

Panel:  
Can Anthropology Work for Migrants? Anthropologists at Work in Charities and NGO's

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How have community development approaches aided our understanding of "community building" for newly arrived Portuguese migrant workers in Great Yarmouth?



Author: Robert Gregory (Great Yarmouth Borough Council)

### SHORT ABSTRACT

Anthropological inquiry and community development practice have helped to better formulate a more nuanced approach to the migrant worker experience in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk. Initially forming part of a final Masters dissertation in Applied Anthropology at Goldsmiths College this paper provides a practical appreciation of the migrant worker experience in a semi-urban British setting.

Figure 1: Lusa MiniMarket, St Peters Rd, Gt Yarmouth

## **LONG ABSTRACT**

Since their arrival in the early 2000s the influx of Portuguese migrant workers to Great Yarmouth has heralded a significant re-constitution in the demographic makeup of the town. Early community development responses initiated both through local public and voluntary sector structures have sought to engage, involve and empower the newly arrived 'Portuguese community' to mobilise and integrate into the wider social, cultural and economic life of the town.

In this paper I argue that by reducing the impact of migration to the need to integrate bounded communities into a wider social arena we ignore the very complexity of re-negotiating identity between migrant workers. By drawing upon a short period of ethnographic research and reflecting on wider theoretical debates around migration I will suggest that concepts of belonging and communal solidarity are constantly re-negotiated between Portuguese-speaking migrants in the town. Questions of home, affiliation and belonging offered through anthropological inquiry will suggest that community development responses to date have overlooked the intricacies of the migrant experience. This highlights an urgent need for government and non-government workers to reconfigure their understanding of "community" to respond far more succinctly to concepts of association and social networks as they are created and understood by these new arrivals to the town.

## **BACKGROUND**

The particular focus of this paper is the experience I have built up over the past 8 years, not as an anthropologist but as a community development practitioner, working with Portuguese migrant workers in Great Yarmouth. This formed the basis of my Masters thesis in 2007 at Goldsmiths College, London, where I studied Applied Anthropology and Community and Youth Work.

## **KEY POINTS**

### **Locating Migration in Great Yarmouth**

- An urban coastal resort on the edge of rural Norfolk.
- Suffering decline and inter-generational unemployment.
- Derelict and redundant hotels provide accommodation for migrant workers, who are bused out of the borough on a daily basis.
- Workers recruited directly from Portugal for Norfolk's poultry and food processing industries.
- Portugal has a strong history of migration, feeding labour to northern Europe since the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War (see Brettell 2003).
- Population of the borough in 2001 98.6% "White, British".
- 2002 onwards 4-5,000 Portuguese migrant workers have arrived in the borough.

### **A Critique of Community Development Responses**

- Employed as a Community Development Worker for a local NGO, my role to empower communities to develop responses to their own needs and issues.
- Geographic location and NGO ambition to engage meant that Portuguese Migrant Workers were a focus of work.
- Significant freedom from state, however, funding requirements sought participation and representation.
- Community development undertaken to help create community institutions.
- Herois do Mar born out of early conversations, weekly meets in a local Café.
- Launch event and several projects initiated but difficult to sustain (See Margolis 1994).
- Focus on building institutions to empower.
- Assumptions about needs and that a community existed, merely waiting to be empowered.

### **Negotiation and Identification**

- Short piece of ethnographic fieldwork undertaken as part of MA.
- Questioned external representations by the state/NGO's/indigenous community.
- Local state structures focused on management of services, management of demand, management of migrant workers (part of the "Migration Apparatus" See Feldman 2012).
- This fed a notion of a bounded, readily identifiable "community", spatially, culturally and ethnically distinct, but unified.
- This informed opportunities for civic participation i.e. a seat for a Portuguese rep.
- Ignored associations and disassociations between migrant workers sharing the same social space. E.g. the pursuit for social status.
- The negotiation of individual and collective identities, individually and collectively imagined, which rework concepts of home (See Rapport and Dawson 2005).
- Offers far greater insight into the complexity of the migrant worker experience in Great Yarmouth.

### **Can Anthropology Work for Migrants?**

- The challenge of being both a facilitator and an observer. E.g. Far right activity in 2007.
- A clear contribution Anthropology can make to NGO responses. This needs to be presented in a meaningful way.
- Must appreciate the parameters to ethnography and other research methods in these contexts, i.e. time, politics, funding, quick results.
- Perhaps too, anthropology can more fully embrace "participatory" research as favoured by many NGO's.

### **IN SUMMARY**

In 2012, Portuguese migrant workers have become an embedded part of the social fabric of Great Yarmouth. More migrants have arrived, some have moved back to Portugal, others to other part of the UK, but many have decided to remain and moved beyond the initial boundaries of South Yarmouth. Permanence was not anticipated by public agencies and NGO's in 2004. The community association Herois do Mar exists, with new groups and associations continuing to emerge.

Anthropology can offer state institutions and NGO's a far more sophisticated appreciation of "community". The Portuguese migrant experience in Great Yarmouth is culturally specific but not unique. Often it is assumed that a community exists which merely needs to be empowered. I have suggested that the process of migration is a complex one, underpinned by a range of meta-narratives, past and present experiences. A wide interplay of identification and association create idioms of relatedness, which do not position Portuguese migrant workers in an imagined homeland or neatly integrated into a new society. Instead they sit within an imagined framework of relations. The fact that they are imagined by several people at once makes them real although not necessarily the same. This, I believe is part of a continual process of negotiation between migrant workers and with others. The challenge for NGO's working with migrants is to appreciate these ever-evolving relations and respond accordingly.