'I'm a local...': fostering 'belonging' for former refugees in regional Australia through inclusive partnerships

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“I’m a Local...”

Fostering belonging for former refugees in regional Australia through inclusive partnerships

Dr Leticia Anderson & Mr Rob Cumings

The Asian Conference on Cultural Studies, June 1-3, 2018 (Kobe, Japan)
Overview

• Australian race relations – historical context
• African refugees and asylum seekers in Australia
• Regional resettlement experiences: Lismore
• Why “I’m A Local...”? 
• Project impacts and learnings
Historical context

- Settler-colonial society with unresolved legacies
- Race the defining characteristic of Australian identity
Multicultural Australia?

‘Immigrants (“New Australians”) could come, but on the condition they would give up their foreignness and assimilate into the “Australian Way of Life”.’ Tavan (2017), pp. 159-160.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5. Support for diversity</th>
<th>Cultural diversity is good (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>80.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree/disagree</td>
<td>15.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>4.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6. Support for assimilation</th>
<th>Support for assimilation (%)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>48.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neither agree/disagree</td>
<td>32.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>18.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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Challenging Racism 2015-2016
Refugees and asylum-seekers from African nations in Australia

• Cuts to African region resettlement programs (RCA, 2017);

• Refugees and asylum-seekers from African nations face ‘complex challenges...[and] regularly confront systemic and institutional racism’ (UTS, 2015);

• African-Australians report higher levels of discrimination than other groups (Scanlon Foundation, 2016).

Moral panics (Wahlquist, 2018)
Regional resettlement: Lismore

- Local institutions and agencies vital to successful resettlement (UTS, 2015);
- Push for regional resettlement not always accepted by communities (Puteho, 2015).
- Lismore:
  - Population: 43,000;
  - 40% post-secondary education;
  - 78% born in Australia or UK;
  - 6% Indigenous (ABS, 2016).
"I love being able to take my child to childcare just around the corner from my place. I am qualified and work as an Assistant in Nursing."

Cassie Aguot
Cassie was born in Kenya and is a proud mum. She came to Lismore in 2005. Moving for a short while to Adelaide, Cassie became homesick for Lismore and came back here to live. She is a member of her local basketball team. She is currently studying the ‘Preparing For Success’ tertiary preparation program at Southern Cross University.

"I love Lismore because it has very good people and everything is so close – the shops and school."

Mary Ajok
Mary was born in South Sudan. She has lived in Lismore since 2005 and loves being a local. Mary is a proud mother and grandmother. Mary smiles a lot.
I’M A LOCAL...

“I am a local because I participate in my local community. I play in the annual African All Stars vs Lismore Legends football match, attend my local church and have studied and continue to study locally. I am a member of Lismore Thistles Soccer Club. It has nice, friendly members who have helped me learn many skills.”

Anthony Leju

Anthony was born in South Sudan and has lived in Lismore since 2008. He has been a student at Wyrallah Road Public School and Lismore High School and is now studying a Bachelor of Nursing at Southern Cross University.

I’M A LOCAL...

“I am a member of the Lismore African Choir. I love working with people, the feeling of being connected to each other and supportive of each other. At church, I have met people who inspire me and who love me unconditionally.”

John Mapatano

John was born in Democratic Republic of the Congo, has lived in three countries and came to Lismore in 2015. John has worked as a volunteer disability support worker for people with special needs in the community. He is an early childhood educator who is dedicated to supporting children realise their potential in education. John is currently studying a Bachelor of Social Welfare at Southern Cross University.
“I am part of the community by playing sport. I have made quite a lot of friends here just playing sport. I was kind of shy in kindergarten. Now I go to Trinity Catholic College I have lots of friends, who I hang out with every day. I’m proud of who I am and happy to live in Lismore.”

**Augustine Leju**

Augustine was born in South Sudan and has lived in Lismore since 2008. He started his schooling at Wyrallah Road Public School and is now a student at Trinity Catholic College. Augustine is a very keen sportsman, starting to play soccer at six and now playing rugby union as well.

“Lismore has nice warm arms that welcomed me and my family to this community. It has become my home.”

**Aggrey Leju**

Aggrey was born in South Sudan and has lived in Lismore since 2008. He started his schooling here at Wyrallah Road Public School and is now a student at Trinity Catholic College. Aggrey is an active member of Thistles Soccer Club and the Lismore City Rugby Club. He loves his school and ‘hanging out with his friends’.
‘I’m a Local…’: Project outline

- Posters displayed in more than 50 local business and organisations (SCU Media release, 2017);
- Wide range of community events coordinated in conjunction with the project;
- Wide coverage in local and regional media (e.g. Echo, 2017);
- High levels of community support displayed through the project for former refugees in the region.
“These great photographs are already on display at Lismore and Goonellabah libraries. The Story time sessions at both libraries are also celebrating cultural diversity in Refugee Week. So proud to be involved in this program...the photographs are wonderful.”

“Amazing photography - well done...great initiative.”

“Well done! Great project, great people, great cause.”

“We have several refugee families at the College and they bring so much to our community. Seeing refugees as individuals will hopefully challenge the unhelpful stereotypes students are exposed to on a daily basis. Thanks.”

Social Media Comments on the project