Reciprocal expressions of care: Older adults’ negotiation of community

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Acknowledgements: Jessica Terruhn, Nicole Ashley, Guanyu Ran, Janine Irvine
Northcote – a suburb undergoing considerable change
Living with (ethnic) diversity

- **Wise**: ‘everyday multiculture’ and ‘sensuous multiculturalism’
- **Amin**: ‘local liveability … the micropolitics of everyday social contact and encounter; ‘prosaic sites of cultural exchange and transformation’
- **Wessendorf**: ‘commonplace diversity’; ‘microspaces of conviviality’
- **Hage**: ‘everyday mixing’ is translated as a form of cultural capital for middle class white people; the consumption of difference
- **Lamont & Aksartova**: distinction between upper-middle-class cosmopolitans and ‘ordinary cosmopolitans’
- **Noble**: how might we ‘do recognition’?

- Little on how older adult residents of multiply diverse neighbourhoods ‘live with diversity’
Introducing the study

Living with (ethnic) diversity in Northcote

Multi-stage research with older adult (65+) residents of Northcote
  — Graphic time-lining interview;
  — Materiality and home interview;
  — Go-along interview;
  — Focus groups;
  — Reflexive interview
Results

• Older adults are not as resistant to change as the scholarship suggests!

• Participants told us they wanted to ‘get to know’ people different from themselves but often didn’t know how to bridge cultural and linguistic difference

• Rather than public spaces, the intimate space of the home was a site in which difference was negotiated.
Results

Boundaries of home are:
1. Momentarily opened through gestures of invitation and celebration (Roger);
2. Bridged through everyday practices that seek to form sustained connections (Margaret);
3. Collapsed as the home becomes an extension of community and community becomes an extension of home (Diana and Wallace)
Roger

Boundaries of home are momentarily opened through gestures of invitation and celebration
Well, we had Chinese New Year celebration here this year and I had about 18 Chinese people here … Yeah, only two people spoke English. So we had traditional Chinese New Year plus a kiwi barbeque, so we had both and it went off very, very well … you don’t need a lot of verbal communication to… communicate among the group, it is surprising how much you can get away with in sign language and food [laughter]

I’ve taken the lanterns down but I have left the dragon up because I like him [laughter]. But we did it Western and Chinese, so they came and did all the cooking with the dumplings and all the traditional New Year spring festival, but we also lit the barbeque and did a huge leg of lamb so it was a mixture of cultures.
Margaret
Boundaries of home are bridged through everyday practices that form sustained and ongoing connections

Photographer: Dave Simpson
After the kids grew up and [husband] moved out, I got international students and that brought a lot of pleasure into my life because I am hearing about their countries and helping to be responsible for them, you are not really responsible but making sure they are enjoying themselves ... He still calls me mum ... When I've got students here they go through a lot of soup [laughs]

I have a collage of photos down the hall, and most of them are ... students. I had one boy here for eight years ... Yeah, he came here from Thailand, no language, no English at all, thank you and good bye, after about a week we started to communicate and gradually it grew ... anyhow, we are still in touch
Wallace and Diana
Boundaries of the home are collapsed as the home becomes an extension of community and community becomes an extension of home
[Tongans] take some getting to know … it’s a real ring around to get to talk to them … most of the older Tongans, they only speak in their own language … they were a bit suspicious of me until the taro gardens flourished! … I went around one day and did all their gardens for them … you should have seen the smiles and the respect changed and reversed and even the younger ones are saying you put the taro garden in for my granddad ay! They always yell out to me, you know … you have to figure out ways of doing that … manaakitanga

I teach people how to grow puha in containers, how to propagate it, get the seed going, what are the best conditions … they’re very hardy … within six days you will see the plant pop up, I spent about 3 years studying it and making sure that we can grow it so people can grow a couple in polystyrene containers to feed the family and when you cut it and situate it, it will come up again from the root and give you more next time, maybe 20 shoots off the one piece so I have been encouraging people to do that

A lot has changed against our will … I got all these people around here to sign that I was their advocate [with regard to social housing] … gave me immense power and I said ‘we will stand by our families’ and then they suddenly realised that they had this mass up-swelling of people …
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• The home is a site in which diversity is negotiated
• The homes becomes a site in which expressions of care are realised
• These expressions of care generate *social poeisis* – practices that bring something into being that didn’t exist prior
• Asks us to reconsider community development:
  –The emphasis on neighbourhood, city or policy ignores the most private, intimate space of the home

• Emily Beausoleil: reassertion of dominance in the moment of recognition
  –These relations are all, to some extent, embedded within relations of power