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A tenuous belonging: International students, multiculturalism and the manifestation of cosmopolitanism in local schools.

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with the ‘imagination of community within local/global contexts such as those of Australian schools, at the beginning of the 21st century. In particular, it explores the ways that school community representatives in urban and rural Victoria, Australia discuss the presence of international students within their school communities and the consequences of these understandings for the ways that these students can belong. The paper argues that recent and globalising changes, particularly the impact of international students within schools, have meant that school communities understand the presence of others and therefore themselves in new ways. Arguments derived from mono-cultural and multicultural thought, always ambivalent, take on new forms as school representatives are concerned with a more individualistic and market driven world shaped within a cacophony of local/ global tensions. The paper concludes that in the tenuousness of belonging within local /global communities such as those of Australian schools, understandings of community and its outsiders need to be understood in relation to the contradictory but increasingly pervasive logics of cosmopolitan discourse.

Introduction

We’ve always had a number of students who have gone overseas on exchange programs so there’s certainly a healthy respect for travelling and appreciation of other cultures. But the example now of students coming in who had very poor English skills is one that’s going to test our tolerance and respect in terms of what we expect our students to behave towards and that’s a challenge for us is to really...to continue to promote the program and its strengths and to encourage our students to think about all the benefits here (chad- p.5) ¹.

Australian secondary school communities have become, often unsuspecting, drawn into a complex, often turbulent global world. Demands for a ‘western and English education by students overseas, and local demand for international and intercultural skills, have resulted in a growing number of internationalisation programs. Educational goods, teachers and students move between countries on interchange,

¹ Footnotes have been referenced by pseudonyms and page numbers so the days can be audited against the taped transcripts.

tourist and fee-paying programs. School students exchange visits with sister schools, visit countries of curriculum interest, and study on exchange programs. International fee-paying students have become a particular, and increasingly popular, manifestation of these changes. Public schools – dependent almost solely on government funding, and local community participation and support – can source funding and cliental outside of Australia. The enormous success of these programs into what are local and community, government schools in Victoria have helped make Australia a leading player in school education provision.²

In this paper, I examine how communities, that have become ‘international’ in this way, conceptualise their social world and the way members belong within it. My interest emerged from my research into the impact of international students into what have been neighbourhood state secondary schools.³ Preliminary data taken from eight case studies of Victorian state secondary schools, four within metropolitan Melbourne and four within regional and rural centres highlighted the tensions that lie between communal perceptions of identity and intentions to provide good and viable curriculum for all of their students. Like the Vice Principal cited at the beginning of the paper, teachers interviewed in the research were concerned with the development of international student English language and cultural readiness skills and the ease at which local and international students could develop relationships and work together.⁴ Intertwined with these discussions were others which examined the notion of

² See Australian Bureau of statistics: Year Book Australia, 2003 Education and Training, Feature Article – Full-fee paying overseas students, International education in Victoria: An analysis of global demand and supply issues in the short medium and long-term future, Nov 2003, DE&T)

³ Following from naturalistic research methods described by Guba and Lincoln (1999) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) I conversed with school representatives about the implementation and impact of international students programs: the marketing of these programs, service provision, pedagogy and curriculum change and their success. My interest was not merely to describe these every day events and the debates about policies and programs that criss-cross them. Augmenting Lather (1991) the notions that made up these conversations were laid out and analysed in a series of moves: the conversations about the day-to-day of my respondents, described; the terms and conditions that shaped that argument, made transparent; and the binaries that provided their fundamental logic, transcended.

⁴ (Including Vice Principals, international student co-ordinators, English language teachers, class teachers)

difference, the amount of difference that could be accommodated within the school community and the costs and benefits of bringing international students and their attendant differences into the community. Beneath these discussions were descriptions which described the community itself and the ways that community members belonged. These described the place in which 'students' were 'coming in', the 'us' for whom their presence is 'a challenge' and 'our students' who need to think about 'all the benefits here'. The challenge for the community was the ways in which its members could perceive the material but also the notional benefits derived from international students.

This paper explores the ways that 'community' is defined and spoken about and the implications this has for understanding the impact of international students on local schools such as those in Victoria, Australia. My exploration is in three parts. In the first I argue that notions of community are ones of 'imagination' which serve to define who community members are and the ways they can belong within it. In Australia, as in many western societies, these ideas have traditionally been discussed through the contradictory tropes of monoculturalism and multiculturalism. These notions, always ambivalent, take on new forms as in contemporary times; they have become intertwined with new discourses of cosmopolitanism. In the second section, I exemplify and extend my analysis through discussions that emerged from my school study.⁵ Beneath conversations about the day-to-day of school life, I find others that define the ways these school members understand their school communities and the place of international students within them. The final section, investigates conceptions of cosmopolitanism and their impact on the ways that notions of community are understood. International student belong tenuously within changed and increasingly complex local communities. Increasingly, and amidst the tensions of belonging within local/global communities such as those of Australian schools, perceptions of community and its outsiders need to be understood differently in relation to the contradictory but increasingly pervasive logics of cosmopolitan discourse. The

⁵ This material is large and is still being added to. It is impossible to develop all of the examples and themes developed within the analysis within the limited space provided within this paper. These examples do provide real examples of experience and practice and in this way add to our understanding of the ways that community and difference has been understood, particularly in relation to the presence of international students in Victorian state secondary schools.

implications of the presence of international students in such communities as state secondary schools, and on the formation of a holistic and comprehensive curriculum for all school members demands that these understanding be made transparent and explored.

Imagining community.

My project, to investigate how communities are understood and defined, is informed by recent literatures of identity and imagination. Benedict Anderson's (1991) depiction of the nation as a 'particular kind' of imagined entity suggests that the socio-cultural condition of contemporary communities is not merely a matter of physical presence but of conception. In a similar vein, Yasuko Kanno and Bonny Norton (2003, 241) define the term 'imagined communities' as referring to:

groups of people not immediately tangible and accessible with whom we connect through the power of the imagination. In our daily lives we interact with many communities whose existence can be felt concretely In imagining ourselves bonded with our fellow compatriots across space and time we can feel a sense of community with people we have not yet met, but perhaps hope to meet one day. .

In Anderson's argument communities too large to meet with each other define how people in their society behave and interact together. It is not just that people within a nation or community share with each other common ways of thinking and understanding. Rather, these terrains are profoundly implicated within the materialities and structures of social relations. They shape and are shaped within the normative notions that define who-we-are and who-we-are-not. Said (1991) suggests that in western contexts such negotiations take place within an unequally empowered and post-colonial world in which the 'West' has the power to create its own reality, history, traditions of thought, imagery and vocabulary. It is Dwyer (1997) suggests a multi-positioned and 'white' world whereby narratives of white set out the conceptual and material terms and conditions that describe identities, the resources they can use and the places and spaces they inhabit. In a post-colonial world, the terms and conditions that define communities are made through the particularities of their cultural and historical trajectories. In Australia, Hage's (1998) posits this sense of community is defined by a particular kind of white, a 'not-wogginess'.

More than simply ‘imagined’ the notion community represents a terrain of imagination which is both notional and material in its conception and comprehensive and multilayered in its application. As Marion O’Callaghan (1995) explains:

The selecting out and rearrangement of ‘facts’ in order to provide coherence, framework and seeming unity between ideas and action, or more precisely to provide a basis for the direction of social relationships and the social creation of categories. It is what is imagined that posits the ‘natural’, that is, the normal, the fixed and unchanging. Seeming to exist in a historical forever, this is nevertheless framed by the present. To put it in another way, imagination is socially created in what follows, not precedes, the structure of social relations. (O’Callaghan, 1995, p.22)

The term ‘terrain of the imagination’ describes the taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world that provide the frame through which everyday practice and the negotiation of social conditions take place. The formulation of the universe as it is known and practised is nevertheless, socially created and remains firmly fixed in relation to its negotiation within the social world. It remains linked within the unpredictable process that interweaves the actions and ideas of identities and the ways of meaning and practice in which they are part. The ‘terrain of the imagination’ defines the ‘taken-for-granted’ ways things are known about and done in the world but also the contingent link of these processes with their socio-historical and cultural context and with day-to-day experience and practice.⁶ It is as Atvah Brah (1996) explains a shifting, changing interrelation between concept and materiality played across patterned fields of power. A specific type of power relation’ produced and exercised in and through a myriad of economic, political and cultural practices.

I am considering the proposition that the conception ‘community’ is a terrain mapped by ‘some’ who have the power to consider how others relate within imagined communities. Its focus, as Phil Cohen (1993)⁷ argues evocatively, is the warmth and comfort of the hearth, safe within the centre of ‘home spaces. This is the nostalgic dream-place of childhood memories and settled old age; a place of Eden-like existence where everyone obeys the rules and knows their place. The object of these

⁶ This codification of the world as it is made and known and is caught in a formation of ‘linkage’ has been described by Hall and by Grossberg as ‘articulation’. For an in-depth discussion of articulation see Grossberg (1992, 1996a).

⁷ For other discussions of these ideas I consider the work of Balibar (1991) and in a slightly different vein Chambers (1996) and Papastergiadis (1998).

dreams Cohen (1993) points out, is not the warm, nostalgic comfort of the home but the always prescient threat of the stranger:

The elision between hearth and heath, inside and outside, native and nature, is produced through a succession of homely images, the fond memories of happy childhoods blurring into the nostalgic reminiscences of old age, an organic image of life and landscape now threatened by the alien presence. (Cohen, 1993, p.5)

The irony contained within dreams of home-spaces, is that the promise of safety they provide is a never-reached fantasy shadowed by the threatening presence of outsiders. The stranger, Zygmunt Bauman (1997b, pp.10 – 11) suggests, ‘shatters the rock on which the security of daily life rests’, ‘comes from afar’, ‘does not share the local assumptions’. He or she is ‘the dirt that needs to be swept away’. He does ‘not fit the cognitive, moral, or aesthetic map of these worlds’.⁸ The presence of strangers reconceptualises the most basic of understandings about belonging, taste, class, taste, social order, sexuality. The presence of strangers places nostalgic imaginings of home-space out of control. The most basic of actions and conceptions no longer happen as expected. The alien, the stranger remains just outside of our gaze, ambivalent and not quite known. He or she disrupts the safe, taken-for-granted communal maps we draw.

These conceptions of community and belonging become increasingly complex as in recent times globalising trends (technology, communication, trade, the production of goods, and people and the mass movements of people) change the ways that people understand day-to-day experience, domains of policy and practice, and the most taken-for-granted concepts including identity.⁹ Even the solid and durable sense of time-space becomes threatened as people travel ever faster both virtually and in reality. The merely local of home-space becomes interwoven within the international and the global as the Internet, radios and television beam the world of the outside into

⁸ I am drawn in this instance to Bauman’s (1990; 1997a; 1998) most evocative analysis of the process of change that underpins the globalisation process. However other writers have concerned themselves with similar themes. Chow (1998), for instance, writes of ‘the fascist in our midst’, Bhabha (1990) of the ‘*heimlich* pleasures of the hearth and the *unheimlich* terror of the space of race of the other’, Balibar (1991), of the division between the ‘genuinely’ and the ‘falsely’ national’ and as I discuss, Chambers (1994) the ‘ghost that shadows’ every discourse.

⁹ See, in the first instance, Paolini (1997).

our innermost home-spaces.¹⁰ In such multiple worlds the home-spaces of some men and women become ever more complex and changing as they find themselves able to come and to go to what seems everywhere; to be it seems almost anyone. Others find their world shrink as it becomes even more difficult to move outside the location of the-place-they-are-now. In this post-modern world the solidity of what was and is seems to fall apart. Strangers ‘gestate uncertainty’, ‘befog and eclipse the boundary lines which ought to be clearly seen’ (Bauman, 1997b, p.17). Whereas in earlier times, the stranger was clearly defined as different and as outside the community, now borders between inside and outside of the community seem to fall apart (Arber forthcoming, 2006). The conception of who-we-are and who-they-are becomes increasingly difficult to define as the stranger moves inside and outside of communities, is part of the community and not part of the community at the same time. In a time of increasing confusion the borders between self and the other fall apart altogether, even as they remain as other even as before. The recent conception of the ‘terrorist’ exemplifies the vision of another who is both frighteningly different and a danger to our innermost home spaces even as he or she could be anyone of us. In such an ever faster, ever-in-process world, the stranger is neither on the outside or the inside, is neither another nor ourself.

In Australia, the terms and conditions that define the relationship between belonging and not belonging have been negotiated by the contrastive tropes mono-culturalism and multiculturalism. These Michael Singh (1998) importantly argues, have become ‘code words’ a relanguaging of the conditions of who-we-are:

used to give selective and exclusory meaning to notions such as national identity, national spirit, citizenship and social political values in order to discuss and justify efforts to marginalise Australians of Asian, indigenous and some other migrant backgrounds. (Singh, 1998, p.13)

It is argued that the relationship between those considered to be other and those who are defined as Australian is set out in particular tropes, particularly those of multiculturalism. These languages provide the ways that those who understand

¹⁰ For a discussion of the relation between this imposition of the outside into the centre of our very homes and the enunciation and embodiment of relations between others and ourselves see McCarthy (1998).

themselves as Australians map out safe home-spaces and block-out the ambivalent strangeness of others. Mono-culturalism, the belief in the superiority and singularity of Western white and patriarchal culture and, by extension, the centrality of these cultures remains a focus within western conservative thought¹¹ and in Australia.¹² Those who belong are understood to share a singular and in Australia a decidedly Anglo-Australian and Christian approach not shared by those who do not belong. Multiculturalism, in its various guises, has traditionally been concerned with conceptions of ‘unity-in diversity’.¹³ A most recent policy statement, *Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity – Updating the 1999 New Agenda for Multicultural Australia: Strategic Directions for 2003–2006* (May, 2003) reaffirmed the Government’s support for, but also its suspicion of, multiculturalism.

The freedom of all Australians to express and share their cultural values is dependent on their abiding by mutual civic obligations. All Australians are expected to have an abiding loyalty to Australia and its people, and to respect the basic structures and principles underwriting our democratic society. These are the constitution, Parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech and religion, English as the native language, the rule of law, acceptance and equality. (Australian multicultural policy, <http://immi.gov.au/multicultural/Australian>, p.1 updated 23 March, 2004)

In Australia, multiculturalism has come to be a top-down policy and crucial trope through which community definitions and relationships can be explained and understood.¹⁴ It is the key ‘national narrative of cohesion and unification’ where the language and cultural differences that define immigrant and established resident populations can be unified as a single project (Mitchell, 2003, P. 391). It is an ambiguous discourse. Multiculturalism, Sneja Genuw (1994) argues, provides the language to mark out the boundaries which separate nation from that which is not nation. More than that multiculturalism provides the limit, which distinguishes between that which is intrinsic and that which is extrinsic to us:

The rationale for this procedure is precisely the underlying logic of classic deconstruction, which posits that the elements excluded in the analytical process are the conditions of its possibilities. Thus the exclusions or marginalisations of certain

¹¹ See for instance (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997)

¹² Various Australian policy statements have discussed these trends see for instance *Towards a National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*, Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs, 1988, p.2) or within academic textual discussion see for instance Jupp, 1996, Cahill, 2001)

¹³ See, for example, most recently *Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity – Updating the 1999 New Agenda for Multicultural Australia: Strategic Directions for 2003–2006* (May, 2003)

¹⁴ See for instance Stratton (1998)

writings in fact frame the conditions of those *other* writings, which are included or endorsed by the analytical process. 'Framings always sustains and contains that which, by itself collapses forthwith. (Gunew, 1994, p.28)

By providing the frame, Gunew argues, multicultural conception and practice reconceptualizes the borders between 'usness' and 'themness', margin and centre, within the Australian imagination. In this case Australian writings, define the conditions of other writings and in doing so defines the self. However, it is a formulation of self that is paradoxical and in process. It reflects the power of the 'coloniser' but also the disruption of his or her power so that 'it collapses forthwith'

Arguably the ontological base of these tropes has changed as, in an increasingly globalised world, these conversations intersect with notions of cosmopolitanism. At its simplest cosmopolitanism is what happens as the flow on effect of market, financial and cultural interchange as well as population movements alter the definition of populations, the relationships within them and the ways these relationships are dealt with. Szerszynski and Urry (2002, p.370) describe cosmopolitanism as the condition within the modern world where some people have the ability to travel extensively, corporally and imaginatively and virtually. These people have the capacity to consume on route, indulge their curiosity, take a risk, map ones own culture and interpret and appreciate the world of others. Such descriptions ignore the non-traveller who in modern interchange is put in place; left in place; able to move only in certain ways (Bauman, 2004). For Lu (2000, p.40) these changes call for definitions that follow a 'universalistic morality that eschews parochial, especially national limitations or prejudices'. Like multiculturalism, she argues, such notions are contradictory, the individual difference of persons and groups understood in paradoxical relation to the common humanity of the many. The current mobility and interactivity of global human relations becomes increasingly problematic in so far as it is 'unable to account for deep difference' (p.257). Mitchell's view (2003, p.268) is that the changes that underpin these conversations must be understood in relation to the strategic imperatives of globalisation. The neo liberal agenda, with its focus on the reduction of public costs, market choice and accountability and the creation of 'hierarchically conditioned, globally orientated state subjects' means foci related to multicultural thought (cultural relativism, harmonious interchange, individual interchange and community solidarity) are no longer of immediate importance.

Rather, 'new strategic cosmopolitan' has become the 'foot-soldier' for a renewed emphasis on national patriotism and international capitalism (p.399). Schools have been part of this capitalist involvement within the globalisation process and have had to increasingly market their product. This has been reflected in a reshaping of identities as competition and accountability become crucial indicators of the academic enterprise.¹⁵

A more complex and multilayered view of cosmopolitanism accounts for the activities of individuals concerned with a modern world impacted upon by their changed ability to travel and to interact both virtually and materially. The lives of people in local communities across the globe are effected as demands of industry and capital interchange make new demands on labour, education and social behaviour. These altered conditions introduce new tensions and debates that transform conceptions of community relations including: debates about marketing, internationalisation, cultural interchange; but also about terrorism, refugees and illegal workers. In a globalised world, some people are mobile in ways unimaginable in past times. Others remain tied to place, caught in space and times in new and old ways. For Delanty (2006, p.26) these changed conditions suggest the need for a critical cosmopolitanism concerned with the principle of 'world openness ... associated with the notion of global publics'. Delanty's argument is that such discussions about cosmopolitanism take place within an essentially contingent, unequally empowered and interdetermined social world inextricably constituted 'in and through globalisation'. He sees this as a new and 'transformative dialogic', a space of translations where it can no longer be understood that translation is possible. Here those inside and those outside, the local and global, self and other, can no longer be simply defined, understood or excluded. As Ulrich Beck (2002, p.18) explains:

The central defining characteristic of a cosmopolitan perspective the dialogic imagination. By the I mean the clash of cultures and rationalities within ones own life, the internalised other. The dialogic imagination corresponds to the coexistence of rival ways of life in the individual experience which makes it a matter of fate to compete , reflect criticise, understand, combine contradictory certainties.

¹⁵ See for instance Whitehead (2005), Matthews (2002), Singh, (2001), Purdie, (1999), Dooley, (2001).

For Beck, a critical approach to cosmopolitanism negates a 'monologic imagination which excludes the otherness of the other' (ibid, p.19) for a perspective which includes the 'otherness of the other'. That is, it must account for the ambiguities that have dogged multicultural and monocultural thought of the individual both differentiated and implicated in various group identities; and as undifferentiated in his common humanity. The complex nature of this paradoxical relation in contemporary times of insurgent globalisation shape cosmopolitan thought and demand.

Crucially, a critical view of cosmopolitanism must account for the interconnections between notion and activity constructed as they are within an unequally empowered and interactive social world. The ontological context of today's world, shaped within socio-historical context and global and technological change provides a new, but by now normalised and taken-for-granted circumstance that mediates modern thought and behaviour and argument. It is concerned with 'a terrain of imagination' entered into from the very different perspectives made available by individual experience, community debate and socio cultural circumstance. The exploration of this terrain includes the interrogation of discourses about the identities who describe and are described by these activities. People acting in a social world of day-to-day activity negotiate the culture and histories which define how identities are in-process; sometimes to replicate them, other times to transcend them. (Hall et al, 1992). In western countries, these productions are formulated within the crucible of modernity: within the notional and material terms and conditions of risk, transience and uncertainty (Bauman 1997, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2004). They are wrought and fought over within interwoven, unequally empowered and often conflicting notional frames emergent from the crucible of social and historical traditions of thought and behaviour and the exigencies of living within an interrelated and increasingly technological world.

In suggesting for a critical approach to understanding cosmopolitanism, Delanty (2006), argues for 'a process of transcendence' whereby the normative questions within the social imaginaries of nations are made explicit and opened up. I am arguing that the study of communities within times of insurgent cosmopolitanism means that the ontological context of social context needs to set out and understood, as it shapes and is shaped by the interactive and changing demands of local and global interchange

and a framework of transformative globalisation. It is concerned with these notions as they are fomented in times of change and unease, incongruity and doubt. Understanding what is happening in communities such as those of local schools need to clarify and analyse what is a terrain of imagination whereby the everyday practices of individuals are shaped and shaping of the differently powered and normalised frames that emerge from within a crucially changed and changing modern world.

This has particular implications for community research. To explore the ways communities understand themselves and the impact of internationalisation, these imagined spaces must be described and analysed from different vantage points: the everyday experiences of the people who live and work within them; the debates that discuss and define those day-to-day events; and the social and cultural notions that shape and are shaped by them (Arber, 2005, 2005, forthcoming). Research into ways that people speak about internationalisation of programs within a community must account for the ways that the social world and the identities that live and work within it, can be understood as changed by globalisation. It must interrogate the maps of normalised conception shaping and shaped by these activities and experiences and the fields of debate and practice which structure them. Moreover, it must provide the means to listen to the ways that identities talk about their day-to-day lives within that world. That is, research about a school community considers a terrain of imagination as it can be understood from each of these directions: individual practice; fields of debate; and maps of normalised conception.

International students in a local school

The object of community imagination is the identification of its membership and the ascription of those who belong and those who do not. It is a conversation about identity and difference which has been taken up as number of different tropes: particularly those of monoculturalism, multiculturalism and most recently as cosmopolitanism. Of interest to my project are the ways that conceptions of community and difference are played out amidst conversations about the impact of international students in local community schools and the consequences of this. Data

taken from two schools in my study - one metropolitan; one rural – gives substance to this discussion and allows its intricacies to be investigated more extensively.¹⁶

The first school Kilnoon Secondary College houses a population of 520 students. Sited in the South-Eastern suburbs of Melbourne, the school stands apart from the heavy traffic and the light industry that impacts on nearby neighbourhoods.¹⁷ Instead suburban brick residences with small but well-kept gardens, surround the school. The school has a largely cosmopolitan population of first and second-generation migrant students originating from: South East Asia (particularly Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand), Africa, Europe and South America. Robert Willis, the Vice Principal tells me that ‘Aussie Students’ make up 50% of the school. However, many of these Australian students are born to Asian parents: 15-20% of Cambodian and 15 –20% of Vietnamese origin.

Willis argues that, the presence of international students at this multicultural metropolitan school is of little consequence. The population of the school is:

a big mixture. It is 50% Aussie. Although if you went into our classroom you’d probably would say yes, right where are they. Can you spot them. Because they don’t look Aussie. But of course they’ve changed their names. They wear Aussie. They eat Aussie. They watch Aussie. And they speak English perfectly. So its just their appearance means...as you say, second generation. – (kil¹⁸.p.17)

Nevertheless, defining the population of this metropolitan school is complicated. Notions of ‘Australian’ are no longer clearly demarcated. The school is 50% Australian when you describe the number of students who have lived in Australia all of their lives and have assumed traditional ‘Aussie’ cultural characteristics.

¹⁶ These case studies have been taken from research in 8 Victorian state secondary schools mentioned earlier: four rural and four urban. In line with notions expressed within ethnographic literatures I am not suggesting that the scenarios discussed are true across all or most secondary schools within rural and urban Victoria (eg Densin and Lincoln, 2002). They do however, describe patterns in the data which exemplify the point I am making here.

¹⁷ The data discussed here is taken from transcripts in my study. The names and descriptions of the schools and of the respondents have been changed so as to preserve their anonymity. At the same time steps have been taken to preserve a sense of the kind of school and the essential integrity of the respondents represented.

¹⁸ These codes are of my devising track where these quotes can be found within the interview manuscript.

Nevertheless, the students do not ‘look Aussie’ and are their appearance marks them out as second generation Australian. Even as 50% of the school population can be described as Australian and as being part of the general community, in a sleight of hand that so often underpins descriptions of Australian multiculturalism, some people are described differently as Australian.¹⁹ Added to this differentiation, is the cosmopolitanism of a large newly arrived immigrant population.

The introduction of international students into the school adds to the complexity of this discourse. Willis explains that the international student is well accepted within the school community as Kilnoon secondary school is already a cosmopolitan school. The ‘culture shock’ he believes would usually underpin such difference is ameliorated because the school already has ‘a range of students’; from varying countries. Students and teachers are well used to seeing students from ‘many different nationalities’. The difference that students from these countries would usually represent does not cause ‘culture shock’ because many students at the school are already different. Two separate and potentially divergent notions, which so often dog such multicultural tropes, underpin Willis comments. On the one hand all students are understood as different and therefore they are the same in their difference. On the other hand some students are more different than others because they come from different nationalities: those from Cambodia and Vietnam. Thus, even as he Willis argues that all the students are the same and accepted in their difference, he shares an awareness that students from some countries and cultures are understood as being different.

In explaining why the students have been well accepted into the school, Willis argues that.

acceptance of the program. I haven’t had one teacher or anybody say ‘no’.we shouldn’t be doing this, this is wrong. It does bring considerable money into the school and that of course makes it very appealing to many people. And it easily pays for itself and in fact its not only that of course it provides facilities for other students in the school. Apart from the ESL and through the international students themselves. We provide whatever they need virtually. But apart from that there’s still money available for all students and that’s the advantage of having them. – kil – p.10

The international program at Kilnoon, has been most successful in a business sense. ‘It pays for itself’ and ‘provides facilities for other students in the school’. This means

¹⁹ See for instance Arber (2003,2003, 2003/4, 20004), Hage (1998) , Stratton and Ang (1998), Gunew (1994)

thinking about ways that the school is organised for its students. It also means calculating the money needed to look after international students, the money earned from teaching international student students and the ways that the profits from these ventures are used. In this sense, the international student is already defined as outside of the community, part of a business arrangement whereby international students must bring in more than what they cost. It is a two-tiered unequally empowered relationship whereby 'we' provide everything that 'they need' and they leave money 'available for all students'. The tension that exists between the concept of 'all students' and 'of having them' spells out the confused but definitive binaries created within this relationship. On the one hand, the international student is included as part of the community of all students. On the other, these students are always outsiders who are welcome because they are profitable for the other and more local participants within the community who choose to invite them.

The common sense described as Willis sees his students as culturally different, even as they are the same in their difference, is impacted upon by other notions. Willis is concerned that:

Again you are really caught a bit because you don't whether to publicise that these are international students and therefore create as I said this small group of sort of elite students and while we are encouraging to be elite we don't want them to be so special that they won't even be accepted by the other students an so on. So we keep their names and presence down to what we think is acceptable levels. (kil p.5)

International students are understood to be 'elite' students. Their special status is both a reflection of their status as fee-paying students and the extra demands such clients can make. It can also be a reflection of the different academic preparation, aspiration and achievement that teachers perceive as typical of these students. On the one hand, Willis is unsure whether or not to advertise the presence of international students because their achievement adds to the status of the school. On the other, he is concerned that such advertising might make students be so 'special' that they are not accepted by others. He wants teachers and community members to know who these students are so that their can provide the support demanded by such students even as he wants to keep the identities of these students anonymous so that they should not become the subject of adulation or envy. The discourses of class that underpin the placement of moneyed and academically aspirant students into what is otherwise a lower- middle class local school community need to be the subject for further

research. Placed on top of the ambivalent logic of cosmopolitan multiculturalism, and of commodification, through which Willis defines school thinking, the international student remains as another and different presence.

Implicit in this discussion with representatives at an urban secondary school were perceptions of community which included some students differently to others. Willis explains that the international student is not a problem, because the population within the school is already differentiated ethnically. This knowledge is nevertheless confused. Even as Willis acknowledges all students as being the same in their difference he is concerned that different students belong within the community differently. The racialised context of this differentiation is crisscrossed, by other ambivalent discourses. The international student is wanted – as the bringer of much needed funding, and admired - as someone elite; even as he or she is someone who must pay for him or herself, must not be understood as too special and must remain at ‘acceptable levels’.

Corrumba Secondary school provides a different example of the ways that a community imagined its social world. High on the hill, overlooking the residential areas of a rural centre Corrumba College is only kilometres from Victoria’s rugged coastline. The old yellow-brick buildings sprawl amongst outlying paddocks and the rich pastures of Victoria’s dairy and encroaching sheep and wheat belt. The concrete stone design of the school’s grandiose administration towers over an immense bus park where fourteen hundred and fifty students are bussed daily to the school from the city and the surrounding countryside. The high school is considered as a highly academic school, with results that include it alongside the top academic schools within Victoria. Its students go on to study at Melbourne, Monash as well as Deakin Universities. The school has 18 international students, mostly from Japan.

Vice Principal, Lester Finch and teacher Susan Reynolds give ‘two reasons’ for bringing international students into the schools:

Susan: One is it’s a good fund raiser....

Lester: But also its good for our kids because their isolated from any kind of ethnic traditions there aren’t we...

Susan: ...its pretty monocultural here – corr- p2/3.

Once again, the international student is considered first and foremost a business proposition, a 'good fund-raiser' for the school. In contemporary times of accountability and cost benefit analysis public schools such as Corrumba are interested in ways to bring money into the school. International student programs as I argue elsewhere (Arber, 2006) become important business concerns: in demand when they are profitable; less useful, and often problematic when they do not bring money into the school. The notional 'it' refers to the program, even as it removes from the conversation the personhood of the international students who are wanted in this way.

The depersonalisation of the international student as a business commodity is placed against the seemingly self-explanatory, 'our kids'. who represent a community which is essentially 'monocultural'. The underlying understanding that the conditions of who we are as a community remains silent and unexplained is much discussed in the literature.²⁰ Those who are 'us' remains as an almost empty category; explained through ambivalent conditions of that which we are not. Certainly, the definition of monoculturalism is not broached in my conversation with Finch. Finch's point is rather that the presence of international students will be good for 'our kids' as the 'ethnic traditions' that come with the arrival of the international student provide a useful way to break down the schools mono-cultural nature.

Once again, perceptions of the international student are crisscrossed by ambivalent conceptions of identity and difference. For Finch, the ethnic difference brought by the international student breaks down the isolation of the school and the more multicultural world represented outside of their school community. Ethnic traditions, the thing that many have in the city and that international students bring from other countries, are seen as interesting and perhaps useful notions for the local students at the school to learn about. The exotic difference brought by the international and ethnic student is placed in binary opposition to an undefined, normalised, seemingly empty notion of monoculturalism

Such difference is at the same time hugely problematic – 'a big ask for the Australian kids'

²⁰ See particularly Dyer , and for discussions of ways this takes place in Australia see for instance Hage....., Stratton .

but we need to get some kids to buddy up with them when they first arrive and that's a big ask for Australian kids to spend their...meet them before school if that's what's necessary and sit with them and explain things and you can't...you can't ask a kid to do that for very long because the novelty wears off initially. And then its hard at lunch time to be always trying to include this one in. Explain jokes 3 times and you know, all that sort of thing. It's a big ask for the Australian students I think. The kids are happy to help out and they've got good friends. They go to each others parties and they go to weekends away and things. Corr.17

Finch's view is that the Australian students have tried to help out, inviting international students to their parties and helping to integrate them into the school community. Nevertheless, local students at the school have found the arrival of international students into their school difficult. The language and cultural understandings necessary to do seemingly simple things – telling jokes, including students within the playground – put a strain on everyday relationships. When the novelty of having international students wears off, the 'Australian' students find interaction with international students increasingly difficult. A second analysis focusing on the taken-for-granted notions underpinning the conversation is of interest here. The international student, presents with different cultural and language attributes. These are in the first instance something different and a novelty, something exotic. Increasingly, they become something difficult, something that local students need to help out about. Teachers have also found things difficult. There is 'a degree of staff anxiety about having these kids. In particular, teachers are worried about having non-English speaking students in their classrooms who need to sit for 'rated' exams.

and certainly I think there's a degree of staff anxiety about having these kids you know its hard to have a non English speaker in your classroom particularly if they're doing an exam that's going to be rated. Corr p.17-18

International students have been encouraged to come to the school as a business venture, but also as a way of reconciling what is understood as a 'monocultural' perspective within the school. The international student is understood as representing ethnic difference more commonly found in more urban and 'multicultural' schools. Their cultural difference is novel and exciting at first, something that the students and teachers and the school need to 'help' overcome. At the same time, the differences brought by international students are difficult to cater for and the cause of a great deal of anxiety. Moreover the international student can be frightening – dangerous even.

I know they all flock together initially and they'll speak Japanese which you want them to anyway. They need that ... But there is that bit of a danger when...We don't really want anymore than that from one country because they do stick too much together and they don't mix enough. Its dangerous. – corr- p.4 –

Despite the efforts of teachers and students at the school to help integrate students into the school, international students continue to mix mostly with each other and speak together in their first language. Finch is concerned that these initial differences will remain a permanent fixture, a potentially divisive force within the school. I am concerned by a second theme that underpins his discussion. The international student remains as a separate and worrying presence within the school. Difference, here is a physical, as well as notional presence. Students who 'come from one country, 'stick too much together', and 'don't mix enough'. The international student, now almost animalist in his or her difference, continues to 'flock together'. The presence is something that needs to be better controlled: We don't really want anymore than that from one country because they do stick too much together. The international student, with all their dangerous and separate difference, is something that We no longer want in our community if 'they don't mix enough'.

The discrete and inviolate difference of the international student is manifested in the smallness of the ESL room where the availability of computers encouraged students, particularly the boys, to be separate and inside.

A bit of a girl/boy thing too. The boys seem to be worse in sticking together, and just talking amongst themselves. We have a room for them, the ESL room. It's a tiny room and there's computers there and they can actually go there and do their emailing and that sort of thing and we've now had to sort of kick them out because they just go there all the time and they don't sit outside at all. ... its when they feel safe I suppose and its lunch time recess issues so in classes they have to be because their all together in classes so they have to mix with others. And I believe they do but they just all flock to that comfort zone I guess.- corr pp4-5

International students, particularly the boys, are attracted to the ESL room where they get support from each other and they have access to the teachers. A second theme underpins this argument. Even as Finch sympathetically describes the ESL room as an island, a place of safety for the international student, his concern is that it represents a danger to the school community. 'They', the international student, remain apart from the school community. What is necessary is to that 'they have to mix with others'. Even as 'we've' have the power 'to kick them out' their congregation within the computer room is a sympathetic but worrying presence.

Moreover, the good student is the one who has been successfully integrated into the school. The student who is 'happy and chatty, plays soccer at lunchtimes and joins into bike riding expeditions:

not been here very long and apparently they've been in Melbourne a year. I've just heard the other day that the father just decided their going to come to Warrnambool and they came the next day. So the boys weren't particularly happy about coming here and they've come at the end of the year and ones in year 9, he's on the bike trip now. He went to Apollo Bay and he's father...

Denis: ...they mix in with the other kids...

Maureen: There's one in year 9 and one in year 8. the year 8 one in particular is quite happy and chatty...

Denis: ...he plays at lunch times...

Maureen: Yeah. Where as the older one he's much more reserved person just by nature. He's gone on this bike ride with 20 kids or something.

Denis: And the boys have got him in and he plays soccer or whatever at lunch time with the boys.- corr – p.19

The desired student is the one who overcomes the barriers that define his difference, joins in the recreational activities of the school; mixes 'in with the other kids' and does 'whatever' with the boys at lunchtime. Nevertheless, the boy who was happy has not been altogether successful in his integration into the school. His low study score is 'an issue' not only for the student but 'impacts 'on the 'overall results' of the community as a whole.

And the other issue to is the exam results do impact on our overall results. We have really good results here ... This boy for example who had a fabulous time, he was lucky to get a study score of 20 in anything so individual teachers feel responsible for that and that's an issue.- corr - 18²¹

At Corrumba Secondary school, the international student is wanted because of the funding he or she brings to the school and because he or she brings the difference of 'ethnic traditions' to the school. It is felt that these differences can be overcome by being 'happy and chatty' and mixing easily with the other children. However, this melding of the definitions between difference and the community marks out real boundaries between international students and the school community. These are made within the paradoxical relations entangled within the tropes of monoculturalism, multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism, crisscrossed as they are by discourses of commodification, race, class and ethnicity. They are represented by discussions about the 'bad' student sitting separate in the island of the ESL room and the 'good' student who has failed all of his subjects.

²¹ In year 12 students get study scores of 20 out of 50 in each subject. Finch explains later that the student failed all of his subjects, including Japanese.

Impacting imagined communities

In discussing the impact of international students into local schools older discussions about multiculturalism and monoculturalism are spoken about in new and more complex ways. In an important paper, *Racism, reorientation and the cultural politics of Asia-Australian relations*, Fazal Rizvi (1996, p;178), explores the contradictory and ambivalent logics that underpin the ways that Australians have imagined Asian migration and their relationship with Asia. He argues that, inconsistencies and exclusions underpin the convoluted, decentred yet disturbingly material notion of the stereotype and the post-colonial conditions in which these notions have been formulated. The orientalist condition whereby the other is constantly encountered in a changing dialectic between 'power and powerlessness' set up 'new patterns of resistances and social formations'. Logics of racism reflected in the overt exclusion of the other, become buried in the covert and taken-for-granted ways that minority groups have been spoken about and constructed as other. More recently, Rizvi argues, these discourses have been overlaid with something new as these logics are reformulated as economically driven. A changed and ambivalent conception emerges as the Asian person – the immigrant, the businessman, the international student - is constructed not only as raced but commodified. Kenway and Butten's (2003) recent book 'consuming children' explores how the consumption and production of education alter the conceptions of the students as a social construct. The marketing of education and of students as goods overlays the identity of the international student with functional utility and social meaning. It is this changed dialectic of derision and desire as these notions negotiate the already-raced conceptions of community identity and cultural difference that needs to be better understood.

This paper suggests important directions for thinking about the ways that communities are defined and spoken about and the implications this has for understanding the impact of international students into local school communities. Discussions about international students in what were government and community schools were thought about and defined by the material and conceptual relations of identity and difference and crisscrossed by the politics of consumption and production. The slippery notion that underpins notions of multiculturalism evidenced in a metropolitan school is that difference seems to disappear even as it reappears in complex and confused ways. The ambivalent logic, which defines ways that students

belonged and did not belong within the school, became increasingly marked in schools that were further from the metropolitan area. In the rural school, the isolation of the mono-cultural school student was impacted upon by the increasingly dangerous presence of the international student, separated as he or she was, by the lack of sameness exhibited, materially as well as conceptually, in the ESL room. The success of the international student's contribution to the finances of the school and the politics of desire that underpinned the logic of this process of commodification, adds a new logic to these conversations. Literatures about cosmopolitanism critically explore the ways that communities are understood and behave within an internationally and globalised context. These too are interrogated when we explore the tenuous belonging of international students in local schools.

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