The Growth of Suburban Ethnic Diversity in Post-War Australia

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Abstract

The rapid growth of post-Second World War suburbanisation in Australia’s major cities is closely related to the massive migrant inflow from overseas. The migrant labour force from overseas has contributed to the development of manufacturing and tertiary industries on a large scale. The tendency has been for the first generation of post-war migrant groups up until the 1960s and 1970s shift their residence from the inner city to the middle ring and outer suburban areas and this coincides with the dispersion and expansion of residential zones. This has encouraged a diffuse ethnic mixture in the suburbs. A residential concentration of particular ethnic groups in inner areas did exist in the 1960s and the similar segregation can still be seen in some places, but the new migrant inflow has been toward the more middle-class suburbs and this has further developed the ethnic mix within the suburbs. The ethnic diversity has intensified, and concomitantly become a kind of norm in the suburbia.

1. Introduction

In Australia, the vast majority of the population live in urban areas. It is suburban life which, as much as anything else, characterises the Australian life-style. As for life in suburbia, Davison and Dingle explain, “the suburbs are now characteristic habit of Australians” (1995: 16). There is simply no denying that post-war suburbanisation in capital cities, Sydney and Melbourne in particular, has largely depended on international migration. Current suburbia in Australia’s sprawling metropolises does not mean ethnic homogeneity. The drastic changes in the demographic character of post-war Australia were caused not only by the general global migration trend but also by Australia’s post-war immigration policy. Having come to the recognition that there was an insufficient number in the total population, Australian government policies have accepted the massive migrant intake by recruiting labour from overseas.
Hence, the rapid growth of suburbanisation after the Second World War has everything to do with this intense migrant inflow. And the migrant labour force has contributed on a large scale, and in particular to the development of manufacturing and tertiary industries. Many of these diverse migrant groups have lived entirely within the mosaic of suburbia, and their activities have generally gravitated around what has been available in the host culture(s) of suburban life. Maher describes suburban life in these terms: “In the new world where social status has been less readily identifiable through accent, and in most cases not conferred by birth, other ways were sought by which to have oneself identified” (1982: 22). The main focus of this paper is upon the significant social changes which have appeared on the Australian domestic scene in the post-war period, and relates these to the diverse patterning of contemporary ethnic residency.

2. The Post-War Population Growth and Migrant Labour Forces

Ever since the Australian government commenced the programme of large-scale labour migration in 1947, the number of source countries of immigrants has grown continuously. Apart from the migrants from the British Isles, by the 1950s and 1960s massive immigration had originated from southern Europe, and by the 1970s many Asians also entered Australia. Australia has also accepted a number of refugees who were forced to leave their countries of origin due to the War and its aftermath or political persecution. The number of refugees during the period of 1947-1952 reached approximately 170,000 and that meant just over 2 percent of the entire 1947 population of 7,600,000 (Takeda, 1991: 64; and Freeman and Jupp 1992: 5). On the other hand, British settlers to Australian society as a dominant group could not be viewed as refugees, even if they were often leaving social situations of great dislocation.

Besides accepting refugees in such large numbers, the Australia government, after the war, arranged for a range of government-to-government agreements which enabled immigration to populate the continent. In March 1946, the Australian government concluded a convention with Britain for the recruitment of British immigrants (Borrie, 1949: 21). After this, the lists of other countries as sources from which Australia would accept immigrants steadily expanded: an agreement was reached with Malta in 1948; Italy and the Netherlands in 1951; West Germany, Austria, and Greece in 1952; Spain in 1958; Turkey in 1967; and Yugoslavia in 1970 (Freeman and Jupp, 1992: 5).

Between 1947 and 1966 the population grew at a rate which, in some capital cities, meant that the net migration of foreign-born exceeded the population increase by natural and internal migration. According to a survey on components of Australia’s metropolitan population growth in Australia by Choi and Burnley (1974: 56-60), during the years 1947 to 1966 international migration
contributed 55 percent of the total population growth in Sydney and 58.7 percent in Melbourne. The net migration of Australian-born people during the same period grew in proportion by only 0.0 and 0.2 percent in these same cities (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metropolitan division</th>
<th>Natural Increase</th>
<th>Net migration of Australian-born</th>
<th>Net migration of foreign-born</th>
<th>Total increase (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>378,784 (45.0)</td>
<td>266 (0.0)</td>
<td>463,413 (55.0)</td>
<td>842,463 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>365,649 (41.1)</td>
<td>1,438 (0.2)</td>
<td>522,111 (58.7)</td>
<td>889,198 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane</td>
<td>123,672 (38.6)</td>
<td>87,720 (27.4)</td>
<td>108,820 (34.0)</td>
<td>320,212 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide</td>
<td>104,372 (28.9)</td>
<td>52,579 (14.6)</td>
<td>203,887 (56.5)</td>
<td>360,838 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>103,910 (40.6)</td>
<td>37,455 (14.6)</td>
<td>114,488 (44.8)</td>
<td>255,853 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobart</td>
<td>28,746 (50.4)</td>
<td>9,946 (17.5)</td>
<td>18,286 (32.1)</td>
<td>56,978 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All boundaries are adjusted to the municipal boundaries as defined in 1966. Source: Choi, C.Y. and I. H. Burnley (1974: 58).

The figures for Sydney and Melbourne show a strong contrast with Brisbane where interstate migration was also a significant factor in urbanisation. In Melbourne “immigration contributed most to labour force growth in that city, consisting 70 percent of the increase in size of the labour force and over three-quarters of the increase in the manufacturing and building and construction sectors of the workforce” (Burnley, 1974: 115). In fact, the migrant labour force contributed to the advancement of urban infrastructure, and the concomitant suburbanisation by supplying a massive industrialised labour force.

3. Development of Ethnic Diversity and Multicultural Policy

Immediately after the war, Australia’s demographic character was predominantly British, and 98 percent of the entire population had been born in Australia, Britain, Ireland or New Zealand (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1992: 154). Moreover, nearly 90 percent of the population had an Anglo-Saxon background (Office of Multicultural Affairs, 1989: 2). In the 1950s and 1960s, an exceptionally high number of immigrants came from southern Europe. Between 1951 and 1961 the net intake of migrants from southern Europe was 33.1 percent (275,841) of total intake and this percentage exceeded the net intake from Britain which was 32.6 percent (Birrell and Birrell, 1987: 54). In the 1970s, the proportion of permanent arrivals from the Asian region gradually increased from being 5.3 percent of total arrivals in 1971 to 29.4 percent in 1979 (Markus, 1994: 185-186). It was at the end of 1970s, that “boat people” spawned by the Indochinese crises began flooding Australia’s northern shores, and the country had its first experience of en masse Asian migration,
including many refugees.

Ethnically based social changes had effects on the official advocacy of multiculturalism in the mid-1970s. Prior to the acceptance of multiculturalism as established policy, domestic social change was also manifested particularly in metropolitan areas. Thus, before the launch of multiculturalism in that decade, there was already a discernible mosaic of active ethnic communities already functioning in some of the major state capitals and major cities. The symptoms of change in public policy toward ethnic groups emerged, focusing on migrants with non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB). A growing awareness of multi-ethnic migration meant that community activists, social workers, bureaucrats, and politicians started to consider migrant experiences in a concerted way (Castles et al., 1988: 44). For instance, the first serious public debate over institutional responses to the presence of migrants was held to draw attention to the concerns of teachers and school officials that education systems for migrant children were inadequate (Martin, 1978: 34). Furthermore, Henderson’s poverty research published in 1969, disclosed that certain ethnic groups of non-Anglo Saxon origin had extremely high rates of poverty.

It was no longer the difference between British (often termed “English”) and European culture; it was not a matter of confronting the massive differences between European (Indo-European) and the cultures of the ancient civilizations of Asia. Consequently, one of the crucial factors for adopting multiculturalism as an official doctrine was often given as the new understanding of the drastic changes that were taking place in metropolitan life. In addition to increasing ethnic diversity, there are a number of other factors, local and global, which have aided the establishment of multiculturalism as a national policy for Australia (Mizukami, 2000a: 110). In terms of global economic systems, Australia’s economic ties with Asian countries have rapidly expanded since the 1950s and 1960s, and this has, in turn, influenced a change in Australia’s position among countries of the Pacific Rim, and more broadly across the entire globe. This contrasted with the former embarrassment felt by many Australian traders when faced with their own country’s discriminatory and exclusionary immigration policy. After all, the ethic presuppose by the “White Australia Policy was still evident in the early 1960s, and this was well-known around the world as an important characteristic of the Australian way of life (Castles et al., 1988: 53).

From the perspective of domestic demography, the appropriateness of the general assimilation policy was subject to continuous question and scrutiny in several of Australia’s large metropolitan areas. The previously dominant assimilation policy focused on encouraging ethnic minority groups to divest their ethnic backgrounds in order to adjust to, or to approximate, the norms of the dominant cultural group. Such an approach encounters great difficulty in coping with the realities of diverse ethnicity in various locations. Indeed, “when the myth of cultural homogeneity is undermined, it can no longer be the driving force” (Mizukami, 2000a: 113).
This undermining process has occurred simply as a result of this diverse migration intake. Indeed, in Australian society today, there is a great variety in the birthplaces of settlers. Castles et al states: “no other nation-state has been as actively involved in recruitment of immigrants. Nowhere have the sources of immigrants been so diverse” (1988: 1). According to Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008), “In 1901, 23 percent of Australia’s population was born overseas. By 1947 the proportion of the overseas-born population had declined to 10 percent. The creation of a national government immigration portfolio in 1945 accompanied a gradual increase in the proportion of overseas-born Australians, and by 1995 this proportion had increased to 23 percent.” In 2006, there were nearly 5 million overseas-born which accounts for about a quarter of the entire population (see Table 2).

Table 2  Main Country of Birth of the Population in Selected Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>1954(a) '000</th>
<th>1961(a) '000</th>
<th>1971(a) '000</th>
<th>1981(a) '000</th>
<th>1996(b) '000</th>
<th>2001(b) '000</th>
<th>2006(b) '000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom(c)</td>
<td>664.2</td>
<td>755.4</td>
<td>1081.3</td>
<td>1075.8</td>
<td>1164.1</td>
<td>1126.9</td>
<td>1153.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>74.1</td>
<td>160.7</td>
<td>315.1</td>
<td>394.1</td>
<td>476.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>119.9</td>
<td>228.3</td>
<td>288.3</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>259.1</td>
<td>238.5</td>
<td>220.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China(d)</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>121.1</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>203.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>164.2</td>
<td>169.5</td>
<td>180.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>84.8</td>
<td>103.6</td>
<td>153.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>102.7</td>
<td>112.2</td>
<td>135.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>145.8</td>
<td>141.8</td>
<td>132.5</td>
<td>125.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>118.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td>109.3</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>109.3</td>
<td>120.8</td>
<td>117.5</td>
<td>114.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>87.2</td>
<td>103.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>102.1</td>
<td>98.6</td>
<td>95.1</td>
<td>95.3</td>
<td>91.2</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>86.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong (SAR of China)</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>76.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total overseas-born</td>
<td>1285.8</td>
<td>1778.3</td>
<td>2545.9</td>
<td>2950.9</td>
<td>4258.6</td>
<td>4482.1</td>
<td>4956.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian-born</td>
<td>7700.1</td>
<td>8729.4</td>
<td>10173.1</td>
<td>11388.8</td>
<td>14052.1</td>
<td>14931.2</td>
<td>15648.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total population(e)</td>
<td>8986.5</td>
<td>10508.2</td>
<td>12719.5</td>
<td>14516.9</td>
<td>18310.7</td>
<td>19413.2</td>
<td>20605.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*na not available; (a) Census counts; (b) Estimated resident population at 30 June; (c) Includes Ireland in 1954, 1961 and 1971; (d) Excludes SARs and Taiwan Province; and (e) Includes country of birth 'Not stated' and 'At sea'.


4. Migrants’ Residential Shift from Inner Areas

There has been a tendency for newly arrived migrants, including refugees, to cluster in ethnic communities around metropolitan areas. The ethnic concentration in certain metropolitan areas is ascribed to the synergy between job opportunities and accessibility of settlement services not only from governments but also from the existing communal effort particularly offered by ethnic compatriots. There are discernible “generational” differences in subsequent living patterns between the different massive tides of migration. There is a tendency among the first generation of post-
war migrant groups to shift their residence from the inner-city areas to the middle ring and outer suburban zones.8 Bryson and Thompson indicate that “the vast majority of families have young children, many are migrants, particularly from Britain and residential mobility (towards Newtown) seems to be an established pattern” (1972: 31).

This tendency coincides with the dispersion and expansion of residential zones and has meant a diffuse ethnic mixture in the suburbs, facilitating interaction between the people and organisations of the different ethnic groups. In fact, many post-war migrants with southern European origin also demonstrated this tendency of residential shift. Davison points out, “post-war immigrants from peasant backgrounds in eastern and southern Europe often acquired their own suburban homes even more quickly than the native born” (1993: 7). According to the survey on ethnic communities in Melbourne conducted by McKay (1981), between 1971 and 1976 Italian-born immigrants moved from the inner area to northern outer suburbs and Greek-born immigrants demonstrated a residential shift from the inner areas to the north and southeast areas. In addition to these southern European migrants, subsequent arrivals in the 1970s from Lebanon and Turkey also demonstrated similar residential shift patterns (Forster, 1999: 114). This tendency to disperse into expanded residential zones has caused further interaction with other ethnic groups and the majority population as they left behind their ethnic concentration in inner cities. Unlike the first generation from 1947 up until the 1960s, many second generation children of these migrants grew up in outskirts of inner-city areas7. And as a result, a significant proportion of inter-ethnic marriage has been fostered in this climate.

Some researchers have attempted to ascertain patterns in individual preferences towards suburban life in contrast with the benefits of inner-city living (e.g., Davison, 1978, 1993; Maher, 1982; and Frost and Dingle, 1995). The data present cultural factors relating to natural and socio-cultural environments as well as the well-known suburban ideals - the so-called “Australian dream.” In addition to these cultural factors, the research considers other factors, including public and private transportation, community amenities and infrastructure, the availability of housing, as well as the crucial factor of low-priced real estate on the outskirts of cities (Mizukami, 2000b: 254). The emergence of a massive “ethnic” middle class, who had the resources to live in suburbs, is also a major cause of the post-war suburban boom, and the penetration of car-ownership has allowed for significant outward movements from city centres. Although there are some critical views on suburban life, it generally remains a strong social aspiration and expectation for many families.8 Maher emphasises the positive images of suburban life as follows: “In fact the suburbs were seen by many as the embodiment of all things fine - the ability to achieve a certain harmony with nature, and to mix some elements of an idyllic rural setting with the opportunities offered by a large city” (1993: 7).

Furthermore, since the 1960s, the urban renewal policies of Australian governments, notably
programmes that promote gentrification, have also had a significant effect upon population movements within metropolitan areas. Since the late 1960s, in order to re-vitalise inner city areas, Sydney and Melbourne especially, have seen the emergence of high density flat-type housing. In addition, under the gentrification programmes, some terrace housing, which was 19th century architectural heritage, have been refurbished to become part of the contemporary housing mix. Such gentrification programmes are evident in several inner areas, domiciles which had been available for first generation immigrants from south Europe when they were old and dilapidated and thus inexpensive. As so many migrants have left behind, while others have remained in, their initial settlement location in the inner area with their semi-ctached houses. And at the same time these older ex-working-class residences in the inner areas have been refurbished and new life-styles for inner city residents have appeared. The provision of various forms of entertainment in the central city attracts the young middle-class. So, as an overview, we can say that the urban policies have in general encouraged a significant mingling of different ethnic groups.

5. Conclusion

With the assumption that migrants tended to concentrate in ethnic enclaves in the initial stages of their settlement, massive numbers of post-war migrants have already shifted from inner-city areas to the “outer” regions of suburbia. Many children of the first wave of post-war migrants do not experience the social change involved in an inner-outer residential shift. In suburbia, these second generations have been socialised in the same local schools and thus a pattern of interaction between people of existing different ethnic backgrounds has been fostered. Although various ethnic groups have established their own communities and schools, the major part of the social activities of the second generations have generally gravitated to the host dominant style in suburban life, with an evident ethnic diversity. The daily-life interaction of, and between, the different ethnic groups, especially after the second generation of migrants, is promoted in the commerce and culture of suburbia.

The massive intake of migrants has become an integral part of the post-war urbanisation process, and the life-style changes among the second generation in those migrant groups have already become mature citizens in an Australian suburban setting. In this way, significant interaction amongst ethnic groups has occurred fostering a significant proportion of inter-ethnic marriage. Price discloses the figure that in Australia: three-quarters of second-generation ethnic individuals marry a partner with a different ethnic background (1994: 10-11). Additionally, new kinds of migrant inflow since the 1990s have also demonstrate that some newly arrived groups prefer to settle in the middle-class suburbs, instead of those traditional inner areas which embrace
ethnic communities. Forster points out that many higher income people from Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong have tended to cluster in middle class suburbs (1999: 116). This foments a further mixture of different ethnic groups in the suburbs. In fact, “the largest and most rapidly growing ethnic concentrations are now located in the middle and outer suburbs, particularly in western and southwestern Sydney and southeastern, northern, and northwestern Melbourne” (ibid: 114). It is the case that, until the 1960s, a residential segregation of particular ethnic groups in inner areas did exist and the continuing ethnic segregation lines can still be seen in some places, but the new migrant inflow as well as return movement to refurbished inner city housing appears to increasingly mingle groups of individuals where ethnic diversity has become a kind of norm. The suburban myth of homogeneity suffers a considerable decline in credibility on the one hand with the intensified ethnic diversity, but the other, a rich ethnic mixture has continuously developed within a complex migration movement.

Notes

* This article is a revised version with some updated data from the oral presentation at Asian Frontier, Symposium, Rikkyo University in June 2001.
1 In the initial post-war immigration policy, two fundamental strategies were considered: the defence of the continent and economic development. In these terms, the issue of population growth became a main concern as the rate of the natural increase declined.
2 As for the growing diversity of source countries for immigration to Australia and the growth of Asian population since the mid-1970s, see Freeman and Jupp (1992); Markus (1994); and Mizukami (2000a).
3 In these days, it is politically-correct to say “Anglo-Celtic” which refers to the social and cultural institutions of British people rather than Anglo-Saxon language as in “English-speaking.”
4 To be exact, the number of “air people” is larger than that of “boat people,” as many arrived in Australia through their transit points at Southeast Asian countries (Takeda, 1991: 92-97).
5 At this time, people in the British Isles were asserting cultural and regional differences against “English” dominance, through rediscovery of Welsh, Cornish, Scots and Irish roots - in Australia, it seems that a peculiar mix occurred with a new recognition of the cultural heritage of indigenous people, but also of the ethnic mosaic that was then made up of the dominant “Anglo-group.”
6 Some surveys (e.g., Burnley, Pryor and Rowland, 1980; and McKay, 1981) clarify the fact that many first generation post-war migrant groups experienced a “residential shift” from the inner-city areas to the middle ring or outer zones.
7 However, recent research indicates that “low income workers who rely on the private rental market have been pushed further into the suburbs as affordable housing disappears from the job-rich inner city areas” (Atkinson et al. 2007: 44).
8 As for this discussion, see Maher (1982); Davison (1993); Frost and Dingle (1995); and Mizukami (2000b, 2001).
9 See Forster (1999); and Mizukami (2001).
References


