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This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Fabrications in 2019, available online:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10331867.2019.1589917>

Anoma Pieris, Mirjana Lozanovska, Alexandra Dellios, Renee Miller-Yeaman, Erik Eklund, David Beynon & Richard Tuffin, 'Forum: Industrial sites and immigrant architectures. A case study approach', *Fabrications: The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand*. 29:2, 257-272, DOI: 10.1080/10331867.2019.1589917

'A New Port Kembla? Migration and change in an industrial port community, 1947–1975. (Excerpt from pp. 262-264).

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Post 1945 Port Kembla was on the cutting edge of major changes to Australian society. Waves of migrant workers from Europe and their families flowed into the town. These demographic shifts changed the economic, social and retail landscape of the town. What had been an overwhelmingly Anglo-Celtic community, with a remarkably self-sufficient town-ship with civic, social, sporting and political organisations prior to 1945 became one of the most ethnically diverse communities in New South Wales (NSW).¹

Port Kembla is an industrial and port town on the NSW south coast. The town developed as a coaling facility in the 1890s. The NSW Government began construction of the port from 1901, and industrial development began in 1908. The Hoskin Steel works relocated from inland Lithgow with production beginning in 1929. The new company, Australian Iron & Steel Pty Ltd (AI&S) was taken over by Broken Hill Proprietary limited (BHP) in 1935. A commercial and residential area grew alongside the new industries with the first subdivision in 1908, the Wentworth estate. By 1921 the population had grown to 1,622. By 1924 there were already six boarding houses, typically run by women, that provided accommodation for short term fluctuations in the labour force.²

By 1947 the population was 4,960. As the system of migration became tied to government and company-sponsored programs for workforce needs, large migrant hostels for single men were built in nearby Cringila, and new smaller migrant private operations emerged.³ The labour process at the Port Kembla steel works shaped post-war Port Kembla society. There were many jobs available for men. Opportunities for women were limited. Migrant

¹ The focus here is on migrants arriving between 1945 and 1975. See Erik Eklund, *Steel Town: the making and breaking of Port Kembla* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2002) for a comprehensive study of Port Kembla.

² The Anglican Church attempted to provide relief, social contact, and a respectable alternative to the hotels for seamen, and heavy drinking that characterised shore leave Owen Dykes, *Port Kembla, 1770-1992: a brief story of the port from the earliest days and a history of the work amongst seafarers in the port through the Missions to Seamen, 1942-1992* (Alexandria, NSW: Owen Dykes/J. A. Wales, 1992).

³ Eklund, *Steel Town*.

women found their new lives in Australia framed by the domestic space, and to a lesser extent the retail space of Port Kembla. For migrant men the labour market was divided in two. Anglo-Celtic, Northern and Western European men dominated the professional trades, commerce, skilled trades, and occupations. Migrant men from Italy, Macedonia, Greece, and elsewhere were mostly found in unskilled industrial jobs. This was true even when men had skills and qualifications; these were often not recognised in Australia. A work gang of recent migrant workers, led by a leading hand of Anglo-Celtic or Western European origin was common.⁴

Points of contact between a new migrant and older Anglo-Celtic town were few. The suburban landscape echoed the bifurcation of the labour market divided into skilled and unskilled. Migrant families moved to cheaper housing in nearby Warrawong and Cringila; Australian-born and British-origin migrants lived in the new housing commission suburbs of Berkeley and Lake Heights. New sporting clubs and codes too were often separate. New soccer clubs were set up by migrant fans. Cricket, rugby league, golf, and tennis remained Anglo preserves. The back and front yards of Port Kembla revealed new migrant influence. Macedonian families often kept pigs in their back yards. They grew tomatoes, cucumbers and chillies. Italian families typically grew tomatoes, grapes and zucchinis. Europeans more commonly using these spaces for extended family gatherings.⁵

The arrival of Greek and Macedonian-owned small businesses – fish and chip shops, cafes, and fruit and vegetable stores – on the main Wentworth Street, from the early 1960s, changed the urban retail landscape of Port Kembla. They required small amounts of start-up capital, and migrant families often had existing expertise. In the face of competition from new shopping malls at Warrawong, Figtree and Wollongong, the lower commercial rents at Wentworth Street allowed migrant activity on the main street, despite the not ideal retail location.⁶

As a site of industrial and residential growth Port Kembla was at the forefront of nation-wide changes associated with diverse migration. Far from being a small overlooked portion of the urban landscape of the Illawarra region, Port Kembla was very much the focus on a new set of cultural impacts and influences. But what developed was an economic, social, and retail landscape with only tentative connections with the existing Anglo-Celtic Port Kembla.

⁴ Meredith Walker, *Every Story Counts. Recording Migration Heritage: A Wollongong Case Study* ed. John Pearson (Wollongong, NSW: Illawarra Migration Heritage Project Inc, 2007) & Eklund, *Steel Town*.

⁵ Eklund, *Steel Town* & Walker, Meredith *First accommodation for Migrants arriving in Wollongong post World War 2*. (2007). Accessed 7 January 2019.
<https://www.uow.edu.au/~arice/2016/projects/mtti/pdfs/migrationplaces/Accommodation%20Essay.pdf>

⁶ J.C. Steinke, *Future Prospects of Port Kembla Shopping Centre*. Wollongong, NSW: Wollongong University College, 1969?).

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