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Biography

Michele Lobo is an Australian Research Council Senior Research Fellow (ARC DECRA) at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. She is a social and cultural geographer whose work draws on emotion and affect to explore intercultural encounters in public spaces of cities with majority cultures. Michele has published in *Gender, Place and Culture*, *Social and Cultural Geography*, *Population, Space and Place, Emotion, Space & Society*, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, *Journal of Cultural Geography*, *Urban Policy and Research* and *Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies*.

Abstract

Exploring cultures of belonging in Darwin, Australia

This paper argues that the use of visual methods such as participatory video is crucial to co-producing sensory and embodied knowledges of belonging in Australian cities. These knowledges of belonging that focus on affectivity and passion have the potential to expand the worlds that racialised bodies of colour inhabit, but contemporary urban research shows an overwhelming focus on 'talk'. This paper therefore takes the risk by engaging in a research process that is experimental, flexible and adaptive to explore diverse sensory cultures of belonging through a focus on Darwin, a small north Australian city. This is a city with a polyethnic history where Indigenous-migrant-settler race relations are recognised as more complex in comparison to large south Australian cities. The paper draws on participatory videos of two events in suburban Darwin - a Vigil on the side of the road opposite Airport Lodge, an asylum seeker detention centre, and an afternoon walk along Casuarina beach where Aboriginals who live 'rough' camp. Using short video clips, long-term residents, migrant newcomers and asylum seekers (on bridging visas) compose an expressive narrative of the road and beach in Darwin, as places where refrains of welcome expand worlds that racialised bodies of colour inhabit. Using digital technologies the flow and juxtaposition of video clips of these events provides the possibility to craft sensory and embodied knowledges of belonging in a north Australian city with a history of assimilationist and racially discriminatory policies.

Rosi Braidotti (2014, 315) in her exploration of a vital politics and an ethics of becoming asks the question 'how can we do justice to experiences that have no recognition in the language and practices of conventional wisdom'. She urges us to find an appropriate language for social engagement that is about affectivity and passion so that silences and missing voices can be heard and fixed identity categories overcome. This paper tries to find this language to explore everyday cultures of belonging in Darwin, a small north Australian city with a polyethnic history where Indigenous-migrant-settler race relations are recognised as more complex in comparison to large south Australian cities (Ford, 2009). In this city with a long history of assimilationist and discriminatory state and federal policies, a diverse and hypervisible Aboriginal, migrant and asylum seeker population is routinely pathologised and racialised. Responses to everyday racism simmers and surfaces through bodily intensities of hurt, frustration, anger, rage, and despair. These affective intensities or 'what *happens* to bodies' (Saldanha, 2010, 2414; original emphasis), however, continues to be legitimised by restrictive immigration policies, draconian border control acts and interventionist practices of surveillance, scrutiny and judgement (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007; Commonwealth of Australia, 2012; Australian Human Rights Commission 2013; Australian Government, 2015). These policies and practices are like 'deathly repetitions' (Guattari, 2000, 10) that unfold in public spaces of the city and cement cultures of belonging that privilege particular ways of being. Guattari (2000, 8) argues that repetitions that privilege particular ideas, tastes and ways of being, can saturate the unconscious, go 'round and round' in people's heads' and shrink the worlds that bodies inhabit. In Darwin when such repetitions unfold in public spaces they weigh down bodies and limit the possibilities for recomposing refrains of belonging that are inclusive, vitalising and central to the joy of life (Lobo, 2013). Such joy unfolds when encounters

welcome the openness of life as a process of becoming that cannot be contained and produces space as fluid rather than bounded (Ingold, 2011).

This paper argues that experimental methodologies such as participatory video provides the opportunity to craft knowledges of the city that vitalise bodies and expand their worlds. Such innovative methodologies that value embodied knowledges of banal or quotidian spaces, moments or situations in the lives of city dwellers that often escape language, have the potential to provide new insights into cultures of belonging and the capacity to live with difference. The paper draws on fieldwork in Darwin conducted in 2014 and 2015 among participants who used a simple video camera as they engaged in everyday events such as strolling in the shopping centre, walking along the beach, playing football, shopping at open-air markets or caring for country. It included video recordings of weekly/bi-weekly events such as open-air markets, vigils, sport, cooking, art and sewing activities; monthly events such as community dinners and annual events such as marches, ethnic minority festivals and Harmony Day celebrations. I have been part of these events over the last six years that were selected because they were social gatherings and collective initiatives that demonstrate conviviality as well as intercultural anxiety (Wise 2009). These events were held in semi-public and public spaces of the city such as public squares, parks, beaches, beach reserves, city/suburban streets, underground carparks and community centres. This paper, however, specifically focuses on two interconnected events that centres the entangled lives of migrant newcomers and asylum seekers with Aboriginals and long-term residents of diverse backgrounds in Darwin –a Vigil on the side of the road opposite Airport Lodge, an asylum seeker detention centre and an afternoon walk along Casuarina beach where Aboriginals who live 'rough' camp. The paper demonstrates that participatory video that values embodied and multisensory knowledges of the city has the potential to expand worlds that racialised bodies inhabit. Emerging research within urban studies and visual culture that explores the intensities of entangled movement that produce

place, suggests that expansion of worlds and the opening of potentialities occur through the ways that images are made, consumed and move forward through perceptions by embodied persons (Kindon 2003; Garrett, 2011; Pink 2007; 2008; 2011). In this paper this process is initiated through sharing space with participants who were invited to use a video camera to craft sensory knowledges of Darwin that highlighted moments of exclusion and racism, but also collective belonging. Together, we emerge as wayfarers whose paths cross and flow in the meshwork of life that produces places through the coupling of ongoing perception and action (Ingold 2011). Therefore, the aim of this paper is not to produce some verifiable objective truth or an accurate reflection of life in Darwin but diverse multisensory knowledges of place. However, I must acknowledge that in exploring these knowledges as a mature aged researcher of colour, I did exercise some power in the editing process even though I incorporated feedback from the participants. Also, even though the aim was to make editing a collaborative and transparent process, this may be problematic because two young Anglo-Australian women and one mature aged Canadian woman prepared the videos for consumption and also unintentionally exercised power. These videos were shown at a public creative exhibition held in Darwin in October 2015.

Events, images and public spaces

This paper uses moving images of singular events to craft embodied and sensory knowledges of belonging. Public spaces such as the road and the beach where these events unfold, that are the focus of this paper, are conceptualised as emergent assemblages composed of bodies, rhythms, orientations and atmospheres (McCormack, 2013) Such a composition of public space contributes to affective intensities or energies that register bodily as emotions, moods and feelings (McCormack, 2012; Stewart, 2014). However, because these public spaces are emergent assemblages, refrains that would normally shrink worlds that bodies inhabit can be recomposed – worlds expand. This is possible because singular events are empirical

happenings, but also much more than that - singular events have a ‘thisness’ that enables bodies to dwell in the moment through a slower multi-sensory layered experience (Connolly, 2010; McCormack, 2013; Zwicky, 2014). Such an experience is vitalising if it has the potential to take bodies in new and different directions (Guattari, 2000; Zwicky, 2014). In other words if something in the world resonates so that bodies are moved, sensations of fear, anxiety, hurt, frustration, anger, rage, and despair can be recomposed (Zwicky, 2014). Tapping into these multiple singular points that make up events, however, is difficult as these points are imperceptible at the level of cognition (Guattari, 2000). Guattari (2000), however, argues that it is the exploration of these singular points that have the potential to expand worlds bodies inhabit. This paper tries to tap into these singular points by engaging with a new vocabulary that involves thinking with moving images or videos of events taken by participants.

Zwicky (2014) argues that thinking with images provokes the imagination and its sensitivity to resonance that comes from being in and communicating with the world. It produces an ‘‘oh’ moment’ (Zwicky, 2014, 31) that strikes bodies like a shaft of light even before they have time to think cognitively or express their feelings in words. Here thought is more than a cerebral process and involves both mind and body acting together in moments, events and encounters with the world that are affective, excessive, oriented towards the future and only partially stabilised by practices, capacities, tendencies and affordances that are limiting (McCormack, 2013; Stewart, 2014). Perhaps a vocabulary that involves thinking with moving images addresses the call by Braidotti (2014) to engage in research that allows silences and missing voices to be heard and fixed identity categories overcome. In this paper thinking with moving images provides the possibility to explore how bodies have the potential to be

taken in new and different directions through their capacity to affect and be affected (Massumi, 2002).

Anderson (2012, 28) argues that affect is the 'aleatory dynamics of lived experience' that draws attention to the pre-personal realm of bodies. It is central to the 'push' of life because it invokes bodily intensities that ebb and flow in situations where action cannot be explained merely through cognition (Thrift, 2004; Amin and Thrift, 2013). Such a conceptual approach values imperceptible and almost unidentifiable catalytic forces, vibrations, energies, and rhythms that modulate events and give it expression (McCormack, 2013; Stewart, 2014). This paper shows that such affective forces are important to explore if racialised bodies are to be 'refuelled' and new refrains of public spaces reactivated.

Darwin

In Australia, 34.8% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population as well as 85% of overseas-born residents live in major urban areas with a population of over 100,000 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013; 2014). There is a valuable body of research on urban Aboriginality and the rights to public space that focuses on southern cities (Shaw, 2007), but work that focuses on anti-racist agendas and belonging in suburban areas of north Australian cities like Darwin is just emerging (Author, 2014a; 2014b; 2015). Paradies and Cunningham (2009) have underlined the urgent need to examine the impacts of racism on the everyday lives of residents in Darwin who feel angry, annoyed and frustrated when treated unfairly. Such emotions were reported by residents such as Susan, an Indigenous woman who said, "There's a lot of racism. Umm...like you go to a shop, you could be the first person there and they'll serve a white person...yeah...we get treated unfairly". Sam, an Indigenous man, on the other hand, spoke about tensions with migrants when he said, "The Africans nearly killed one countryman". Migrant newcomers from countries like Nigeria, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Myanmar, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh who face everyday racism were

reluctant to voice their feelings. Charmaine, a woman from the Philippines who has lived in Darwin several years was more outspoken. She said:

> *He told me I am bloody Filipino. When they ask you where you are from and then I say Filipino, they look up at me as if I am an easy girl.*

Fethi a young man on a bridging visa who had a wife and daughter aged less than a year, however, could only recall the trauma of travelling by boat from Indonesia, everyday life in the Airport Lodge detention centre and financial difficulties rather than moments of everyday racism. He said "*We are waiting for Abbott. We are kind of hostage to his goal/plan*". The family had little or no interaction with their neighbours, spent their free time at the Nightcliff beach, Casuarina shopping mall and had recently started attending church services.

Today, however, Darwin (pop. 83,020), the capital of the Northern Territory prides itself as evolving, dynamic, different and diverse city with a rich Indigenous history (Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation, 2006; City of Darwin 2012; 2015), but there are emerging everyday tensions that need to be addressed. In 2008, the city had the 7th highest urban Indigenous population in Australia which accounted for 9% of the population. In 2011, the overseas born population was 19,490 (23% of the total population) and 33% percent of this population arrived within five years prior to 2011 (City of Darwin, 2015). These percentages fail to reflect a transient Indigenous population (including 'Long Grassers' who live in green spaces), an asylum seeker population visible in public spaces in the rapidly growing northern and eastern suburbs, residents from the satellite town of Palmerston in the south-east as well as visitors who are often tourists, bureaucrats, American army personnel, fly-in fly-out workers and professionals. Given Darwin's northern tropical location, history of poly-ethnicity that predates the arrival of white settlers and white supremacist acts that regulated everyday family life of Aboriginal peoples, the dynamics of intercultural relations in Darwin is quite different from southern metropolitan cities like Sydney and Melbourne (Ganter, 2006). Darwin is situated

within highly politicised national and international public debates on racism, asylum seeker policies and Indigenous wellbeing (Lea et al., 2006; FaCHSIA, 2009; Ford, 2009; Lea, 2014). The closing of detention centres for asylum seekers who arrive by boat (Northern Immigration Detention Centre, Airport Lodge), the opening of new detention centres on the outskirts of Darwin (Blaydin Point and Wickham Point opened in 2011); recent media and bystander reports of African-Aboriginal conflict and federal intervention in the form of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007) and the Stronger Futures Legislation (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012) means that urban cultures of belonging are complex and is connected to shifting local, national and global discourses of who is welcome and valued as an urban/Australian citizen. This paper therefore aims to provide a modest contribution into understanding how quotidian situations such as a Vigil outside a detention centre and a banal moment of walking along the beach in Darwin play a part in recomposing refrains of the city as welcoming.

Thinking with moving images - Keeping Vigil at the fence

A red dirt space with grassy patches and trees near a rough gravelly road with speeding cars and buses is a public space where a loose network of residents committed to advocating for the rights of asylum seekers gather once a week in the afternoon. Across the road is Airport Lodge an alternative place of detention (APOD) for unaccompanied minors and families. Although this weekly/bi-weekly Vigil has been held over several years, today there seems to be a thicker pall of gloom as we gather to remember Reza Berati, a young Iranian man who died under tragic circumstances, a month earlier in the offshore detention centre at Manus Island, Papua New Guinea. Mansour, a newcomer from Iran who arrived by boat and had spent 8 months at

the offshore detention centre on Christmas Island and 3 years in Darwin was keen to attend this Vigil that commemorates the life of a young Iranian man.

"I feel for them" – Mansour uses the camera – (Video Clip 1)

It is the end of the wet season (Nov-March) and Mansour shows me the direction of Darwin airport and the two-storeyed detention centre. The camera also captures the cloudy, dark afternoon sky, the gravelly road and the green cyclone wire fence. This is the first Vigil Mansour is attending and through conversations across the fence, he has heard that there are 40 residents including families with young children who have been there more than a year. This is because many of the residents have been moved to Wickham Point, a large detention centre on the outskirts of Darwin. Mansour has never lived at Airport Lodge, but he knows what daily life is like in a detention centre. Ironically, the only job he could get after being released was as a security guard at Wickham Point. Mansour says:

> *Yeah, because I have been there and I can feel [for] them. That's why, I just wanna support them. I just come in, show myself, yeah, to support the refugee. Yeah. My feeling is very bad. Because I have been there I know how they treat the refugee.*

Standing near the fence for about one and a half hours, the trauma, fear and despair that circulates in the atmosphere is felt and is contagious. For Mansour who said 'my feeling is very bad', it registers as a blockage in this space where detainees are denied human dignity and subject to 24 hr surveillance by guards and CCTV cameras…they are afraid to come to fence or stand on the verandah that runs along the side of the two storeyed building made from shipping containers. The sky is grey and thunderstorm is brewing…it begins to rain. Perhaps Mansour's presence at the fence produces a flicker of hope that momentarily disturbs or

perturbs the trauma, fear and despair. This is evident because Mansour's body is affected and he says:

> *It is good to come here to talk to them and give them hope, especially like I have been in detention, now I am out. Now I have a life, so yeah, it is good for them too.*

Mansour works 14 hours a day from Monday to Saturday, but today is Sunday and his video clip of this banal space registers affective intensities of despair that circulates in the atmosphere but also the potential for hope. As a former detainee who is free, he communicates this hope through conversations with asylum seekers.

15-minute film –"They're not forgotten" (Video clip 2)

This film that brings together video clips by a long-term resident and Mansour shows that bodies who keep vigil by standing at the fence or sitting quietly along the road are moved. Large cardboard placards demand basic human rights and a wreath made from fresh green leaves is placed on the fence. People who drive past wave. Soon a few asylum seekers venture out, children hold hands/wave to each other across the fence and there are conversations in Persian as well as English. These embodied experiences are interrupted by memories of an event, 'Playing for Change', when Filipino and Aboriginal musicians gathered at the fence. The short edited 15 minute film brings together the different video clips to compose an expressive narrative that is more than just a representation of the Vigil. At the studio we experiment with the different multisensory narratives and arranged the video clips in a sequence - we send the 15-minute film to the participants for feedback. We exercise power by composing and recomposing space through digital technologies so that tendencies or affordances flicker in and out of view. Stewart (2014) in exploration of the banal space of the emerging assemblage of the road argues that while blockages register it is crucial that they do not congeal to produce a public space with hardened edges and that tendencies and capacities are also set in motion. In this modest way, the hope is that the film emerges as a co-production

that produces multiple refrains and recomposes the road as an emergent assemblage. This space perhaps is no longer a public space with hardened boundaries when registers that are visual, enunciative, sensory, facial and expressive can be engaged with through moving images (McCormack, 2013; Stewart, 2014).

Juxtaposing moving images (Video Clip 3)

What if we interrupt this recomposition of public space by juxtaposing moving images that focus on different sides of the road – the red dirt patch and the detention centre. McCormack (2013) argues that when images are juxtaposed, refrains get mixed up and modified. In other words the rhythm and affective energy of one modifies the other and in the process new affective refrains emerge. It involves editing, manipulation and modification that focuses less on creating a linear sequence. In the studio we experiment with the moving images so that the affective energies of trauma and despair near the fence around Airport Lodge is modified by a moving image of another event – Shiraz walking along the beach. Shiraz, is a newcomer from Myanmar who arrived by boat and lives with his mother in a northern suburb; his father lives at the Wickham Point detention Centre on the outskirts of Darwin. Over the last 3 years, Shiraz has sought refuge in several countries such as Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. He arrived in Australia less than a year ago and is anxious about when he will be recognised as a 'genuine' refugee and when his father will be released. Shiraz is on a bridging visa and tries to go through the long day (it was Ramadan, the period of fasting before the Eid festival) by playing football with friends or walking along Casuarina beach. When I tell him about my research in Darwin, he is eager to walk with me along the beach. Rather than talk, he uses the video camera and asks me to listen as we walk toward the beach. We hear loud voices even though we cannot see anybody camping in the shady grove. Shiraz points and says "Aboriginal" thrice. Shiraz then uses the camera to capture the flat sandy beach backed by

mangrove trees. As someone who arrived by boat, the sea brings back memories of dangerous voyages, but the beach provides a sense of comfort. Shiraz says:

> *[From the boat], we don't see the beach, only water. So dangerous.*

Moving images and Ambient sounds (Video clip 4)

What are the effects when we include ambient sounds to explore the road and the beach? One can hear chirping birds, the sound of cars driving past, the crunch of gravel as our feet hit the road and the sound of Aboriginal languages. Perhaps this what Wang Jing (2012) calls 'affective listening'. She argues that affective listening is what a sensing body does, and how it engages with the vitality of the world before perception, experience and understanding. It includes an openness to environmental sounds that are both natural as well as social and cultural (Wang Jing, 2012). In this situation it includes the sound of chirping birds as well as sound of chatter in Aboriginal languages. Such listening that is affective rather than interpretive shows an embodied connection to the environment that is comforting. This is what Wang Jing (2012) calls a body that is 'comfortably situated' in a material or natural world. But it is only when we use technology to craft these moving images is it possible to capture these sounds that are comforting but escape cognition.

Crafting knowledges of public space: hardened boundaries or energetic co-compositions

This paper has shown that thinking with moving images evokes sensations that are difficult to capture through words. Such an experimental approach to understanding belonging provides the possibility to recraft knowledge of public spaces by drawing on videos taken by participants of banal moments and quotidian situations that are part of their everyday life. Nikos Papistergadis (2006, 49) argues that the camera opens bodies to an 'unconscious optics' In other words, video recordings allow sensations, affordances and capacities to come to the fore that affect bodies even though these intensities escape consciousness. Felt perception is a variation of intensity that opens up bodies to a world beyond themselves, a kind of selflessness

that depends on the spatial and temporal context (Massumi, 2002; Wang Jing, 2012). Bodies do not function as filters for interpretation but channels through which affective intensities pass and movement is initiated (Wang Jing, 2012). Perhaps the fence and beach where bodies, rhythms/refrains and atmospheres meet, emerges as a metamorphic zone where such movement is initiated through 'energetic composition' (Stewart, 2014, 556). Using digital technologies the flow and juxtaposition of video clips of two events that unfold on the road and the beach provides the possibility to craft sensory and embodied knowledges of belonging in a north Australian city through refrains that expand worlds.

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