

Migration of Culture(s) symposium

More than a sea change? Post-World War II French migration to South Australia

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The proposed paper seeks to examine the contextual reasons as well as the personal motivations that spurred the French to migrate and settle in South Australia in the 1950s and 1960s. This study constitutes the second stage of the investigation of post-World War II French migration to South Australia up to the early 1970s, this time from a qualitative perspective. A quantitative study carried out in 2003-2004 produced original demographic and socio-economic data about the French migrants settling in South Australia (see Bouvet & Boudet-Griffin, 2005), however, it did not provide information about the migration process as experienced by individuals.

Archival evidence obtained from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs show that the post-World War II Australian authorities were willing to promote migration to Australia in France, as, since colonial times, French immigrants had demonstrated that they could settle well in Australia and contribute effectively to society (Rosenberg, 1978; Stuer, 1982). Their professional skills, adaptability and entrepreneurial spirit, among other things, made them very suitable candidates for migration. However, despite the efforts of the Australian authorities to attract potential migrants from France, French migration to Australia never occurred on a large scale, nor was it a steady process. In fact, the influx of French migrants seemed very much dependent on the implementation and timing of intergovernmental migration agreements (such as the *General Assisted Passage Scheme*, introduced in 1954, and the *Special Passage Assistance Programme*, introduced in July 1966), as well as on socio-political events occurring in France. Our quantitative database, for instance, shows a sharp increase in the arrival of French nationals born in Algeria in Australia from 1964 onwards, following the independence of Algeria in 1962 and the subsequent repatriation of over one million French nationals to mainland France. Similarly, the highest influx of French nationals into Australia occurred in 1969. It followed the May 1968 protest movement to which some factions of the French population were opposed at the time.

Consequently, the proposed paper aims to report on the contextual reasons as well as on the personal motivations that spurred some French nationals, from France, its colonies and territories, to migrate and settle in Australia. Preliminary findings for South Australia indicate that the motivational characteristics of the French contrast with those of other ethnic groups such as the Italian and the Greeks. Indeed, evidence gathered for this study from interviews I have had with French migrants indicate that, like their predecessors, post-WWII French migrants were not necessarily motivated by adverse economic circumstances occurring in the country of origin. Rather, they were driven by opportunistic reasons, migrating as individuals or small family units (as corroborated by the Bouvet & Boudet-Griffin (2005) study). In order to examine the contextual and motivational characteristics that led some French national to migrate to Australia, this study will draw on several types of data: published research

materials on French migration to Australia; an original French migrant to South Australia database; reports published by DIMIA; and qualitative data obtained by the author from interviews with French migrants. To my knowledge no study investigating the migration experience of post-World War II French migrants from has been published in Australia.

References:

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