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Gillian Bottomley

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PART I

*Migration studies and the problem
of culture*

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CHAPTER 1

*Migrations and cultural analyses:
a point of departure*

. . . this is, after all, the century of the migrant as well as the century of the bomb, perhaps there have never been so many people who end up elsewhere than they began, whether by choice or by necessity, and so perhaps that's the source from which this kind of reconstruction can begin.

Salman Rushdie, 1987, p.63

Culture is one of the most commonly used concepts in studies of migration, yet it is curiously unexplored. The notion of culture as a way of life of a particular group of people is obviously central to the process of migration, whereby people leave one set of social and historical circumstances and move, or are moved, to another. By this very movement, migration challenges the idea of a distinct way of life. If it is possible to transport whole 'cultures', then their specific conditions of development must be irrelevant. Clearly, this is not the case; anthropological work has long demonstrated the intricate inter-penetrations of economic, political, geographic and social conditions in cultural practices. The process of migration, therefore, calls into question such interrelations between circumstances and practices.

Much of the material about migration and its social consequences demonstrates the considerable difficulty of attempting to answer this question. For example, social scientists often assume that culture = ethnicity, that is, a defined national or linguistic category. Hence we read discussions about multiculturalism or cultural pluralism that concentrate only on 'ethnics', minorities within a state. 'Cultural studies' on the other hand, are more likely to concentrate on class or youth 'subcultures' or on the practices and products of specific classes or class fractions. When these two perspectives are combined, they can provide valuable insights into the construction and transformation of ways of life. Some examples of such successful

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cross-referencing are Jayawardena's studies of Indian emigration (1963, 1968), Berger's *A Seventh Man* (1975), Piore's *Birds of Passage* (1980), and Gilroy's *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987). The theoretical frameworks of these studies differ, but they share certain important similarities. One of these is their concern to interrelate the constraints arising from structured circumstances, caused by migration or by class-based inequalities, with the active construction of cultural practices and the reinterpretation and understanding of both circumstances and practices. Another is their recognition that understanding requires a knowledge of the origins, modes of migration and current circumstances of the subjects of study. In my own studies of Greek-Australians, for example, I have found that international migration can create international people, who identify with kin, friends and fellow emigrants virtually across the world (Bottomley, 1979, 1984). Sociological studies of ethnic minorities often miss the significance of the continuing interaction between homelands and countries of emigration. This neglect can also lead to a reified view of culture, as a kind of package of attributes carried across from the homeland.

I will discuss some of these studies at greater length in the following chapters, which take a basically anthropological approach to culture. Studies of relatively static populations, as many anthropological works have been, are brought into question by migration. But the frameworks used to study migration – derived from demography, political economy, political science, or the sociology of minorities – generally fail to cope adequately with the complexities of culture. The separation of academic disciplines has contributed to this situation, where sociologists see themselves as concerned with the structures of industrial societies, anthropologists with non-industrial societies, political economists with the economic and political bases of social action, and ethnicists with the recovery and development of relatively unproblematic 'traditions'.

The writers I mentioned above all offer inter-disciplinary frameworks, including anthropology, sociology, political economy and, for Berger and Gilroy, a form of poetics. A further similarity is that all these writers include analyses of social power, of the ways in which cultural forms are constructed, dismantled and re-negotiated in the struggle for access to valued resources, for economic and symbolic capital. I will attempt to develop such a perspective on culture in the following chapters. I also believe that it is important

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to include, with an analysis of structural constraints, the perceptions people have of those constraints. My basic framework here could be described as comparative sociology, derived from anthropology, but seeing the specific instance as 'a particular case of the possible' (cf. Bourdieu, 1986). Anthropologists have developed sophisticated sets of understanding of cultural processes (see Geertz, 1973, Clifford and Marcus, 1986, Herzfeld, 1987). The anthropological method has been described as 'diverse ways of thinking and writing about culture from a standpoint of participant observation' (Clifford, 1988, p.9). Even when this method was at its most objectifying, in the service of colonial governments, it nevertheless required the observer to spend a good deal of time with the observed – the rather sacrosanct activity of fieldwork. Migration studies, on the other hand, are mostly written about the writer's own society and its impact on people within that society who come from other places. But the differences between these two modes of study become increasingly blurred. For example, probably no existing society has been unaffected by industrial civilisation in some way; hence the exotic Other is increasingly a problematic construct. And the decades of intense and continuing international migration have radically altered those immigrant-receiving societies within which studies have been made.

This book includes material gathered from participant observation, as well as from other sources (historical, demographic, statistical, literary, and the work of other social scientists). My participant observation began formally some 22 years ago, with a socio-cultural study of Greek-Australians in Sydney. It has continued through work on southern European settlement in Australia, return migration to Greece, cultural aspects of feminism and political change in Greece and Australia, and, more broadly, through studies of international migration and cultural interactions in industrial societies (Bottomley, 1979, 1983, 1984a, b, c, 1988, 1990).

More informally, I believe that the experience of living in a highly diverse society can generate an intense interest in the processes of cultural formation. For example, during my childhood in a small country town in Australia, the differences and comparisons between the lives of my own family of orientation and the lives of our Aboriginal schoolmates were striking. Many of the Aboriginal children had been deserted by irresponsible fathers, as we had been. Aboriginal mothers and children often lived in economic circumstances not greatly dissimilar to our own. Yet, as descendants of Celtic

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and European settlers, we had much readier access to the status of 'decent poor', and therefore access to a self-respect denied to the indigenous people - who were, at that time, not allowed into the municipal swimming pool or into the back rows of the cinema. As fringe dwellers in that country town in the 1950s, the Aboriginal people had limited access to the considerable cultural capital of their own heritage, and were forced to endure the status of people who had been deprived of their land and been systematically categorised as 'naturally inferior'.

At the same time, several large and hardworking families of Kytherian Greeks provided another model of family life - somewhat introverted, but solidary and mutually supportive. All our Greek schoolmates belonged to these café-owning families and all became professionals themselves, as a direct result of strong family support. Later I taught at schools in Sydney where one quarter of my students were of non-English-speaking background - a challenging and harrowing experience, but one quite common to teachers in a city where at least one quarter of the population is of non-Anglophone background.

My informal study of migration and culture included emigration from Australia, considerable 'working travel' in Europe, Britain and North America, and several years of employment in Montreal, struggling to communicate in my second language in the fairly hostile environment of Quebec in the early 1960s, when the politics of culture were pervasive (see Handler, 1989, for a detailed academic account). These personal experiences were not academic, of course, but they have shaped my interest in and approach to questions about the processes of cultural formation.

Perhaps even more basically, the experiences of growing up in a poor, mother-headed and all-female household, and of a kind of migration in to the profoundly middle-class (and masculinist) environment of the academy, have also helped me to understand some of the ways in which class and gender structure lifestyles, and are themselves cultural constructs. I will elaborate on these points in later chapters, where I have tried to stress the significance of class and gender perspectives in understanding culture.

In the chapters that follow, I am particularly concerned with the relation between definitions of social power (e.g. based on economic, gender and ethnic criteria) and cultural practices. These discussions offer examples of such interrelations, including studies of international

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migration and cultural change; of the poetics of ethnicity; of dance, including some political aspects of dance; of the institution of dowry, considered both as tradition and as adaptation; of the cultural construction of gender relations and their links with models of the 'ethnos' or nation; and of the consequences of some of the differences generated by class, gender, age and ethnicity in Australia.

Many of these chapters refer to people of Greek origin, because they are drawn from my own research in Greece and among Greek-Australians. Apart from the fact that Greek-speakers have been international migrants for centuries, they have also actively maintained and translated cultural practices that help to define 'Greekness', even in the diaspora. In Australia's highly diverse population, Greek-speakers make up one of the largest minorities of non-English-speaking background, now extending through several generations (see Bottomley, 1979). There is also a dynamic process of interaction between diaspora Greeks and Greece itself, providing a built-in comparative framework that allows cultural practices to be seen as something other than memories or museum pieces. The very diversity of Australia's population (of over 100 different linguistic groups) raises compelling questions about the politics of culture. I have chosen to concentrate on Greek-speakers because I want to investigate these questions, and concepts such as tradition and ethnicity, through analyses of specific practices. Despite this ethno-specific focus, this is not a comprehensive study of Greek-Australians, nor even of Australian immigration and settlement. The Greek and Australian contexts are rich and interesting in themselves, but my primary intention here is to raise more general questions about migration and settlement and about the constitution and recreation of cultural capital. These studies demonstrate particular cases of a range of possibilities.

In talking about cultural forms, there is a risk of solidifying what should be seen as *process*. 'Culture' is often conceived as products – as books, pieces of music, plays, rituals. My intention here is to emphasise the fluidity of cultural forms, to question static concepts of 'traditions' and 'institutions', and to try to reveal something of the flow of social relations in cultural processes.

The chapters that follow range across a number of social fields, from considerations of dance and music to studies of gender relations and representations of race and ethnicity. A common thread running throughout is an exploration of what might be called muted modes.

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This is a similar usage to that of 'muted models', referred to by Ardener (1975) and Dubisch (1986). Muted models have been described as 'muted in the face of the dominant ideology' and perhaps 'only vaguely articulated by the members of the subordinate group themselves' (Dubisch, 1986, p.32). But the term 'model' implies a conscious construct, whereas certain modes of expression and communication may be barely conscious, perhaps literally embodied, as in dance, or hardly surfacing in a discourse (as, I would argue, the poetics of ethnicity rarely appear in social scientific studies of migration). One of my aims is to develop different ways of perceiving and perhaps understanding such modes, of listening to voices that tend to be subdued and raising questions about absences.

I am aware of the dangers in such a project, of the criticisms of writers such as Edward Said of those who apparently claim to represent others (see Said, 1978, 1985). These are criticisms with which I am familiar, as an Anglophone who has written extensively about migration to Australia. The area of migration studies is inherently political, and it is difficult to avoid the pitfalls of insider-outsider debates. Said has also pointed to a 'kind of possessive exclusivism . . . the sense of being an excluding insider by virtue of experience . . . or by virtue of method', i.e. only women or migrants can write about women and migrants, only Marxists or feminists can write about economics or women's literature, and so on (*ibid.*, p.15). My position here is that both domination and understanding can take many forms, and that both experience and methods are therefore comparable. But both should be scrutinised critically, rather than assuming understanding either through some kind of essentialism or through methodological orthodoxy. Perhaps the ultimate test of intellectual work here is the response from those whom we appear to represent. I have certainly found it a challenging, stimulating and instructive experience to have my work constantly discussed, criticised and evaluated by the 'subjects' of my research, over the last fifteen years or so.

In fact, one of the continuing themes in these chapters is a resistance to ready categorising, a resistance that becomes apparent in the ways in which people perceive and act on structural forms and limitations. Such resistances may create their own contradictions, as Paul Willis demonstrated in his study of 12 working class 'lads' who, in rejecting schooling as an avenue to social mobility, virtually ensured that they were thoroughly adapted to factory work (Willis, 1981). In my own research, I have argued that the resources of

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'Greekness' have offered Greek-Australians a positive sense of identity in the face of the negative pressures towards assimilation (cf. Bottomley, 1979, 1987). However, these forms of Greekness can include their own processes of subjection that also generate resistance. For example, family relations may reflect mutually contradictory pressures – the family is central to Greekness, especially in Australia, yet the State, the economy and more general ideas about personal freedom are based on individualism (cf. Strintzos, 1984; Bottomley, 1984a). And the tolerance of 'difference' promoted in policies of multiculturalism blends into notions of individual differences that can generate conflict within the 'imagined communities' that construct and guard ethnic identities. The difficulty, then, lies in developing a framework that can help us to understand some of these complexities, rather than to resort too easily to formulae about one or other perspective or category – such as either class, ethnicity, or gender.

In the light of these remarks, the title of the book may be a little clearer. I am arguing from some slightly different perspectives on the subjects discussed here. These chapters are critical in the sense that they all question legitimated ways of understanding and representing the social world. They also suggest other ways of understanding, partly by attempting to hear muted modes, and partly by presenting material from another perspective.

Much of this material is about others of several kinds, especially that part drawn from Greece or Greek-Australians. But my main focus of study is the work of other academics and scholars. My central critiques are of representations of culture, of the static notion of tradition, of the narrowing effect of dichotomous schemata used to describe social relations, of views on migration and ethnicity, and, finally, paraphrasing John Berger, 'ways of knowing'.

The material is heterogeneous, but it refracts the themes of culture and social power from several different viewpoints – in general, from the perspectives of those who, in one or more senses, come from another place, those who are not the 'natural' legitimators of social knowledge. The perspectives offered here may also be misrepresentations but the main aim of my project is to question certainties rather than offer an alternative Truth.

As a university teacher, I am myself part of a powerful legitimating structure, of course. However, my perception of universities is not that of one who feels at home. As Bourdieu's brilliant study of class-based universes demonstrates, a 'sense of one's place' appears as

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natural in those whose conditions of existence have produced particular practices and lifestyles (1986). Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus', 'history turned into nature' (1977, p.78), which generates practices and perceptions, will be an important organising concept in several chapters, and I will discuss it further in the next few pages.

In my own case, habitus helps to explain a tangential and sometimes resistant perspective, developed as a rural 'poor white' female and, more academically, as an evening student at a university that barely tolerated such a marginal species. I mention these conditions in order to point out that I am also, in some ways, from another place. My particular life experiences are surprisingly remote to most academics, even to many who have an abstract understanding of the existence of poverty, of gender- and regionally-based inequalities and the elitism of universities. Despite claims to egalitarianism, there are real, lasting and basic cultural differences generated by our relations to class-based conditions. In a way, the limits of necessity create, in James Baldwin's phrase, 'another country'.

At the same time, differences generated in this way can be valuable in relativising claims to legitimacy: the absence of shared assumptions can bring such assumptions into question. I have heard the same observation from a number of people who have experienced the much more profound alienation of migration, but also from others whose class habitus means that a university is not naturally 'their' place. 'Different definitions of the impossible, the possible, and the probable, cause one group to experience as natural or reasonable practices or aspirations which another group finds unthinkable or scandalous, and vice versa' (Bourdieu, 1977, p.78).

Nevertheless, I make no claim to special insider knowledge of a particular category of people, not even on the basis of sisterhood, as some might argue (cf. Strathern, 1985). I share some objectives and some understanding with some of the people in this book but, above all, my own experience and that of my family underlie an interest in the operation of power relations and, especially, in forms of resistance and creative modifications.

THE POLITICS OF CULTURE

The chapters of this book all pose questions about the politics of culture. My working definition of culture is borrowed from Raymond Williams: 'a constitutive social process creating specific and different

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ways of life' (1977, p.19). I would add to this definition Stuart Hall's note that culture includes

both the meanings and values which arise amongst distinctive social groups and classes, on the basis of their given historical conditions and relationships, through which they handle and respond to the conditions of existence; and the lived traditions and practices through which those 'understandings' are expressed and in which they are embodied. (1981, p.26)

In *Keywords* (1976) and *Culture* (1981), Williams describes the concept of culture as one of the most difficult in the language. Certainly, it is used with considerable variation. It is, however, worth following his brief history of the concept from its early use as a noun of process - as we still find it in 'horticulture' and 'agriculture' - to a noun of configuration or generalisation, a kind of informing spirit of a whole way of life, manifest in all social activities but especially in language, styles of art, and intellectual work. It was taken up in this sense by anthropologists, and provides a valuable sense of the interconnectedness of social activities. However, the concept tended to support a rather static view of cultures as integrated and enduring wholes that could 'clash' on contact or be completely destroyed. There are several problems with this view. One is that human history has been one of constant cultural interaction, interchange and change. This means that cultural processes are always historically specific. To quote Eric Wolf:

We need to remember that the culture concept came to the fore in a specific historical context, during a period when some European nations were contending for dominance while others were striving for separate identities and independence. The demonstration that each struggling nation possessed a distinctive society, animated by its special spirit or culture, served to legitimate its aspirations to form a separate state of its own. The notion of separate and integral cultures responded to this political project. Once we locate the reality of society in historically changing, imperfectly bounded, multiple and branching social alignments, however, the concept of a boxed, unitary and bounded culture must give way to a sense of the fluidity and permeability of cultural sets. In the rough and tumble of social interaction, groups are known to exploit the ambiguities of inherited forms, to impart new evaluations or valences to them, to borrow forms more expressive of their interests, or to create wholly new forms in answer to changed circumstances. Furthermore, if we think of such interaction not as causative in its own terms but as responsive to larger economic and political forces, the explanation of cultural forms must take account of that larger context, that wider field of force. A 'culture' is thus better seen as a series of processes that construct, reconstruct and