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## Cowra, NSW: Architectures of Internment

Internment as a condition and the camp as a spatial trope have historically underwritten exclusionary practices related to Australian citizenship. The passage of marginal subjects, prisoners of war or new immigrants through temporal punitive structures is a recurrent phenomenon, repeated in contemporary practices of detention. This paper traces such transformations through the history of Cowra, a country town in New South Wales. It studies the translation of a specific spatial type, the camp, across diverse histories of displacement, dispossession and commemoration. It asks questions regarding the correlation between internment and citizenship, its colonial origins and strategies of dehumanisation.

This paper's focus is on four sites in Cowra each with its history of internment: the Erambie Aboriginal Mission, the Cowra Prisoner of War Camp, the Cowra Immigrant Camp and the Cowra Japanese Garden, where each of these deal with strategies of containment, difference and trauma in specific ways. Whereas the physical character of these spaces are ephemeral, their scale and their difficult histories have irrevocably transformed this small country town giving it a national and international focus. Whereas punitive camp environments elsewhere have been deliberately dismantled and are of limited significance to local residents, the resilience of this town, its camp spaces and their history reveal underlying anxieties of the Australian social psyche. They offer insights into the changing capacities of citizenship norms occurring throughout the twentieth century, through the exposition of their limits.

## Cowra

Cowra, a small agricultural town in New South Wales, 188 kilometres north of Canberra, enters our imagination through a painful episode in Australia's wartime history, occurring on 5 August 1944. During the early hours of the morning around 1000 Japanese Prisoners of War (POWs) held at the Cowra POW camp staged a mass breakout.<sup>1</sup> They threw blankets over the barbed wire perimeter fence and climbed over into the surrounding countryside. They were shot at during their escape attempt, leaving 231 dead and a further 108 from among their number wounded. Four Australian soldiers were killed. All escapees were apprehended in the days that followed. Deep insecurities produced by this traumatic incident, the only confrontation at this scale on Australian soil, catapulted this obscure country town into national history, rendering it internationally visible. Although Cowra was a military town with lives lost in both World Wars, the Cowra Breakout has dwarfed this broader context. The town provides an excellent example of the congruence of numerous geographic scales and geo-political scenarios that act out wartime politics. It is a microcosmic representation of Australia's Pacific War. Originally inhabited by the Wiradjuri, the settler town of Coura Rocks was established on the banks of the Lachlan River in 1847. It developed after a military depot was built at nearby Billimari. This military association has underwritten Cowra's history since. As researched by Graham Apthorpe for his book *A Town at War*, military encampments, wartime production and military training converted the town into a hub of wartime activity in Central (West) NSW.<sup>2</sup> The Cowra POW camp was part of a much larger military complex, scattered across the town; a town that had sent its citizens to war. Yet our knowledge of Cowra is largely filtered through that fatal escape attempt and its aftermath.

This paper examines how distinct histories of internment are embedded in Cowra's geography offering varied insights into Australian history. Using four examples; the Erambie Aboriginal Mission, the Cowra Prisoner of War Camp, the Cowra Migrant Camp and the Cowra Japanese Garden, it argues that internment and citizenship are co-determinant in the Australian psyche. That strategies of confinement measured against proper citizenship are translated across varied subjectivities - of class, race and nation. By examining Cowra during a period when the White Australia Policy (1901-73) was still in place, we are able to isolate incidents of alienation within national citizenship. We are reminded of the historical significance of the camp as a national boundary in the Australian imagination.

There is another factor that makes Cowra unique. Whereas punitive camp environments elsewhere have been deliberately dismantled and are of limited significance to local residents, the Cowra camp has persisted. The commemoration of the site, ironically, is due to the history of the Cowra Breakout. A portion of the POW camp site has been cordoned off and an audio recording from a replica guard

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1 The National Archives of Australia holds a number of records on the Outbreak of Japanese Prisoners of War at Cowra, August 1944 in folder numbers A373, 1944-44; A1066, 1945-45; A1608, 1944-44; A 5954, 1944-44; and A 2684, 1944-49.

2 Graham Apthorpe, *A Town at War: Stories from Cowra in World War II* (SA: Railmac Publications 2008).

tower evocatively recounts the incident to visitors. A memorial to the Italian POWs is located beside it. There is no architectural evidence of the camp, apart from scattered brickbats and the derelict foundations of toilet blocks.

The sizeable gap between official records and physical remains at Cowra demand an alternative strategy for conveying its history, which might tactically deploy the thematic of translation. Rather than constructing the history empirically from military archival data, one could approach it through its physical and discursive residue. Material fragments, photographs and popular media have been deployed in translating this history for contemporary purposes. But more significantly, cultural difference and dependence on oral histories makes translation essential. The revision and representation of the traumatic episodes underlying Cowra's self-construction are further concretized in commemorative spaces.

### Erambie Mission 1890 –

The POW camp was not the first encounter with racialized confinement at Cowra. Colonial Cowra spatialized such distinctions in 1890, when demarcating the Mulyan Aboriginal reserve.<sup>3</sup> A 32 acre property at the periphery of the town became home to the local Wiradjuri peoples alienated from their traditional lands along the Lachlan, Macquarie and Murrumbidgee rivers.<sup>4</sup> Erambi, the Wiradjuri word for waterhole, was adopted for the mission station, a colonial space that segregated and sedentarized Aboriginal people whose 'country' had been appropriated for farming. Lawrence Bablett writes that an early period of unmanaged residence at the newly created reserve forged an independent community and strong associations with place.<sup>5</sup> However, once Erambie became a station under the Aborigines Protection Board in 1924, regulation and superintendence provoked resistance to authority. Erambie residents were regarded as "trouble makers" and Cowra townspeople requested the station's removal.<sup>6</sup>

Bablett argues that the retention of Erambie had to do with its growing population (150 persons by 1920), which made the removal of the station difficult.<sup>7</sup> In fact, Erambie had already absorbed Ngunnawal peoples forcibly displaced from Yass. It was simultaneously a place of containment and a refuge from white townships. Residents asserted their equality in incipient calls on civil rights. Arguing for its resilience, evident in oral accounts and photographic material, Bablett counters a

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3 Peter Read (ed.), *Down there with me on the Cowra Mission: an oral history of Erambie Aboriginal Reserve, Cowra, New South Wales* (Sydney: Pergamon Press, 1984).

4 Mary Coe, *Windradyne: A Wiradjuri Koorie* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1989), viii, cited in Lawrence Bablett, *Our stories, are our survival* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2013), 40.

5 Bablett, *Our stories*, 40-44.

6 Bablett, *Our stories*, 41-43.

7 Bablett, *Our stories*, 40.

“deficit discourse” linked to Aboriginal mission histories.<sup>8</sup> He focuses instead on positive practices and relationships. He uses the visual medium to trigger narrative divergence from a linear structure to a wandering yarn.<sup>9</sup> Bamblett’s work of translation carefully negotiates visual, linguistic and cultural differences in refashioning them for historical research.

Spatial evidence is less compelling. The tightly knit grid of streets that still houses the Aboriginal community (Front, Middle and Back streets off Waratah Street, east of the town-centre) testifies to their historic marginalization and control. The basic weatherboard houses at Erambie, captured in period photographs, suggest impoverishment and assimilation. They closely resemble the huts used at Cowra POW camp. Elsewhere in Cowra, linear streets on an expansive colonial grid offer spacious brick and mortar settler homes, and continuous vistas.

Oral accounts from Erambie unsettle the co-determinacy of pacification and confinement - realigning internment with human rights discourse. The tradition continues. A petition in 2013, led by Diyan Coe, protests government plans to run a bypass through mission land. “Save Erambie... 32 acres...” put before the Cowra Council speaks for a contemporary community of 700 Koories. Invoking historic acts of dispossession that gave rise to Erambie, the petition demands that an alternative route be found.<sup>10</sup>

## The Cowra Breakout

The National Archives documents a peak of 12,000 people interned in Australia in 1942, including 7000 residents and 1500 British nationals.<sup>11</sup> A further 8000 allied prisoners were sent to be interned, at the cost of the sending governments. The History of the Directorate of Prisoners of War enumerates the following numbers of POWs: Germans, 1,658; Italians 18,432; Japanese 5,637 - totalling 25,727.<sup>12</sup> Although prisoners were predominantly men, there were some women and children and they were of various nationalities. Europeans were captured in Europe or North Africa while the Japanese were from the Pacific theatre of the second World War. Internment camps were established at Cowra, Hay and Holsworthy in New South Wales; at Enoggera in Queensland, Harvey and Rottneest Island in Western Australia, Loveday in South Australia and Tartura in Victoria. From among these the No. 12 Prisoner of War Compound at Cowra has gained the most attention.

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8 Deficit thinking is described as a concept whereby a group of people are described as deficient, and thereby perpetuating a particular structure of power.

9 Bamblett, *Our stories*, 46.

10 Save Erambie Mission - 32 Acres, GOPetition, 27 August 2013, <http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/save-erambie-mission-32-acres.html> (accessed 21 January 2014).

11 National Archives of Australia, *Your story, our history, Wartime internment camps in Australia*, <http://naa.gov.au/collection/snapshots/internment-camps/index.aspx#section2> (accessed 31 January 2014).

12 The policy and details of camps is comprehensively outlined in National Archives of Australia, A7711, 1939-51, “History - Directorate of Prisoners of War and Internees - 1939-1951”, Vols. 1&2.

Oral accounts and interviews, many of them in Japanese, invariably dominate histories of the Cowra Breakout, partly due to the post-war moratorium on official military records. Prominent among them are Teruhiko Asada's *Cowra Breakout* and *The Night of a Thousand Suicides*; Seaforth Mackenzie's *Dead Men Rising*; Harry Gordon's *Die Like the Carp* and his expanded *Voyage from Shame*.<sup>13</sup> The Australian TV miniseries *The Cowra Breakout* and Nippon Television's *On That Day, Our Lives Are Lighter Than The Toilet Paper* have popularised the story.<sup>14</sup> Most recently, Tom Keneally has fictionalised this history in *Shame and Captives*.<sup>15</sup> Aphorpe's is the first substantial study to contextualise the Breakout within Cowra's broader history of the war.<sup>16</sup> We might argue that exaggerated emphasis on the Camp and the Breakout has much to do with the Japanese Government's commemorative efforts. They have elevated Cowra into a national and international destination injecting revenue into the maintenance of civic properties. The township commemorates the four Australians killed on that night in the Cowra Breakout Memorial at Squire Park (1994) and the Doncaster Memorial on Canowindra Road.<sup>17</sup> The posthumous award of the George Cross to two of these soldiers affirms their significance.

The remains of the four Australians are interred at the Cowra War Cemetery's Australian section (maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission) alongside 27 graves of soldiers who died in training at the Cowra Military Camp.<sup>18</sup> The Cowra Military Training Camp for AIF (Australian Imperial Force) trainees housed 80,000 to 100,000 soldiers between 1940 and 1947.<sup>19</sup> The Japanese section of the cemetery, which is maintained at the cost of the Japanese Government, holds graves of the POWs, other civilian internees and casualties of the battle for Darwin.<sup>20</sup>

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13 Teruhiko Asada, *Cowra Breakout* (North Ryde, N.S.W.: Angus & Robertson, 1985), and Asada, *The Night of a Thousand Suicides: The Japanese Outbreak at Cowra* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1972), Seaforth Mackenzie's *Dead Men Rising* (North Ryde, N.S.W.: Angus & Robertson, 1975), Harry Gordon's *Die Like the Carp* (London: Corgi Books, 1978) and its expanded version *Voyage from Shame* (St Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1994).

14 *The Cowra Breakout* (Kennedy Miller, 1984) and *On That Day, Our Lives Are Lighter Than The Toilet Paper: The Cowra Breakout* (Nippon Television 2008).

15 Tom Keneally, *Shame and Captives* (North Sydney, NSW.: Random House, 2013).

16 Aphorpe, *A Town at War*.

17 The memorials are to Pt. Ralph Jones, Pt. Benjamin Hardy, Pt. Charles Shepherd, and Lt. Harry Doncaster. Cowra Breakout Memorial, Monument Australia, <http://monumentaaustralia.org.au/themes/conflict/ww2/display/20932-cowra-breakout-memorial> (accessed 29 January 2014).

18 Cowra, Australian and Japanese War cemeteries, New South Wales, Australian Government, Department of Veterans' Affairs, [http://www.dva.gov.au/commems\\_oawg/OAWG/post\\_war\\_commemorations/cemet\\_AU/Pages/nsw.aspx](http://www.dva.gov.au/commems_oawg/OAWG/post_war_commemorations/cemet_AU/Pages/nsw.aspx) (accessed 29 January 2014).

19 Jenny Hayes, *Australia, A New Country - A New Life* (Jenny Hayes and Cowra & District Historical Society and Museum, 2007), 43.

20 Ai Kobayashi and Bart Zino, in *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with "Difficult Heritage"*, ed. William Logan and Kier Reeves (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 99-113.



Fig. 1. Cowra War Cemetery, Japanese section.  
Photograph by Anoma Pieris.

Other commemorative sites at Cowra include an extensive honour roll at 101 Brisbane Street, which includes World Wars One, Two, and the Korean and the Vietnam wars. The Cowra District War Memorial Honour Roll has 510 names.<sup>21</sup> They suggest a broader picture of wartime engagements and continued implication of Cowra in national agendas. Since the numbers of Cowra's war-dead far outnumber the Japanese interred there, focus on the Breakout is both cultural and political.

The historic details of the unsuccessful breakout are recorded elsewhere. The impact on the town is evident from a plan showing the apprehension of fugitives drawn by the military officer in charge. It provides a spatial narrative of the routes carved by Japanese POWs through the farmlands, until they made contact with and were given up by townspeople. Oral histories suggest that while Cowra residents were aware of the proximity of the camp, the threat of the enemy was realised due to the Breakout. The incident provoked the recalibration of national sentiment throughout Australia and on home ground. The overt racism evident in period newspaper accounts became diffused in the post-war years.

As non-white, enemy aliens held in Australia on behalf of military allies, the bodies of the Japanese could not be legitimately incorporated into the national body, but the sentiment that underlay their physical displacement, the politics of the absent body, was poignantly felt among Australians fighting away from home. Two commemorative monuments identify the Japanese trace in Cowra's wartime history, a peace bell outside the council chambers and a commemorative garden. Conciliatory gestures of post-war political repositioning, they create the openings for Cowra POW histories. Before examining these more closely it is important to understand the history of the camp.

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21 Register of War Memorials in New South Wales, Cowra, <http://warmemorialsregister.nsw.gov.au/search/results/Cowra> (accessed 29 January 2014).

## Cowra Prisoner of War Camp 1941-47



Fig. 2. Cowra Campsite.  
Photograph by Anoma Pieris.

As reported on the National Archives website, the Cowra POW camp was purpose built in 1941, with four compounds surrounded by barbed wire fencing. A broad avenue, Broadway, ran through its centre. Apthorpe enumerates a diverse camp population which peaked at 4,600 in 1946.<sup>22</sup> He observes that the first group of prisoners were Italian civilian internees, some Albanian and Greek nationals and Indonesian merchant seamen. However, the camps were initially created to receive British captives from North Africa, as many as 15,000 Italians.<sup>23</sup> Cowra, Hay, and Yanco were established in New South Wales and 5000 Italians came to Cowra. Although huts were arranged in lines following the military tradition, the figure of the camps at Cowra and Hay were polygons. In his artwork referencing the Cowra camp, artist Alex Selenitsch compares the Cowra camp footprint to Vincenzo Scamozzi's Ideal City, a twelve-sided polygon with a twelve pointed star through its peripheral ramparts. He reminds us that "[t]he ideal city is a fusion of military control, rational organization and faith and hope for the future - these are founding qualities of OZ since the first fleet; and were repeated for the Fleets of Displaced Persons who arrived here just after WW2."<sup>24</sup>

Italians were housed in compounds A and C, compound B housed Japanese soldiers and non-commissioned officers, and compound D housed Japanese officers as well as Koreans and Chinese from Formosa (Taiwan), and a few Thais and Malaysians.<sup>25</sup> These Asian nationalities had been interned as Japanese imperial subjects.<sup>26</sup> Civilian internees included Italians and 1200 Indonesians - including members of the Javanese Independent Party (and Communist Party) and their families - dissident prisoners of the Dutch.<sup>27</sup> Internees were housed in tents while their huts were built by local

22 Apthorpe, *A Town at War*, 16-18.

23 Apthorpe, *A Town at War*, 10.

24 Alex Selenitsch, *Ideal City*, 17 August - 10 September 2011, Place Gallery, [http://www.placegallery.com.au/2011/artists/alex\\_selenitsch/alex\\_selenitsch.htm](http://www.placegallery.com.au/2011/artists/alex_selenitsch/alex_selenitsch.htm) (accessed 28 January 2014).

25 Apthorpe, *A Town at War*, 18.

26 National Archives of Australia, Cowra, New South Wales (1941-47) <http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/snapshots/internment-camps/WWII/cowra.aspx> (accessed 26 January 2014).

27 Apthorpe, *A Town at War*, 33.

townspeople.<sup>28</sup> Apthorpe reminds us that attitudes to foreigners were polarized in Australia and that war in the Pacific emphasized the Asian threat.<sup>29</sup> Former, simplistic attitudes towards colour and cultural difference were complicated by specific national alliances and hostilities – towards Black American soldiers, British, Dutch or Japanese imperial subjects or European citizens of allied or axis partnerships. The shifting geopolitical indices of race relations had to be renegotiated in townships hosting POW camps. Fear, uncertainty, and political turmoil elsewhere impacted the translation of culture.

The Cowra camp would expand into a community over the course of the war, with, “stores, kitchen, mess huts, showers and latrines, recreation huts, shops, playing fields and vegetable gardens”; but its military plan persisted, and the huts remained basic; an Australian prototype for temporary accommodation. A property at Mulyan near the Lachlan River was farmed by Italian, Korean and Formosan prisoners with the objective of meeting food shortages during the war years.<sup>30</sup> Italian prisoners were given the greatest freedoms and their cultural habits, political factions and particular skills were recognised, sorted or accommodated by their captors. They travelled between the farm and the camp.<sup>31</sup> In contrast, the cultural opacity of the Japanese to Australians led to their removal to other camps and separation after the Breakout.

The incident which projected Cowra onto the national and international imagination – as evident in newspaper reportage at the time – was a tangible weight on the Australian conscience, articulating the threat to the homeland, the loss of innocence and anxieties regarding Australian troops, elsewhere, in internment. These sentiments were undoubtedly heightened among Cowra residents who lost family-members in Japanese occupied territory. The camp was a grim reminder of proximate wartime realities. The disbanding of the camp and immediate sale of buildings in 1947 was a concerted effort to forget; their temporal character, adaptive reuse and rapid dissolution effectively erasing their punitive past.<sup>32</sup> The camp as a type would subsequently transform into the third example, explored in this paper – a pathway to opportunities and embryonic institutionalisation.

## Cowra Migrant Camp 1940-56

Originally established in 1940 on Darby Falls Road, a property owned by A.W. Emery of James Park, Crookwell, the Cowra Military Camp was decommissioned in 1947.<sup>33</sup> It was instead converted into

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28 Apthorpe, *A Town at War*, 30.

29 Apthorpe, *A Town at War*, 19-27.

30 Apthorpe, *A Town at War*, 16, 18.

31 See Alan Fitzgerald, *The Italian Farming Soldiers: Prisoners of War in Australia 1941-47* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press 1981).

32 Apthorpe, *A Town at War*, 17, auction notice for 24, 25 and 28 March 1947.

33 Jenny Hayes, *Australia, A New Country*, 20-21. The material includes newspaper notices, interviews and life-stories.

the largest Immigrant Centre in NSW, alongside Uranquity, Kapooka, Scheyville, Greta and Parkes.<sup>34</sup> New immigrant arrivals, once sorted, examined and classified at Bathurst would be separated by gender - men sent off to work across the country and women and children sent to the Cowra family camp. They would remain there for up to six months until secure jobs and accommodation might reunite the families. Newspaper reports of the period highlight the allocation of forty workmen to Cowra ahead of the immigrants' arrival in December 1948. They lined and partitioned each army hut into six separate bedrooms for two to three people, each with a common room at the end. Anticipating an increase in Cowra's population to over 8,000 persons, due to this new influx and 150 permanent camp staff, notices in the papers appealed for British migrants to be accommodated by Cowra residents, recalibrating the township's cultural balance.<sup>35</sup> The newspapers also anticipate an increase in domestic and manual workers of immigrant stock. By 1948 over two thousand European women and children: Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians, Czechs, Ukrainians, Yugoslavs and Poles were housed at Cowra.<sup>36</sup> Husbands were dissuaded from visiting their families in the interest of expediting their financial independence and swift movement of families from the camp. Dutch and Italian migrants would arrive in 1952.

Accounts of the Migrant Camp describe the conversion and expansion of existing military facilities - the mess room, the recreation room, the hospital and the theatre and the construction of a school for the children of immigrants. Reports suggest that up to 4000 migrants were accommodated at the camp at its peak with 17,000 from 27 nations passing through during its lifespan.<sup>37</sup> A punitive or military typology adopted for pragmatic reasons had converted into a passage into Australian citizenship. The Camp provided a temporal window for assimilating difference, educating immigrants and ensuring their productivity. It was a waiting room for the nation.

The institutionalization presaged in humble facilities at the Migrant Camp is consolidated through the appropriation of its decommissioned buildings upon its closure in 1956. The hospital was converted to the Cowra Rugby Club and the old store room was deployed as the Cowra East railway station.<sup>38</sup> The hutments were sold by the Disposals Commission to charitable organisations and salvage yards. Although Europa Park at Cowra, built to commemorate its 50th anniversary, is the physical memorial for the Camp, oral accounts and immigrant associations are its social repository. Translation is a two-way congress, between culturally affiliated migrant groups and via assimilation.

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34 Hayes, *Australia, A New Country*, 21.

35 "British Migrants for Country, Tradesmen need help from Cowra people," *Cowra Guardian*, 26 November 1948, cited in Hayes, *Australia, A New Country*, 10.

36 "2,000 Women and Children for Cowra Migrant Camp," *Cowra Guardian*, 12 November 1948, cited in Hayes, *Australia, A New Country*, 8.

37 Hayes, *Australia, A New Country*, 23.

38 Hayes, *Australia, A New Country*, 20.



Fig. 3. Europa Park.  
Photograph by Anoma Pieris.

## Cowra Japanese Garden 1979, 1986

Cowra's most significant tourist attraction, the tour de force of its internationalisation, is the Japanese Garden, a five-hectare site between the town and the camp. Created at the request of Cowra Tourism Development, its construction was funded by the Australian Federal and State Governments, the Japanese Chamber of Commerce, EXPO 70 Osaka and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government - as well as several private organisations.<sup>39</sup> The garden was opened in two stages in 1979 and 1986. The garden's website describes it as a replica of the first Japanese *kaiji shiki* - strolling garden built for the first Shogun Togukawa Ieyasu during the sixteenth century, Edo Period. It notes that the Shogun held 250 warlord families captive in the capital, releasing them to return home once every four years. He ordered detailed maps of their travels - 49 in total - which formed the first geographical map of Japan. These maps were used to construct a garden which replicated the country's landscape in miniature.<sup>40</sup>

Designed by architect, Ken Nakajima, (1914-2000) with three kilometres of pathways, the Cowra Japanese Garden includes two lakes, several pavilions, a Bonsho Bell, Edo Cottage Bonsai House and Tea House.<sup>41</sup> The five-hectare garden is a microcosm of the Japanese national geography held hostage at Cowra. The dry rocky hill-scape and unruly gum trees are disciplined and dressed as they enter the perimeter, visibly transformed into an alien topography. They mingle with Japanese Cherry blossoms which steal out onto Sakura Avenue, to lead spirits from the cemetery to the Japanese Garden.<sup>42</sup> The town holds an annual Sakura Matsuri - cherry blossom festival. This botanical

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39 Cowra Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre in Australia, website, <http://www.cowragarden.com.au/history.php> (accessed 29 January 2014).

40 Summarised from the Cowra Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre in Australia website, Japanese design.

41 Nakajima was the designer of the Japanese gardens in Montreal, Moscow and the garden around the EXPO 67 Japanese pavilion. See Cowra Japanese Garden, website.

42 Nakajima's concept of the avenue mentioned in Cowra-Japan Conversations, Australia-Japan Research Project, Tony Mooney, interviewed by Terry Colhoun at Cowra, New South Wales, on 18 March 2003 (AWM S03074), <http://ajrp.awm.gov.au/ajrp/ajrp2.nsf/trans/379CD64FF4E67F3ACA256D57000625C0?openDocument> (accessed 29 January 2014).

interchange with its slippery geographic associations suggests a wider cultural tolerance borne of grief. Translation takes many forms which while largely intangible are culturally empathetic.



Fig. 4. Cowra Japanese Garden.  
Photograph by Anoma Pieris.

## Reconciliatory Practices

The passage of internees through Cowra's history reveals Australia's national journey - in successive waves of migrants, in recognition of its proximity to Asia and in evolving attitudes to race. The journey is not tokenistic being largely dependent on individual efforts at reconciliation. Many soldiers from the Riverina were stationed at Singapore (in the 8th Division AIF) and were prisoners of the Japanese. It is through their conciliatory practices supported by the Cowra Council that new relationships are forged. They are spatially manifested in the sister city relationship between Cowra and Joetsu, a city in Niigata Prefecture, Japan. The Naoetsu POW Camp (Tokyo-04-Branch Camp), a two-storey wooden barracks building on a three acre site in the city housed 300 Australian POWs from 1943-44.<sup>43</sup> Unbearable temperatures during summer and winter months led to 63 Australian casualties.<sup>44</sup> There were a total of 698 allied POWs at Naoetsu Camp at the end of the war, a small portion of the 32,000 imprisoned in Japan.

Following inquiries by an Australian soldier from Cowra, Matt Cliff, who was interned at Naoetsu, a relationship developed between the two cities in 1988, with gum trees being planted at the Naoetsu City Hall. The exchange was led by Tom Mooney who was involved in the Japanese Garden and Cherry Tree Avenue project at Cowra.<sup>45</sup> In response, the Joetsu Japan-Australia Society formed to raise funds for a peace park and museum with peace and friendship memorials unveiled in 1995.<sup>46</sup> These commemorate four Naoetsu guards, convicted and executed following the Yokohama Trials, and Australians who died at the Camp. Families of victims and perpetrators are brought together

43 Cowra-Japan Conversations, Tony Mooney.

44 Roger Maynard, *Hell's heroes: the forgotten story of the worst P.O.W. camp in Japan* (Pymble, NSW.: Harper Collins, 2009).

45 Cowra-Japan Conversations, Tony Mooney.

46 Peace Memorial Park, Museum Brochure, Joetsu City, Japan-Australia Society, posted on Tripadvisor, Australia, Joetsu forum, by Kamakochi 18 February 2012, <http://www.city.joetsu.niigata.jp/uploaded/attachment/49248.pdf> (accessed 30 January 2014).

in commemorative ceremonies expressing a common humanity borne of loss.<sup>47</sup> A small museum documents the difficult task of accepting historical responsibility and of creating the park.

## Spatial Histories of Internment

A spatial history of Cowra writ through internment is an opportunity to scrutinise the national psyche related to mandatory detention. The policy is that persons who enter Australia without a valid visa are detained in Immigration Detention facilities. While some of these are offshore facilities with liquid boundaries others in remote areas mimic wartime spatial practices. Fences, huts, and basic institutional facilities have affinities to their historical antecedents.

As argued by Gassan Hage, national detention policies dehumanise Australians making us culpable in punitive procedures.<sup>48</sup> At some point in Australian history, punitive practices were domesticated as peripheral country towns were populated by the dispossessed. Although this social adaptation builds on colonial histories of transportation and settlement, its contemporary translation is not benign. Refugee-immigration policies remain centre stage in the political arena, leaving their displaced subjects at the social and spatial margins.

There are many histories of internment in Australia that hold no visible lessons for Australian citizenship. In comparison, Cowra was an intense experimental site for national policies of racial differentiation during and after World War II. The town was spatially reconfigured to meet national needs. But in the aftermath of war, rather than bury these traces, the citizens mobilised the memory of the Breakout as a valid historic entry point.

The citizens of Cowra have circumvented national channels to build international diplomacy and dialogue. The town makes its own history and builds its own commemorative spaces. The Garden is part of a larger Peace Precinct which will see future development of the heritage-listed POW Camp site. The Cowra Festival of International Understanding (2013) focused on post-war Sri Lanka, whose refugees are arriving at Australia's borders. Meanwhile, Cowra Tourism diverts difficult memories towards fresh rural diversions by promoting the region as 'the great escape'.<sup>49</sup>

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47 Chronological Table Centering on the Naoetsu Prisoner-Of-War Campsite Koichi Inamata, Bridge Across the Pacific Ocean, referenced in <http://www.max.hi-ho.ne.jp/yoshi-ko/park/historye.htm#BOOK> (accessed 29 January 2014).

48 Gassan Hage, public lecture on 'Colonialism, Asylum Seekers, Border Protection', Institute of Post Colonial Studies, 10 September 2013.

49 Cowra Tourism, <http://www.cowratourism.com.au/> (accessed 31 January 2014).