumstances of plentiful food and comfortable climate were said by environmental determinists to lack ambition, endeavour and creativity (see Bonnett’s 1996 review of this field of geography).

Table 1: Paradigms of cultural geography, as seen in ‘ethnic and racial studies’ and work with indigenous Australians

Phase of cultural geography	Theory of culture and the cultural landscape	Ethnic and racial studies in Geography	Examples of work with indigenous Australians
<i>Environmental determinism</i>	Landscape (environment generally) as the generator of culture (sociobiology, social Darwinism)	Identifying the environmental bases of ‘races’ and of culture more generally	Measuring skin colour and skull shapes, & linking those to environmental patterns and change
<i>Old cultural geography</i>	Cultures as deposited on the landscape (Berkeley cultural determinism, Chicago School, neo-Weberian)	Measuring and mapping ‘race’ & ethnicity. Use of diffusion models & segregation measures	Mapping the distribution of indigenous peoples / tribes. Assessments of segregation, welfare and resources
<i>New cultural geography</i>	Cultures and landscapes as constructs of human action past and present (critical race theory, social constructivism)	Deconstructing racial ideology, analysing the politics of race, the links between nationalism (or localism) and racism	Analysis of the racialisation of indigenous people & their places, analytical work on whiteness

Bonnett (1996) identified the second phase of geographical scholarship of race as that which was focussed on mapping the distribution of racial groups, such as measuring residential concentration using indices of dissimilarity and assimilation. The work was most often in a liberal tradition, conceptually informed by the integrative ideals of Chicago School theorising. The clearest Australian examples of research in that tradition were the field-based projects of Fay Gale (1972) and the migration analyses of Burnley and Routh (1985). This work was in keeping with superorganic conceptualisations of culture, and work on other cultural groups at that time. For example, geographers of that era in Sydney were measuring and mapping Asian races (Connell and Ip 1981).

By the 1990s, and with the rise of new cultural geography, Australian research with indigenous people was very much concerned with the contested notions of culture. The works of Anderson (1990), Gibson (1999), Head (1999), Jacobs (1993), Jackson (1995) and Jones (1997) have focused on indigenous and non-indigenous constructions of culture, and of the cultural landscape, particularly through contests over the ownership and use of land. These research works were deeply politicised, exposing the claims of powerful groups to critical attention, and emphasising the legitimacy of indigenous

constructions of culture, landscape, and political claims. More latterly, cultural geographers have begun to examine how indigenous people suffer from constructions of whiteness, how they are excluded from spaces constructed as white (see Shaw 2000). The critical examination of whiteness is a frontiers foci of Australian social science (Hage 1998, Johnson 2002) and cultural geographers are at the forefront of that work in Australia. Work on racism is also revealing that while most recognise that there is a problem with racism in Australia (82%), much fewer are prepared to accept that there is a white cultural privilege (39%) (Forrest *et al.* 2002). This review of geographical scholarship relevant to indigenous people reveals the shifts from environmental determinism, to Berkeley-style superorganicism, to new cultural geography (Table 1). The fundamental conceptual change is the incorporation of a constructivist theory of culture.

The focus on the construction of culture is overt in much of the work of cultural geographers with minority ethnic groups. Such work has revealed the negative constructions, stereotypes and absences, in cultural products like news media, advertising, and even post-cards (Dunn and Mahtani 2001, Waitt 1997, Waitt and Head 2002). Geographers have been able to extend the work of media researchers and cultural studies practitioners by demonstrating how the constructions of cultural groups are bound up with the constructions of places. Some of the best known Australian examples include work on Chinatowns (Anderson 1990), Cabramatta (Dunn and Roberts 2003) and Redfern (Anderson 1993). It is geographers, influenced by the theory and politics of new cultural geography, who are bringing studies on ethnic enclaves to “maturation” (Light 1998, Mitchell 1999: 670). This arises from the focus upon senses of place and community within enclaves, and the emphasis upon dynamism and diversity in migrant spaces, rather than the pathologising of non-assimilation, a feature that underpinned much of the earlier scholarship on ethnic enclaves.

The dynamic nature of culture has best been demonstrated in geographical research on the experiences and perspectives of migrants. Pulvirenti’s (1997) work with Italian migrants revealed how the experiences of emigration, travel, and settlement had generated very different versions of Italo-Australian-ness. Similarly, ongoing work by O’Connor (2002) is demonstrating the dynamic nature of Irish-ness in Australia. Many Northern Irish protestants in Australia, who had previously identified as British, were assenting to being “Irish-Australians”. These migrants would complain that their accent was constantly taken by others as a marker of Irish-ness. Also, their decision to identify as Irish was a strategic choice undertaken to avoid confusion, as well as the threat of the ‘whingeing Pom’ stigma if they identified as British. These works demonstrate the fundamental influences of place, context and mobility on identity. Peach (2002) recently expressed concern that too much of cultural geography had too little attention to space or landscape. That concern is clearly not applicable in Australian cultural geography, where traditional core concepts like place, landscape and mobility remain central to investigations of culture.

Cultural geography in Australia is by no means exclusively focused on ethnicity. There have been the analyses of identity and landscape in places like western Sydney (Hodge

1996, Mee 1994, Mee and Dowling 2000) and Newcastle (Winchester *et al.* 1996). There is also a solid base of work on sexuality and space (Costello and Hodge 1999, Hodge 1995, Kirby and Hay 1997). The social construction of space in ways that are aged, if not ageist, has also been explored by Australian cultural geographers (Tandy 1999, Leary 1999). Another demonstration of the paradigmatic distance from environmental determinism is the new cultural geographies on constructions of nature, wilderness and environment (see Baker 1997, Gill 1999, McManus 2000, Suchet 2002).

The social construction of citizenship

As discussed above, cultures are dynamic and they are constructed within space. The same can be said of citizenship. Citizenship, defined broadly as a “political constellation of rights and duties”, is “realized and altered in specific contexts” (Smith 1999: 167). Citizenship is socially constructed. Like culture, citizenship is not naturally accorded, and neither is it evenly distributed. The possession and deployment of citizenship rights and duties are uneven.

Citizenship in Australia is contestable, and has been contested. Analyses of debates surrounding the development of Sydney mosques revealed the ways in which protagonists were contesting who was and was not a citizen. Opponents of mosques would insist that there was no place for a mosque in a Christian country, while the proponents would remind development authorities that Australia was a multicultural country (Dunn, forthcoming). These were counter-points in a debate regarding national citizenship. In these same land-use disputes, there were contests over local citizenship. Objectors would assert their local citizenship, defining themselves as “locals”, “citizens” and “rate-payers”, insisting there were no local Muslims and that “they” were “outsiders” (Dunn 2001: 303-4). Anti-mosque politics, and conflicts over citizenship, are a continuing feature of Australian urban politics. Isin (1999: 267-8) observed that cities have historically been foundational sites of democracy, and that the people have always had to wrest citizenship from elites. Urban citizenship is, and has always been, a struggle. Political geographers have also insisted that meaningful citizenship depends upon a sense of belonging and affiliation to a space, itself related to how those spaces are defined (see Kearns 1995: 167-9, Smith 1999: 169). Citizenship is clearly defined and contested in place. Being actively involved in governance and in the marking and direction of place are core practices of citizenship. Citizenship is a performance in place. This is indeed fecund territory for cultural geographers, and has particular utility for analyses of local land-use conflict and for debates regarding the identity of people and place.

Research indicators of citizenship

The concept of citizenship within the social sciences extends beyond formal national-political affiliation. Citizenship refers to the ability of individuals to exercise their individual capacities and pursue collective endeavour. Cultural geographers use a range of concerns and concepts that can be grouped under the rubric of citizenship issues. Many of these are shared by other sub-disciplines. Such concepts include representation, participation and belonging. These concepts are in opposition to forms of oppression,

including cultural imperialism, exploitation, powerlessness, marginalisation and exclusion. One of the short-falls of citizenship theorising is that it remains too abstract. Geographers are well placed to ground such theorising (Painter, 2000). In this section I have defined and organised these concepts under the rubric of citizenship.

Participation

Participation is a key concept that sits comfortably within a discussion of citizenship. Firstly, there is political participation. This form of participation is obvious to citizenship, it includes formal rights to vote, to be a candidate for political office (at whatever scale or scope), as well as accountability of the governors to the governed (see Kearns 1995: 163-5). But political participation extends well beyond formal electoral involvement. Citizens should expect to have day-to-day involvement in the governance of their own circumstances. Australian scholarship on local government and planning has an established interest in the extent and depth of public consultation (see Gleeson and Low 2000, M^cGuirk *et al.* 1996, Sandercock 1998, Sarkissian *et al.* 1997). The alternative to political participation is powerlessness. Young (1990: 56-7) defined the powerless as those who lack control and involvement in decision-making processes that pertain to their daily lives. Public participation in governance in Australia is generally limited and culturally uneven (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs, 1996: 36, Office of Multicultural Affairs 1995:60). For example, public involvement in urban governance remains largely confined to affluent, highly educated, and English-speaking (mostly male) Australians (see M^cGuirk 2001, Sandercock 1998, Thompson and Dunn 2002). Indigenous Australians, and those of non-English speaking background, generally experience lesser access to political participation and this limits citizenship.

Another form of participation is economic in nature. Urban and especially economic geographers have long had an interest in labour force participation and economic security. Again, this form of participation is critical to citizenship. The economically marginalised lack opportunity and are unable to “command what are perceived as being the normal necessities of life to provide an adequate standard of living” (Winchester and White 1988: 38). Economic marginalisation hits those of the working classes hardest, but it is also concentrated among certain cultural groups who lack access and control over key resources. Indigenous people’s lack of access to land is a root cause of their economic marginalisation. Native Title, and especially regional agreements, can advance economic participation among Indigenous Australians (Gibson 1999, Robinson 2001). The ability to command the necessities of everyday life is central to citizenship.

Some cultural groups require the protections of civil society against exploitation (Young 1990: 50). There was a good deal of academic interest in migrant welfare, and in the socio-economic fortunes of cultural groups in Australia in the 1980s and early 1990s (Collins 1988, Moss 1993). Recent geographic interest includes the doctoral work of Elissa Sutherland (2002) on migrant outworkers in Sydney. Economic participation is critical to citizenship and a reinvigorated series of analyses of economic participation, encompassing experiences of exploitation is much needed.

A third important form of participation is cultural in nature. Citizens must be enabled to develop and express their culture. Cultural participation includes input into the cultural marking and direction of space. In terms of migrant settlement, Isin and Siemiatycki (1999: 9) have argued that critical urban research needs to move beyond the assessment of migrants “as subjects of integration and assimilation” and instead see migrants as agents of cultural dynamism and change (see also Silvey and Lawson 1999). This thinking assumes that cultural distinctiveness, hybridity and change are desirable, and preferable to cultural homogeneity or assimilation. The cultural marking of space, and its symbolic ownership, has underpinned a good deal of cultural geography in Australia (eg. Anderson 1990). My work with Indo-Chinese-Australians in Cabramatta has been overtly concerned with the cultural participation by that set of cultural groups (Dunn and Roberts 2003). Having a space for cultural expression is one of the core means for reproducing culture. Citizenship involves belonging to place, marking that place and having a meaningful say in the cultural direction and future of that space.

Protection from oppression versus tolerating intolerance

Participation, or citizenship, requires mechanisms (laws and institutions) that “promote reproduction of and respect for group differences without oppression” (Young 1990: 47). For example, state protection from violence and intimidation, such as racist or gender violence, is essential for citizenship. The everyday, lived knowledge of a threat of violence restricts mobility and dignity. Violence against a particular group, or the fear of it, occurs because the powerful in society have decided to tolerate this violence. This reinforces the systematic nature of the oppression of violence.

The fear of violence, especially the uneven gendered geographies of fear, has been a strong field of interest in human geography. However, with the exception of the work of Hay (1995), not enough of this work has been done in Australia. Too little geographical work has been done on the variations of fear and discrimination. Work on the spatial variation of discrimination would reveal the spatially uneven bases for citizenship.

Representation, belonging and ownership

Young very usefully outlined the structural nature of oppressions. They are results of the everyday practices of what may even be “a well-intentioned liberal society” (Young 1990: 41). Oppressions rely upon assumptions about hierarchies and social orders. These assumptions are reinforced through stereotypes and repeated statements on the naturalness of these orders “in the normal processes of everyday life” (Young 1990: 41). Iconic statements of this ilk would include the raft of messages on how “a woman’s place is in the home”, how “migrants should leave their cultural ways behind and behave like mainstream Australians”, how gays and lesbians should not flaunt their “unnatural” sexuality, and in the mechanisms through which working class kids come expect working class futures, etc. The oppressions discussed earlier depend upon the everyday circulation of ideas regarding natural orders and deviant minorities. Young used the concept of cultural imperialism to describe the oppressive processes through which some cultural groups (be it across axes of gender, sexuality, ethnicity or class, etc) come to be seen as

the norm (the mainstream, the most valued, the Self, etc). Subordinate groups are constructed as the inferior or absent Other, and their experience, interpretations, stories and ideology are marked as abnormal, as different, as ethnic, deviant or lesser. Oppression is fundamentally facilitated, and the possibilities of citizenship curtailed, through these structural beliefs or ideologies.

One of the real political strengths of new cultural geography has been the attention to the core structural processes underpinning oppression. Geographers in Australia have focused a good deal of attention to constructions of norms and Others, and to the oppressive results of those ideologies. There are numerous examples of such scholarship, but it includes work on representations of national identity, landscape and people in products like news media, official tourism advertisements, heritage landscapes and post-cards (Dunn and Mahtani 2001, Waitt 1997, Waitt and M^cGuirk 1996, Waitt and Head 2002). These products make announcements on what Australia is, and who is an Australian. Research on constructions of ethnicity in the redevelopment of 'ethnic precincts' in Australia has revealed processes through which spaces are (re)racialised (Anderson 1990, Dunn and Roberts 2003, Shaw 2000). Research by cultural geographers on the re-imaging of place, especially older industrial cities, has drawn attention to how portrayals of place can symbolically dispossess, undermining the citizenship of the long-resident working class (Watson 1991, Winchester, *et al.* 1996). Work on local government in Australia has revealed the uneven recognition of cultural diversity in constructions of local identity. Recognising cultural diversity is a first and fundamental step towards recognising the varied needs and expectations residents, and for involving as many residents as possible in the processes of local governance (Dunn *et al.* 2001). In this manner, representation is linked to citizenship.

An emergent key concept of the social sciences in the 1990s was that of belonging. In Australia, theorists like Ghassan Hage (1998) have explained the cultural unevenness of belonging (see also Butcher and Thomas, 2001). Anglo-Celtic-Australians are often positioned as the confident hosts. Australians of a non-English speaking background are constructed as the guest, or worse still as some burden or source of deviance (Gunew 1993: 42-50, Hage 1998: 35-46). The absence of non-Anglo-Australians from representations of Australian-ness, in cultural products such as those mentioned above, undermines national belonging. A recent survey of 3501 Australians (of which more than half were Australians of a NESB) found that 74 per cent of long-present Australians (principally Anglo and Indigenous Australians) identified themselves as "Australians", while for those of a non-English speaking background the proportion was only 10 per cent. Of the 400 Vietnamese-Australians surveyed only 3 per cent felt prepared to identify as Australian (Ang, *et al.* 2002: 40). The authors concluded that "mainstream definitions of Australian cultural identity still tend to ignore or overlook the social diversity of the overall population", and the national imaginary remains white (Ang *et al.* 2002: 41). In other words, representations of the nation, of Australia and Australian-ness, remain too narrow to allow for a wide sense of belonging. My geographic argument is that a sense of place, in this case at the national scale, is also central to citizenship. And geographers have an exceptional heritage in examining sense of place. The current social

science of belonging would benefit enormously from the insights of geographical analysis.

Hope

Hope is emerging as a frontier concept of social science. In a book titled *Hope: New Philosophies for Change*, Mary Zournazi (2002) has examined the politics of hope, including the uneven distribution of it. There are those in our society who are hope-full, and there are those who are hope-less. The hope-less are likely to lack opportunity and participation, they may be symbolically excluded, lack a sense of belonging, spatial ownership and voice. On top of all that, they see little scope or opportunity for those circumstances to change. In large part, social scientists have examined the class variations, and to a lesser extent the ethnicity variations, in hope. But as any geographer intuitively knows, there is a geography to hope. Residential differentiation has long been recognised by urban geographers as a means of class learning (Badcock 1984, Bassett and Short 1980, Harvey 1973, Smith 1994). But it has clearly also been a means for allocating hope. Alongside hope rides aspiration. The decline of welfare capitalism, and the rise of individualism, are generating new and complicated geographies of hope. Gleeson and Randolph (2002: 21-5) have recently commented on how neo-liberalist state policy is exacerbating the polarization of aspiration. I would add hope as a final category under my conceptual umbrella of citizenship, and I am hope-full that more Australian geographers will engage this emerging concept. Cultural geographers, and urban and economic geographers influenced by the cultural turn, would seem exceptionally well equipped for such work.

Citizens in place

People become citizens in place. Social science should examine in a grounded manner the local circumstances of citizenship, and from that, develop concepts and politics that address critical forms of oppression. I can think of no better way to examine peoples' grounded circumstances than to ask them, in context. That sounds like a job for human geographers.

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