

Acknowledgements

I began this book at a hopeful time – a new job, a child on the way, and plenty of expectation about a future in which proliferating migrant stories would be told on their own terms across many mediums. Then COVID struck, marking a shift from hope to existential dread and uncertainty. Hearing stories about refugees on protection visas, temporary migrants and international students in Australia who would not have access to welfare payments like the rest of us, I was reminded of how uncertainty is the dominant emotion for the vast majority of migrants in limbo, with or without COVID. I narrate this not to make those with full citizenship rights in the Global North feel grateful and recognise their privilege. Instead, I want to point out how such lives are never given due consideration until we are in circumstances where we might, momentarily, experience their pining for a better future.

For this reason, I am grateful to those who participated in the projects that contributed to amplifying such stories and have made their way into the case studies examined in [Chapters 1, 5 and 6](#). The project on multicultural and Indigenous communities in the Illawarra, conducted with esteemed colleagues Associate Professor Tanja Dreher and Professor Bronwyn Carlson, is one that has inspired my longstanding interest in empathy and spawned many subsequent research activities. I am grateful to both for helping sow the seed for that work.

The project about making short films on belonging in Liverpool in South Western Sydney came out of preliminary conversations with CuriousWorks, an inspiring media and arts organisation with a focus on empowering disadvantaged young people. Again, this project has become the bedrock of my interest and investment in Western Sydney, particularly its working-class migrant and refugee communities. For this, I am grateful to University of Wollongong for providing me with a secondment through a governance role that enabled me to work on the Liverpool campus. The research itself was funded through a competitive Community Engagement Grant Scheme (CEGS) funded by the university, with in-kind contributions from CuriousWorks and Settlement Services International.

Draft material from [Chapter 6](#) was presented at an invited seminar at the University of Sussex in August 2019, at the inaugural symposium of the

Justice, Arts and Migration Network (JAM) held at the Hong Kong Baptist University in November 2019 and at the seminar series of the Institute for Culture and Society (ICS) in June 2020. I am grateful to Dr Elaine Swan for the Sussex invitation, to Professor John Erni and Professor Stephanie Donald for starting JAM, and to the ICS Engagement Committee. The feedback from these presentations was invaluable in shaping the chapter and my conceptualisation of belonging.

I first became interested in ‘aspiration’ as a complex emotion associated with migrants when it was being weaponised during the 2019 federal election campaign in Australia. Both major parties were referring to their base of ‘working families’ as aspirational. It also emerged that many voters from migrant backgrounds were pivotal in deciding the future of certain seats and were described in the post-election analysis as embodying aspiration. In order to better understand this demographic, I organised a forum on the Asian Australian vote in July 2019. For this and the work it has inspired, I am grateful to all the participants and to my co-organiser – Associate Professor Bhuva Narayan from the University of Technology Sydney – and sponsor – the Asian Australian Studies Research Network.

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The idea of putting empathy, aspiration and belonging in one book may come across as novel, perhaps even eccentric. Courtesy of Associate Professor Lisa Slater (University of Wollongong) and Associate Professor Michael Richardson (University of New South Wales), the ‘Public Feelings’ network came together in 2018 to workshop inter-disciplinary work that investigated feelings in relation to public, political and systemic issues. I had the privilege to attend many sessions and received feedback from colleagues that has greatly benefited the rationale and writing of this book. At a 2019 workshop organised by the network, I first presented the three emotions outlined in this book as complex and ambivalent emotions of migration that needed to be brought together. Again, the commentary from that presentation was invaluable and helped shape the proposal on which the book is based.

Did I mention the bulk of this book was written during the Delta-related lockdown in Sydney in 2021? I acknowledge what a difficult time this was for essential workers, migrants, working families among others. I was privileged to be able to work from home, to be able to send my toddler to day care most days of the week and to have the support of my partner when I had to work on the book over the weekend. I am grateful to my dear and talented friend Lathalia Song who is like family and helped us through many life transitions during this time. My generous friend and colleague Nisha Thapliyal was kind enough to read the proposal in its early stages and suggest productive directions. As always, I am indebted to my friend through thick and thin and intellectual comrade Maria Elena Indelicato for reading chapter drafts and offering incisive feedback.

Reena Saini Kallat was very kind to let me use an image of her acclaimed work *Woven Chronicle* as the front cover of this book. There is no better evocation of what this work stands for.

Shannon Kneis, the sociology and gender commissioning editor at Bristol University Press, and Anna Richardson, their fantastic editorial assistant, have worked tirelessly to make sure the best version of this manuscript goes out into this world. I am honoured to be working with a publisher that cares about impact beyond the halls of academia.

Large excerpts from [Chapter 1](#) were first published in a volume edited by Tanja Dreher and Anshuman Modal titled *Ethical Responsiveness and the Politics of Difference* (2018, Palgrave Macmillan). They appear in an updated and revised form here. My contextual review of the film *Here Out West* (seen here in the Conclusion) was first published under a Creative Commons licence by *The Conversation* on 7 February 2022.

Finally, this book is dedicated to my ‘Daddy and Dadima’ (paternal grandparents) who trotted the world in their youth and passed away in 2020, not from COVID but possibly from the isolation it brought forth. I miss your stories!