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Chapter IV

Social disconnection, or popular racism

Interrogating notions of identity and difference in cosmopolitan times

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Introduction

By the beginning of the 21st century, Australian secondary school communities have been, almost unawares, drawn into a complex, often turbulent global world. People, finances, technologies and ideas shift within local and across global spaces in ways that they never could have before (even as some remain tied to place more securely than ever). My project here is to examine the impact of these changes on the ways that notions of identity and difference are understood and played out in school communities (Arber 2008). I explore how school community representatives, particularly teachers, have talked about their day-to-day practices over the last two decades and the salience of conceptions of race and identity in shaping those practices.

Despite teachers' good intentions and hard work, I find that other, taken-for-granted understandings (and their material effects) shape the ways that programs and practices are understood and implemented within schools. These understandings change over time. Globalising processes and demographic change give the illusion that race and cultural difference are no longer indicators of difference. At the same time, modern definitions of
cultural, linguistic and racial difference remain. In post 9/11 and increasingly globalised times, people are more confused and frightened as they continue to identify themselves in relation to those whom they define as other and different – even as their identities are evidently in-process, fragmentary and changing.

This chapter is concerned with the discourses and accompanying silences that shape the ways teachers in government secondary schools speak about their students in times of insurgent global change. It examines data from earlier research (Arber 2008) into the ways that teachers speak about race and ethnic relationships at their school, and it applies those understandings to my most recent research (Arber in press a, in press b), which investigates the ways in which the impact of international student programs are understood by teachers and international and local students.

Earlier research (Arber 2008) suggests that some people feel less comfortable within school communities than others. It is a sense of belonging mediated by taken-for-granted understandings that defines who different groups within the school are, and how they can be expected to behave. Recent research (Arber in press a, in press b) suggests that, in the case of international students, these normative notions are mediated by a host of others, including those related to conceptions of multiculturalism, entrepreneurialism and sojourning. In question are the ways notions of identity and difference are understood, as local–global interaction and individualistic and market-driven changes have consequences for everyday lives. Of concern is whether and how these examples of social disconnection can be understood more chillingly as 'popular' or 'everyday' 'race talk' (Rizvi 1995).

My argument is in four sections. The first section describes earlier research that examines the ways that teachers and parents speak about race and ethnic relationships in their school. It explores the noises and silences that emerge from within teachers' conversations about intercultural relationships and racism, the ways they change and their consequences. The second section illustrates my analysis, with material from my most recent research into discussions about the day-to-day experiences of teachers as they speak about the impact of international programs in their school. It describes one example of the conversations I have with good teachers as they market their school, and it examines the systemic and ontological discourses played out within those discussions. My work as a researcher is to critically analyse the transcribed text of teachers conversations as they discuss their everyday experiences. These experiences embodied by teachers need then to be understood in different ways, 'problematised' as they are mediated by institutional and systemic changes (Smith 2001) and the ontological and discursive dimensions of social life that provide their shaping power (Lather 1991; Pillow 2003).

In the third section of my argument I interrogate discourses of identity and difference, neo-liberalism and naive cosmopolitanism, which shape discussions about international student programs. Real attempts by school representatives to understand the academic and pastoral needs of all students become confused, as these requirements are negotiated in relation to
government demands for economy and accountability, student demands for international and Western education and the marketing and educational imperatives of the school. Discourses of identity and difference take on new forms as local-global interaction and the individualistic and market-driven changes that lead to the implementation of international programs have consequences on the everyday lives of school community members.

The final section explores the relationship between the noises and silences of the teachers’ discussion of ‘popular racism’ (Rizvi 1995) and the terms and conditions of globalisation and the internationalising process.

Methodologies of identity and difference

The day-to-day experience of teachers

My exploration of notions of identity and difference and their consequences within communities, such as schools, begins with the study of the everyday lives of practitioners. Dorothy Smith (1987, 2001) argues convincingly that the day-to-day experience of teachers is understood in relation to the systemic structures that shape their practice. This is to find a ‘way of seeing from where we actually live, into the powers, processes and relations that organise and determine the everyday context of that seeing’ (Smith 1987, p.97). The world as we know it is a complex one in which the contingency of day-to-day existence takes place within the complexity of institutional processes and the contingencies and conditions that underpin the social the world as it might come to be. Never a matter of mere portraiture, the research process is that of making the everyday world problematic in order to reflect its real complexity. The matter is to interrogate ‘what everybody knows experientially’ as it is embodied and located in time and space (Campbell 2003). This complex matter of ‘homework’ is one in which the researcher interrogates the everyday and embodied experiences of teachers and their work and critically confronts the often taken-for-granted ways of meaning, which in turn, shape the understanding of both researcher and researched (Clifford 1997). Critical theory provides the insight that the social and cultural structures and notions that historically position researchers and the researched must be explored, but also dismantled in a process of ever-greater ‘reflexivities of discomfort’ (Pillow 2003, p.188).

This complexity of everyday practice, systemic enterprise and ontological framing describes a multi-layered and unequally empowered complexity of discoursal space played across patterned fields of power (Anderson 1991; O’Callaghan 1995, p.22). Such a ‘terrain of imagination’ can be explored from three different, but integrated narrational vantage points: that of practice, that of concept and that of its underpinning logic (Arber 2008). From the vantage point of narrational practices I examine the seemingly ad hoc nature of individual experiences and stories and the ways that experiencing individuals understand and participate in their day-to-day worlds.
SOCIAL DISCONNECTION, OR POPULAR RACISM

From the vantage point of *narrational fields* I explore the patterned, yet contingent and often disjunctive, ways in which meaning and practice are related to a particular conceptual or practical domain. From the final vantage point of *narrational maps* I explore the logic, or terms and conditions, of the debate as they appear as essential ways of knowing and being in the world.

The argument advanced by critical race theory is that conversations about day-to-day practice take place in Western societies, which are structured in ways that are already inequitable. Discussions about social formations, and the contexts in which they are understood and mobilised, are subdued and marginalised. Literatures of race and whiteness (Lather 1991; Pillow 2003) argue that some people are able to define the terms and conditions of social participation and that they do this through the conception and the embodiment of those people who do not belong. They allude to the possibility of two narratives, so often defined as ‘silent’ in post-colonial theory and in writings on race and whiteness (Bhabha 1994; Spivak 1995; Young 1995). In the first, the person of the community finds it difficult to define him or herself save through the presence of others. In the second, the other – the person outside of the community – is understood, and comes to understand him or herself, through the descriptions that delineate his or her difference. The task of the researcher is to understand the constraints and impediments of day-to-day practice and to make transparent the logic through which these everyday experiences are constructed.

A critical analysis of race and ethnic relationships requires us to understand the day-to-day identifications of ordinary people, the debates and structures that consolidate these ideas, and the sociocultural and historical notions that shape them. It is, Patty Lather (1991) argues, a matter of untangling the ambivalent stereotypes that make up the narrations, of reversing the gaze of these narrations to study the narrator self instead of others, and of reconsidering the stories that describe the everyday in other ways. Lynn and Parker (2006) more recently contend that it is the raced structures that are undeniably and inextricably present within Western societies that need to be uncovered and interrogated.

This reassessment of the terms and conditions of race and ethnic relationships takes place at a time when globalisation refocuses and reshapes our most basic understandings of social organisation and cultural convention. As Hall (1996) so dramatically puts it, in recent times the conceptions of identity itself have come ‘under erasure’. Hall argues that the concept of the human person as essentially formed, fully centred, unified and reasonable, is more recently constructed as ‘post-modern’, a ‘moveable feast’ in which conceptions of identity are in process and at odds with themselves, as they are made and changed within the contingencies of socio-historical contexts. The examination of teacher talk in the context of Western schools shows it to be shaped by the terms and conditions of identity and difference and articulated by the noises and silence of race and whiteness. A crucial task is to examine these relations at a time when these concepts are subject to a changed politics of representation and when the notions
that underpin them, especially those of identity, are changing. Moreover, it is to explore them in a social world mediated by other and unequally empowered flows, which Appadurai (1996) notes, make up 'scapes' of globalisation (e.g. images, finances, people, technologies). When understanding racist conception in contemporary times, these processes and their consequences for identity and difference must also be made transparent and interrogated.

This chapter reports discussions I have been having with teachers about their day-to-day experiences in government secondary schools in Victoria, Australia, as these schools are being altered by demographic and global change. It draws from a series of research projects implemented within Victorian country and metropolitan government schools undertaken over a twenty-year period to look at the ways that teachers understand race and ethnicity in their school. In various projects from 1988 and 2008 I have surveyed over 30 schools and undertaken participant case studies in two schools. This chapter is not a synopsis of this work. Rather, it explores directions that the interrogation of the data takes as I refocus conceptions taken from my earlier projects to investigate the impact of fee-paying international students on secondary schools. Throughout my research, I have used focused, open-ended questions, and I have used a sample of school representatives within case study schools including the Vice Principal (usually also the International Students Co-ordinator), English language and class teachers. Following on from grounded and naturalistic research methods (Guba & Lincoln 1999; Strauss & Corbin 1998) I have conversed with school representatives about the implementation and impact of international students programs: the marketing of these programs, service provision and pedagogy and curriculum change.

The focus of this chapter is on the ways in which notions of identity are played out within conversations I have been having with teachers in local schools as they speak about their everyday practice. I examine two examples from this data to explain my argument. The first example is drawn from earlier research undertaken in 1988 (Arber 2008). Here I asked teachers to speak about the way that they understand race and ethnic relationships at their school. Respondents (parents, teachers, administrators, aides) were adamant that there was no racism in their school and that relationships between groups of teachers and students were good. Nevertheless, some teachers reported that they did not feel comfortable at the school. My later research sought to discover why this was the case (Arber 2008). I argued that this feeling of discomfort and exclusion needed to be understood in relation to the systemic and ontological notions that described identities in particular ways, and as different, and which defined the ways in which groups of people could belong within the community.

In the next section, I exemplify my analysis with materials taken from my most recent research, which describes the way international students are understood within the school. The focus of that research is on the day-to-day experiences of teachers and administrators in rural and urban government secondary schools as they speak about their rationale for
introducing international students programs and the implications this has for the ways that they market their school overseas. The analysis of the terrain of imagination that surrounds these discussions of everyday practice shows them to be intertwined with other and taken-for-granted discourses. These notions, formulated within the contradictions and tensions that underpin teachers’ lives, are shaped by systemic pressures for accountability and resource management and professional aspirations to help their students. They are formulated within discourses of location, identity and difference, and neo-liberalism. Together these serve to commodify international students and include them differently within the community.

Interrogating racist conceptions

Throughout my research into identity and difference in Victorian secondary schools, community members agree that inter-ethnic relations at their school are good (Arber 2008). In my earliest research, Sally Williams3, a history teacher, explained that:

But the only sort of racial comments we've ever had was, we went to this school camp and we came back and the train stopped at Warrigal and a girl got on and she shoved her bag in the face of one of the students and I got really upset and I said, 'Do you mind?' Move on. 'Get away from these students' and the other kids sort of sobbing a bit and they said, 'We wish we were back at Southgate. Everyone accepts us there we're just normal.'

There has been, as Amanda Winters points out, racism in the past, and racist acts perpetrated by others outside the school, but at this time, most tell me, ‘they get along wonderfully’, there’s ‘no problem’. There are ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Australians, Tom Paterson says.

In more recent research, teachers still say that community relationships within the school are good. Social studies teacher Bill Kelty comments, typically, that:

Things you read about in other schools, seems to be ... It doesn't happen within the school. It's lovely to come to this school. It's got the most wonderful atmosphere, really, like, I can't remember.

As in my earlier research, teachers and parents reiterate that there are ‘no racial intolerances’, ‘no problems if they have to interact’, ‘you don’t have that in classes here’, ‘there is really nothing there’. Schools are understood by teachers particularly as ‘somewhere safe’, ‘comfortable’ and ‘relaxed’, often because of, and not despite, the fact that ‘everyone is different’ and we’ve got so many people who are in the same position.

A very few community members I interviewed describe their experiences differently. Whilst they agree that there is ‘no racism at the school’, they are concerned that they do not always feel comfortable within the

3. These names have been changed to preserve the anonymity of the schools and people concerned.
school community and that they are included differently. In my earlier re­
search, communication aide Linda Chan tells me

Well I would say that everywhere you will find nice people and rude people every­
where, as long as you can take it and manage and face it. If you take it as serious mat­
ter then you will upset yourself very much but if you take it, that is like people every­
where and take it.

Chan finds people who do not like her difficult. Like Arona Sandra, the sci­
ence aide, she worries about whether people are ‘nice’ or ‘rude’.

In my later research I interview Chan again and find that it is even
harder for her to explain her position:

I, really, don't know and I don't want to try to find out, because I'm too afraid it will
start. If I start to test people to see the reaction, it's just like I'm banging my head onto
the rock.

I'd rather just leave it, you know, calm everything, as usual, because if you try and
find out something. When the fact comes to you, you be very disappointed and you will
be upsetting and working. You know ... You don't know, bow people see you, but you
would rather the fact that you would rather not to know, so you can still keep in your
mind peaceful in the area ... The Australian attitude is very hurting.

Like Aruna Sandra, Chan iterates that relations between herself and others
within the school generally are more complex than ever. She fears that
people might hurt her. Now she is able to give those people a name. ‘The
Australian attitude is very hurting’, she tells me. On the other hand, she is
no longer sure who those people are. The definitions of the ‘good people’
and ‘bad people’ that pervaded her earlier remarks now appear more
blurred. Now she doesn’t really know who these people are or ‘how people
see you’ and she ‘would rather not know’.

The slippery and increasingly contested condition of race talk and the
ways that this has changed in the latter part of the 20th century and early
21st century underpin my research focus. Good and conscientious teachers
—who care about their students and institute good programs and policies to
work with immense demographic and technological change — report on the
good relationships that they find in their school. Respondents argue that
racism either does not exist at their school, exists elsewhere or has not
happened at all. What intrigues me are the respondents (few as they are in
number) who argue that they feel differentiated within the school com­
monity because of their race, identity, religion or language background.
The characteristics of this understanding have changed over time. In earli­
er research, respondents explain that this is because of the behaviour of
‘good people’ or ‘bad people’. In more recent research they are no longer
sure who the ‘good people’ or the ‘bad people’ are.

Dimensions of identity and difference

The focus for my most recent research has been to explore the dimensions
of the discomfort described within this initial research. I argue that to un­
derstand this sense of exclusion it is necessary to understand the notional
and systemic underpinnings of the everyday discussions of community members. The 'framework of analytical abstraction' that underpins my research work emphasises the need to understand the data from the vantage point of the ontological context that frames discussions of day-to-day experience and practice. The discussion of data taken from my most recent research into international students in schools exemplifies my line of reasoning.

Peter Gregory is assistant principal of Wentworth College, a large rural school in the coastal regions near Victoria's sheep wheat belt. The school attracts busloads of students who commute daily from the surrounding countryside and from the rural city itself. The school has well over a thousand students, including eighteen international students, most of whom are from China and Japan. Gregory describes explaining to a school community that the school has 'two reasons' for taking in international students:

one is that we need to break down the monocultural aspect of our school and the wider society, and a lot of people nod at that, and ... the other reason is, and the ears prick up, that we can potentially make money out of it, and a lot of people expect the money to flow immediately.

International student programs are important to the ways schools develop student intercultural and international competencies, and are an important funding source. Binary notions of multiculturalism and monoculturalism represent the paradoxical relationship that exists between international students and the home community. In the case of this country school, international students provide a way for the isolated and conceptually 'monocultural' environment of the school community to be broken down. 'Our' school is described as having a heterogeneous and unchanging culture, which lacks the ethnic and international sophistication of multicultural city life. International students fill this lacuna, providing (however tenuously) an intercultural and international education for students who otherwise have little exposure to cultural and ethnic differentiation. The financial aspect of the international students program adds to the binary processes that define community belonging for international students. It is a two-tiered community in which an ill-defined 'we' can make money and 'get a full fee pay out' from the introduction of an international students program. Bringing international students to the school makes 'business sense' as we 'expect the money' and 'expect [it] to flow immediately'.

Teachers and administrators describe the numerous ways they market the school: by using agents or the government's International Students Unit (ISU), participating within exhibitions and employing of local and regional consultants and processes. Like many school representatives, Gregory finds it most effective to market the school to international students and their parents personally, through 'word of mouth' relationships:

[1] maintain the best way of getting students long term and getting them rolling over is to develop personal relationships with schools and then word of mouth. If you're offering a good product it will spread and you'll keep on getting them. So that's what we've done basically.
An essential element of the marketing work of the school is to provide 'a good' educational 'product'. Community representatives use photos, school reports, programs and policy statements, advertising and curriculum pamphlets to advertise school programs to prospective parents and students. These artefacts demonstrate good schooling and curriculum practice, and the caring nature of the staff and community who provide them. 'Good personal relationships' between parents and schools are developed in tension with the notion of the educational process as a commercial enterprise. The binary us–them relationship underpins the marketing process, as 'what we have done' is 'get them' here. The notion of 'getting them' adds to the notion that these students are invited to our community under different terms from the local school that receives them. The term 'getting them rolling over' suggests products on an assembly line and adds weight to the notion that this marketing trip works towards the commodification, not only of curriculum, but of international students.

Keeping in contact with families is prefaced by an awareness that parents want to be familiar with the school and need to be reassured 'that everything' is 'OK':

*The first kids we got from China, [and] even though I went on a marketing trip and met the parents, there again I believe it was that initial contact with the kids coming here [that] was the most important thing. They were familiar with the school. And going on the marketing trip was important in the sense that their parents got to meet me and [were] reassured that everything was OK and they could trust me, and trust is very important with them.*

Part of encouraging parents to send their children to the school is reassuring them that the school can provide a good educational curriculum and a safe and ethical environment for their children. The thrust of marketing exercises for the school is the development of the most essential of school relationships, the development of 'trust' between teachers and parents. A curious binary space is set up between the well-meaning professionalism of teachers, expressed in 'their parents got to meet me', and trust, which is 'very important to them' (the parents). In other words, a binary develops between the work that the teacher must do – to market the school, to teach students and the trust that is built up with parents that everything will be done in their child's best interest. It is trust that needs to be built with parents who are truly separated from their children by the logistics of distance. As part of 'them', parents are different culturally and nationally from 'us', and they need to be convinced they can entrust their children to the school. The purpose of the marketing exercise is to emphasise that the school community is attractive and safe, despite the distance that separates parents from their children:

*Parents being able to put a face to a school and having confidence that that person will look after their children is really, really important – as it would be for us if [the shoe] was on the other foot.*

The everyday pictures of student activities and experiences, recorded in albums and reports that Gregory shows parents during his visits, allows
parents to overcome geographic and intercultural space and 'put a face to
the school'. 'Face', in this instance, is about creating an atmosphere of trust
and security. On the surface, it is concerned with developing the conviction and the 'confidence that that person will look after their children'. Gregory's insight contains a moment of empathy, a fatherhood understanding that we would feel the same way 'if [the shoe] was on the other foot'. Notions of 'face' and 'trust' nevertheless hide a tension between the parental 'they' who send 'their children' and the 'we' who receive and educate them. The essential values that underpin the parent–teacher relationships are put under strain, as Gregory is torn between his wish to provide pastoral care and support for parents and students and the imperative to convince parents to relinquish their children into his care.

To sell the school successfully in China involves entering different cultural and geographic spaces to become part of networks of friends and powerful people:

_They would say my son is 13; in 3 years I'll be looking for a school and he will be going to Wentworth College because my friend recommends him, and we had that so often and all this very, very important powerful people who in themselves know other people because Chinese society seem to work ... it's very patriarchal still but it works on networks, male networks basically._

To market the school successfully Gregory must understand how social and friendship patterns work in countries outside of Australia. Gregory explains that this means integrating himself into networks and friendship groups that are powerful and patriarchal. More than a matter of meeting potential clients, Gregory feels he is able to enter the most sacrosanct of community relationships as 'my friend recommends him' to 'very important powerful people'. Moreover, Gregory is confident that he understands the Chinese people generally: who they are, the way they work. Chinese society is, in his opinion, 'patriarchal' as it works on 'networks, male networks basically'.

Despite his knowledge of Chinese society and the effort put into the marketing exercise, Gregory cannot count on 'getting a group up' of international students to the school. Factors beyond the school's control change the ways that international students come to the school including:

_[the] sheer disorganisation of the Chinese and [working] through the agent over there meant that we didn't get a group up. And we thought we were going to get another 30 ... but the 2002 tour was cancelled. We had a number [of international students] every year. And then 2003 of course was SARS ... it was really disappointing because you're counting on getting those kids interested and then it rolls over ... they come back and it starts spreading. So it was just really, really disappointing._

The particular support of the International Students Unit (ISU), numbers of international students already at the school, the demography of local students, and the relationship with agents – all affect the number of international students who arrive at the school. World events – including the SARS viral epidemic – administrative decisions in China, and the marketing and competitive costing of other international education providers have a huge impact. That what 'was really disappointing' is enmeshed with
other and 'taken-for-granted' notions. The Chinese society to whom he markets is no longer defined as networks of parents and friends, but as disorganised structures that are not only problematic, but reflect deficiencies in the characters of all Chinese. The binary 'us and them', which shaped discussions about the marketing exercise, takes on new complexity. International students are not only described as 'kids' to be interested in coming to the school, but as 'a number' that 'we had' every year. The notion of students 'getting interested' and 'rolling over', brings to mind the notion of learners, distanced from us already by geography and race, moving along a production line.

**Problematising discourses**

I argue that a multiplicity of discourses underpins everyday conversations about differentiated groups within the school community (Arber 2008). Enmeshed with conversations about international students are other tropes that describe debates about multiculturalism and monoculturalism, entrepreneurialism and sojourning.

**Multiculturalism/monoculturalism**

Throughout the research, respondents depict a multicultural/monocultural binary between local school communities that are inclusive of many different cultural groups and communities that are culturally and racially homogeneous. In one city school, a multicultural community, already differentiated by immigrant and ethnic difference, understands itself as having the skills to integrate other groups who are culturally different. At another urban school, international students bring academic and skills not held by other school members. Such conversations interpolate already-contradictory discourses traditionally used to define community belonging for immigrant and refugee students. Traditionally, discussions about multiculturalism have been concerned with an ethnically or racially differentiated other, who is included within our community, even as they continue to be defined as different and as not-quite-part of our community. Conversations about monoculturalism are concerned with the ways that representatives of other ethnic and raced groups are allowed to enter a seemingly culturally and racially homogeneous community (Arber 2008; Rizvi 1994). Either way, international students become token outsiders bringing to our community that which it desires – internationalism – and often multiculturalism, diversity and the upgrading of the school's academic and classed condition.

Certainly, the development and marketing of international student programs requires new cross-cultural and linguistic skills and knowledges, and brings into play new cross-national, intercultural and cross-racial complexities (Singh 2005). This work involves school representatives in a complex kind of 'strategic essentialism' (Luke 2005, p.xvii). Gregory, for instance, developed strategies to break into social networks in China, negotiate with
agents, work with students on their arrival and keep contact with their parents. Too often this move to describe those within the school usefully and economically slips into the discursive device of the stereotype (Pickering 2001, p.7).

Conversations about the 'patriarchal' nature of Chinese society — how 'it works on networks, male networks basically', and the inefficiency and 'sheer disorganisation' of Chinese institutions — do more than describe observations about individuals and groups within the teacher's acquaintance. Such notions about male-dominated societies and ineffectual organisational structures tap into commonplace and taken-for-granted assumptions about Chinese people and institutions, which are held by the community generally. More than an attempt at categorisation, here 'we' define the broad elements of cultural practices and process as primordial attributes. The ability to negotiate with the identities described as 'individuals' in any other way than as 'other than the attributes ascribed them' is lost. It is not just that these school representatives fail to see the individual parents and students they work with. The paradoxical common-senseness that underlies these stereotypes affects these embedded notions within the realities of everyday life. Too easily, discussions about entering social networks become generalisations, for example about the sensibility of sending women to market the school or about the patriarchal nature of Chinese society generally.

The notion 'to know' and locate as 'ours' the other who provides the focus of our conversations is to locate them, both conceptually and materially, as an-other (Brah 1996; Chow 1993; Young 1990). Representations of other people become matters of appropriation and control, as these claims 'to know' are ones made within the ambivalent protocols of fantasy and desire (Bhabha 1994; Hall 1997a, 1997b). People, unable to find the other person, represent him or her in a fluctuation between its consideration as one thing and its opposite. It is an impulse that is always doomed to failure: disrupted, slipping and incomplete. As part of the orientalist project to locate and to know other miscellaneous and unequally empowered individuals and institutional practices and interests we create and maintain what it is to be in 'our' world (Said 1991). Gregory no longer merely knows about the way to behave and access social networks in China. He knows the Chinese people. In fact, Gregory knows the Asian people generally. Most of all, these people whom he knows are comfortably located as ours and at our place.

The central condition of orientalism is its appearance of normalcy, as an almost unconditional 'us' represents the condition of being and working within the world. The other person who is 'not us', who is orientalised, becomes the creation that exists as a way of formulating what is in essence our world made in comparison to their world. It is within the power of those speaking from a position within our world to define the dimensions of the map that underpins the ways that day-to-day worlds in contemporary Western societies are understood (Dyer 1997; Said 1991; Young 1990). 'Us-ness' comes to be seen as 'that which is'. That which is 'us' becomes an almost-empty category defined through that which is not ourselves. It is a
near-silence reflected throughout the research. Teachers within one school, describing their school as monocultural, discuss the cultural skills international students bring to the school to ameliorate its 'cultureless' condition. Teachers in another city school speak of their school as multicultural, sharing with their students a sense of multicultural 'difference'. Who we are, in a sense, remains undecipherable and unexplained. It is a notion of 'us', which is hybrid to its core, that is both powerfully omnipresent and slippery and changing as those who imagine themselves as part of the community are, in a complexity of binary thinking, variously included and excluded (Bhabha 1994; Hall 1997a, 1997b). Within the complexity of international student provision, definitions of 'ourselves'—always a slippery concept—define community belonging as nothing and everything, including variously: other teachers, other local schools, schools outside of Australia. 'Who we are' remains a near-silent chameleon presence criss-crossed with notions of race and geography as it describes at different times 'we who make money as part of the local school community', 'we who are part of the school community who are not refugees and would like to attract middle-class students', 'we teachers who support the program and have permanency and who represent our local urban school, our state, our nation'.

Entrepreneurialism

These connections become more complex in the case of international students as they are overlaid by the entrepreneurial nature of the international student enterprise (Matthews 2002; Ziguras 2005). The most basic of educational notions are subject to challenge as they are understood through neo-liberal mantras of corporate management, money making, business rules, market rules and the subsequent gratification of consumer desire (Apple, Kenway & Singh 2005; Raduntz 2005, p.235; Singh 2005). The primary objective of participating in international students programs is to be involved in a 'money earning venture'. Without doubt, enrolling international students in secondary schools is profitable and provides much needed funding at a time of decreased government spending on education. Local community schools, strapped for cash, enter the market for international students to seek what has become an important and often lucrative funding opportunity. Gregory, describing speaking at a country school, reminisces that 'ears prick up' as school community members realise that they can 'potentially make money' out of the program. At another city school, Vice Principal Douglas observes that an international student 'paying the school $9000' sits 'next to a kid who is paying an annual fee of $150'.

The 'cherry picking' that underpins a capitalistic approach to education means that support for international students is complex and inconsistent as its profitability to the local school community wavers. Providing for international students in schools is costly and makes high demands on school
infrastructure and school staffing. To provide for large numbers of international students, schools such as Brentwood Secondary College invest heavily in infrastructure, in classrooms for providing large-scale English language instruction and for providing pastoral care. In order to remain cost-effective and to cover the cost of expensive capital investment, the number of international students coming to the school needs to remain high. Any long-term changes to the numbers – caused by the opening of competing language centres nearby, the impact of terrorism in Australia or SARS infections overseas – threatens the school with financial disaster. Further, as it is a tenuous but profitable venture, costs and benefits need to be kept properly in check. This affects the careers of English language teaching staff, particularly as language teaching staff were hired on a short-term and contractual basis because of the irregular nature of international student provision. Local schools compete for lucrative student contracts. Australian school communities are disappointed as United States and British schools take the ‘cream’. Schools in participant Asian countries increasingly enter the international student market themselves to form a new and socioculturally complex source of competition to Australian schools.

Under the impact of neo-liberal discourse, ‘public education is seen as a market commodity in need of marketing’ (Matthews 2002). Other notions in support of international student programs – such as providing social justice, international skills – are distorted as ‘altruistic reasons’ for bringing in international students and are refocused in place of others, which are to ‘make money’ and increase profits for the school community. Notions of good practice, concerns about humanitarianism and pastoral care are similarly reconfigured. ‘Discussions about what international education could mean or what donor students and nations might want or need are notably absent’ (Matthew 2002, P.373). Hard-won intercultural and linguistic skills are needed to participate within the marketing processes – interacting with agents, government and local bodies; attending marketing expos held in participating provider countries, interacting with social networks and families – which are no doubt well intentioned, but are nevertheless fraught by inconsistent purposes. The photographs that so touch the hearts of parents add to the success of the marketing exercise. Crucial values – trust, friendship, pastoral care – become inducted into the marketing process. On marketing trips, Gregory tells me, ‘parents ... trust me, and trust is very important with them’. Parents ‘put a face to a school’ and have ‘confidence that that person will look after their children’. The lexical terms and conditions of marketing imagery, as they are shaped by capitalism and global business, reconfigure the ‘human face’ of the school.

The human face presented to the international student is betrayed by the fickleness that underpins the maintenance of international programming, as schools confront changed financial and political environments. Support for the enterprise is not consistent – on my return to Wentworth, only three years later, I find that Peter Gregory had retired. Later administrators do not share Gregory’s passion for internationalisation, and the number of international students in school is less than a third of what it
had been only three years earlier. In other schools I visit, teachers are reluctant to support these students on their arrival. The effects of decisions by the International Students Unit (ISU) to support one school or another with student recommendations and marketing opportunities cannot be underestimated. In Brentwood, nearby schools with stronger academic and middle-class credentials now provide for international students, making the Brentwood entry into this market increasingly untenable. Moreover, schools are in competition with other schools and secondary education providers worldwide. Large scale events – wars, the threat of terrorism, epidemics, the strength of the Australian dollar – affect the attractiveness of Australia to international students. The reduction in student numbers in any one year means the loss of valuable networks and education patterns. The competitive nature of other major providers – particularly the US, UK and Canada – changes the way that Australian providers are able to compete, particularly at international marketing ventures, such as expos. Associate Principal Douglas notes that Australia finds itself competing in global markets where US and UK providers are able to ‘cream’ off the best students worldwide. Moreover, international student markets themselves are changing as educational systems in supply countries are developed – and often become modern education and English language providers themselves.

Overlaying the discourse of race and difference is that of commodification and objectification – of ‘getting them’, ‘getting them rolling over’. Students are wanted when they are profitable – and not wanted when they are not. In another interview, teachers explain how the cost of staff is calculated in relation to student numbers and the cost of student marketing and provision. Gregory reports that the school is excited about bringing international students into the school when ‘we can potentially make money out of it’. Douglas is worried about the risk that is taken when international students are also a ‘major expense’. Throughout the conversation, international students are those who need to be ‘sold to’ and wooed to come to Australia. Their particular identity is of no importance; the school’s interest is in ensuring the physical capacity of the school to take any number of international students, acquiring appropriate staff and of finding their market niche.

Sojourning

Notions of race and identity and those of neo-liberalism are criss-crossed by those of trans-locality and globalisation. Older notions used to describe refugee, immigrant, indigenous and religious groups describe groups of others who are here to stay and who consider the ways that their inclusion into their community can be organised (Rizvi 2005). The commonly held notion of international students as ‘sojourners’ affects traditional conversations about identity and difference. International students are sought from ‘over there’ ‘to come here’ and come ‘to us’. Such conversations describe international students as short-term wayfarers who come to the community
from the outside when invited to do so, stay for a while and then leave. They bring to mind images of a naïve cosmopolitanism whereby, in a modern world, some people have the ability to travel extensively, corporally and imaginatively and virtually whenever and wherever they wish. The international student sojourner becomes emblematic of the youthful wanderer who indulges his educational curiosity, consumes endless experiences en route, takes risks, maps out cultures and identities and interprets and appreciates the world of others (Szerszynski & Urry 2002).

To argue that international students require that their parents have money and therefore is an upper-class phenomenon is simplistic (Rizvi 2005; Roman 2003). Providing an international and Western education for one’s children is a way of changing the family’s fortune, and parents are prepared to undertake considerable sacrifice to allow their children to study overseas. The international student ventures out on his or her educational venture paid for, even as he or she is representative of the dreams and aspirations of him- or herself and his or her family. The notion of international students as sojourners, and the correspondent appreciation of their desire for Western education, cannot be understood separately from the indispensability of English language and Western education as a resource for access to an increasingly complex modern world (Lin & Martin 2005). This is a notion mentioned by Ralf Willis, Associate Principal at a participating school:

*I believe students who come here say that this is a land of wonderful opportunity ... it does break up their family of course but they [the parents] ... they'll sacrifice that family and those connections for the sake of the future of their children ... Often a place like America it's the students saying I want to go and please mum and dad can you send me. It's the other way around [here]. Usually from the South East Asian communities they say, we think it's good for you.*

Willis understands that Australia provides an opportunity for students, an asset for which parents are prepared to sacrifice even the very foundation of their family connections. Left undefined is the particular nature of a globalised and post-colonial world whereby these parents feel that they need to make these sacrifices while American (and for that matter Australian) parents do not. It is a reflection of the particular empowerment provided by English language that in a globalised and post-colonial world parents are forced to make difficult decisions about the education of their children in order to provide them access to future resources. Far from reflecting the ability of international students to move freely in a modern and globalised world, the international student market provides a rarefied point of access for students and their parents to themselves become ‘tourists’ in a modern and increasingly globalised world.

Moreover, the person of the international student sojourner allows all school members to share, however vicariously, the notion that they are international and cosmopolitan. Local students, unable to move themselves, are given the opportunity to travel through cultures, experiment with languages, risk social interactions with others, through the person of the international student. Both ‘monocultural’ and ‘multicultural’ local students are
introduced to international and intercultural experiences by the introduction of international students programs within the school. Teachers believe that academic standards are lifted by students who come to the school from the 'outside' to become 'our' students. Teachers have new freedoms, but also new responsibilities to move cross-culturally and cross-nationally both in their day-to-day experiences within the classroom and in their marketing experiences abroad. It is a semblance of participation within the larger global context; a matter of opportunity, but also of incredible tension as international students provide access to the skills and resources needed to participate in an increasingly complex globalised world.

In a globalised world shaped within conditions of motion and disjuncture problems manifest themselves in new patterns in local terms but in contexts that are anything but local (Appadurai 2000). Students come 'to us' and stay for a while. Parents wait over there; they are met when we go over there on a marketing trip; they want to 'put a face to a school' they might never see. Teachers learn new intercultural and international skills as they speak of 'going over there' of coming back to 'our place'. Agents come out and stay at 'our place' as they act as intermediaries between students and parents over there and the school. A metropolitan school finds itself in competition not only with schools in its immediate neighbourhood but with schools in other English language provider countries worldwide. New interrelations of 'local' and 'global' are set up as local school representatives from rural Australia meet with Chinese parents and compete with educational marketers from the US and UK and more recently, new language providers including Japan, China and Emirate countries themselves. In these discussions, the terms and conditions of class, race and identity are played out in new ways against backdrops of other conversations: particularly those which surround notions of globalisation, capitalism and commodification.

Social disconnection, or popular racism

The exploration of conversations about everyday teacher experience and practice from the different vantage point of its ontological context shows them to be underpinned by other notions that understand some students differently within the school community. The systemic and institutional arrangements that pattern daily activities take place within other and taken-for-granted notions that define the ways that teachers and other community members understand and behave towards each other. Numbers of other discourses – multiculturalism/monoculturalism, entrepreneurialism and sojourning – define ways students are identified and understood as community members. These tropes and debates about race and identity, neo-liberalism and naïve cosmopolitanism interpellate the ways that international students are understood in schools.

At stake are the ways in which entrenched understandings about identity and difference contained in everyday conversations have implications
for the ways in which migrant students, and more recently international students, are able to build and maintain social connections within communities. Rizvi's (1995) notion of 'popular racism' calls for new definitions of inter-ethnic relations, which draw attention to the day-to-day practices, structures and notions of everyday experience, and allow some to inhabit the world differently to others. His is a timely reminder of the ways that taken-for-granted assumptions concerning 'others' operate, not just at an individual or institutional level, but through ordinary interactions taking place on a daily basis. Exploring raced understanding involves understanding and contesting individual actions and relationships as they are shaped within the systemic and institutional devices and the historical and sociocultural understandings that shape (and are shaped) by them. Conversations about user-pays, markets and accountability - along with others about multiculturalism, monoculturalism and cosmopolitanism are not necessarily intended to exclude students from accessing everyday institutions. Nevertheless their existence as frames that define the identities and behaviours of individuals and groups within schools is unarguable.

In a more recent paper Rizvi (2005) interrogates the relationship between the 'popular racism' of the everyday and historical process of locality, positionality and globalisation, arguing that:

Globalisation is not simply the name for a new epoch in the history of capital or in the biography of the nation state, but is also marked by a new role for the imagination in social life. In relation to the various ways in which global processes now work, through the growth of flows of people, capital and images found in the media ... imagination has become a 'critical part of collective, social, everyday life and is a form of labor'. It involves processes through which people engage with ordinary life, consider options and make decisions, now in new forms of collaborations that are no longer confined to local communities but span across national boundaries.

(Rizvi 2005, p.165)

Processes of globalisation have reformulated the ways in which we understand and speak about the processes of everyday life, its systems and structures and the identities of those who live within it. In times of rapid global and demographic change conceptions of 'who we are' and 'who they are' seem blurred. Teachers and students shift between countries virtually and materially, school communities are demographically diverse and schools compete to sell their curriculum worldwide. Nevertheless, other identities remain as a looming presence. Notions defining a person's race, religion, ethnicity, culture and language (like gender and class) clarify their difference in relation to notional selves, redefine their otherness and the ways they are able to belong within 'our' community. Placed with the day-to-day performance of these phenomena the international student provides a particular and apt example of the manifestation of social connections in cosmopolitan times. International students, complicit within local school dreams of travel to far off places and intercultural interaction, indulge their own and their families' needs and desires to accumulate Western education. As the object of our dreams and our most intense desires,
international students find their otherness inscribed and embodied within schizophrenic processes of antagonism and desire shaped within powerful discourses of identity and difference and commodification. It is a process of interchange that positions the international student both inside and outside of the school community in new ways. Whether matters of social disconnection, or popular racism, such notions of identity and difference in cosmopolitan times need to be in interrogated.

Conclusion

Discourses and accompanying silences continue to shape the ways teachers in government secondary schools speak about their students in times of insurgent global change. The raced discussion of earlier times, reshaped by the terms and conditions of globalisation and of the internationalising process, nevertheless continues to mediate teachers’ discussions of their students. Taken-for-granted understandings and the materialities they inform continue to define who students are, how they are expected to behave and how they are able to belong within the community. In the case of international students, normative notions concerned with identity and difference are intricately enmeshed with others concerned with race and ethnicity, neo-liberalism, and cosmopolitanism. As local-global interaction and individualistic and market-driven changes have consequences for everyday lives these examples of social disconnection need to be spelt out and the notional and material consequences of this ‘everyday’ ‘race talk’ interrogated.

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