The Vietnamese Concentration in Cabramatta: Site of Avoidance and Deprivation, or Island of Adjustment and Participation?

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The Vietnamese over-representation around Cabramatta in western Sydney has been unfavourably looked upon by politicians, the public and academics. Both inclusionary and exclusionary forces of ethnic concentration have contributed to the concentration of Vietnamese in Cabramatta, in a reflexive and inter-related way that often makes a taxonomy of agency and structure difficult. Evidence from informal interviews with key informants of the Vietnamese communities and from documented international experiences are drawn upon to show us that ethnic concentration is not necessarily a negative phenomenon. The positive aspects of Vietnamese concentration in Cabramatta should be capitalised upon and social theorists should not be so quick always to damn ethnic concentrations.

With the demise of assimilationist settlement policies in Australia, and the formulation of 'multiculturalism' (Office of Multicultural Affairs, 1989), the right of all Australians to retain and express their culture was established. Yet the idea, or presence, of a spatial concentration or expression of people of a certain cultures is still frowned upon by many. The desire that immigrants should residentially disperse and disappear into the urban milieu is a legacy of the former assimilationist policy. The suburb of Cabramatta, in the Fairfield Local Government Area (LGA) of Sydney's western suburb, is often unfavourably referred to as 'Vietnamatta', due to the presence of many people of Indo-Chinese or Asian appearance. A report by McAllister and Moore (1989, 8) positioned Vietnamese-Australians as the birth-place group which experiences the least tolerance from the other groups in Australian society. This ethnic group, and the suburb of Cabramatta provide a contemporary and topical focus for the study on the link between the social and spatial dimensions of ethnic relations in Australia.

Fairfield LGA has higher percentages of Vietnam-born than other Sydney LGAs (Fig. 1). Further still, the Collector's Districts (CDs) surrounding the suburb of Cabramatta have higher percentages of Vietnam-born than other Fairfield CDs (Fig. 2). The cultural ambience and oriental icons in the suburb point to the presence of Indo-Chinese-Australians around Cabramatta. This somewhat literary account by
Musgrave (1990, 16, 18) highlights the Indo-Chinese 'feel' of the town:

Just 40 minutes down the Hume Highway from Sydney, sharp right and ... you step into a strange and wondrous oriental city, Cabramatta ... We walked down alleyways where the sights, smells, sounds made you feel you were in Saigon, Bangkok, Hong Kong ... anywhere but Australia. Your senses were sent reeling by the dazzling diversity of it all. Such sights! A Buddha with 1000 arms sharing a shop window with a telephone built into the arch of a scarlet stiletto.

Blainey (1988, 18) has expressed dissatisfaction at the formation of a Vietnamese 'ghetto', which he labelled a 'Little Saigon', around the suburb of Cabramatta. Popular conceptions of 'Chinatowns' and 'ghettos', as areas of vice and social menace (Anderson, 1987, 589-93), are reflected in the reporting on Cabramatta by some sections of the media. Any instances of crime, or other disturbances such as Health Department raids upon restaurants (Allison, 1990, 2), receive sensational treatment from the popular press (Ethnic Affairs Commission of NSW, 1986, 3). The print media has described Cabramatta as the 'Wild West', and produced headlines such as 'Death in Cabramatta' and 'Sydney's Wild West: The War of the Gangs' (Brown and Sampton, 1988, 81).

Research on ethnic concentrations has also tended to adopt a negative view. The ghetto or enclave, is usually seen as a spatial result or expression of the exclusion and marginalisation

Fig. 1 Percentage Vietnam-born of the population, LGAs, Sydney Metropolitan Region, 1991
of minority ethnic groups by the wider society (see Smith, 1989). Positive aspects of ethnic concentration are often ignored. After consultation with Vietnamese-Australians in Cabramatta, structural views of migrant settlement experience were felt to be somewhat disempowering. It is argued here that a better way of analysing the concentration of the Vietnamese in Cabramatta, and of formulating policy for successful Vietnamese settlement, is to utilise a less negative and more open view of ethnic concentrations. The Commonwealth Government defined multicultural policy as having three broad dimensions: the right to retain cultural identity and to express it, the right to social justice and equal opportunity, and the need to fully utilise the economic potential and abilities of all Australians (Office of Multicultural Affairs, 1989, vii). It may well be the case for many Vietnamese-Australians, that these three policy dimensions can be most easily achieved in suburbs of ethnic concentration such as Cabramatta.

Terms like ‘ghetto’ and ‘Chinatown’ traditionally convey negative images. More recently in Australia, the term ‘enclave’ has experienced an unpopular reaction. This was shown just prior to the 1990 Federal election, when the perceived possibility of a Japanese ‘enclave’ being created, through the Multifunction Polis development, was sufficient to force politicians to deny strenously that an ethnic enclave could occur. From this point onward, unless the meaning and image of terms such as ‘enclave’, ‘ghetto’ or ‘Chinatown’ are purposefully being sought, the less image-laden term ‘ethnic concentration’ will be used to refer to the spatial agglomeration of an ethnic or birthplace group.

While the Vietnamese are often referred to as a single entity, there is important internal heterogeneity according to class, ethnicity and religion. There are also specific gender, family status and age variations in settlement experience that are only touched upon in this paper (see Alcorso, 1991 and Pittaway, 1991). The term ‘Vietnamese’ is used forthwith as a generic reference to all Vietnamese-Australians, be they ethnic Chinese or ethnic Vietnamese. The term refugees will be used when specifically referring to refugees, otherwise the discussion covers all forms of Vietnamese migrant.
Aims and Method
The literature on ethnic concentration shows that there are many factors which can result in, or contribute to, spatial agglomerations of an ethnic or birthplace group. According to structuration theory (see Giddens, 1979, or Warf, 1990) agency and structure act reflexively. In utilising this theory, the present paper examines forces of choice and agency in concentration, as well as forces of exclusion. The general aims are to establish first, the location choices of the Vietnamese in Cabramatta, and second, external constraints operating to affect those choices (or lack of choice). Choice and constraint in behaviour was best examined through direct consultation with Vietnamese communities.

The major component of the present research methodology has a more qualitative form than that of Burnley's (1989), Wilson's (1987, 1990) and other specifically geographical research on the Vietnamese in Australia (see also Gardner et al., 1983 and Carlow, 1987). Between June and September 1990, taped in-depth interviews were carried out with twenty informants from the Vietnamese communities around Cabramatta. It was felt that this methodological tack would work to supplement and extend upon prior research, which was of a more quantitative nature and operated from the problematic level where behavioural assumptions have to made from ecological abstraction (Galvin, 1980). The sample was gained using elements of both key informant selection (Tremblay, 1982, 98-9) and snowball sampling (McNeill, 1985, 35), in other words, informants were chosen by the researcher according to their anticipated contributory potential, or were suggested by other informants. Interviewees included representatives of community organisations, social workers, local politicians and entrepreneurs.

While transcribed interview data provides a better insight into the location decisions and constraints of the Vietnamese, it is a datum type that is invariably hard to present succinctly. The selection of the interview excerpts presented here, was determined according to how well such data represented the general feeling of all respondents, or occasionally, to demonstrate differences of opinion.

The next section provides a brief statistical introduction to Fairfield LGA and the suburb of Cabramatta. The forces of exclusion and inclusion that are experienced by Vietnamese in Australia is then discussed. Attention is then focused upon explanations for the Vietnamese concentration in Cabramatta, followed by a consideration of theoretical and policy implications.

A Quantitative Contextualisation
The five shaded LGAs in Figure 1, which all had Vietnam-born population percentages of two or more, captured almost 79 per cent of all Vietnam-born persons in the 44 LGAs of Sydney in 1991. Over eleven per cent of the Fairfield LGA population were Vietnam-born. More than forty per cent of the forty-seven and half thousand Vietnam-born of Sydney in 1991, resided in Fairfield (Table 1). Although Table 1 and Figure 1 show that other LGAs are important centres, the statistical pre-eminence of Fairfield LGA is obvious. It is within the LGA of Fairfield that the level of ethnic residential concentration becomes more stark, the forty-nine CDs around Cabramatta (Figs. 2 & 3), having an average Vietnam-born population of 23.9 per cent in 1991 (ABS, 1993).

Table 1: Vietnam-Born Populations for Sydney and 5 Selected LGAS, 1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected Area</th>
<th>Viet.-born pop.</th>
<th>% of Sydney</th>
<th>Total pop.</th>
<th>Viet.-born % of LGAs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fairfield LGA</td>
<td>19,410</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>175,145</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auburn LGA</td>
<td>3,245</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>48,553</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marrickville LGA</td>
<td>3,843</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>77,991</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bankstown LGA</td>
<td>6,298</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>153,867</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury LGA</td>
<td>4,696</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>129,254</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-total</td>
<td>37,492</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>584,810</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of Sydney</td>
<td>10,181</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>2,953,638</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Sydney</td>
<td>47,673</td>
<td>100.1</td>
<td>3,538,448</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using indices of dissimilarity and segregation, Burnley (1989, 138-9) found that while there was an overconcentration of the Vietnamese in Cabramatta, it was not of ghetto proportion. From a vigorous investigation of 1986 Census data, he concluded that the concentration around Cabramatta could be attributed to four principal factors: the close proximity to Cabramatta of three of the four refugee-receiving migrant centres in Sydney; family reunion migration from overseas and from elsewhere in Australia; the existence of rental accommodation in the area; and the depressed economic climate that precluded the 'normal' residential dispersal of migrants that is associated with socio-economic adjustment.

Wilson (1987, 1990) applied a less quantitative technique to the analysis of Vietnamese residential location and settlement in Sydney. From a survey of 134 Vietnamese household heads, Wilson found that the Vietnamese in Sydney tend to reside in clusters within ‘... a broad south-western corridor of the Sydney metropolitan region’ (Wilson, 1987, 15; 1990, 172) (Fig. 1). These clusters were found along linear transport routes such as rail lines, adjacent to industrial areas and to belts of medium density rental accommodation. Like Burnley, Wilson (1990) also pointed to the institutional impact of settlement policy, in the form of migrant centre locations, to explain concentrations in suburbs like Cabramatta. Wilson also

Fig. 3 CDs of Vietnam-born concentration around the suburb of Cabramatta
detected a limited residential dispersal of Vietnamese households away from Cabramatta toward the city.

**Inclusion and Exclusion**

Blainey (1988, 18) and others such as Birrell (1990, 50–2) have argued that Vietnamese concentration in Cabramatta and in other ‘little Saigons’ is the combined outcome of that ethnic group not wanting to interact with the wider community, and the Federal Government’s social policy of multiculturalism which encourages ethnic groups to preserve their culture. All respondents disagreed when asked whether they felt that concentration was a result of the Vietnamese purposefully avoiding the wider society. The respondents felt that the majority of Vietnamese were very keen to participate in Australian society. Those people thought to be less enthusiastic or able to involve themselves in the wider community included the Vietnamese elderly, particularly those who could not speak English. In 1986, the average proportion of people who did not speak English well, in the twenty or so CDs surrounding Cabramatta was 32.7 per cent (ABS, 1988). Those Vietnamese without English language proficiency were seen by respondents as less likely to participate in the wider society, and more likely to remain in Cabramatta:

‘...the first generation of any migrant community would have some language problems, some language difficulties. The language barrier is still there, so how could you expect a person with such a difficulty to fully participate in the Australian way of living? Say for instance, they sincerely wish to come to attend say Red Cross meeting or Lions Clubs meeting, but how could they come there without being understood by others and unable to understand others.’

The language barrier mentioned in this interview excerpt, can cause difficulty even in less formal interactions with the wider community, as one respondent states:

‘...because they don’t speak the language. They haven’t got the confidence to go out and have the interaction with different ethnic background people.’

Keys Young (1980a, 81) found that the inability or refusal of refugees to speak English was the thing that most angered other Australians, because they felt that ‘a migrant who comes to Australia and does not learn English fails to meet his (sic) part of the bargain’. Cabramatta is seen by many in the wider society, as an area where Vietnamese refugees can avoid ‘fulfilling their part of the bargain’ (Keys Young, 1980a, 80–1). A small number of respondents accepted that Cabramatta did form a protective environment, in which some Vietnamese could avoid participating with the wider society, but these respondents argued that most Vietnamese were keen to participate in Australian society, and avoidance was only the case for a small number of Vietnamese. One Vietnamese social worker did admit that:

‘... it could retard the growth of Vietnamese and other Asian people in their being forced to learn English more quickly if they learn to get by in total dependence upon people with whom they can communicate here ... it would probably be people who are not going to be able to learn English anyway.’

Other respondents pointed out that the second generation of Vietnamese migrants do not suffer from the same language and other cultural barriers as have some of the first generation Vietnamese migrants. Some researchers report that second generations, because of stronger achievement orientations and pressure from parents generally perform well in school and university systems (Bullivant, 1988, 71–5). However, such findings should not be allowed to disguise the educational problems faced by many Vietnamese students, particularly those who may have suffered a disruption of their schooling (Borthwick, 1987). Nevertheless, it was felt by those interviewed that the second
generation would fare excellently in Australian society.

Most of those interviewed argued that the Vietnamese in Sydney desired participation in and interaction with the wider Australian community:

'...Because I would say that they [the Vietnamese in Sydney] ... they would have as much desire to be a part of the community as a whole ... for example they would love to have Australian friends. I would say that to have a good Australian friend would be the desire of everyone of them's heart ...'

Even if Vietnamese desired to isolate themselves from Australian society, this would not be possible for two general reasons. First, the Vietnamese cannot easily return to their birthplace as can members of some migrant groups. Second, at least some form of participation was unavoidable because most have to venture outside Cabramatta every day to attend their place of work. A Vietnamese community leader pointed out:

'...Some other people [other migrants] they can just go back to their country and do what they like. We cannot ... we see here as our country. That's why I think that in the future time we will — our people — must try to contribute something to the multicultural society ... A few of us have joined the army you see ... three or four, and I think there will be more ... we have some people here in the police force, and we have people in government, and we have a few in politics...

'...they [the Vietnamese] are not working here [Cabramatta] but they have to go somewhere else to work. They have to go to — they have to meet Australians every day, no matter what they want to do they cannot live in a seclusive area, they have to make contact with Australian society every day, every minute of their lives, and for sure ... they are now actually participating in many ways.'

Participation with the wider society might be viewed with trepidation by some Vietnamese was suggested by one respondent:

'No. Non-participation is the furthest thing from their [the Vietnamese] minds. They might perhaps, be a little frightened of the wider society, but they certainly are not interested in isolating themselves from Australian society.'

A few informants argued that concentration was a conduit to participation in Australian society. A leader of one of the community organisations representing the Vietnamese said:

'...but concentration I think gets people more involved in social issue or political. Like the elections; I have the two political parties — Liberal and Labour Party — come to seminar to the community to talk about the immigration issue, and how do they presently intend to go about it; and they will have their view themselves. Otherwise, if there is no concentration, I find it very very difficult for me to put a message across for the political party, and even for the government policies as well on services.'

Concentration of the Vietnamese in Cabramatta was seen as a form of participation in Australia's multicultural future:

'...and I think by concentrating in a certain area that would give you that chance to provide the means to promote your culture, to show to the people what we are, what we have, what we have brought along with us to this country.'

The Vietnamese communities in Sydney clearly do not express a wish to isolate themselves from the wider community by setting up their own inclusive sub-societies or enclaves, as some have argued (Blainey, 1988, 18). Yet the territorial identity of Cabramatta is unmistakably Indo-Chinese, which serves to promote and therefore 'preserve' Vietnamese culture. This corresponds to Boal's (1976, 48-9) notion that
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one of the functions of ethnic segregation is the preservation of culture. However, Boal's orientation is on ethnic conflict, while the promotion of Vietnamese culture in Cabramatta is consistent with the government policy of multiculturalism (Office of Multicultural Affairs, 1989) and ostensibly consensual. While a small number of Vietnamese may use the concentration area as a means of avoiding wider contact, on the whole the Vietnamese are keen to involve themselves in almost every aspect of Australian society.

Some respondents felt that the Vietnamese were not given the opportunity to participate fully in Australian society:

'... They are not given the chance to do that, haven't been given the chance ... in saying this is trying to help people to understand us, and trying to give us a chance to become Australian as other people, to become accepted in this country so I think that like myself, I have Australian lunch, I have Australian friends and like other people we like to be accepted here, so why shouldn't we want to become part of this country?'

The possibility that sections of the wider society may be curbing the attempts of Vietnamese to become fully involved in Australian society, raises the prospect that processes of exclusion may be at work. Respondent opinion on whether the Vietnamese were segregated by the wider community was divided. Some respondents felt that the Vietnamese had not been forced to concentrate and that clustering had been a matter of choice:

'... they do it by choice — I don't think that they have been forced.'

Others argued that discriminatory factors had been at work to encourage the concentration of the Vietnamese, which included social isolation and discrimination:

'Maybe by language, maybe attitude you know. They drive into town, and you pass by

... I walk around the parking sign, they make different sign [respondent smiles and raises the index and middle fingers of his right hand, interviewer smiles back], the language you know.'

Discrimination would lessen over time, one respondent suggested:

'...I feel the general attitude of Australian people are more generous than that [that they are exclusionary] ... and you see so many voluntary organisations in Australia helping refugees, and I think that should be taken as the general attitude of the Australian people more than you look at the media statement or the political statement.'

The level of discrimination was judged by respondents as quite low compared with other countries. This was the general conclusion of the report of the National Inquiry into Racist Violence in Australia (1991, 259).

While most admitted that concentration was an effective means for the Vietnamese to avoid possible discriminatory treatment (see Boal, 1976, 46–8), they did not feel that this was the sole reason, or even an important reason, for the clustering of Vietnamese in the Cabramatta area:

'...You know living together is not to avoid discrimination, it's only really to support each other, that's all. That may help them in terms of avoiding the discrimination, because the white people coming into the area will have the awareness not to say anything against the bigger group because they might get attacked. That may help indirectly. But it doesn't mean that they want to put a wall between themselves and the others.'

Concentration was said to be due to forces beyond the control of the Vietnamese themselves, but not caused by overt exclusion. Factors such as the positioning of the migrant centres, lack of English proficiency, location of
employment opportunities, social security in areas of concentration, access to public transport, the location of affordable housing or ethnic-specific goods and services were seen as important. Many spatial choices, be they residential, workplace or activity space (leisure, shopping and visiting destinations), are made in response to constraints that make Cabramatta a preferable or unavoidable destination.

Explaining the Cabramatta Concentration

Political and Institutional Influences

Figure 3 shows the forty-nine CDs surrounding Cabramatta that were categorised as having large Vietnam-born residential populations in Figure 2. The migrant centres are quite close to Cabramatta, particularly Cabramatta Migrant Centre (Fig. 3). The proximity of the Westbridge, Cabramatta and East Hills centres to each other, where most Vietnamese refugees in Sydney were settled before 1982 (Wilson, 1987, 13–4), meant that a degree of concentration was perhaps inevitable (Viviani, 1984, 162; Burnley, 1989, 133). Minority migrant groups in Australia have a more restricted awareness of the built environment and a narrower scope of residential opportunities than the wider society (Humphreys & Whitelaw, 1979, 17). Wilson (1987, 14–5) points out that from his sample of Vietnamese refugees, the majority settled within 10 kilometres of the migrant centre they had attended.

In a study of Indo-Chinese settlement processes, Keys Young (1980b, 50, 54) found that three-quarters of all refugees surveyed had made return visits to reception centres, to visit family and friends but also to obtain the services of staff, such as interpreting and language classes. Although none of the respondents were directly asked whether they thought that the positioning of the migrant centres in Sydney had had any bearing on the concentration of Vietnamese people in Cabramatta, most pointed out that this was a factor. The services that migrant centres provide to refugees, even after they had left the centre, help explain why people tended to settle close to them. A Vietnamese Grant-in-Aid worker pointed out that:

‘...those migrant hostels not just provide the accommodation for the newly arrived migrants, but also the basic services for them, say for instance employment services, the society security services, the adult migrant education services, and those services are very needed to the newly arrived migrants and to any ethnic communities, and that’s why the people tend to move out to live around those migrant hostels.’

The various Vietnamese organisations were also able to arrange meetings and talks for newly arrived refugees in the centres. The tie to the migrant centre was an important factor that kept Vietnamese settlement near to the migrant centres, with the restricted urban knowledge of the refugees also being influential. This indicates an underlying tendency in the spatial behaviour of Vietnamese migrants that leads to initial clustering. Many current Vietnamese immigrants continue this process of choosing to settle in Cabramatta. While this helps account for the location of concentration, it does not satisfactorily explain the underlying precursors for concentration.

Employment Opportunities and Housing

Employment opportunities were another reason for settlement of Vietnamese new arrivals in the Cabramatta area. The industrial estates of Chipping Norton and Wetherill Park are located within the Fairfield LGA. Factory employment was a necessity to the Vietnamese, who desperately required money to support and reunite family from overseas and to establish their own family here in Australia. There was little time or money for most Vietnamese to spend on updating qualifications or gaining language proficiency, and many first generation have been restricted to unskilled factory jobs or have been informally employed as outworkers. Problems
still exist in having overseas qualifications recognised, and despite much comment over the last decade, this has not improved greatly (see Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, 1982, 27; Nguyen, 1986, 2; Illawarra Migrant Resource Centre, 1989, 12). There is de-skilling of many first generation Vietnamese migrants:

'...You see I have a friend who qualify as a doctor in my country and comes here and works in the hospital as a cleaner — you can see that happen. I have friends who qualify as a pharmacist in my country and come here and have to get herself part-time jobs as a welfare worker part-time, and try to do the course here. Many people couldn't afford to go back to college because — especially it's hard to get in, it is very difficult to get into, secondly because of the language difficulties, thirdly because they can't afford to because they have to have something here to settle down here first before they can do any studying...'

'...a lot of Vietnamese women are doing piece work at home. In one way it's a good thing because it keeps them occupied and it gives them financial support for the family. But on the other hand it is very — I can say that it hurts me a lot — I feel very worried, very hurt, when I see them very exploited at home ... And the employee really depends upon the employer, and they get very exploited. Not only women, also men. And they depend on the employer. They have to accept a very low price for their labour. But they don't have a choice, because of the English again. They cannot get better work, so they have to accept that. I might be paying only $3-4 per hour, and they have to accept, because they cannot work elsewhere.'

There are clear indications of economic constraint. Choice of residential location and housing type was restricted for the Vietnamese, due to the financial disadvantages of suffering marginal labour force positions (Iredale, 1983, 60). The Vietnamese were attracted to cheaper rental accommodation that was near to public transport (see Fig. 3). Burnley (1989, 140) pointed out that in '...the Cabramatta area, most flats were completed just before the main wave of Indochinese migration began in 1978'. But rental accommodation was available in many more areas than just around Cabramatta, and the further development of rental accommodation in the area may have been a response to demand, suggesting that the preferences or choices of the Vietnamese have been important in the development of medium density accommodation around Cabramatta. The educational successes of many Vietnamese youths would suggest that choice of vocation should move beyond unskilled and marginal employment in the near future, and the dependence upon cheaper housing and residential proximity to industrial estates should fade.

Evidence from the interviews confirms the arguments of Keys Young (1980b, 22) and Viviani (1984, 230–1) that most Vietnamese families are keen to purchase housing. Despite their often financially constrained positions, many families have been able to save sufficient capital to share the Australian dream of home ownership (Kemeny, 1986, 251).

'We think that here a house is the most important thing, so we try our best to buy the house. I come here and in two years I bought a house. We all set in to buy the house. I think other people too — and we pay it in four years. I sleep less, we very poor when I come here, to give us some basis, I sleep less for nearly five years...'

Many home purchases appear to have been in the newly developed housing estates within the Fairfield LGA. Suburbs that were mentioned as dispersal destinations included Bonnyrigg, St John's Park, Bossley Park, Wetherill Park, Cabramatta West and Canley Vale — all are within or along the Fairfield
LGA boundary. The Vietnamese appear to have sought housing to purchase that was not too far away from the services of Cabramatta, and the development of housing estates in the Fairfield LGA reflects this demand. The 1991 Census shows that the distribution of Vietnam-born across the CDs of the Fairfield LGA has spread. However, despite this micro-dispersal, Fairfield LGA and Cabramatta still retain a statistical over-representation. Burnley (1989, 150—2) suggests that the higher in-migration than out-migration of Vietnamese in the Fairfield LGA may be attributed to the unfavourable employment climate. Evidence from key informants suggests that recessionary effects upon the move to home ownership for the Vietnamese are a particular constraint of the last two years of the 1980s, and not necessarily a phenomenon of the decade. Cultural orientations and values, such as industry and thrift, were perceived by respondents to have facilitated a challenge to the economic constraint of the unfavourable economic climate and labour market segmentation.

Social Welfare and Shopping Facilities
The social support provided for arrivals in a new country is a powerful influence in the creation and maintenance of concentration. For those migrants who are not competent in the host language, or who are unable to arrange employment or accommodation, Cabramatta provides numerous Vietnamese-specific social welfare services. The Vietnamese people provide much needed social supports to each other, such as informal childcare.

‘For the migrant of non-English speaking background there are many advantages to concentration. Here [Cabramatta] the migrant can feel more secure in what is a very insecure time. It can help people who are not yet able to speak English, and it can also help with social and cultural adjustment problems. There is informal welfare, guidance with government services and qualifications recognition. Concentration also means that non-English speaking Vietnamese are not isolated, or stuck in their homes as they would be if they were in other areas.’

Government departments and voluntary agencies are better able to provide Vietnamese-specific services in Cabramatta than they can in other areas. The level of service demand in concentration areas make it worthwhile to provide Vietnamese speaking employees and Vietnamese-orientated services. Government authorities and the Vietnamese associations around Cabramatta are able to lobby for additional resources. The Cabramatta concentration of Vietnamese is an environment in which the special social needs of the Vietnamese can be met, and where adjustment to the wider society can be gradually achieved.

Pebaque (1991) has argued that the Commonwealth Government policy of ‘mainstreaming’ social services over the last five years has resulted in a reduction of ethno-specific services. This has particularly impacted upon communities of non-English speaking background (NESB). Speakers and discussions at the NSW Migrant Resource Centre Forum (Nov. 1991), highlighted the problems of implementation of the Commonwealth Government’s Access and Equity policy on social services (Office of Multicultural Affairs, 1991). This reaffirmed the necessity of community-based advocacy and service provision, especially for NESB communities.

Cabramatta continues to provide social welfare support to some groups of Vietnamese who are unable, because of language or economic barriers, to purchase housing and move to other areas. Vietnamese elderly and those not English language proficient, were mentioned by respondents as those more likely to prefer the accessibility of living in Cabramatta. A Vietnamese religious groups representative pointed out that:

‘...There are a lot of problems that develop in a community of people like this when they have loneliness. We have had more contact
outside of our Church group with the elderly people than we have within any one group, and we have found that this proximity this great concentration of people, is a real blessing to them."

Elderly Vietnamese who cannot speak English are therefore constrained to residing in Cabramatta. Some respondents also suggested that Vietnamese elderly, many of whom can speak English and are mobile, still prefer to live in Cabramatta, for the co-ethnic contact available.

An important reason why Vietnamese households have not relocated far away from Cabramatta is because of their activity space behaviour. Wilson (1987, 16) argued that for Vietnamese in south-western Sydney, shopping behaviour was 'highly localised'. However, Cabramatta shopping district draws on Indo-Chinese custom from a wide catchment, because of the provision of a diverse range of Indo-Chinese-specific goods and services, and the entertainment and leisure attractions for Indo-Chinese.

'...Economically I should say that Cabramatta now becomes the regional centre, which is a very unique centre in New South Wales, to cater and to provide services to the Indo-Chinese community. They were travelling from Wollongong, from Newcastle and other parts of New South Wales to come to Cabramatta to do their shopping.'

'Because, you talk in Vietnamese, and you can see a lot of people, you may meet friends during weekends, so this is a good point for going to shopping in Cabramatta, and thing is that it is cheap too comparing with Australian shop, and good quality.'

A walk through Cabramatta Mall or Freedom Plaza leads one to suspect that this activity space concentration in Cabramatta may be much more pronounced that the residential concentration surrounding the suburb. The burgeoning Indo-Chinese commercial district is an important factor in the wider society's perception of Vietnamese spatial concentration in Cabramatta. The streets and shops, as opposed to the workplace or home, are the places where other Australians are more likely to come across migrants such as the Vietnamese (Keys Young, 1980a, 49–52).

Activity space clustering is one of the reasons for popular over estimation of Vietnamese residential concentration. Despite a growing residential dispersal of Vietnamese from Cabramatta, the area will more than likely continue to be a site of apparent Vietnamese residential concentration, simply because of the numbers of people of Asian appearance seen in the town, as well as actual activity space concentration. Cabramatta's cultural uniqueness is being commercialised in order to attract a wider custom, such as through tourism or novelty shopping, and to enhance the business opportunities in the area.

Business opportunities certainly exist in Cabramatta for Vietnamese entrepreneurs in the provision of ethnic-specific as well as general goods and services. However, as is the case in enclave economies overseas (Sanders & Nee, 1987, 764) the competition among small business is fierce, returns are often quite low and many family businesses have gone bankrupt.

'...Grocery shops, there are grocery shops practically along side of each other for five kilometres you may as well say. Everyone wants to go into [set one up] a grocery shop, there's too much competition.'

'...like bread shops; maybe the first bread shop is good, but the second one, the third one and tenth compete with each other, and with the market being too small to support them, therefore sometime they go bankrupt, because they share the clients.'

But the number of businesses, the proposed developments of the Cabramatta shopping district and the widening market, all indicate that business opportunities will continue to attract
potential Vietnamese entrepreneurs to set up in Cabramatta. The decision of Vietnamese to shop and spend leisure time in Cabramatta is an example of an inclusive spatial decision. This choice should be considered as existing almost entirely outside of any exclusionary constraint. The spatial dynamics of the Vietnamese in the future will most likely be increasingly dominated by such choices.

**Theoretical and Policy Implications**

**Structure and Agency**

The earlier stages of Vietnamese residential settlement and workplace location were outcomes of external factors constraining Vietnamese spatial activity. Members of the Vietnamese communities interviewed largely felt that the forces impinging upon them were not examples of overt discrimination, or wider societal exclusion. Rather, the informants felt that these constraints were adjustment problems that all migrant groups had to overcome. However, the lack of acceptance of new migrant groups is a form of exclusion. The lack of action to change qualification recognition procedures is an example of a more overt exclusion that directly contributed to a de-skilling of some Vietnamese.

According to structuration theory, agency and structure operate reflexively, such that structure not only constrains and empowers agency, but agency transforms structure (Giddens, 1979). The spatial choices of the Vietnamese have been made within varying parameters of constraint. The Australian state and society not only constrain Vietnamese choice through labour market segmentation and involuntary migrant centre placement, but also empower choice by providing social services to encourage socio-economic adjustment. The parameters or constraints are influenced by choice in a reflexive manner. For instance, activity space concentration led by shopping preferences, increase the demand for Vietnamese-specific goods and services in Cabramatta, which in turn, increase the range of services in the area and therefore the activity space attraction. Vietnamese concentration has been both an inclusive and an exclusive process. The Vietnamese have chosen to live and shop in Cabramatta, but these choices are made within economic, social and political constraints.

The earlier years of settlement are a period of dominant constraints for the Vietnamese. Initial settlement decisions of Vietnamese refugees were made by immigration officers of the various Federal Departments that housed immigrants over the years (Viviani, 1984, 135–6). There are the financial constraints of trying to achieve economic security and overcome disadvantaged labour force positions. The Vietnamese in Sydney are slowly progressing past their period of exclusion — the time when concentration was a reinforcement (through the media especially) of that group's difference and its marginal status. Once socio-economic security is attained, the Vietnamese have a much greater spatial flexibility and choice. In the future, the spatial behaviour of the Vietnamese should be more typified by choice. In particular, the proximity to shopping and leisure facilities may be the driving influences of concentration, while white collar employment and economic security will be important contributing factors to residential and workplace flexibility.

**Refugee Settlement Policies**

A common settlement pattern of Indo-Chinese immigrants in cities throughout the world since 1975, is that they have tended to concentrate in larger urban centres. This is true of countries such as France (White et al., 1987), Canada, the USA (Montero, 1979; Franklin, 1983; Desbarats, 1985), New Zealand (Farmer, 1988) and the United Kingdom (Dalglish, 1989; Robinson, 1989; Robinson & Hale, 1990). Concentration has often occurred despite government policies to encourage dispersed residential settlement of Indo-Chinese refugees (Desbarats, 1985, 526; Robinson, 1989, 332).
These policy decisions were premised upon the belief that dispersal would spread the burdensome costs of the services these migrants required. It was also felt that concentration, through cultural isolation, was a barrier to assimilation into the wider society (Desbarats, 1985; Dalglish, 1989, 128). British Government dispersal policy highlights the failure of attempts by host governments to avoid a concentration of Vietnamese refugees. A British Government Home Affairs Committee report (1985, xxvii) concludes:

The Vietnamese are showing their dissatisfaction with the dispersal policy by moving to areas where Vietnamese are more numerous and prospects for employment and education are better. Some move to escape racial harassment or to be reunited with kin. The main centres of attraction are London and Birmingham, followed by Leeds, Manchester and Bradford.

The unregulated gravitation migration of Vietnamese refugees to larger urban areas with existing Vietnamese communities, can transform a concentration into a 'ghettoisation'. Dalglish (1989, 128) argues that:

'...dispersal policy itself may be the creator of ghettos. This particularly is true in London, where secondary migration nearly trebled the refugee population there ... causing over-crowding, [some refugees] became homeless and found themselves in hostel type accommodation or took to squatting.

Australia Federal Government policy on the settlement and intake of Indo-Chinese refugees has always been tempered by perceived public opinion and the concern that are shown in polls and in the media (Lawrence, 1983, 17). A report in 1982, on Indo-Chinese refugee settlement by the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, recommended that in future the distribution of refugees should be more dispersed (1982, 30). Due to publicly expressed concern in Sydney over the clustering of Indo-Chinese, the Cabramatta and East Hills Migrant Centres were closed during 1982, and the Endeavour Migrant Centre in Coogee was allocated increased refugee numbers (Wilson, 1987, 13–4). The Community Refugee Settlement Scheme (CRSS), which settles refugees near to or with private sponsors or voluntary agencies, was embraced by the Federal Government as a means of achieving a more dispersed settlement pattern (Kelly, 1988, 835). It was argued that this settlement program would reduce welfare expenditure, as the costs of CRSS are largely borne by sections of the community such as voluntary agencies (Viviani, 1984, 162; Pittaway, 1992, 65).

CRSS policy was to place refugees in small groups (Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, 1982, 19–20), but these small groups could not offer the social support and advice networks possible in bigger cities (Tran, 1981, 31). Refugees settled under the CRSS experience many more difficulties in adjustment, while government sponsored refugees have had the benefit of the comprehensive number of services offered in the migrant centres (Tran & Nelson, 1982, 14; Pittaway, 1991, 64–5). The social isolation that many refugees in smaller towns and cities often suffered (Tran, 1982, 23) has led to migration from smaller towns to larger cities (Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, 1982, 31). Many refugees settled under the CRSS migrated in search of employment to areas where larger ethnic communities existed, especially those refugees initially settled in non-metropolitan areas (Viviani, 1984, 219).

More extreme attempts to forcibly disperse newly arrived migrants are not entirely improbable in Australia. Indeed, in May of 1991, an ALP Caucus immigration policy motion to regulate the dispersal of new migrants to country areas was drafted (Millett, 1991a, 1). The same anticipated problems of isolation and lack of service provision were arguments that were suc-
successful in having such a potential policy quashed, as well as concerns over the complex administration and probable failure of such a scheme (Millett, 1991b, 2).

Government attempts at dispersing the settlement of Vietnamese refugees in Australia, such as through the CRSS, have been unsuccessful. Even if the Australian settlement system had not used migrant centres in proximity to one another, but had had more dispersal orientated settlement policies from the outset, it is still probable that some concentration of the Vietnamese would have occurred somewhere in Sydney, perhaps even in Cabramatta. A Vietnamese community representative with some personal knowledge of the settlement of Vietnamese in other countries, argued that because of a tendency for new migrants to concentrate, policies of dispersal such as used in America and Britain without success, would have had a similar outcome in Australia:

'And I don't think that the policy would work, Kevin. It didn't work in Britain and it didn't work in America either. Because between 1975 and 1979 the American Government tried to resettle the Vietnamese refugees, you know as you mentioned, scattered around America, but in fact a couple of years later there was a trend that those people moved to the southern part of California, and now they form a little Saigon in southern California, you see ... but as I said you know, there is a trend for those people getting together ...'

To suggest that Vietnamese concentration in areas in Sydney's south west is attributable to migrant centre location is to ignore not only the international settlement patterns of the Vietnamese, but also the role of social and economic forces of ethnic concentration. More importantly, this would be a purely descriptive and a theoretical explanation that would only help to explain where concentration occurred and not why it occurs at all.

**Cabramatta as a Cultural Expression**

Anderson (1990) has recently raised concerns over the spatial cultural expression of Chinatowns in Sydney and Melbourne. While Chinatowns in Australia have moved from being seen as iniquitous slums to being celebrated as expressions of a our cultural diversity, Anderson’s (1990, 14–2) argument is that this is merely a shift in the racialisation process:

The area that once carried the stigma of a fearful slum, had by the mid-1970s gained a reputation of being a valuable contribution to 'pluralistic' Australia. ... But the belief in a Chinese race — and the sense of separation upon which that belief relied — were persisting through a new discourse of pluralism.

Consideration of the political and ideological construction of Cabramatta, and of the social policy of multiculturalism, is important here. Increasingly Cabramatta, which has a visible expression of oriental culture, has been celebrated politically as a positive spatial expression of a successful social policy of multiculturalism. Like Anderson (1990), but from a very different perspective, Blainey (1984) and Chipman (1980) have argued that multicultural policies reinforce uniqueness, difference and separateness. My interpretation of the social policy of multiculturalism in Australia is that it is a policy which demands social, economic and political integration by way of celebrating cultural diversity. To many of the Vietnamese interviewed, the Cabramatta area is a place of social and economic adjustment to a new society, but it is also a celebrated spatial contribution to cultural diversity. Therefore the three dimensions of the social policy of multiculturalism: cultural expression, equity and economic efficiency (Office of Multicultural Affairs, 1989, vii), might be best achieved for many Vietnamese in this area of ethnic concentration.
However, if areas of concentration become under serviced and overly stigmatised, such places lose their positive roles. As they become areas of poverty the adjustment component is undermined. Morrill (1965) produced this stereotypical definition of a ghetto:

Inferiority in almost every conceivable material respect is the mark of the ghetto. But also, to the minority person, the ghetto implies a rejection, a stamp of inferiority, which stifles ambition and initiative. The very fact of residential segregation reinforces other forms of discrimination...

Care should be taken to avoid allowing the concentration of Vietnamese in Cabramatta to develop into the phenomenon Morrill describes above. The Cabramatta commercial district has an aura of vibrancy and commercial activity, not poverty. Cabramatta forms a fundamental part of the adjustment process of many Vietnamese, and the town has a creditable, though always insufficient, level of culturally-tuned service provision.

Conclusion
Dispersal policies for migrant settlement have been shown to be misguided. Forced dispersal is an intolerable restriction of personal mobility, a policy that leads to isolation, and often a domestic political expedient tacked on to an ostensibly international humanitarian program. It has also been shown that dispersal policies are unsuccessful. The international experiences of the settlement of Indo-Chinese refugees is that once refugees were given autonomy in their location decisions, a pattern of residential concentration arose (White et al., 1987, 49; Farmer, 1988, 36). This spatial concentration has increased over time, and the urban areas with the largest Indo-Chinese communities have had proportionally more of this growth. Burnley (1989, 135) has used the term ‘gravitation’ migration to describe the subsequent in-migration of Vietnamese to areas such as Sydney and Melbourne, which contained established Vietnamese communities. For the many reasons identified, there appears a tendency for Vietnamese refugees to concentrate if given spatial autonomy.

Given that dispersal policy is not a judicious option and that Vietnamese refugees, like other migrant groups, are for many good reasons ‘agglomerative’ (Dalglish, 1989, 128) during the earlier stages of settlement, it is better to emphasise and enhance the positive aspects of concentration. These advantages can be summarised as: the provision of informal services and support, the viability and accessibility of formal services, and the existence of a protected adjustment environment. There is an understandable sense of bewilderment amongst the Vietnamese communities, at how the concentration in Cabramatta is viewed so negatively by the wider society. If commentators on migrant settlement continue to infer that ethnic concentration is always a divisive phenomenon, or argue that it is an unavoidable short-term evil, then public perceptions of ethnic concentration will always be negative. Care should be taken to avoid allowing areas of ethnic concentration to become underclass traps, or for them to receive negative images from stereotypical treatment. Policy should play to the strengths of ethnic concentration and avoid the pitfalls.

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