

# 'Responding to diversity in rural/regional Australia communities: Everyday multiculturalism and resilience in bridging difference'



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# Background

- Inspired by labour/skill shortages and population decline Australian government policies since the 1990s have directed immigrants to rural areas
- This included specific government programs such as the State Specific Regional Migration scheme (2003-- ) which encourages skilled immigrants and humanitarian immigrants to move to rural and regional Australia
- Migration and ethnicity factors have profoundly reshaped the cultural diversity of some rural areas. Older Anglo-Celtic and indigenous inhabitants of regional towns and other primarily European immigrants now live alongside those from the Middle East, Africa and Asia



‘Standing out as a visibly different sort of person in a smaller regional town or rural community—being ‘seven feet tall and very black’...heightens sensitivities for both the new entrant and the host community. Visibility, whether because of skin colour, dress or religious [belief or] practice, is a feature of modern multicultural migration.’  
(Galligan et al 2014)



# Factors for successful migrant settlement:

- Support of Mayors and Councils/local government
- Community partnerships and coordination
- Supportive host community including vibrant volunteer support network
- Effective processes for engaging with refugee communities
- Affordable housing
- Employment opportunities
- Competence in English
- Access to community based resources
- Social inclusion factors - Integration into and building social cohesion (social and cultural capital) as diverse communities – feeling that one is ‘at home’ and ‘belongs’



# Challenges for regional communities

- ‘Rurality’ = exclusive and white national identity places – Tensions around definitions of ‘Australianness’
- ‘Otherness’, marginalisation, ethnic landscape
- Racism – some rural communities dominated by strong opposition to multicultural values, and form of cultural pluralism: *‘This place is shit because of the migrants’ ‘I’m a racist. I don’t like them and want them out of town.’ ...[After further drinks], ‘We will get those bastards out of town.’ ‘Keep Australia for Australians’*
- Labelling – ‘Boat people’, ‘asylum seekers’, ‘illegal’ immigrants, ‘Muslims’, terrorists, generalisations, war metaphors





# Places/spaces of inclusion or exclusion



# How can regional communities/new migrants identify and develop capacities for intercultural understanding?

- The emphasis is on the responsibility of engagement of both communities.
- In the context of rapid change, including increased complex diversities, not only immigrants but locally born people are required to change and to develop new forms of cultural competence and new capacities for interaction and identity transformation (Schech 2014).



- Pardy and Lee have argued that increasing diverse communities living in the same physical location ‘is not something to be accepted, rejected or debated’, rather, ‘...it is a fact of life’ (2011, p. 300).
- Greatly influenced by globalisation and increased mobilities (Urry, 2007, Elliott and Urry, 2010).

\*\* The key is how individuals and regional communities respond or react to this ‘fact’.





# Research Site Naracoorte, South Australia

- Approximately 8000 population, offers a broad range of retail, commercial, community health services and education facilities.
- Focused on cereal cropping, sheep and cattle grazing, dairy farming and viticulture, with some forestry and tourism, a major meat-works facility.
- Between 2006-2011, the number of people born overseas and from a non-English speaking background significantly increased.
- Afghan Hazara humanitarian migrants moved into the area increasing the local population by over 300 people (5-10 %) over the last five years.



# Everyday multiculturalism

Moving away from traditional notions of diversity as ‘multiculturalism from above’ - how government policies impact cultural diversity – this approach has explored ‘multiculturalism from below’ - the kind of everyday interactions that local and newer migrant individuals and communities negotiate and experience in this changing environment, and how these encounters impact upon social relations and individual/social identities.



# What is otherness?

- The ways in which we identify others as being different from ourselves, often but not always, in opposition or opposing us in some way.
- It can be used as ‘criterion that allows humanity to be divided into two groups: one that embodies the norm and whose identity is valued and another that is defined by its faults, devalued, susceptible to discrimination.’ (Staszak 2008)



# 'Everyday Otherness'

- 'Everyday otherness' is reflective of the way people come to terms with and negotiate the conscious and unconscious differences that members of different communities feel, see, experience, understand and interpret when interacting with one another, or when one is aware of the 'others' presence in the community.
- 'Everyday otherness', I suggest, represents a form of cultural crisis – reflecting both danger and opportunity - as long-term regional residents and new, 'visible' migrants engage in the challenges of intercultural interaction



- There are challenges to the way ‘otherness’ and difference can be bridged in diverse communities.
- Some challenges revolve around fears that are felt or expressed about the ‘other’ in the community.
- In many cases those fears are based on hearsay or unsubstantiated assumptions about the ‘other’ in the community



# Karen (retired in her mid 60s):

The older generation in the town are unsure...They don't like to have their culture questioned...They [the Hazara] are not happy with Christmas celebrations...They can't expect to move from where they've come and stay the same inside. They need to make an effort...they mustn't tell us, you can't sing hymns at Christmas... some classes have stopped putting Christmas decorations up, our own little plaza stopped putting on Christmas carols.

I'll tell you quite honestly that offended me. That offended me so much that my neighbour and I went down to Woolworths every day and said, 'Where are the carols?' They must not come in and tell us 'you cannot play carols in your plaza'.

They can't, they mustn't, and they are. And therefore I would say, part of the fear is associated with that, it's associated with the unknown, and it's a dreadful way for Australians to be made to feel rather than to be welcoming.





# Aziz (local Hazara leader, agricultural contractor)

“We didn’t want to do this...we are not like that, we really enjoy Christmas time, our children really enjoy it, and the adults do too. We always arrange to go and visit our friends at Christmas. This is a wonderful time...

Why do people feel like that? We are not like what those people are thinking...”

# Transversal Enablers - Wise

Individuals ‘who employ and facilitate “transversal practices” which, in essence, are forms of exchange and gift relation that foster everyday relationships across cultural difference in multicultural settings....who go out of their way to create connections between culturally different residents in a local area, workplace, or other such micro-public’ (Wise 2009, p. 21, 24).

# ‘Structural transversal enablers’

Those people who have some form of paid or voluntary position in the community which allows them to actively support and positively influence intercultural dynamics between long-term residents and new migrant communities



# ‘Everyday transversal enablers’

Those individuals in the community who, in everyday life situations, positively influence intercultural dynamics between long-term residents and new migrant communities.

## Mary (Kindergarten principal):

What we're trying to do more is to make [new migrants] feel a part of the Kindy as a whole. Not just to come in and 'do your kindy day' but to come in and actually participate in kindy functions. We'll have an end of year graduation party and I will say to them, 'I want you all to come'. Because, you know, the kids they will [soon] be heading off to school... Bring your food, you know, and that way my [non-diverse community or local] families will get to know them [migrant children/families] and understand them...What will happen is the assimilation of '[local families] with my diverse community families...these kids and families will go with these onto [primary] school and then they don't have to get to actually get to know these families because they already know them, they already feel comfortable with them.



# Aziz – One of the first Hazara to Naracoorte

Look these [Hazara] people come here and they don't know English and they don't know how to do things, and they really need help. That's why I work at the MRC. I'm just a volunteer...sometimes I'm just going from my work and they [Hazara] say it is very important for me. I stop my work and then go to fix the problem, [laughs] everywhere, like they have an appointment with the doctor at the hospital and then even they ring me from hospital, they ring me from clinic, doctor, police station, pub and post office and job network and everywhere, you know...This is my turn to help them...For me personally, I'm very happy, I'm really proud to be here because I know a lot of people from this town, and a lot of people know me, that's very important for me. Everywhere I'm going I say 'hi', and they say 'hi', and you know, everyone knows me. I'm very happy and I have set up my family here.





# Everyday transversal enablers

## - Displaying resilience in everyday encounters

- Fatima – Young Hazara mother in her early 20s, and first to finish high school in Naracoorte
- Peter – Landscaper and member of local government Council. Married in his late 30s



“We must...come to processes of learning how to collaborate, how to be together, both in our differences and in our unity. There is work to be done in which we hold the cultural differences in community and communication as both basic problematics to be worked out and as opportunities for enrichment. Groups and communities coming together can be seen as places for emergence, creation and transformation.”  
(Grand in Amin 2002)



- ““Everyday otherness”– Intercultural refugee encounters and everyday multiculturalism in a South Australian rural town’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*,
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