The stranger who comes today and leaves after-tomorrow. An analysis of current concerns with migrants’ and refugees’ regional settlement and mobility

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Abstract
The regional migration and settlement of migrants and refugees is an issue that concerns a wide range of actors beyond the migrating subjects themselves. These include policy makers involved in the management of migration, state governments seeking to address regional labour shortages and demographic decline, so-called host communities responding to newcomers, and local businesses in demand of compliant labour. These diverse agents tend to share a general interest in the attraction and largely also the retention of migrants or refugees. A closer analysis reveals the diverse expectations of migrants and refugees that inform the concerns of non-migrant, non-refugee actors with migrants’ and refugees’ settlement and mobility. This paper explores regional migrant and refugee settlement, relevant policy rationales and the existing research on these forms of settlement with a focus on interests and perspectives on regional settlers held in the so-called host society. It suggests that these interests and specific perspectives on the ‘stranger’ are indicative of a currently prevailing understanding and governmental framing of a multicultural Australia based on migration management.

Keywords: regional settlement, immigration policy, migration management, the stranger

Introduction
Georg Simmel’s classical essay about the ‘stranger’ (first published in 1908), distinguished the ‘stranger’ as ‘somebody who comes today and stays tomorrow’ from the ‘wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow’ (Simmel 1950: 402). The
‘stranger’ embodies simultaneously the wanderer’s mobility and the settler’s sedentary nature, he is ‘the potential wanderer; although he (sic!) has not moved on, he has not quite overcome the freedom of coming and going’ (402). Another characteristic of Simmel’s figure of the stranger is his objectivity as ‘a positive and specific kind of participation’ (404). Simmel warned against misunderstanding this objectivity as a passive *tabula rasa* on which an unknown environment inscribes itself and defined it rather as a kind of freedom, which allows the stranger to ‘experience and treat even his close relationships as though from a bird’s-eye view’, free from being ‘tied down in his action by habit, piety, and precedent’ (405). Albeit more than 100 years old and subject to much misinterpretation (McLemore 1970), critique (Stichweh 1997) and reconceptualization (Alexander 2004), these sociological reflections on the stranger provide a useful starting point for reflecting on the expectations of migrants and refugees that underlie current regional settlement policy and practice in Australia.

The national imagination and popular discourses suggest that immigrants and cultural diversity combine poorly with non-metropolitan locations in western societies (Jordana et al. 2009). Country areas are often sketched in shades of red as in ‘redneck’ and white as in Anglo-Celtic dominated, which seems to imply that immigration to these areas would only occur by error, not by choice or even governmental design. However recent policy and demographic trends suggest the contrary (Hugo 2009, 2008), Australia’s managed migration program has more than dabbled with regional settlement and increasing numbers of migrants and refugees decide by themselves to make the move to country Australia. This and the dominant focus on cities in sociological accounts of migration and settlement renders the analysis of prevailing interests in *regional* migration and the associated perspectives on the ‘stranger’ socially, politically and intellectually relevant.

After a brief review of regional settlement and settlement policy in Australia¹, I will address some of the key concerns that have guided research on this form of settlement. This provides the foundation for a discussion of three prevalent perspectives towards regionally settling migrants and refugees. These perspectives and the associated figures of the ‘stranger’ have emerged from research on an ongoing ARC Linkage Project on the regional and rural settlement of visible refugees and
migrants. This research investigates the social, political and economic factors that impact on the settlement experience of recently arrived, visible migrants and refugees in regional and rural Australia.

**Regional settlement and settlement policy in Australia**

A migrant presence in regional areas in Australia is not all new. Colonial governments have indeed hoped for immigrants to go ‘up country’ (Cahill 2007). Indentured labourers were brought from India, China and the Pacific Islands to work on remote pastoral runs, and various gold rushes across Australia attracted numerous migrants from non-European countries, including most notably China, to mining areas in the 1850s and 1860s (Yawood 2002). This latter immigration was met with significant levels of hostility from the earlier white settlers (Yawood 2002). Immigration from different European countries led to ethnic clusters in several regional locations, and up until the 1920s the most multicultural city in Victoria was the regional city of Ballarat (Cahill 2007). The demand for labour in the context first of land development and irrigation schemes (Sherington 2001) then of agricultural and manufacturing industries saw also spontaneous regional resettlement of migrants and refugees throughout the 20\(^{th}\) century. Australian governments made several attempts to encourage migrants and refugees to settle in regional areas since WWII (Jupp 2002), but the rate of non-metropolitan migrant settlers has decreased over the 1947-96 period (Withers and Powell 2003) and has always been significantly smaller than that of born Australians (Hugo 2009).

The mid 1990s saw a surge in political interest in attracting newly arriving immigrants to rural areas at the level of the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (Babacan 1998; Withers and Powell 2003) as well as State governments with Victoria in a leading role. This was based on the recognition that migrants gravitate to large cities (particularly Sydney and Melbourne), while regional areas increasingly experienced labour shortages and negative population growth. Perceiving a link between population and immigration policy the Commonwealth Victoria Working Party on Migration identified a need to increase the dispersal of migrants into those regional areas (CVWPM 2004). Different policy programs were
designed in response to the apparent mismatch between population decline and labour demand in country areas (Hugo 2009).

Firstly, a number of State Specific and Regional Migration programs (SSRMs) and then a Skilled Independent Regional (SIR) visa were created to channel migrants into particular regions with more acute labour shortages (Galligan and Horvath 2009). Secondly, refugee settlement and relocation pilots were started in several regional sites to address both regional needs for labour and growth and refugees’ difficulties in accessing urban labour markets. They included programs that directly resettled ‘unlinked’ refugees, that is, refugees with no social connections in Australia (e.g. to Shepparton and Ballarat in Victoria) (DIAC 2010a; Piper & Associates 2007; 2009), and others that relocated refugees from Melbourne to a regional location (e.g. Warrnambool in Victoria) (ICEPA 2007). Over recent years, Australian State and Territory Governments have gained increased flexibility to be involved in the skilled and business migration programs and determine how aspects of the programs can be used to best meet their own development needs (Hugo 2008). The percentage of recently arrived migrants who settle outside capital cities has grown from 13.7 in 1996 to 16.1 in 2006 (Hugo, 2009).

The policy rationale of the depicted programs as of Australia’s immigration program more generally, is the shaping of current migration and settlement patterns in the national - usually presented as national economic - interest. This rationale is hardly ever questioned in public discourse. It is worth noting here that Australia alongside Canada has been at the forefront of ‘migration management’ and in particular the selection of migrants on a skills-basis, which Cohen has aptly referred to as ‘immigration shopping’ (Cohen 2006: 187). The policy of migration management is by now an uncontested fact, public debate evolves generally about its intricacies, successes or failures, as for example in the case of ‘border control’.

**Accounts of attraction, settlement and retention**

Regional migration and settlement remains an under-explored area in the growing body of sociological scholarship on immigration and multiculturalism. The bulk of research in this area has occurred on demand of government such as the Department
of Immigration and Citizenship (and its previous incarnations) (Piper & Associates 2007; 2009), the Department of Transport and Regional Services (ICEPA 2005) or the Victorian State Government (Sinha and Dobric 2006). Besides, some analyses originated from the community sector (Taylor and Stanovic 2005), academia (Johnston et al. 2009) or a combination of the two (Nsubuga-Kyobe 2004; McDonald et al. 2008). For the purpose of this paper I will briefly review this body of research in the light of prevalent research aims and the perspectives on migrants and refugees underlying these aims.

Unsurprisingly government-commissioned research on regional migrants, has largely focused on employment outcomes and immigrant retention in regional and rural areas. For example a recent national survey among immigrants in regional and rural Australia commissioned by the Commonwealth of Australia, Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation explored the central factors of attraction and retention (CSU News, 2010). Two previous surveys investigated the employment outcomes, settlement experiences and regional retention of migrants who had arrived under different visa schemes (DIMIA 2005a; 2005b). The focus of these surveys was to assess the effectiveness of those schemes in achieving the policy goal of migrant retention in designated regional areas as well as employer satisfaction with these schemes. Beside labour market outcomes, the assessment of qualifications and earnings, the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA) examines also housing arrangements and community involvement for different groups of migrants. LSIA survey analyses also provide insights into the differences in outcomes between people who migrate under different visa categories; the impact of personal attributes such as English language proficiency, age, formal education, prior work status and gender on economic independence; and the role played by Australian migrant services in assisting settlement (Richardson et al. 2004a; 2004b). Human capital and thus productive capabilities are the dominant lens on migrants, considered in isolation of other influences such as employment policies or discrimination (Ho and Alcorso 2004).

Government-commissioned evaluations of the direct settlement of refugees had a different scope. They aimed to identify lessons learnt by the stakeholders involved in the settlement process and its preparation. The focus was hence on administrators and
administrative processes, while considering the outcomes of these processes for refugees (Piper & Associates 2007; 2009).

Different sets of questions have been addressed by community-sector and academic researchers in this area. The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation commissioned study on refugee resettlement in regional and rural Victoria (McDonald et al. 2008) aimed to increase an understanding of the impact of resettlement and relocation programs on the health and wellbeing of refugees and the impact of these programs on regional communities. Taylor’s and Stanovic’s (2005) research on Iraqi refugees in Shepparton and Sudanese refugees in Colac and Warrnambool explored the settlement experiences of these groups with a focus on the extent of their social inclusion, and Johnston (et al 2009) investigated the impact of dispersal policies on the integration experience of Iraqi refugees.

A common feature of both the government-commissioned evaluations as well as the community sector-originating research on regional settlement is a concern with the needs particularly of refugees who settle in regional locations, the corresponding gaps in service provision and infrastructure and how these gaps could be better addressed to improve settlement outcomes. The tacit and mostly unquestioned assumption in the reviewed research is that these settlers are there to stay, thus to act differently from significant numbers of locals, especially those in the young adult age group who have left the regional or rural area to seek for better opportunities elsewhere (Withers and Powell 2003). The underlying perspective on the regionally settling migrant or refugee is hence that of ‘the stranger who comes today and stays tomorrow’.

**Figures of the ‘stranger’ in regional Australia**

Different from Alfred Schuetz’s (1944) reflections on the stranger as a ‘newcomer’, based largely on adopting the stranger’s perspective and using the specific example of the immigrant, Simmel’s analysis focused on the stranger by adopting the perspective of the ‘in-group’, the society into which the stranger enters (McLemore 1970). The latter perspective is also at the centre of the present discussion.

Much sociological analysis drawing on the figure of the stranger has focused on metropolitan settings and on the responses to strangers, such as asylum seekers or
refugees (e.g. Klocker 2004; Tazreiter 2002). The aim of the present discussion differs from this body of work in that it focuses on regional locations and on the prevailing explicit or implicit expectations of newcomers. Based on a preliminary research analysis, I have identified the following three subtypes.

The ‘useful’ stranger

The directing of migrants to regions of labour shortages and demographic decline is informed by an understanding of the stranger as a ‘useful’ figure (Karakayali 2006). The underlying hope or policy objective is to retain ‘useful’ strangers, where and as long as they are needed. This rationale has also underpinned various ‘labour import’ programs across the world throughout the centuries, from slave labour in ancient times to indentured labour in 19th century manufacturing and ‘guestworker’ programs in post-war Europe. The limitations of government and business-design in recent history have been well documented however in the aftermath of guestworker programs in countries such as Germany and Austria. So-called guest workers often stayed on, joint increasingly by their families, and migration continued regardless of the official stop of the labour import program following the ‘oil crisis’ in 1973 (Castles 2006). What defied the design of migration managers was quite simply the reality of these migrants’ lives and their life choices unfolding over time which turned the site of their employment increasingly into the site of their life. As the Swiss writer Max Frisch famously observed: ‘We called for labour, and people have come.’ The figure of the ‘useful’ stranger frames migrants or refugees however primarily in terms of their use value without regarding the complexity of their lives, dreams and aspirations. In a regional location that tends to lack the influx of labour that cities attract, the newly arriving migrant that readily picks up any vacant work is thus found particularly ‘useful’.

The ‘good’ settler

This subtype is closest to ‘the stranger who comes today and stays tomorrow’. Reactions to the staying stranger notably vary, ranging from outright rejection to toleration, acceptance and sometimes inclusion, or, as Bauman (2002) suggested in his analysis of the ‘making of strangers’, assimilation or exclusion. In the context of
this paper, I want to shift attention away from the making of strangers to a host society’s expectation of the ‘stranger’s’ continued presence. The ‘good’ migrant and refugee are expected to stay and contribute to local life, at least in the medium and ideally in the long run. A typically expected contribution of the recently arrived migrant in a regional location is employment, alongside volunteering and participation in community events, for example through contributing a bit of ethnicity to the occasional, organised display of cultural diversity, the ‘seasoning than can liven up the dull dish that is white mainstream culture’ (hooks 1992, 21). At a more general level, the stranger who stays is expected to ‘settle in’, adjust to her life in new surroundings and ‘get on with her life’. This general formulation is telling in its inherent expectation of the newcomer’s commitment to stay. While there is some overlap between the ‘useful’ and the ‘good’ settler, a significant difference lies precisely in the temporal dimension of continued settlement and all it entails. The temporary worker on a 457 visa may be considered utterly useful by businesses yet is not necessarily framed as a ‘good’ stranger by the host community.

The ‘inconveniently mobile’ stranger

Settlement is usually described as a transition process, containing of different phases of reorientation and adjustment that may lead to variable outcomes (MacDonald et al 2008). These analyses suggest that settlement is a process that occurs in one place albeit over a considerable length of time. Many migrants and refugees however choose to continue their journey after arrival, they are indeed strangers ‘who come today and leave tomorrow’ (Simmel 1950: 402) or after-tomorrow perhaps. They may decide to do so because things have not worked out as well as they hoped in one place, they may be seeking out better employment opportunities, they may want to purchase a house they can afford and would enjoy living in, they may feel isolated and disconnected where they currently live, they may want to live closer to a university to provide their children with better prospects for the future, to name only a few examples. In sum, they may simply practice the ‘freedom of the stranger’ as described by Simmel, which allows them to survey opportunities in one location, free from ‘being tied down in (their) action by habit, piety, and precedent’ (Simmel 1950: 405), and move on to look for a different place as a result of this assessment. What the preliminary findings of the research discussed in this paper suggest, is that this
mobility is often met with disappointment or even disapproval in regional locations. The secondary migration of migrants and refugees emerges indeed as a phenomenon that challenges the mantra of migration management. It also poses challenges to those involved in the planning and provision of services targeted to these groups. Furthermore I would argue that it challenges perspectives towards the stranger promoted in current Australian multiculturalism. The stranger who comes, sees for herself and moves on based on these decisions does not fit neatly into the image of ‘all of us’ (VMC 2009) ‘living in harmony’ or diversity iii.

Conclusion

Schuetz (1944) explored the figure of the stranger in terms of a ‘newcomer who fails to become a fully participating member of the group’ (McLemore 1970, 89). Simmel (1908/1950) suggested that the stranger who comes and stays can be differentiated from the wanderer who comes and goes, and highlighted the stranger’s objectivity and freedom compared to the settler. Both scholars were interested in how the fact of being in but not of a social group can affect social relationships, recognizing the challenges this may generate for the stranger herself (especially in Schuetz), and for the group she joins (in Simmel). In the case of regional settlement which I have explored in this paper, the migrant or refugee who comes and goes again, not tomorrow perhaps but metaphorically speaking after-tomorrow, who ‘has not quite overcome the freedom of coming and going’ in Simmel’s terms, appears to be a more unsettling figure than the stranger who comes and stays. Contrary to more recent conceptualizations of the stranger, which tend to focus on urban contexts, I contend that the very fact of the stranger’s material mobility is far from being met by indifference in non-metropolitan contexts. In seeking to understand what makes the idea of continued mobility disconcerting to some stakeholders, I have explored the perspectives on migrants and refugees settling in regional areas that underlie the mantra of migration management in this area, and have explored the questions that underlie recent research on this form of settlement. Regional settlement has come to be considered a political desirable as long as the decision on who settles where, stays with a local or national stakeholder, whether government or business, not with the settling subject. However, migrants and refugees choose for manifold reasons to move to or away from regional locations, for
example because of family ties, affordable housing or employment opportunities. Besides these migrating subjects themselves, other individuals hold their own perspectives and expectations about migrant and refugee regional settlement. Among these I have identified three figures: the ‘useful’, the ‘good’ and the ‘inconveniently mobile’ stranger. The ‘good’ and the ‘useful’ migrant and refugee in particular are implicit in both current policy design and public discourse on immigration and multiculturalism, while the ‘inconveniently mobile stranger’ appears to be perceived as more of a technical problem by those working on the ground of the big migration management scheme. All three figures are indicative of presently existing understandings of Australian multiculturalism.

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While lacking a universally accepted definition, *regional* Australia describes all non-metropolitan areas, that is, all areas with less than 100,000 inhabitants (Withers and Powell 2003). *Rural* refers to a connection to and/or dependence on agriculture (Gray and Lawrence 2001).

The research is led by Prof Brian Galligan and Dr Millsom Henry-Waring at the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne and carried out in partnership with the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC). By ‘recently arrived’ we mean within the last five to seven years. Visibility is understood as a relative category, which only ever carries meaning in relation to a particular place and time. The underlying assumption is that a person may be perceived or perceive herself as standing out through cultural or racialised features (Virdee et al. 2006) from a given majority in one area at a particular time.

*Living in Harmony* was the name of a funding initiative of the Commonwealth Government, established in 1998, which has now evolved into the *Diverse Australia* Program (DIAC 2010).