

## Everyday Multiculturalism

*Amanda Wise*

... well-grounded and illuminating analytic points flow only from bringing concepts into a relationship with the messiness of ordinary life, somehow recorded.

*The Ethnographic Imagination* - Paul Willis

Angela Merkel's 2010 declaration that 'multiculturalism has failed' resonated among conservatives across the world. It played into the naive idea that multiculturalism could be discarded in favour of integration and assimilation just by 'declaring it so'. Those who are different would magically learn to blend in with the dominant majorities in the societies in which they settled. These ideas flourish in the muddled semantic terrain that is multiculturalism. At the state level, multiculturalism is understood as a set of policies and programmes of migrant integration and settlement that allow migrant and minority communities to retain, maintain and develop cultural and religious practices and belief systems. It also signals questions of national identity in settler societies like Canada and Australia. Comments like Merkel's imply that these policies encourage minority cultures to live un-integrated 'parallel lives' to the mainstream, and multiculturalism is to blame for a myriad of social ills from terrorism to urban crime and poor school performance. In part such views gained traction because the everyday lived reality of diversity remained absent from public, political, and scholarly discourse.

Everyday multiculturalism emerged as a concept in the 2000s to mark out the 'fact of diversity' as a separate, though related, empirical object. Everyday multiculturalism (Wise and Velayutham 2009) is a situated approach to understanding the everyday dimensions of multiculturalism as it is lived. As opposed to policy-oriented multiculturalism focused on group based rights, service provision and legislation, the everyday multiculturalism perspective explores how cultural diversity is experienced and negotiated on the ground in everyday situations such as neighbourhoods, schools, and workplaces, and how social relations and social actors' identities are shaped and reshaped in the process. While the focus is on everyday interactions, the everyday multiculturalism perspective does not exclude wider social, cultural and political processes, institutions and structures. Indeed, the key to the everyday multiculturalism approach is to understand how these filter through to the realm of everyday practice, disposition, encounter and meaning-making. The term 'multiculturalism' is used in favour of 'interculturalism' to capture these intersections and avoid the trap of equating interculturalism to interpersonal interactions across difference.

The everyday multiculturalism perspective is both a way of observing and a way of conceiving diversity as it is

lived on the ground daily by people. It challenges 'ethnicity' as a singular, contained unit of analysis and starting point for research. Instead, everyday multiculturalism research takes an interactional, typically place-situated approach to understanding the dynamic nature of urban multiculturalism. It incorporates a particular set of qualitative methods where people's everyday experiences and encounters with difference are placed into the larger cultural, political, economic and social contexts in which they are occurring. Operationalising everyday multiculturalism calls for a thoroughly interdisciplinary approach, drawing on work from sociology, cultural studies, human geography and anthropology. Some of the sub-themes explored by those working in this field include the rituals and everyday practices that underpin the development of communities of difference; how (intercultural) habitus and embodied dispositions interact with lived diversity, emotions, affect and the senses; material cultures; everyday cultural exchange and transformation; cultural hybridities; civility and incivility; networks, reciprocity, solidarity and gift exchange; everyday scripts, speech practices, code switching and humour, and their role in drawing and overcoming racial boundaries; how space and place mediate encounters with and meanings made of difference – and how relations of power and wider discourses and politics and institutions interplay through all of these. A focus on the everyday includes documenting positive signs of an emergent openness to difference as well as everyday racisms. Understanding the multifaceted lived complexity of super-diversity is at the heart of this approach.

The sites of study include any domain of life where everyday encounters with difference occur. This includes most prominently studies of how encounters, interactions with, and negotiations over difference occur in the everyday places of neighbourhoods, including urban spaces like shopping centres, high streets, public spaces, parks, markets, public housing estates, public transport, and 'micro-publics' like schools, workplaces, sport teams or neighbourhood associations. Resonant terms in circulation include 'mundane multiculturalism', 'commonplace diversity', 'vernacular cosmopolitanism', and 'everyday cosmopolitanism'. They share with everyday multiculturalism an orientation towards qualitative methodologies, particularly ethnographic approaches.

### References

- Willis, P. (2000) *The Ethnographic Imagination*, London: Polity Press.
- Wise, A. and Velayutham, S. (eds.) (2009) *Everyday Multiculturalism*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.