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Hybrid Spaces and Identities: Performing Cultural Citizenship at Geelong’s Pako Festa

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Introduction
If cultural citizenship involves membership of a polity in which social diversity is irrelevant to the bestowal of rights and obligations, the assertion of ethnic difference is welcome but also risky. For claims of difference, if accompanied by demands for resources, space or special consideration, will impose strains on a liberal state espousing and attempting to deliver equity. Where such difference becomes a condition for eligibility, this in turn presupposes stable and clear boundaries around social groups. However, as postmodern discourses have argued and the experience of first and second generation migrants has confirmed, ethnic identity is anything but stable and unidimensional. Such stability is further questioned when such identities are consciously mobilised and performed for others in a cultural festival. For which identity is chosen and how it is then consumed by others raises interesting questions about the fluidity of identity and what exactly thereby constitutes cultural citizenship. In the academic context of the postmodern city of spectacle, this paper will argue that, within a policy framework of multiculturalism, stable identities are assumed and required. When hybrids are generated or even more problematically performed, the terms of political inclusion are challenged. But at the same time social inclusion can occur on local terms. The Pako Festa in the regional city of Geelong offers a space in which cultural citizenship can be made and owned by those defining, performing, celebrating but also hybridising their ethnic identities.

Policy context—from exclusion to assimilation and multiculturalism
From the earliest days of European settlement in Australia, those admitted as citizens to the Australian society and polity were defined by their race and gender. The politics of exclusion and assimilation were clear and unequivocal—epitomised by the White Australia Immigration Policy, voting laws and a host of informal regulatory regimes which policed the borders of White, Anglo-Celtic identity (Saunders and Evans 1992). The mass migrations of non-English speaking migrants into Australia after World War Two presented a major challenge to such regimes and led ultimately to the policy shift towards ‘multiculturalism’ in the 1970s. From this time, citizenship was increasingly understood in terms of civil, social and political rights and responsibilities, rather than the result of membership of an ethnically and culturally homogeneous society. This new vision of Australian citizenship was epitomised in the 1989 National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia. This recognised the cultural diversity of Australia and the need for universal social justice, regardless of ethnicity or culture. The document and the Keating Government’s response to it defined the core values of a multicultural Australia—acceptance of the Constitution and rule of law, parliamentary democracy, tolerance and equality, freedom of speech and religion, English as the national language and equality of access, opportunity and participation in the social, political and economic life of the country, unimpeded by barriers of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, gender or place of birth (Jordens, 2000). Such a policy was built upon relatively stable notions of identity and assumed unidimensional and clear definitions of social difference, including ethnicity.

Within this policy framework, legitimate cultural difference was defined by those outside ethnic communities. Thus ethnicity could be admitted, even celebrated, when it assumed a range of safe non-political forms—such as food, dancing, music, dress, even some religious buildings, observances and rituals. Assertion of linguistic and political difference or, more recently, religious difference, was not acceptable. The right of social membership was therefore always fragile and contextual; negotiated in particular times and places within moving discourses of tolerance, racism, assimilation, multiculturalism and coexistence. Particular markers of difference, such as the temple, the chador, languages other than English or retail precincts, could be the catalysts of heated debate and attack or the sites for cultural tourism, community building or pleasure. Within such a fluid if fractious environment, the assumption prevailed of fixed and singular identities—be they Asian, Moslem, Italian, Aboriginal or whatever. However, as any convert to postmodernism accepts and anyone working across social boundaries knows, identity is anything but unidimensional and stable, but rather is contextual, performative and dynamic. And for Human Geographers, such performances are
inextricably linked to where they occur and in turn create those spaces. Theorisations of these spaces has occurred within the literature on the postmodern city of spectacle.

**Academic context—the postmodern ‘city of spectacle’**

This paper is based on research conducted in the regional city of Geelong in Victoria. Like many manufacturing centres, it is a city which has seen much restructuring and where the service sector—especially community, business and social services but also recreation and tourism—is seen as integral to local economic (re)development. In particular, there are high hopes that major events, conventions, urban festivals and cultural tourism will form a key element in the revitalisation of the urban fabric, employment outlook, investment climate, image and social confidence of the city. Academic work that focuses on this ‘city of spectacle’—usually as one dimension of the postmodern city—is primarily concerned with charting the economic impact of such activity: with how the resulting attractions, designer landscapes, tourist precincts, theme parks and major events generate employment, investment and high spending external visitors (Harvey 1989; de Jong 1991; Levine 1992; Sorkin 1992; Holcomb 1993; Fensham 1994; Craig-Smith and Fagance 1995; Jessop 1997; Judd and Fainstein 1999).

With the exception of work by Soja (1996) and Hannigan (1998), who concentrate on how class groups are variously displaced or included in festival cities, their success is rarely assessed in terms of which social groups are included or excluded from them and on what terms. How then do festivals offer spaces in which cultural citizenship can be exercised? Do ethnic festivals create an ersatz Other which is then uncritically consumed; present self-defined, authentic and localised multicultural identities for the education and enjoyment of visitors (Urry 1999, 1995; Selwyn 1996) or do they allow people to detach socially prescribed roles from actual performativity and hybridities? (Parker and Sedgewick 1995) In short, how do festivals construct, mobilise and engage as citizens those who are variously defined as ‘different’ in the city?

A range of literature exists which addresses the issue of social differentiation in the city—Marxist, feminist, postcolonial, queer—and further discussion has occurred within Tourism Studies and Anthropology on how the object of the tourist gaze—such as the ethnic Other—is constructed and with what consequences for host and visitor alike.

America’s Black Power movement, Marxism and later feminism first forced the foregrounding of social difference as a vital political and theoretical project. Such discourses were advanced by queer theory with its emphasis on sexuality, and by postcolonialism with its renewed emphasis on racial and ethnic difference. Such discussions have become more complex as a result of postmodern and deconstructive notions of identity formation; with gender, for example, seen as ‘performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence’ (Butler 1990: 24). In academic circles at least, it is no longer possible to consider social groups in terms of single markers of differentiation—such as class, gender, ethnicity or race. Rather, identities are increasingly viewed as multifaceted, fluid, performative, lived in place and enmeshed within complex webs of power (Jacobs and Fincher 1998).

Within Australia, there have been few studies which have seriously engaged with how such thought impinges on the urban environment. My own work on gender and cultural difference in Australian cities has charted the ways in which planning regulations and house designs have enforced certain narrow views of women and Anglo-Celtic norms (Johnson 1993, 1994, 1997a). Jane Jacobs’ work also admits the centrality and fluidity of racial difference in contests over spaces in Melbourne, London and Perth (Jacobs 1996, 1998) while that of Leonie Sandercock directly engages with how social difference challenges the planning system (Sandercock 1998). In the same vein there have been some important studies of the ways in which ethnic groups are constituted and made their marks upon particular urban environments, such as the Chinese, Vietnamese, ‘Arabs’ and Italians in Sydney and Melbourne (Anderson 1990, 1998; Dunn 1993; Watson 1996; Grace et al. 1997; Pulvirenti 1998). However, in all of these cases, while the issue of individual and group identity is seen as fluid and contested, the role of the urban festival in such identity creation and expression has not figured prominently. There is therefore a need to connect the city of difference to the city of spectacle.

Clues as to how this can be done are present in work at the intersection point of Tourism Studies and Anthropology. Thus Tom Selwyn locates the contemporary tourist experience within the processes of globalisation which, he argues, has radically displaced the cultures of the world via migration, refugee movement and massive international tourism. As a consequence, signs and artifacts of cultural difference are now used in a continuous process of reformulating and hybridising cultures. Meanwhile the tourist seeks out the culture which has in some way survived the onslaught of globalisation. The tourist therefore pursues ‘authenticity’—knowledge about the nature, culture and society of a tourist destination. Such knowledge is both sought and actively presented (Selwyn 1996: 1-2). This tourist quest—for the authentic Other which in turn is then consciously if ambiguously presented—can
usefully be conceptualised in terms of Homi Bhabha’s notion of hybridity. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha presents culture as actively constructed and involving a complex and shifting amalgam of discourses, migrations, practices and fusions, such that no one culture can ever be fixed or defined (Bhabha 1994). As a tourist searches for the authentic experience, all they can both expect to find and encounter are (re-)made cultural objects, experiences and places. The consumption of Others by tourists is thereby both real and manufactured, stable and contested, fixed and fluid, singular and hybridised (Hollinshead 1998).

How such notions are grounded in places and communities is the subject of the rest of this paper. What follows is the story of one such space—a street in Geelong West which once a year is turned over to a conscious celebration of multiculturalism in the Pako Festa. It is here that ethnic difference is both mobilised and affirmed as a unitary thing, where the traditional markers are presented and consumed and spaces given over to the occasion. But it is also where new ethnic (and other) identities are explored. The result is a space of transgression and newness, of difference defined, defiled and abandoned. It is therefore an event where ethnicities are affirmed, breached and challenged, where hybridity is created and a cultural citizenship is owned—if only briefly—by those who make it.

**Geelong and the urban festival**

Geelong is a classic ‘rust-bucket’ city of 184,000 which is consciously attempting to rebuild its industrial economy on the basis of tourism and the spectacle. Located 80 kilometres south west of Melbourne, it began as a port and wool service centre in the early 19th century before developing as an industrial hub with agricultural processing industries—textiles, flour milling, soap and candle making. This status as a manufacturing centre was cemented with the coming of the Ford Motor Company in 1925 and the subsequent expansion of this and other heavy industries in the 1960s, including International Harvester’s truck manufacturing plant, Shell oil refining and Alcoa aluminium. Many European migrants were actively recruited and attracted to these industries, especially during the 1950s and 1960s so that in 2001 20% of the city’s population was born overseas (McLean 2002: 8).

From the 1970s however, these industries and the older agricultural processing plants began to shed labour; as a result of new processing technologies, changing trade and currency policies, rising imports from cheaper producers and the rationalisation of multinational operations (Johnson 1990). The resulting calamitous fall in manufacturing employment has only been partly offset by expansions in education, health and community services. In the mid-1990s retrenchments in the service sector—especially in local, State and Federal government and in the education and health industries—contributed to ongoing high levels of unemployment (Johnson and Wright 1994; Johnson 1996). While manufacturing continues to be viable, it is no longer the largest employer and is regularly viewed as problematical and backward. Thus in public pronouncements by the city council, in local newspapers and in tourist promotions, service sector growth is presented in highly positive terms as the future of the city. In particular, there is an emphasis on the prospects of tourism generating major investment and job growth in the city. Such a view reached its zenith in the bid for a Guggenheim Museum (*Geelong Business News*, 2000). On a more mundane level, cultural tourism and the urban festival promises to both reinvigorate a troubled economy, displace the ‘rust bucket’/‘Sleepy Hollow’ image and ease the associated social strains and divisions (GOT 1999). An examination of employment figures tends to belie this hype—with the largest employers in the city still the Ford Motor Company, Barwon Health, the Department of Education, the City of Greater Geelong and Deakin University. So too the major sectors are wholesale and retail (20.2%), manufacturing (18.6%), business and personal services (15.8%), health and community services (10.1%) and education (8.1%), well ahead of leisure, entertainment and tourism at 6.4% (McLean 2002: 12-13).

In 1998 there were 24 festivals in and around the city of Geelong. Of these, seven were located within the newly redeveloped bayside Steampacket Place precinct but many more were scattered across the city in older, more traditional venues—such as the showgrounds, major parks, indoor stadia and racecourse. Most of the outdoor and waterfront events were in the summer. Only two festivals could be defined as general in their appeal—the Waterfront and Gala. Others were more specific: with a number concerned with sport—horse racing, triathlons, sailing, surfing, car racing and bike racing; music—the Celtic folk festival, the Rock Eistedfford and Schools Music; specific age groups—be they children to the Poppy Kettle or young adults in new Year’s Eve by the Pier; and heritage. Only three were aligned with ethnicity—the Celtic Music Festival, the Scots Highland Gathering and the Pakington Multicultural Festival or Pako Festa. By 1999 the number of festivals had risen to 30, in 2000 there were 50 ‘major events’ but since then the number has fallen. However, as some such as the Waterfront Festival and Momenta Arts Festival drop by the wayside, those based on ethnicity continue, including the Pako Festa.
Hybrid spaces and identities—the Pako Festa

In Geelong community festivals are seen by planners, city bureaucrats and tourism authorities as ways in which public confidence can be displayed and enhanced as well as vehicles to get the locality spending and outsiders to notice this industrial provincial city desperately trying to shake off its ‘Sleepy Hollow’ image. The Pako Festa—with its emphasis on building community, enhancing ethnic identities and supporting Geelong (West) as a place—is somewhat outside this main agenda, though it readily connects the urban spectacle with the city of difference. Began by a small Migrant Resources Centre in 1983 as a local celebration of an ethnically diverse heritage suburb, the Pako Festa is a combination of local communities, traders and schools, ethnic food and dance; all overseen by the Geelong Ethnic Communities Council in the main street of Geelong—West-Pakington Street. In 1999 50 000 people attended and in 2000 and 2002 close to 100 000 over the long weekend in February. The Chairman of the Pako Festa Committee George Ballas observed in a Geelong Advertiser supplement for the Festa:

I invite everyone to join in the celebration of our diverse cultural heritage. Pako Festa is the best opportunity the people of Geelong have to experience the colour and richness of our cultural heritage. Pako Festa also supports local ethnic community groups in maintaining their traditions and sharing them with the general community (GA 23.2.99).

The Pako Festa has strong local connections back into the diverse ethnic communities which make up Geelong. Critical to this is the active involvement—through ‘community representatives’ on the organising committee and the Ethnic Communities Council—of 27 different ethnic groups. These groups range in size from the 8 000 strong Dutch and 5 000 Croatians to individuals representing the 300 Filipinos and Lithuanians in Geelong (Pako Archives). In the Festa content there is a focus on food, music and dance—three of the more obvious markers of ethnic difference.

At the 2001 event there were large and diverse audiences at the dance performances—by Scots, Lithuanian, Albanian and Croatian folk dancers—in an area which also included an Aboriginal contingent selling barbecued sausages, Italians' pizza and coffee, and a group of Celts in full Viking armour and mock boats! The audience was even more diverse with a babble of languages and a range of age groups. The festival thereby specifically includes and addresses Anglo and non-Anglo ethnic communities, presenting common markers of ‘difference’ such as ‘ethnic’ food but also more traditional and, some would argue, inauthentic and idealised markers in the form of music and costume. All are presented in a way that is consciously inclusive.

The organisers are vehement that their aim is financial viability rather than profitability. The 2000 Festa cost $100 000 to stage; with monies coming from sponsors, local traders and authorities. Sponsors included local industry, the city council and tourism authority but also Arts Victoria and the Special Broadcasting Service which supported it as a regional, ethnic, cultural event. At the time there was pressure on the organisers to capitalise further on this as a ‘Major Event’. Thus the City of Greater Geelong and the Geelong-Otway Tourism Authority wish the festival would generate more income—by its relocation from its community and street base to the redeveloped waterfront, by connecting it to other tourist events—such as conventions or conferences—and by assuming a more commercial orientation (Quelch Interview 2000). In two surveys conducted of participants, its local non-commercial nature was confirmed but so too was its community orientation (Johnson 2000; Johnson and Inglis-Gillespie 2002).

For this is an event to celebrate multiculturalism. Pako Festa ‘supports local ethnic community groups in maintaining their traditions and sharing them with the general community’ (GA 23.2.99). In this there is a commitment by some of the organisers to a set and unified notion of ethnic difference. Thus, the Chairman of the Geelong Ethnic Communities Council observed that it has never been about money but bringing the community together; to not exclude, factionalise or marginalise, but to include. It also offers a way in which the contemporary and aging leadership of the 27 different ethnic communities can enthuse the younger generation in their cause (Mavros, Interview, October 2000). And that cause is the maintenance of a singular ethnic identity in the face of time, new generations and the onslaught of hybridity. Significantly it is seen by the Chair of the Ethnic Community Council as very much located within a multicultural policy framework.

In the 2000 survey, this was also the message registered by those who attended. For most enjoyed the music, the diversity of food and the costumed colour of a range of cultures. They were there to observe, to participate and to consume the ethnic Other but they had also been invited and were presented with definite markers of difference. So too in 2002. While many can be critical of what they see as superficial elements of multicultural identity, expressed in a temporary and non-threatening way
within a public space (such as Watson 1992; Gunew 1996); the emphasis on food, dance, dress and music is the choice of those ethnic groups organising the event and is subject to far more profound negotiation and meaning than a cynical viewer might acknowledge (Hage 1997).

Further, what was apparent in the 2002 event was both the presence of the usual markers of unified difference—music, food, dress—but also open invitations to transgress the correspondence of these markers with one particular ethnic group. Thus the Spanish dancers openly invited all and sundry to learn and participate on a public stage—and they did. Greeks bought Filipino food, young people moved easily from Croatian to punk dress and Fijians joined in the highland dancing. And of course, all present in the street visited the Barking Dog all-Australian pub for a drink. Why people came to the Festa—and most (290 out of 389) had been before!—was because of the food and ‘ethnic activities’, the location and the atmosphere, opportunity to meet old friends, to socialise and attend specific events—such as the parade and the Battle of the Bands. It was a space for participation, for voyeurism of the ethnic Other but also for crossing set boundaries. The three most popular precincts were West Park—for the music, variety of activities, relaxed atmosphere and shade—the Town Hall area for the performance stage, children’s activities and ethnic food stalls and around the Barking Dog hotel for the social atmosphere, alcohol, street seating and music. Participants moved easily across these spaces and donned different behaviour and perhaps identities at each as they celebrated their age, music taste, ethnic identity or that of others at the different locations. The most enjoyed activities were eating different food, watching the parade, watching the dancing, listening to music, children’s activities, meeting friends and the multicultural dance/music/costumes. Many people commented on the local community involvement or their role as a participant as being a highlight (Johnson and Inglis-Gillespie, 2002).

At the 2003 Festa, the notion of hybridity is informing the very organisation of the event, with self-defined ethnic groups—such as the Scottish Highland dancers teaming up with the Greek Dance group to explore new movements, new musical possibilities and the notion of ‘world performance’. Playing with and across ethnic boundaries is a key element in the programming for 2003, along with marketing the event outside the locality to Melbourne and Victoria. Enlivened in part by outside organisers, it is a far more brash assertion of cultural difference, one that is going beyond multicultural definitions of stable and traditional markers to embrace new combinations, new representations and a cultural citizenship that is fluid, performative and locally delineated. The form each ethnic group will take in 2003 is the subject of intense negotiation and while some will continue to represent a fixed notion of tradition there are new hybrid forms as well as ongoing tensions between them (Omnundsen 1999).

Conclusion

The Pako Festa—and the host of other festivals which run each year in Geelong and across Australia—are about constructing identities in places. In defining and mobilising various notions of ‘difference’, the built and natural environment plays a role but so too does the creation or projection of particular social identities, be they based on socio-economic class, age, ethnicity or sexuality. The Pako Festa deploys a range of essentialised markers of ethnic difference as a way to link past traditions with second generation migrants but also to invite others into its multicultural space. More recently the event and those who are organising and participating in it have gone beyond multiculturalism with its fixed notions of identity and citizenship to embrace hybrid possibilities. With world music and performances, cross ethnic art forms are being created but so too is a more fluid notion of identity and localised senses of cultural citizenship. Those invited are defined by their political commitment to multiculturalism, not as an exercise in voyeurism but as a statement of tolerance and inclusiveness, which now has the possibility of moving into more radical, self-defining and affirming territory.

References


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