

**Barbara Bloch and Tanja Dreher**

**Resentment and Reluctance: working with everyday diversity and everyday racism in Southern Sydney**

**Article summary**

Pilot research on community conflict resolution, conducted in a local government area in southern Sydney in late 2006, revealed paradoxical findings: The simultaneous presence of both high levels of cross-cultural mixing and appreciation of the area's culturally diverse population; and the prevalence of prejudice against Arab and Muslim residents and visitors to the area. Many respondents who supported cultural diversity, saw Arab and Muslim Australians as an exception and even a threat to harmonious community relations. Particularly striking was the anxiety and anger caused by their apparent large numbers, seen to be taking over certain public recreational spaces. This article explores the contradictions in these findings in light of other contemporary Australian research and identifies complex and difficult issues to be addressed by research and by local government. In particular, the paper discusses the need to address the interconnections between both everyday multiculturalisms and everyday racisms, to distinguish between 'victim' claims amongst diverse communities, and to ground research and policies on 'place-sharing' in Indigenous sovereignties.

Barbara Bloch is a part-time tutor/lecturer and Research Associate in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney. Following a doctorate on the role and effects of Zionism and Israel on the Australian Jewish Community, Barbara's research interests include the diminishing status of official multiculturalism in Australian politics, the positive and negative ways local ethnically diverse communities negotiate difference, the intersections of gender, class and ethnicity in current debates, the rise of religion in our public life and the concomitant urgent need to demonstrate the significance of secularism for a civil society. She is currently researching the purposes for and effects of interfaith dialogue on individuals who pursue it and the multicultural polity in general.

Tanja Dreher is an ARC Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at UTS, researching news media and community conflict resolution with a particular interest in debates around multiculturalism, whiteness, and around media, gender and violence.

Tanja is also a co-coordinator of The Listening Project, funded by the Cultural Research Network to explore the politics and practices of 'listening' as an emerging focus in media studies. Her previous research has focused on news and cultural diversity, community media interventions, experiences of racism and the development of community antiracism strategies after September 11, 2001.

**Barbara Bloch**

**11 Hillcot St,**

**Hurlstone Park 2193 NSW Australia**

**bbloch@optusnet.com.au**

## **Introduction**

Pilot research on community conflict resolution in the local government area (LGA) of Rockdale in southern Sydney in late 2006, revealed apparently ambivalent, even paradoxical findings: both widespread support and enjoyment of cultural diversity, and a high level of anxiety, resentment and prejudice directed at Arab and Muslim residents and visitors to the area. This article reports on and explores the contradictions in these findings in light of other contemporary Australian research. Our research demonstrates complex and difficult issues to be addressed in many local government areas in Sydney, and in further research. Given the existence of both every-day diversity and anti-Muslim prejudice and the unremitting impact of national public debates and global conflicts, innovative and locally developed solutions are required. In this paper however, we highlight a number of challenges for academic analysis and community-level action: How are we to engage with both the prevalence of ‘everyday multiculturalism’ and the persistence of racisms? What are we to make of tensions over the shared uses of public space, and particularly resentments and claims to victim status by groups who have not historically been marginalised? And how might this work address both cultural diversity and Indigenous sovereignties?

The research had its inception in discussions between Tanja Dreher (from UTS Shopfront, the community engagement program of the University of Technology, Sydney) and the Community Development Officer at Rockdale City Council. The Rockdale Social Plan 2004 had identified a range of issues regarding racism, discrimination and community tensions in the local area. In December 2005, the Rockdale LGA was impacted by the aftermath of the Cronulla riot, in which 5000 mainly Anglo Australians formed a drunken mob which protested against the presence of Arabs and Muslims on Cronulla beach and several young Arab Australians were viciously

assaulted. During the following days, groups of young Arab Australians responded with violent forays to Cronulla and nearby beaches including Brighton, in Rockdale LGA. Media reporting of Brighton focused on an incident during which a young Arab Australian man tore down and burnt the Australian flag which flies above the Brighton Returned Soldiers' club. Local Council concerns at these events and reports of community tensions initially resulted in a forum in early 2006 'Rockdale Responds to Racism'. Through discussions following this forum, a research project on Capacity Building for Community Conflict Resolution, was developed.

The research focused on identifying both tensions/conflicts *and* on possibilities for conflict resolution. This approach was intended to prioritise the development of solutions rather than merely identifying problems, and to leave open the possibility that questions of racism might not be the most important sources of tension for people who live and work in the Rockdale LGA. As a Partnership Project, the aims, objectives, activities and outcomes of the project were all agreed in collaboration between the project partners.

As a pilot, its data were limited as are the conclusions that can be drawn. Approximately 16 focus groups and individual interviews were conducted during November and December 2006 with a small cross-section of interests and groups in the Rockdale LGA: young people, senior citizens, Police, a number of ethnic groups and small businesses and officers from Rockdale Council. The individuals and groups were asked about their perceptions and experiences of community relations in Rockdale LGA; their views on the sources of community conflict and the possibilities for conflict resolution; the motivations and barriers to working in partnership to build stronger community relations and their opinions as to the most effective ways to address community tensions. In the report written for Rockdale Council, our discussion and analysis

considered the effectiveness of current approaches to community relations and identified possibilities for innovation and improvement (Dreher and Bloch 2007). Within this article, we utilise excerpts from the above interviews as critical examples which resonate with, and provide further elucidation on the existing scholarly literature on the subject of multiculturalism in Australia.

### **Everyday multiculturalism, everyday racism**

Indeed, our central finding, the co-existence of *both* ‘everyday multiculturalism’ or relatively unproblematic daily cultural mixing *and* everyday prejudices and the persistence of racism, is broadly consistent with existing research. Neither concept is a new one. Stratton, in *Race Daze*, distinguishes between the policy of official multiculturalism and everyday multiculturalism. The latter he describes as:

syncretic and rhizomatic multiculturalism. [He] uses[s] these terms to describe how cultures, produced by individuals in their everyday lives, merge, creolise and transform as people live their lives, adapting to and resisting situations, and (mis)understanding, loving, hating and taking pleasure in other people with whom they come into contact (1998: 15)

Wise has named ‘everyday multiculturalism’ a ‘multiculturalism of inhabitation’ in contrast to multiculturalism as framed by top-down policies or large-scale attitudinal surveys. Wise emphasises mundane interactions in local contexts, describing everyday multiculturalism as:

The diversity that exists in real, lived environments, not simply in abstract multicultural policy, and consequently implies layers of ethnically different individuals inhabiting suburbs and urban environments, corporeally interacting with one another as neighbours, shoppers, workers; rubbing up against one another in a myriad of quotidian situations (Wise 2005).

Ang et al’s research, conducting a national survey for the Special Broadcasting Commission (SBS) found that most Australians are indeed ‘living diversity’:

In practice, most Australians, from whatever background, live and breathe cultural diversity, actively engaging with goods and activities from many different cultures. Cultural mixing and matching is almost universal. There is no evidence of 'ethnic ghettos' (Ang et al. 2002: 4)

However, the authors also found 'evidence of cultural insularity and the absence of cosmopolitanism among long-time Australians' (2002: 37).

Jon Stratton uses the metaphor 'rhizomatic' in describing Australian multiculturalism in order to 'provide an image of culture as evolving from the bottom up and, in the process, constantly splitting and proliferating in form' (1998: 15) . One can understand, from this definition and from our own experience, that the 'taking pleasure in other people [we] come into contact with' can, in certain political and social contexts turn from pleasure to other, less positive responses. Within the rhizome of everyday multiculturalism, there is space for racism, prejudice or ethnocentrism to also propagate. So, Stratton too is concerned to distinguish 'everyday racism', 'the formation of attitudes and understandings that are so embedded in the everyday life of a racialised culture, in this case Australian culture, that the members of that culture, those that, loosely, we might call Australians, don't even recognise themselves as making decisions based in a racialised history' (Stratton 2006: 662).<sup>1</sup>

In research conducted for the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Muslim and Arab Australians reported experiences of violence, threats and discrimination after September 11, 2001 (HREOC 2004), and also significant levels of 'social incivility' such as name-calling, jokes in bad taste, offensive gestures and unfriendliness (Noble 2005).

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<sup>1</sup> Stratton acknowledges the work of Philomena Essed who, in 1991, published the book Understanding Everyday Racism: an interdisciplinary theory. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Kevin Dunn's research finds that experiences of everyday racism are common, but there is also considerable support for antiracism 'repair work' (2007). Regarding everyday racism, Dunn makes the significant point that experiences of racism and responses to perceived threats from the 'other', are contextually and spatially determined. This research concurs with Thrift's (2005) assertion that 'cultural repair work' or 'everyday antiracism' is more prevalent than usually acknowledged (Dunn 2008: 3). This is borne out in HREOC's national consultations on eliminating prejudice and discrimination against Arab and Muslim Australians, which found that most Muslim and Arab Australians reported increased racism and discrimination after September 11, 2001, and that the 'war on terror' had provided an impetus for increased Interfaith and community relations work (HREOC 2004).

The prevalence of both everyday multiculturalism and everyday racism presents an apparent paradox (Ang et al 2002). One implication of this paradox for policymakers and researchers is the need to be clear and explicit about the ways in which both everyday racisms and everyday multiculturalisms persist and interact, and to ensure that research and policy responses can adequately deal with *both* of these dynamics. There is a need to think and organise at the intersection of daily negotiations of diversity and persistent prejudices and discrimination. To ignore one or the other is to actually miss the most crucial dynamics.

One reason for this argument is the sustained retreat from both the language and programs of antiracism to a focus on dialogue and Australian values in the previous federal government's multicultural policy (see Ho and Dreher 2006, Babacan 2006). The result has been the rise of 'living in harmony' and interfaith dialogue as the most prevalent community relations strategies

(Ho 2006, Dreher 2006). Programs of dialogue and interaction are important in addressing individual prejudices, but are not sufficient to address networks of power and privilege or institutionalized racisms (Ho and Dreher 2006, Babacan 2006, Ley 2007).

From this conceptual framework which allows for both positive and negative syncretic expressions of multiculturalism, let us turn to our study in the Rockdale LGA. Broadly speaking, cultural diversity in the Rockdale area was seen as an asset, and most people consulted described positive experiences of multiculturalism. Schools, shops, workplaces and neighbourhoods were all described as places where people living and working in Rockdale LGA meet and mingle across cultural differences:

I think that on the whole most people get on very well, whether you're from a European background or an Anglo background ... most people live in harmony, and there's a good atmosphere, predominantly, in the local area.

Our interviews indicated not only that Rockdale residents inhabit multiculturalism in these daily interactions, but also that this 'everyday multiculturalism' is valued as a relatively unproblematic and positive aspect of life in the area.

### **The daily workings of prejudice and resentment**

As we have noted, while cultural diversity in the Rockdale area on the whole was highly valued, several consultations identified sources of tension and (potential) conflict around cultural diversity and community relations in the local area. These tensions and resentment revealed in the research were deeply felt. Many respondents who supported multiculturalism in general saw Arab and Muslim Australians as an exception (see below for examples from our interviewees) and even a threat to harmonious community relations. Muslims and Arabs were seen as 'other': foreign, threatening, uncivilised. Above all, their cultures were seen as incompatible with



Australian values. Fear and racism directed at Muslim and Arab Australians tended to focus on visible markers of difference, such as clothing, shop signage and the use of public spaces. Both of these findings – the high levels of cross-cultural mixing and the prevalence of prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians – are in keeping with contemporary Australian research, as discussed above. We note here, as others before us have, the frequent interchange of the terms ‘Muslims’ and ‘Arabs’ within popular Australian discourse, signifying a conflation in the minds of many, of religious and cultural/ethnic identity (HREOC 2004; Poynting et al. 2004; Dunn, Klocker and Salabay 2007).

### ***Prejudice against Arabs and Muslims***

In what follows we are considering and analysing the views of some elderly Anglo-Celtic people we interviewed. This is not to suggest of course that it is *only* older people who hold prejudices against Muslims, nor is there *significant* evidence to suggest that Anglo ‘seniors’ are any more likely to hold such attitudes than any other age group. Forrest and Dunn’s research on attitudes to multicultural values and Anglo privilege in Australia found that with increasing age, there is a decreasing level of ambivalence among Anglo-Australians about the statement that ‘Australians of a British background enjoy a privileged position’ – that is they are both more likely to agree with this or to deny they hold a privileged position (Forrest and Dunn 2006:217-18). These authors use the terms ‘British’, ‘Anglo’ or ‘Anglo-Celtic’ interchangeably. So-defined, this group comprises the majority of the Australian population.

Additionally, evidence from Australia’s public multicultural television channel, the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) commissioned research *Living Diversity* reported a

cultural insularity and the absence of cosmopolitanism among long-time Australians [4th generation or more in Aust].... Less enthusiastic take-up of the resources of cultural diversity, least positive about it (56% considered cultural diversity a strength of Australian society, compared to 72% NESB and 70% ESB migrants (Ang et al. 2002: 37).

This research does not however disaggregate the questions on the take up of cultural diversity, with age. We found little quantitative research which examines questions of increasing age and values pertaining to multiculturalism in Australia, particularly among the Anglo-Celtic population. Although, the Racism Project (2001) comprising a large telephone survey across Queensland and NSW, found that 'racist attitudes are positively associated with age, non-tertiary education, and to a slightly lesser extent with those who do not speak a language other than English, the Australia-born, and with males' (Dunn 2008).

A group of male Anglo seniors, meeting in Earlwood at a general entertainment club discussed what they described as a 'Muslim enclave' in Arncliffe, another suburb in the Rockdale municipality:

- We don't have social tensions here. They do at Arncliffe. It's a Muslim enclave. Arncliffe RSL has had to put bars up. People around there smash things.
- I won't go near the place now, they'll spit on you.
- I've been accosted by four of them.
- They think they own the joint, they don't know its part of Australia.
- Everyone else assimilates except for Arabs, they don't assimilate, that's the problem in Arncliffe.
- You think, am I in Australia?
- We're governed by democracy, they're governed by religion.
- The cultures coming here now are so rabid in holding on to what they've got.

Comments by these elderly men reveal their sense of exclusion from familiar places previously visited; which they attributed to a dangerous and inassimilable Islamic presence. These men feel out of place in their own space and blame the 'Arabs' or, interchangeably, 'Muslims' for their sense of displacement and threat.

Analysing data from the 2001 Census, the Rockdale Social Plan 2004 stated that Arabic is the third most common language spoken, after English and Greek in the Rockdale LGA (N.A. 2004: 90), accounting for 8.3% of homes, whereas ‘in Arncliffe and Turella [neighbouring suburbs], one in five residents spoke an Arabic language’ (Rockdale Social Plan 2004 2004: 89). The 2006 Australian Census stated that about 25 percent of the population of Arncliffe gave Islam as their religion (ABS 2006). None of these figures indicates a ‘swamping’ of the area. However, as the above comments indicate, people’s perceptions of ‘ghettos’, ‘enclaves’ and so on, often bear little resemblance to the actual demography of an area.

The Anglo seniors’ concerns about Muslim and Arab Australians in the Rockdale area were often linked to wider changes in their local area:

- I used to know everyone in the street when it was all Anglo, now I only know people on either side [of my house].
- The Army barracks used to be down there [Arncliffe], the whole area has changed, everything has changed.
- Too many are coming to the area. We’re getting enclaves.

Similarly, Wise’s research conducted in Ashfield, an inner-west Sydney suburb, has documented the changing face of that suburb and its impact on the long-time elderly Anglo residents, in part to do with the large increase in numbers of Chinese residents over the past 17 years, but also related to the increasing social and physical isolation which can accompany old age (Wise 2005).

In sum, the presence of Muslims and Arabs made many of those we interviewed feel uncomfortable, resentful and angry, which they also experienced as a loss of the sense of belonging:

- You just feel not wanted – like a foreigner in your own country.
- Sometimes you just don’t want to be around them.
- I’ve been accosted. I wanted to run them over I was that angry.

Resenting certain minorities for appearing to receive more attention from the state, at the expense of the Anglo ‘silent majority’, is not a new phenomenon. At a national level, since the election of the Liberal Howard government in 1996, we have witnessed a ‘conservative backlash that was highly critical of any attempt to encourage a more cosmopolitan and inclusive identity’ (Forrest and Dunn 2006: 208), leading to a situation where, as Forrest and Dunn put it, ‘[I]n a remarkable twist of rhetoric, the dominant group in society was now the oppressed, and the disadvantaged and marginalised had become oppressors’ (ibid).

### **Everyday Resentments**

This apparent switch of roles is of course more nuanced and complex. Now, we want to tease out some of these nuances, before considering what this might mean for daily getting-alongness, in a culturally diverse area such as Rockdale. Wendy Brown, in her essay ‘Wounded Attachments’ (1995: 70 - 71), argues that women and other historically oppressed groups have tended to use the rhetoric of *ressentiment*<sup>2</sup> or resentment, in an appeal to the increasingly bureaucratised, alienating state to make right their wronged status. In this account from Brown, the modern liberal subject literally seethes with *ressentiment* (1995: 69). She raises concerns about those politicised identities which have been historically victimised such as Jewish or Black people, or those who seem to be so in the present. They have reversed their misfortunes and organised a politics, according to Nicholas Rose, ‘around the ideas of suffering, of demanding recompense, of making amends, of holding to account – a way of making sense of a stigma by reversing it and attaching oneself to it as the very mark of one’s virtue (Rose 1999: 269). Resentment can be

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<sup>2</sup> Brown and other scholars use the term most famously described by Nietzsche as ‘ressentiment’....(Genealogy of Morals), defined as ‘the moralizing revenge of the powerless, “the triumph of the weak”’ (Brown 1995: 66 – 7), Although ‘ressentiment’ and ‘resentment’ are not identical in meaning, they are close enough to allow us to use the English word.

directed at the State and/or it can be directed towards others who are identified as having some responsibility for their sense of feeling wounded, excluded. Judith Brett calls the same phenomenon ‘the politics of grievance’ which, she states, appeals to both ‘the radical populist ends of right and left’ (Brett 2005: 64).

The rise of victim discourses in general, whereby different minority groups express resentment and hurt from grievances perpetrated by a majority, has allowed some Anglo people too, to feel victimised by, in this case, Muslims. Here we are discussing resentment and the ‘modern liberal subject’ who does not appear in a minority or to have been historically victimized, Anglo-Celtic Australians - the subject Brown names as a ‘reactive identity’ (1995: 60); that is those who have formed a political identity *in reaction to* their sense that those minority ‘others’ have usurped a cultural-political space in the nation or the neighbourhood, at their expense. Prior to the 1960s and mass immigration into Australia, those who lived here from ‘British stock’ would not have felt the need to perceive themselves as beleaguered in relation to immigrant others, or to claim their own (previously assumed) ethnicity. Australia was a British country, with British values and governments governed in their interests. Pauline Hanson, the infamous short-lived politician in the Australian Senate (1996 - 2000) and founder of the far-right wing One Nation Party, developed a rhetoric supported by many, that was based on a notion that the liberal-democratic state had become too interventionist and supportive of undeserving minorities, thus attenuating ‘the commitment to freedom and breed[ing] *ressentiment* expressed as neoconservative anti-statism, racism [and] charges of reverse racism’ (Brown 1995: 67). Additionally, the era of globalization has brought with it for many ‘a high degree of uncertainty: about the security of their jobs, their future, but more generally about their capacity to domesticate their spaces’ (Hage

2007: 1). According to Hage, for these ‘ethno-nationalist individuals’, one solution to these uncertainties is to become ‘complete, meaning ethnically or racially homogenous’ (Hage 2007: 1). It is perhaps more attainable to blame the different other in their midst, rather than critique the State’s battles with globalised markets.

In the introduction to a special issue of the journal *History and Anthropology* on the politics of victimhood, the editors Laura Jeffery and Matei Candea, ask pertinent questions: ‘How should we relate to claims of subalterneity when such claims are deployed also by states and powerful groups? How should we attend to expressions of suffering when such expressions obscure or deny others’ suffering’ (Jeffery and Candea 2006: 287).

Resentment can be predicated on others’ perceived victimhood or (lack of recognition) of one’s own claims to victimhood, as for example was expressed in the words of an Anglo senior who felt that her senior citizens group was left out by Council, in its funding priorities:

Council supports many ethnic activities. There’s the Greeks’ street carnival, there’s the Macedonian things going on in Arncliffe, there are quite a lot of things going on. We are never offered anything. ... We don’t mind because we’re coping quite well, but we are very much aware that we are the minority ... as far as consideration and attention goes. [General agreement on this point]

For, as Wendy Brown commented in relation to the concept of politicised identity, be they minorities or groups demographically in a majority who perceive themselves to be victimised, it (the politicised identity) ‘becomes attached to its own exclusion both because it is premised on this exclusion for its very existence as identity and because the formation of identity at the site of exclusion, as exclusion, fragments or “alters the direction of the suffering” in subordination or marginalisation by finding a site of blame for it’ (1995: 73 - 4).

Much of the literature on the subject of the politics of victimhood and resentment is concerned with far weightier instances of suffering than the lack of a council's funding for a community facility.<sup>3</sup> For example, the substance of Zolkos' (2007) article is a discussion of the notion of resentment and forgiveness in Jean Améry's writings. Améry, an Auschwitz survivor and philosopher, views resentment as 'the restoration of the victim's social status and dignity, the validation of the experience of victimhood' (Zolkos 2007: 23) and contrasts this with the Nietzschean derogatory view of *ressentiment*, taken up by Brown and others. Much of that literature as well, is concerned about the notion of resentment as a 'psychic condition', 'a retrospective grudge' (Zolkos 2007: 26, 27) for past injury. Here, we examine resentment as it circulates discursively rather than as an individual psychological condition.

### **Tensions over access to public spaces**

Conceptually then, what is the value of considering some of this literature in order to shed light on the quotidian and comparatively minor issues and problems in our respondents' lives? One of the key findings from this research and clear source of tension and resentment was the use of public parks and beaches, especially on weekends and public holidays. These are issues which have particularly come to the fore since the much debated 'Cronulla riot' of December 2005. We will now examine some of the rhetoric used by a group of senior citizens in the light of the above discussion about resentment, victimhood and the complex question of whose voices are listened to in the public domain. Let us be clear that our intent is *not* to simply dismiss the fears older

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<sup>3</sup> The aforementioned issue of *History and Anthropology* includes articles on Primo Levi and his experiences in Auschwitz; the Emergency (1975-77) in India; Turkey and the PKK; memories from the Italian city of Trieste during the Second World War (which had an Italian majority and Slovene minority); analogies between Jewish experiences of the Holocaust and Israeli Jews' experiences of the Intifada – to name a few.

Anglo-Australians have expressed about groups (identified as Muslims) appearing to take over areas they have accessed for many years. As well, the questions asked by Laura Jeffery and Matei Candea and comments by Sara Ahmed concerning the differential access to the public domain by more privileged groups, are serious and difficult questions for local government authorities. Ahmed says: 'The differentiation between which stories are told' in the market place of injury claims, whose suffering and pain is heard and compensated, 'is a crucial mechanism for the distribution of power' (2004: 32).

We note too that much research on public spaces is ethnographic (for example: Low, Taplin and Scheld 2005; Goodall et al. 2004; L'Aoustet and Griffet 2004). On the other hand, the primary research under discussion in this paper was not ethnographic. We did not investigate in situ the range of interactions and experiences of those using the park discussed by the seniors. This group of senior citizens from a relatively affluent suburb in Sydney, many of whom have lived in the same area most of their lives, are not the most privileged group in this country. However, they have access to a range of cultural resources they are probably not even aware of. The discomfort they express in the interview excerpts below, as well as comments made by other older Anglo Australian discussed on pages x-y, reveal the taken-for-grantedness in which they have been able to live their lives, and conduct their leisure activities. Indeed, having the possibility and good fortune of living in relative comfort in the same geographical location most of one's life provides an enormous amount of security and belongingness that many of us do take for granted, until we perceive that this sense of belonging is being taken away from us. This is what Noble, following from Giddens, calls 'ontological security' or 'the trust we have in the world around us, both in



terms of the things and the people with whom we share our lives, and hence which provide stability and a continuity to our identity' (Noble 2005: 113).

Another perspective on this one could argue, is the Indigenous viz-a-viz White, one. The trauma of White settlement or occupation was profoundly dislocating and led to loss of belonging for Indigenous Australians. Nevertheless, As Curthoys writes, an Australian narrative encompassing 'trauma of expulsion, exodus and exile obscures empathetic recognition of Indigenous perspectives, of the trauma of invasion, institutionalisation and dispersal' (Curthoys 1999: 18). Curthoys too, employs the concept of *ressentiment* to explain and understand white Australians' 'rejection of Indigenous claims to land, or any kind of recognition of a history of land seizure' for as she says, White Australians have constructed 'for themselves a past which allocates the land as won through suffering, and therefore theirs' (1999: 18). One is reminded of an Aboriginal response to the 2005 riot in Cronulla, 'whose beach is it anyway?' In other words, this is an Indigenous challenge to white presumptions about land ownership in this country. In the case of Cronulla, the white, mainly Anglo 'rioters', challenged those 'others' (of Middle Eastern appearance), who appeared to have taken over the public space of the beach.

The seniors living around this middle class southern Sydney suburb were distressed about the 'fact' that large groups they identified as Muslims, were taking over the parks and beaches in the area, to such an extent that they felt excluded and afraid to go there on Sundays, still the day most identified with leisure activities in Australia: 'We no longer feel it's our beach as well as theirs'. Their bitterness, resentment and sense of themselves as the 'victim outsiders' was palpable, as evidenced in comments such as:

S1: I walk to the beach every day, and Sunday is the only day I won't walk, because I just don't feel safe with all the groups. I just feel that they look at you, they look down on you...they just make me feel uncomfortable. Perhaps that's the word.

And again as noted previously, the identification of Muslims as uniquely different:

S2: They're not like other ethnics.

The next comments reveal that sense of exclusion, loss of control and a comparison of Muslim children with 'Australian children' and a complaint that 'these people' are unfriendly:

S3: I would like some control of the beaches and the parks on the weekend, and I don't know how they can do it at this stage, because they have been taken over, but I feel that there needs to be some control so that if you do walk through there, you can walk through with safety. If I walk through there with my dog, some stupid little child is likely to come up and want to kick the dog. Australian children don't do that.

S4: We are the aliens. You might think that's strange, but you go for a walk through the park on a Sunday and you'll get looked at and if you say "hello" to anyone – no response.

Int: When you say "they won't meet us halfway", can you say a bit more about that? What would you want them to do?

S5, responding: Just be a bit more friendly! ... When you smile at them and say hello, surely to goodness it's not going to break their little hearts to smile at us and say, "Hello, how are you going, nice day!" That's all! And just appear – even if they can't be bothered being friendly, just appear to be friendly!

Nevertheless, these seniors said they did not want to stop these groups from enjoying the coastal blue and green spaces and acknowledged that if you lived in a small brick unit in one of Sydney's tree and water-deprived western suburbs, it would be understandable that you would want to take your family to the coast for a picnic and day out. It is no great surprise that the appeal of picnicking, relaxing and playing games with your family and friends in a beautiful park overlooking an ocean turns out to be a cross-cultural activity, as Livengood and Stodolska discovered after interviewing Muslim Americans on the negative effects September 11 2001 had on their leisure behaviour (Livengood and Stodolska 2004: 191). We all enjoy this type of relaxation, so how can Councils take a lead in ensuring that it is available to all, including for

less privileged people 'who do not have backyards, much less holiday homes, where they can rest and recreate' (Low, Taplin and Scheld 2005: 18)

From a local government perspective, we see the challenge as being to engage in a different way, the people who express these fears, but without encouraging and legitimising those fears. For at the same time as some white people express fear and dislike of Muslims, the latter also experience discrimination at many levels, particularly since September 11 2001, to a degree unlike those of us who are not stigmatised by this cultural/religious difference (see Dreher 2005; HREOC 2004). In relation to the issue of sharing public spaces, in their extensive study of the Georges River (Sydney) parklands Goodall et al (2004: 167) too report on increased levels of hostility directed towards Muslims and Arabic-speaking people since 2001. They make a point which resonates with the reactions of the small group of Anglo seniors we are discussing:

[T]he outcome [of Muslims feeling under attack, defensive and not welcome] is to make it less likely that the interactions Arabic-speaking people might have with people outside their community in public places will be relaxed and mutually productive interchanges. Such experiences generate a defensive sense of 'ethnic' self-identification and corresponding identification by others as a perceived 'ethnic threat', which is a product not of any homeland culture but of the circumstances and ongoing experiences in the new environment (2004: 168).

There are no easy solutions to the kind of action-reaction syndrome described by Goodall et al (above). Conducting an in-depth investigation into the extent of the problem on the weekends in the parks could be a beginning – an investigation which would delve into the myriad usages of the park, the positive and negative interactions which occur between people, and what factors mitigate against the park being the kind of inclusive, relevant and welcoming place where all peoples can come and enjoy what such a public, outdoors space has to offer. For researchers and policymakers it is essential to better understand everyday resentments and victim claims on the

part of majority communities, in order to be able to differentiate and evaluate competing claims to victim status.

### **‘Place-sharing’ and Indigenous sovereignties**

The theme of ‘place-sharing’ and concerns over the shared use of public space are central in much of the recent research on racism and multiculturalism in Australia. The pilot project reported here found evidence of feelings of exclusion from certain public spaces and discomfort around place-sharing among some older Anglo residents of the Rockdale area. Wise offers nuanced explorations of the practices and ethics of place-sharing in local neighbourhoods and through neighbourly relations, and focusing in particular on tensions around the changing nature of the main shopping strip in the Sydney suburb of Ashfield (Wise 2004, 2005). The research on racism against Arab and Muslim Australians consistently finds that racism and harassment are predominantly experienced in public spaces, and one of the most significant impacts of racism is fear and withdrawal from public spaces among Muslim and Arab Australians (HREOC 2004, Poynting and Noble 2004, Dreher 2005, Noble 2005). While ‘place-sharing’ and public space is a crucial interest for contemporary scholarship on multicultural Australia, that literature is also conspicuously silent on Indigenous sovereignties and relationships to place. Despite the crucial importance of place, Indigenous experiences and histories of places, spaces and neighbourhoods is all but absent from the recent analyses of sharing public spaces and localities. The recent work of Goodall et al (2004, 2007) analysing the changing shared uses of the Georges River is a rare and vital exception.

It is both necessary and productive to address this silence. To do so would be one way to respond to the challenge put forward by Marcia Langton (2005) when she asked, ‘why is the extraordinary history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians not a source for our thinking on multiculturalism in Australia?’ Langton describes the similar argument made by the former chairman of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, Bhikhu Parekh when he suggested that British debates on multiculturalism could productively draw on the millennia-long histories and philosophies of intercommunal living developed in India as a means to move beyond some of the intractable dilemmas of Eurocentric traditions of dealing with diversity. Langton reminds us that Indigenous Australians are ‘inherently multicultural’ (see also Moreton-Robinson 2003: 31), while, she argues, ‘the Western tradition from Plato onwards has produced very limited resources for dealing with diversity’. Indigenous knowledges of ‘engaging across cultural and religious borders’, may not provide simple solutions or easy ‘answers’ to the challenges of contemporary Australian multiculturalism. Nevertheless, Indigenous histories, philosophies and contemporary negotiations surely should be a vital resource for developing politics and ethics of ‘place-sharing’.

Recent research in the St George area provides just a hint of the ways in which engaging with Indigenous knowledges might shift thinking in regards to sharing space and place. In our research, the two interviewees who work and identify with Indigenous communities in the Rockdale area referred to early contact history and to Indigenous protocols around entering and respecting country as models for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people living with diversity. One of our interviewees argued that the local history of the area provided stories of complex interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians:

There is a great opportunity – there is so much early colonial documentation. Watkin Tench came here to get the ten heads. Colebee was a man from this area. There is a rich, well-documented stories of complex interactions, negotiations, diplomacy, dialogue, they are complex stories. Watkin Tench got stuck at Muddy Creek – its all in Tench’s logs. We could have gardens with the story and native plants about what happened there. Look at Colebee rather than Bennelong – it is a different story, he achieved so much politically.

These comments reference a history of early interactions and negotiations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Bennelong is often remembered for dining at the servant’s table in the Governor’s kitchen and for being paraded as a curiosity during a visit to London between 1793 and 1795. Colebee on the other hand received one of the first land grants made by the British in Australia to an Aboriginal person, after negotiating a verbal peace agreement with Governor Phillip. The comments above suggest that the story of Colebee highlights resourcefulness, negotiation and resilience on the part of Indigenous Australians rather than the more familiar tragic narrative of assimilation.

Another interviewee stressed the importance of protocols for respecting land and for respectful interaction between the ‘many mobs’ in the area who have migrated from other parts of NSW.

We are not out to build, but to recognize that we own it. My land rights is that you leave them as they are, don’t touch a tree or anything. Land rights to a lot of Aboriginal people means that you can visit a place but don’t cut a tree, don’t hurt and animal.

A study of the shared uses of the Georges River Parklands conducted by Heather Goodall, Allison Cadzow, Stephen Wearing and others (2007) further develops this history of interactions and complex negotiations in shared spaces. This work documents the continuing interactive presence of Indigenous people in and around the St George area where sandstone areas remained de facto commons across which Aboriginal people moved freely even under colonial and assimilationist policies. Indigenous people from across NSW have and continue to move in and

out of the area, and to develop custodial obligations to land as well as interacting with diverse communities through work, family, fishing etc. It is vital to engage these continuing processes of interaction and Indigenous claims to sovereignty and ownership of land in developing complex understandings and policies around the sharing of space and place.

It is also necessary to recognize and engage with Indigenous sovereignties in research and projects around the shared use of public space in order to avoid reproducing the logic of *Terra Nullius* – the legal fiction of ‘empty land’ which underpinned the colonization of Australia and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. In a chapter on Indigenous belonging Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues that ‘the premise of colonization that Australia *belonged to no one* informed the relationship between indigenous people and the nation state from its very inception and continues to do so’ (2003: 33). Non-Indigenous belonging in Australia is ‘inextricably tied’ to the original theft of land and the right to determine who was allowed into the country and who could belong was a fundamental benefit derived by the British from dispossession (ibid: 25). Analysing contemporary Native Title laws, Moreton-Robinson argues that Indigenous people are placed in a ‘state of homelessness’, ‘trespassers in our own land’ whose belonging and ownership must be proven in accordance with white legal structures (ibid: 36). In light of this argument, it is imperative that investigations of place-sharing do not simply reproduce the original and ongoing dispossession of Indigenous ownership and belonging, but rather centre Indigenous knowledges of home and place, even as these are ‘configured differently to that of migrants’ and all whose belonging is grounded in white possession.

## **Conclusion**

Our small-scale research in the Rockdale LGA provides critical examples which resonate with recent research on daily experiences of multicultural mixing, and of everyday racisms in Australia. This apparent paradox – the simultaneous enjoyment of ‘everyday multiculturalism’ and the prevalence of social incivilities and resentments directed at Muslim and Arab Australians – is not unique to the Rockdale area, but rather is typical of wider trends. In this paper we have focused on a number of challenges arising from recent research: the importance of analysis and policy that can address *both* everyday racisms *and* everyday multiculturalisms; the need to engage everyday resentments while also differentiating between victim claims; and the vital task of grounding research and policy around ‘place-sharing’ in Indigenous sovereignties. These challenges imply difficult and unsettling work. Bringing together Indigenous and multicultural research and policy agendas entails what Ann Curthoys (2000) has called an ‘uneasy conversation’. It is a difficult balancing act to engage with the resentments of relatively privileged Australians without uncritically validating misplaced claims to victimhood or disadvantage. And it is no easy task to work with both intercultural neighbourliness and entrenched racisms rather than focusing on one over the other. Nevertheless, these challenges are evident in much of the Australian research and provide significant opportunities to develop research and policy grounded in the complex and often contradictory dynamics of intercommunal relations in culturally diverse neighbourhoods.

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