



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WESTERN  
AUSTRALIA**



UWA  
Public Policy  
Institute

# Re-imagining Australia: Migration, culture, diversity

Practical suggestions on the  
challenges and opportunities ahead







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# Re-imagining Australia: Migration, culture, diversity

Practical suggestions on the  
challenges and opportunities ahead

Essays by Anne Aly, Colin Barnett, Farida Fozdar, Geoff Gallop,  
Paul J. Maginn, Mike Nahan, Juliet Pietsch, Benjamin Reilly,  
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Edited by Shamit Saggar and Anna Zenz

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# Contents

Foreword <i>Jane den Hollander, Vice-Chancellor</i>	7
Introduction <i>Shamit Saggur</i>	9
Combatting radicalisation in Australia <i>Anne Aly</i>	13
What middle Australia might think about immigration <i>Colin Barnett</i>	21
Community cohesion choices <i>Farida Fozdar</i>	25
Democracy, human rights and multiculturalism: can there be a consensus? <i>Geoff Gallop</i>	33
In what sense is Australia a multicultural society? Planning for/with multiculturalism <i>Paul J. Maginn</i>	41
Multiculturalism in Australia: the triumph of self interest <i>Mike Nahan</i>	49
Australian ethnic change and political inclusion: finding strength in diversity in responding to global crises <i>Juliet Pietsch</i>	57
An immigration economy that lacks ethnic diversity in its politics and government <i>Benjamin Reilly</i>	65

Is Australia at ease with itself? <i>Shamit Saggar</i>	71
Australia's Muslim story: Future opportunities <i>Samina Yasmeen</i>	79
Can business support multicultural inclusion? <i>Edward Zhang</i>	85
About UWA PPI	93

# Foreword

Professor Jane den Hollander AO  
Vice-Chancellor



Australia is a truly extraordinary country.

It comprises vibrant Indigenous peoples whose understanding of the continent and cumulative knowledge has only begun to be recognised across all communities. The country is equally well known for its European colonial settlers – Anglo-Celtic and beyond – who fashioned much of Australia’s modern popular imagine. And Australia has, in the past few decades, become home to very many newcomers from Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the Pacific.

Australian multiculturalism is today a lived reality on a substantial scale. In that sense, the country is rapidly becoming a cross-section of a very large part of the globe, possibly second only to the United States as a great microcosm nation. These recent changes have significant implications for how Australia is viewed by others, drawing on our own imagination of what it is to be Australia.

This timely collection of essays, published by the UWA Public Policy Institute, is designed to shed light on this debate. The ideas, reflections and suggestions in the pages that follow should start fresh discourse here in Western Australia, where regrettably it is all too common to pick up elements of discussions from our eastern states.

The University of Western Australia has an important role as a civic partner in shaping a successful WA society. Instilling evidence and examples of successful practice into debates about the State’s future marks out the role of UWA’s Public Policy Institute.

The State’s ethnic, cultural and linguistic composition has changed enormously and will continue to do so. These are changes that are experienced every day across neighbourhoods, schools, workplaces, public services and businesses. Hence it is vital to understand the ingredients of successful social cohesion, cultural diversity and fairness for us all. I am confident that the ideas and proposals in *Re-Imagining Australia* will help us to do that.





# Introduction

Shamit Sagar



The central idea that inspired *Re-imagining Australia* is that Australia's ethnic composition is changing at such a rapid rate that very few of the policy implications have been systematically examined. The purpose is to promote such a debate and to ensure that there is traction behind the arguments presented here. It is important that academic researchers and policymakers can build on the publication and develop better ways to test and measure future changes in the economy and society.

The UWA Public Policy Institute exists to commission fresh perspectives based on original research that are genuinely capable of improving people's lives. Government, businesses and non-profits are acutely aware of how the country's ethnic mix is changing, and yet often lack access to research findings that can help them manage and take advantage in response. For instance, the Asian, African, Middle Eastern and Pacific Island origins of many newer communities create the potential for new commercial opportunities on one hand, but on the other hand, rather less is known about the precise measures needed to concentrate efforts while not limiting the ambition of settled communities.

Several debates are advanced by the contributors in this publication – and four stand out concerning the economics of mass migration, national stories and symbols, social relationships, and the implications for political leadership.

First, Australia's arrival in the club of mass migration receiving countries in the past three decades roughly matches the stories of other developed economies. The economics of meeting skill shortages through immigration (often at both ends of the skills range) is commonplace across OECD countries and has been a driver of improved productivity, non-inflationary growth and labour market flexibility. Australia's reliance on these migration flows has reached very significant levels and most evidence points to the new workers

having a complementary effect overall so that new jobs and dynamic new sectors are created.

The debate over economics does not stop at how large or small the benefits are. Indeed, there are big, unresolved questions about prosperous countries turning to immigrants for utilitarian reasons. It can lead to a mindset that sees immigrants' value solely in terms of how much more prosperous they make us. It can thwart any appetite for engaging with cultural diversity. And there is a risk that a utilitarian model inaccurately describes the ambition and aspirations of second and third generations who naturally seek to advance like anyone else.

Secondly, there is a big theme around national stories and symbols – about, in other words, what we explicitly celebrate and implicitly value as essentially Australian. Almost every national hero or heroine, business leader, senior politician or celebrity tends to be drawn from Australia's very long White Australia history. The obvious explanation for this skewed picture is that insufficient time has elapsed since the end of that era to expect very big changes to national portrayals of Australia. But in fact almost half a century has produced glacial changes in top roles in business, the professions and politics, whereas portrayals of ethnic diversity in mass entertainment are now racing ahead.

The country as an immigrant nation is a fixed feature of popular imagination but this is mostly linked to successive waves of white European influxes. Grafting non-white, non-European migration onto that base contains the possibility that the latest waves are seen as inherently the same as earlier ones so that assimilation is the only viable way of belonging.

What if Australians are not as good at embracing, trusting and championing ethnic difference as we assume that they are? It is a chilling question to pose. For the left it presents a real challenge to existing ideas and policies that are designed to widen and deepen social inclusion. For the right, the upshot is that nominally colourblind politics and policies may have to be rethought.

The roots of disadvantage (and the despondency and dismay that accompanies it) may be set considerably deeper than imagined, such that a concerted effort to talk about ethnicity and race is the most important step to take. In Australia – of all countries – this is a very substantial undertaking.

The complexion of national politics and politicians undoubtedly singles out Australia where the absence of non-white faces is now widely commented on. It suggests that there are real tensions within and across our arrangements for political recruitment. Some have suggested that this reflects 'imputed discrimination' – the idea that party electors, managers and gatekeepers collectively fear a backlash from mostly white electorates, so they act in a way that is consistent with (their

understanding) of the prejudices of others. The reputational damage that is done by this form of discrimination is a very serious concern.

Thirdly, several contributors have written about the quality and texture of social cohesion. An important debate has raged in recent years about the extent to which societies experiencing rapid ethnic change are successfully able to maintain social solidarity among their people. Some have warned that none of this should be taken for granted, arguing that not only do ‘birds of a feather flock together’ but also that the competition for jobs, schools and neighbourhoods can quickly become racialised. These political divisions are of course already part of our political tradition but what is less clear is how ethnic and racial identity politics can affect Australian politics.

International evidence generally points to diversity and solidarity being connected but, more importantly, affected by inequality. In poorer, deprived areas, whites and non-whites typically trust each other less than in better-off areas. But the reason has less to do with ethnic or racial differences since it is common for everyone to be less trusting of those in poorer places as compared with prosperous ones.

Ethnic change as it is seen from middle Australia matters because of how the nation’s mainstream political parties address ethnic disparities in outcomes in health, housing, employment, education and personal security. This kind of politics for the most part is unfamiliar in Australia.

Finally, as several writers have attested, the politics of ethnic change touches all parts of the political landscape. There are major implications for economic policy, social policy, environmental policy, ageing policy, early years policy, trade policy, foreign policy and so forth. In that respect, the chapters included here touch on only a few of these policy fields and encourage readers to think about the wider implications.

One simple example should suffice to make this point. Many ethnic minority groups in Australia are, relative to their white counterparts, characterised by larger family sizes and a tilt towards multi-generational living. They may wish to buy or rent very different kinds of homes; they may have very different social care needs for their elderly; they may seek neighbourhoods and use transport that maximises their connections with densely-knit families.

The upshot is that ethnic diversity touches much of what governments are tasked to do. It is better to think of Australia’s changing character not one piece at a time but rather as a source of nourishment and reordering across the board. Imagine a Prime Minister making appointments to their government and to arms-length agencies in which these challenges were written into every role.

## *Introduction*

Imagine then, a Home Affairs ministerial role being the perfect test bed for a successful Foreign Affairs ministerial appointment, and vice-versa.

These essays are not answers set in stone, but instead thought pieces to stimulate wider debate about the challenges and the role of government. The arguments presented in this volume are themselves diverse and reflect varying ideological persuasions and personal experiences.

We hope that *Re-imagining Australia* meets the audience's thirst to be better informed and, in doing so, endorses UWA's important role in shaping evidence-based public policy that improves people's lives.

Finally, I would like to thank the UWA PPI staff for their efforts in producing this volume and also Maria Osman (a member of the UWA PPI Advisory Board) for her advice in shaping its contents.

# Combatting radicalisation in Australia

Anne Aly



To say that we live in a turbulent and rapidly changing world may be stating the obvious given recent events at the time of writing. As we enter the second decade of the 2000s, a global pandemic has swept through Europe, Asia, North America and our own fortress, Australia. The novel virus named severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 does not respect borders. It does not discriminate and it has devastated the global economy. It cannot be shot at, bombed, arrested, turned back or sent home. Our frontline of defense does not wear army fatigues and carry a gun. The virus is a stark reminder that contemporary threats to security and wellbeing come from unconventional sources.

Today's security environment is characterised by diverse threats and a broader range of actors. While interstate conflict continues to be an enduring factor, it is no longer the defining concern for international and national security. Intrastate conflict and the collapse of fragile states, climate change, mass population displacement, extreme economic events, cyber security, energy and resource security, transnational organised crime, terrorism and pandemics are likely to continue to present as primary current and future concerns. Consequently, states are no longer the only or even the major actors in the international security landscape. Non-state actors, individuals, non-government organisations and private corporations play a larger role in conflict and security now than they have in the past.

As new challenges emerge, individuals, communities, states and the international security apparatus need to find new ways of meeting them. In the fight against terrorism, Western allies deployed conventional warfare against a non-conventional enemy in the, perhaps, naïve belief that terrorism could be defeated by bombs and bullets. The prolonged war on terror failed to eradicate

the threat of international terrorism. It is reasonable to deduce that the 'War on Terror' has actually led to a proliferation in the use of terrorist tactics by non-state actors in conflicts. In fragile states and those currently in conflict, indiscriminate terror attacks have become part of warfare. The wisdom of employing a conventional 'hard' military response against an unconventional enemy whose regenerative capacity relies on its ability to employ 'soft' strategies of influence and mobilisation has, rightly, been questioned.

Terrorism has been part of the human story since time immemorial. From the Sicaari in the first century through to the Ismaili Nizaris (widely known as the Assassins) of the 13th century, to the Weathermen Underground in the 1970s, Al Qaeda, ISIS and the rising violent far-right, acts of violence by individuals and groups of individuals in the name of a cause have been a part of the human story. At times terrorism has taken on political shades and at other times religion or ideology have been used to justify indiscriminate attacks. The scholar David Rapoport<sup>1</sup> distinguishes four waves of modern terrorism, each wave precipitated by social and political circumstances and characterised by a pattern of internationalisation of terrorist activity across several states with similarities in objectives and tactics. The Anarchist wave, the first of Rapoport's waves, was prevalent between the 1880s and the 1920s and was preceded by the invention of the printing press, which allowed the European Anarchists to spread their anti-authoritarian ideology throughout Europe, the United States and parts of Asia. The Anti-Colonial Wave between the 1920s and 1960s followed the end of the Second World War and was borne out of the self-determination campaigns in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The New Left wave from the 1960s to the 1990s was initiated by the Vietnam War and widespread opposition to the West. The fourth and final of Rapoport's four waves, the Religious Wave, gained momentum in the late 1970s and persists in different forms today.

The driving ideology at the basis of the Anarchist doctrine was the belief that violence and terror were necessary to achieve social change. Violence was an act of creative destruction through which the Anarchist movement could destroy the state and create an alternative society based on the principles of statelessness and anti-authoritarianism.

The use of violence to destroy or deconstruct the status quo and create 'new worlds' is a common thread that runs through all the waves of terrorism. The Anti-Colonial movement sought to mobilise revolution against the established

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1 David Rapoport, 'The Four Waves of Rebel Terror and September 11', in Charles Kegley Jr. (ed.), *The New Global Terrorism: Characteristics, Causes, Controls*. Pearson 2003, p. 36–53.

rulers. The New Left were radical Marxists who wanted to force the collapse of capitalism. Among the terrorist groups that emerged during the religious wave of terrorism, apocalyptic groups such as Aum Shinrikyo have claimed responsibility for attacks. The organisation known variably as ISIS, ISIL or Daesh, claimed its mission to be the establishment of the Caliphate in the Arab World. While not strictly apocalyptic, the violent jihadist movement was initially conceived in the age of imperialism with the aim of establishing an Islamic order and eradicating secular rule in Arab countries.

Apocalypse, changing the world order, anarchy and revolution continue to drive terrorism in its various forms. Since 2001 and the ensuing war on terror, a fifth wave of terrorism has emerged that continues these themes and calls for a revolution of sorts.

### **The violent right-wing**

The term ‘violent right-wing’ refers to a broad range of beliefs and movements associated with far-right political and social ideologies. On its own, it offers little more than a broad-brush branding of an increasingly prevalent mobiliser for acts of violence and terror such as the Christchurch shootings. Within the broad category of right-wing terrorism sits white nationalism, neo-Nazism, eco-fascism, white separatism, ethnocentrism and patriot/militia movements, among others. Some scholars include the Christian Identity Movement and anti-abortion extremism while others argue that a contemporary typology of right-wing extremism should differentiate at least two main categories: racist extremism and anti-government extremism. Across all types of right-wing extremism, the mobilising narrative centres on a perceived threat and the justification for violence through acts of ‘accelerationism’ – prompting the collapse of the government by creating political tensions, schisms and crises. Variably, right-wing terrorist actors may also be motivated by narratives of Satanism, violent misogyny and Great Replacement conspiracies. According to the Great Replacement conspiracy, mass migration and lower birth rates among white races are a matter of purposeful design with the ultimate aim of destroying the white race altogether.

In 2008, the number of right-wing domestic terrorist incidents in the United States doubled. Racially motivated crimes also increased as did the scope of militia organising. Violent right-wing terrorism has since grown to overtake the threat of violent jihadist terrorism in the United States. In 2018 alone violent right-wing attacks caused fatalities in Florida, Pennsylvania, Washington, South Carolina, Texas, Kansas, Michigan, Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee and California.

In 2019 the world was rocked by the Christchurch terrorist attack that killed 51 Muslim worshippers at two mosques in the New Zealand city. The perpetrator, an Australian, left a white nationalist manifesto that identified him with some of the US and Europe's most notorious terrorist actors and details the extent to which he was motivated to act by his unquestionable belief in the Great Replacement conspiracy.

The Great Replacement has existed in various versions for a number of decades but has seen a contemporary resurgence originating in France with the French author Renaud Camus who wrote *Le Grand Remplacement* in 2012. He argues against immigration and identifies it as a global threat. Those sentiments are not just the domain of fringe elements that gather online in the dark spaces of the internet to share conspiracies in whispers. They are also echoed by politicians and media personalities who use their platforms to perpetuate notions of migrant invasions, demonise minorities and stereotype certain 'others' (most notably Muslims) as a threat.

### **Australia's far-right extremism**

We might begin by asking what lies behind the resurgence in what is at best xenophobia and at worst outright violent racism. In Australia, the discursive construction of migrants has been and continues to be a defining feature of our media, political and public discourse. Since the 1800s cultural anxiety about immigration and immigrants has been described variably in terms of a peril, menace, evil, wave, tide or influx poised to invade, inundate, swamp or flood Australia and annihilate, oppress, obliterate or penetrate the invisible rabbit-proof fences of racial and cultural homogeneity – the myth of 'White Australia'. Indeed, Australia's history is peppered with incidents of overt racism and a political discourse that seeks to take advantage of anxiety, insecurity and fear in order to maintain 'Fortress Australia'.

The advent of a novel 'enemy' in the COVID-19 pandemic, gives us reason to pause and reassess. Much has been written about how the health response involving social distancing, isolation and lock-downs has heralded a 'new way' of living. Workers have had to adjust to working from home and employers have had to accommodate this. Millions face unemployment and the current conservative government, nominally ideologically sceptical towards welfare, has had to embark on a program of sweeping social reforms. But our history offers a cautionary tale of how such crises can either bring us together or tear us apart.



Right-wing extremism thrives in economic and political climates characterised by recession, the outsourcing of jobs to migrant workers, and the perceived threat to national sovereignty. In the short months since the coronavirus was declared a global pandemic, far-right extremists in Australia have propagated a narrative that blames the crisis on minority groups and calls for mobilisation against these groups. They also attribute the government response to conspiratorial attempts to exert control over Australians while also promoting segregation and immigration restrictions. While these notions may seem to be the domain of fringe groups, they are also notions that are expressed by some elements of the current Australian parliament. Senator Pauline Hanson rose to notoriety on the back of her maiden speech which warned of an ‘Asian invasion’. Her second term as a Senator over a decade later, re-presented the threat as Muslims. The former Senator Fraser Anning invoked the ‘final solution’ – a Nazi euphemism for the Holocaust – in his maiden speech calling for an end to immigration. The threat Australia faces is not personified in immigrant others, but in the very real mainstreaming of far-right ideologies that normalise ethnocentrism and xenophobia and reconstruct them as legitimate political concerns.

### **Re-imagining Australia**

How might we re-imagine Australia as a nation that responds to crisis not with fear and xenophobia but in ways that challenge the far-right narrative and the dangers that it poses? One answer may lie in building on concepts of collective security.

Early conceptualisations of collective security were applied to peace-keeping collaborative programs between NATO and the United Nations. The traditional concept of collective conflict management focused on collaborative participation in formalised arrangements between international and regional organisations and individual states. A re-conceptualisation and broadening of this concept in the contemporary security context would focus on two inclusions: first, the inclusive participation of civil society groups, professional bodies and task-specific international bodies; and secondly, the inclusion of *ad hoc*, informal and improvised collective action measures. New collaborative patterns of behaviour involve co-operative participation by private industry, regional and transnational task-specific forces, inter-governmental organisations and civil society organisations representing diverse security interests.

As the ‘War on Terror’ moved from the hot battlegrounds of Afghanistan and Iraq to the domestic domain, Western governments co-opted un-institutionalised, community-based and informal collective action against terrorism.

The national security and counter terrorism strategies adopted by governments including Australia and the United Kingdom, to name just two, incorporate soft approaches and recognise the role that communities play in a comprehensive and multi-causal approach. Most commonly this is expressed in terms of building community resilience to violent extremism and terrorism. Australia's counter-terrorism approach outlined in 2010 in *The Counter Terrorism White Paper: Securing Australia, Protecting our Community*<sup>2</sup> describes four elements: analysis, protection, response and resilience. While there have been several iterations of Australia's counter-terrorism policy since then, the four core strands remain constant. Resilience in the Australian strategy is 'building a strong and resilient Australian community to resist the development of any form of violent extremism and terrorism on the home front'. In 2011, the United States announced a refocusing of its counter terrorism strategy with an emphasis on preventing the diffusion of extremist ideologies within the United States. The earlier US 2003 *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*<sup>3</sup> focused on four elements of defeating, denying, diminishing and defending. The 'diminishing' element emphasised international partnerships to address conditions in which terrorism flourishes and on delegitimising terrorism through public information initiatives.

The need to build community resilience to terrorist ideologies has not gone unnoticed in the US. In 2009, the first Special Representative to Muslim Communities was appointed by the US Secretary of State tasked with engaging Muslims around the world to counter terrorist ideologies.

While there appears to be significant support for community-level collective measures against terrorism, there is a marked absence in the literature on citizen- and community-driven collaborative counter-terrorism activities. As noted, much of the literature offers an analysis of collective action in counter-terrorism as formalised arrangements, although the parties may act in *ad-hoc*, informal or improvised ways. The literature on terrorism draws attention to the social situations in which public support for terrorism flourishes, and asserts that support for dissident terrorist activities is garnered in contexts where social, political or economic inequalities exist. For this reason, international efforts to counter terrorism through soft approaches target economic development, political reform, and the promotion of social and political equality in countries where terrorist groups are known to have significant public support. *The 9/11*

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2 Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Counter-terrorism white paper: securing Australia, protecting our community*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2010.

3 United States Government, *National Strategy for Combatting Terrorism*, United States Department of State Archive, February 2003.

*Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*<sup>4</sup> for example, supports the use of foreign aid as a means of addressing the proliferation of terrorist ideologies among the poor and disenfranchised. Such approaches are largely premised on the debatable assumption that poverty and social or political grievances manifest in terrorist movements and public support for terrorist activities.

In the domestic domain, the inclusion of elements such as prevention and resilience in national counter-terrorism strategies also target disenfranchised communities that are assumed to be more susceptible to radicalisation and extremism.

The responses outlined here demonstrate that a holistic approach to collective security which empowers civil society can be achieved. In the fight against Islamist extremism, governments in Australia, the UK and the US have reached out to Muslim communities and partnered with them in developing community-led approaches to radicalisation and extremism. The same level of engagement has not been forthcoming in response to the rising far-right terrorist threat. The same political leaders who called on Muslim communities to work together to stamp out violent jihadism, have been eerily silent on the far-right threat.

The political will to engage civil society in the fight against terrorism cannot afford to be selective. Doing so is not just counterproductive, it is dangerous. And importantly, it misses an opportunity to build on the tremendous outpouring of compassion that Australians have witnessed in the responses to the bushfire and coronavirus crises.

We can re-imagine an Australia where nation-building is an inclusive concept – not an exclusionary practice – and where the urgency of tackling far-right violent extremism is a priority for all sides. But to do so we need to reimagine and redirect the kind of political will that mobilised collective conflict management to counter violent jihadist terrorism to the threat of pernicious far-right ideologies.

*Dr Anne Aly MP is the Labor Federal Member for Cowan, Western Australia, in the Australian Parliament, and founder of People against Violent Extremism Inc ('PaVE'), an independent, non-government organisation committed to addressing violent extremism in Australia and the region.*

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4 United States Government, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, US Government Printing Office 2002.



# What middle Australia might think about immigration

Colin Barnett



Australians have always felt safe living in an island nation and distant from the most troubled parts of the world. Even the coronavirus pandemic is unlikely to shatter our faith in isolation and will more likely reinforce it as we feel better off than those elsewhere.

Beyond physical isolation, the diversity of our population is a barrier against the extremes of nationalism, racism and religion that have been at the centre of many of the world's worst episodes of human suffering.

For most of us it is enough to be proud of who we are with an almost nostalgic trust in the Aussie ideals of 'fair go' and 'mateship'. This, plus a stable democracy, have given us an enviable system of education, health, public safety and social support. We know we are not perfect and we know there have been some dark moments in our past, but we still think this is the best place to be. So, say middle Australia!

We also like to see ourselves as a young and successful nation with its future before us. Our national anthem, *Advance Australia Fair*, exudes that brash confidence. And we are slowly heading along a path toward a reconciliation with 60,000 years of Aboriginal culture.

Such a sentimental Australia welcomes people from overseas and has always done so. A pragmatic Australia also understands that immigration has been a driving force for economic development and growth.

The history of Australia is very much the story of migration. Admittedly the first arrivals from England were reluctant convicts, then came free settlers to be followed by a more diverse group of fortune seekers during the gold rush years.

For modern Australia, it was the post-war migration of the 1950s and 1960s that set us on a path to a more outward-looking Australia. With a baby boom at home,

of which I am a member, the population surged. The traditional migration from Britain increased, including many thousands of child migrants. The ‘Salvo’ boys at my school were presumed to be orphans and lived in a nearby Salvation Army home. They kept to themselves and we kept our distance. The truth is most of us were afraid of them. We did use the term ‘Pommie’, but only with great caution.

However, it was the European migration that really changed things. Suddenly there were large numbers of Italians, Greeks, Poles, Slavs, Jews and other ethnic groups in our midst. They had come from the extreme hardship of a Europe devastated by years of war. They were the ‘new’ Australians. A group of elderly Italian men once told me that they arrived by ship dressed in a suit and carrying a nice case with nothing in it. They then had to wait for years until they could afford to bring their wife and children to join them.

By the time I reached high school the new arrivals were our mates. Yes, there was derogatory name calling, but as often as not it was good humoured, and it went both ways. Australia now had a multicultural society.

The other shift was a post-war fascination with America. My father would say that America saved us at the Battle of the Coral Sea. For me, it was more about television – *The Mickey Mouse Club* and *The Space Race*. Australia now had a Pacific outlook with the ANZUS Treaty at the centre of our defence and foreign policy.

For Western Australia, the development of the remote Pilbara region was the big event of that time. It is heralded as a great economic achievement, yet it also had a social dimension. The Pilbara iron ore mines were developed to feed Japan’s steel industry, just 15 years or so after the end of the Second World War. My father had fought against Japan and my uncle had been a prisoner of war on the infamous Burma railway. For them and their generation it was a confronting thought that Australia might establish closer ties with Japan. The fact that they agreed, even if reluctantly, was a remarkable achievement by the then political leadership. Australia now had a connection to Asia which over the following decades was to set the pattern for both economic and social change.

Migration from southeast Asia increased rapidly and then from China. In the 1990s Australia showed an ugly face as a recession at home somehow translated into an anti-Asian and, in particular, an anti-Chinese sentiment. This manifested itself at a political level through the formation of the One Nation Party. These events were offensive to most Australians and particularly so for Australians of Asian descent.

In the early years of this decade, the integrity of our borders came under challenge with a sharp increase of illegal immigration as asylum seekers undertook

a hazardous ocean voyage in a desperate attempt to reach Australia. This was a tragic time with at least 1,300 people drowning. The television coverage of men, women and children being smashed on the rocky cliffs of Christmas Island was shocking. This was a shameful day for everyone, though there was no clear consensus at the time as to what could be done to prevent a repeat.

In an earlier episode involving a ship by the name of *Tampa*, the then Prime Minister John Howard best captured the feelings of middle Australia when he said words to this effect: "We will decide who comes to Australia and the circumstances under which they come". The antagonism toward Asian migration has now gone as far as middle Australia is concerned. The restoration of border security has been essential in achieving that.

In more recent years, there has been an increase in the number of new arrivals from the Indian Ocean nations of Africa, the Middle East and the subcontinent. These are troubled parts of the world and there is understandably a level of apprehension among Australians, just as there has been in previous periods of migration. But just as in the past, these latest new Australians are quickly becoming part of our multicultural society while maintaining their own cultural heritage and religious beliefs.

Today, some 30 per cent of Australians were born overseas. That is well over seven million people. There have been over 900,000 refugees welcomed to Australia. That is something to be proud of. I have no doubt that Australia will continue to welcome people from all over the world and that they will contribute to our country, just like those before them. They will be part of that middle Australia which respects different cultures and religions, with the only caveat being that change needs to be properly managed and be at a moderate and consistent rate which is accepted by the broad majority of the Australian people.

*The Honourable Colin Barnett MLA is the former Premier of Western Australia, former Member for Cottesloe, and Member of the UWA Public Policy Institute's Advisory Board.*





# Community cohesion choices

Farida Fozdar



To challenge our thinking about the categories of community and cohesion, and therefore the choices available to us, I wanted to entitle this thought piece: ‘Why don’t we care about Mahmoud Hussein?’ Australians celebrated in 2015 when Australian journalist Peter Greste was freed from an Egyptian jail. Activists, government officials and the media pressured the Egyptian government to release Greste, who was being held without charge. Yet more than three years after being imprisoned, his colleague, Egyptian Mahmoud Hussein, remains in jail. We cared about getting Greste out. Why don’t we care about Mahmoud?

It is because our ‘community’, as we conceive it and for which we feel solidarity, is the nation-state, and Mahmoud is not a member. This entity, only around 400 years old, has become so all-pervasive in terms of where our allegiance and responsibility lies, that we cannot think of ourselves in terms of membership of other collectives. Yes, we may be part of a local football club, or a global religion or gaming community, or have a particular gender identity, but when it comes down to our sense of responsibility, it is to other Australians we turn. And this is written into legislation. This hit me personally when the Australian government negotiated the transfer of Australian passengers from the Costa Victoria cruise ship, on which we were passengers, from Italy to Perth. Passengers and crew who did not have proactive and powerful nation-states behind them are still on the ship, and Australia has made it clear it feels no responsibility for members of other nations on board ships currently at its ports. Our remit in this publication was to ‘Re-imagine Australia’, but I want to question why Australia is the unit of re-imagining, and whether we ought to be thinking about re-imagining the world instead.

So first we need to ask, is national solidarity a problem?

Anthony Appiah argued for our ethical obligations to strangers, suggesting our moral universe should extend beyond co-nationals, taking a cosmopolitan outlook, concerned about the welfare of all humans. But he also argued the nation-state remains necessary to protect human rights, and suggests the alternative, a world government or global state, is impractical.<sup>1</sup> Calhoun also emphasised the nation's value as the political structure through which human rights can be asserted and enforced, and where disadvantage and social injustice can be addressed.<sup>2</sup> There is a significant emotional element to membership too, both positive (in terms of affective bonds and a sense of belonging for members), but also negative (in terms of fear of loss of culture and privilege).

However others have argued a post-national world is the next natural step in social (and political and economic) evolution. There are problems with the structure of the nation-state in a globalised world, not least evident in the inadequacy of a coordinated response to Covid-19. Universal rights should apply to all, including freedom of movement, egalitarian principles of justice (fairness, equality of opportunity), access to opportunities for work, education and health care, and a recognition that people should not be advantaged, or disadvantaged, by the arbitrary fact of birthplace.

The European Union, the African Union, and similar meso-level collectives represent the beginnings of alternative models of political and economic cosmopolitanism, and the ability of individuals to hold dual, even multiple, citizenships, suggests the logic of the nation-state is breaking down. Capital, social networks, risk, media, organisations, goods – these all traverse national boundaries, but oddly, fellow feeling and community cohesion does not.

Why do we think other Australians deserve our care, and others do not? Why, through an accident of birth, or some luck with the immigration system, do we feel more 'communitas' or solidarity with these people? And does it really not matter if these people are migrants or do we in fact retain an ethnic allegiance to others which excludes those who do not share a particular heritage and culture, rather than a civic allegiance, to co-nationals?

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1 Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, W. W. Norton, 2006. For examples of everyday Australians making the same argument see Farida Fozdar, 'No borders: Australians talking beyond the nation', *Journal of Language and Politics*, 16(3), 2017, p. 367–387.

2 Craig Calhoun, *Nations Matter: Culture, History, and the Cosmopolitan Dream*, Routledge, 2007.

## What do we mean by community cohesion?

Community cohesion, or more commonly in Australia ‘social cohesion’, is an ambiguous term – we all have a sense of what it means, but would be hard pressed to define it. Most definitions include characteristics of a collective such as common values and civic culture; social order and social control; solidarity and reductions in wealth disparity; recognition, inclusion and belonging for all; social networks and social capital; and attachment to a particular place or territory and identity.<sup>3</sup>

Social cohesion has positive and negative elements. Obviously it makes groups hold together, which has a range of benefits. However it can be the basis of in-group favouritism, and the corollary, exclusion and denigration of outgroup members.

It is because of this that social cohesion can be a fundamentally conservative concept, since it is applied to a particular collective, thus being embedded in assumptions about the relevant unit to which cohesion should apply, and because it emphasises the need for cohesion as opposed to diversity, variance, dispersion ... even entropy. While it does not directly contrast with diversity, it is often talked about in contexts where the dangers of diversity are being articulated, as will be shown shortly.

## Australian values

Discussions about social cohesion frequently orient to the need for a set of shared values to ground diversity on a foundation of commonality. In my work, analysing politicians’ speeches, and focus groups and survey data from ordinary Australians, the notion of ‘Australian values’ is found to be part of the national psyche and discourse, and fully supported by most of the population. It is seen as what makes the Australian community hold together. However, what those Australian values are differs person to person. Perhaps more importantly, the term is generally used for rhetorical effect. Politicians, for example, tend to use ‘Australian values’ to emphasise the threat presented by those who do not share them. It thus becomes a term of exclusion, rather than a concept holding us together. This may encourage a particular type of cohesion incompatible with multiculturalism.

Australia has a long history of suspicion of those seen as having different values. UWA PhD student Catherine Martin is tracking the use of exclusionary

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3 Andrew Markus and Ludmilla Kirpitchenko, ‘Conceptualising social cohesion’, in James Jupp, John Nieuwenhuysen and Emma Dawson (eds.), *Social cohesion in Australia*, CUP, 2007, p. 21–32.

metaphors used to refer to migrants over the last 150 years. Arguing against Asian migration, the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1921 reported the need to ‘safeguard’ “against the incursion of peoples whose basic social, economic, and political ideas and standards are sufficiently different to make their presence in any large numbers ... a danger to that social order” (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 November 1921). Here we see the same basic ideas that are currently circulating about the threat implied by those whose ‘values’ differ from ‘ours’, threatening the presumed social cohesion of a presumed homogenous society.

Concerns about the importance of values to ensure social (national) cohesion are part of a global trend, with a range of countries including the US, Germany, the Netherlands and Australia, implementing values-based citizenship tests and integration contracts over recent years. In Australia values questions have been included in the Australian Citizenship test since 2007, and additionally, since then, all long-term and some short-term visitors to Australia have been required to sign an Australian Values Statement. These were introduced in the context of fear of a loss of culture, to protect national identities from putative ‘threats’ such as terrorism, Muslims, asylum seekers, and globalisation more generally, and to ensure social cohesion in a context of global migration. Here, belonging to the nation and citizenship is no longer framed as being about civic rights, but as a commitment to a particular way of living.<sup>4</sup> And as Gassan Hage has shown us, it is the governing power of the charter/majority/white group that does the ‘tolerating’ of difference and decides the limits to that tolerating.

In a very large survey undertaken recently by the ABC<sup>5</sup>, the most important feature of ‘being Australian’ was identified by respondents as having respect for Australia’s institutions and laws, followed closely by appreciation of the environment, feeling Australian, speaking English and being a citizen. ‘Sharing the same values as most Australians’ was lower on the list, but still important, with around 70 per cent in agreement. Yet a significant majority, around 80 per cent, also agreed that migrants can retain their own cultural values and still be ‘Australian’. This suggests that there is no imperative to adopt Australian values.

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4 Maria Chisari, ‘Testing citizen identities: Australian migrants and the Australian values debate’, *Social Identities*, 21(6), 2015, p. 573–589.

5 Annabel Crabb, *What makes an Australian? Probably not what you think*, ABC news, 22 October 2019, (reporting on the *Australia Talks* National Survey), <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-10-22/annabel-crabb-national-identity-what-makes-an-australian/11623566>.

What are these values? The Australian Values Statement states:

- » Australian society values respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual, freedom of religion, commitment to the rule of law, Parliamentary democracy, equality of men and women and a spirit of egalitarianism that embraces mutual respect, tolerance, fair play and compassion for those in need and pursuit of the public good.
- » Australian society values equality of opportunity for individuals, regardless of their race, religion or ethnic background.
- » The English language, as the national language, is an important unifying element of Australian society.

These are admirable, perhaps aspirational values (although language is not a value). In a survey I undertook a few years ago, 89 per cent of a representative sample agreed that this statement reflects Australian values, 79 per cent agreed migrants should have to sign the statement, and 49 per cent agreed that migrants should be deported if they breached the values. So Australians put a great deal of store in migrants following these values. Interestingly, another 49 per cent agreed that Australia should adapt these values if migrants can improve them, suggesting some willingness to change.

A range of political cartoons make the point that Australian values are variable, and that while certain values such as the fair go and egalitarianism are promoted in some contexts, they are ignored in others. Liberal politicians have used the term to support a range of positions, including linking Australian values to 'Western civilisation' and 'the First Fleet' while critiquing the 'politically correct' who seek to change them. They have called them 'Gospel values' that give us the 'best way to live', and argued that calls to change the date of Australia Day are against Australian values. Yet others say valuing diversity and a multicultural identity are fundamental to Australian values. The Labor party and Greens tend to emphasise diversity, respect and inclusion when talking about Australian values, as well as justice, fair play, secularity and human rights.

A single quote from Peter Dutton illustrates how Australian values are often used to divide: "Our diversity has enriched our nation, but it is not what holds us together. Rather, our success is underwritten by our values, our mutual understanding of our rights and responsibilities as citizens, our national language and our respect for each other, regardless of race, sex or religion ... It's why Australians appreciate straight talking and reject political correctness and social engineering at odds with our heritage. It's why terrorists and extremists target our institutions and seek to foment dissent and disagreement among

us, but they will never succeed. And it is why, in an age of high-speed internet that enables people to live virtually in societies or social groups whose norms are at odds with our own, we need to nurture our core values.” The assumption about what Australians appreciate and reject, the signalling of a shared heritage even though a majority are first or second generation migrants, the notion that disagreement is what terrorists and extremists seek to generate (implying disagreement is akin to extremism), the signalling of the enemy within whose ‘norms are at odds with our own’ – this is how values are used to divide. Indeed, what starts off as a call to civic nationalism, that connects us through shared commitment to political institutions and shared responsibilities and rights, turns into ethno-nationalism, calling all to a particular collective that excludes certain segments of the community. A further omission is that there is no recognition of Australia’s Indigenous peoples in this quote, and it is rare for Aboriginal values to be identified as part of Australian values. Obviously these values are also aspirational rather than actual, for we know people are not treated equally regardless of sex, race or religion.

A final point. Just how Australian are Australian values? In a comparison of results from international surveys, psychologist Nick Haslam compared scores for values such as autonomy, egalitarianism, harmony, collectivism and so on, from 80 cultures. When comparing the deviation from the international average, he found that Australia has the second *least* distinctive culture – we are average in almost everything. So the values identified as ‘Australian’ are not actually distinctively Australian at all, indeed they are shared by many cultures. Haslam concludes “what is unique about Australian values is their averageness.”<sup>6</sup>

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6 Nick Haslam, *Australian values are hardly unique when compared to other cultures*, The Conversation Australia, 1 May 2017, <https://theconversation.com/australian-values-are-hardly-unique-when-compared-to-other-cultures-76917>.

So what options, apart from promoting the rather divisive idea of ‘Australian values’, do we have to engender cohesion? Very early on sociologists recognised that societies can hold together based on internal similarity, but others recognised that difference can also be the basis of cohesion, where different elements rely on each other for the collective to survive. We need to consider how our differences can be productively harnessed, for the benefit not just of Australia, but globally, to begin (continue) to develop global social cohesion. Here are some suggestions:

- » Support global initiatives that recognise the interconnectedness of the contemporary world system.
- » Recognise Australia’s Indigenous peoples and value their contributions. Accepting the recommendations of the Statement from the Heart would be a start.
- » Promote a positive national identity framed around inclusion rather than exclusion through active political leadership and local engagement, but always recognising that national identity is secondary to a commitment to humanity generally.
- » Improve civics and citizenship education, the history, English, and other parts of the school curriculum in Australia, such that the benefits of diversity and awareness of global interconnection are prioritised.
- » Support grassroots initiatives that promote civic participation, intercultural interaction, and global awareness and engagement.
- » Engage in regional cooperation with countries in the Asia Pacific, without assuming a paternalistic orientation.
- » Continue to work towards social equity and equality of opportunity to create a more just society with less structural disadvantage.
- » Leverage migrant diasporas to build social, economic and political ties with countries of origin.

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# Democracy, human rights and multiculturalism: can there be a consensus?

Geoff Gallop



It is often said the Australian condition is made up of three elements: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Australia; British or Anglo-Celtic Australia; and Migrant Australia.

In 1788 it all changed. The British came with their own interests and ideas of race, life and progress, adapting them as they saw fit to produce what was aptly called “a new Britannia in another world”.<sup>1</sup> As knowledge about the opportunities offered by the newly created colonies spread, others started to come neither white or British; for example, the Chinese, their numbers peaking around 40,000 during the 19<sup>th</sup> century gold rushes.

For the British holders of political and military power it was a diabolical mix – primitive and uncivilised people on the one side and barbarians from Asia on the other. From the point of view of the colonial objectives of racial purity, economic development and imperial security, something had to be done, and it was: White Australia and its bedfellows, Immigration Restriction and Assimilation were born. There were some who protested but they were lone voices.

These remained well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only to fall victim to new interests and ideas related to the nation and its future. The sources for these developments were many, baby-boomer radicalism being one and the prospects of new markets to the north being another. The alternative to White Australia – whatever different

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<sup>1</sup> William Charles Wentworth, *Australasia – A Poem Written for The Chancellor’s Medal at the Cambridge Commencement*, G and W.B. Whittaker, 1823. See also Humphrey McQueen, *A new Britannia: an argument concerning the social origins of Australian radicalism and nationalism*, Penguin, 1970.

versions it took, moderate or radical – we called Multiculturalism, as had been the case in Canada. Lots of elements were involved, notably anti-racism, cultural pluralism, democratic pluralism, interculturalism and Asian engagement. Add to that perhaps, civic republicanism.

What we are talking about is an Australian approach to the issue of living with the differences generated by the co-existence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island, British and Migrant Australia. These differences take shape as a way of understanding the past, present and future, and become realised as cultures and communities with different modes of living and expression. Multiculturalism involves the development of an ideology and policies that we would hope will not only manage these differences in the interests of social harmony but also add the value diversity can bring to a nation, economically, socially and politically.<sup>2</sup> The achievement of a consensus policy in this area is difficult because the differing values associated with what we would call a left- or right-wing view of politics are part of the mix: nationalism versus cosmopolitanism.

### **Consensus framing and pluralism**

There are two senses in which we might understand the idea of consensus, one more narrowly political than the other, but both relevant for those serious about good public policy. Firstly, there's the obvious political point of seeking to maximise support for desired changes. That may mean some compromises are needed along the way: the 'two steps back to take one forward' phenomenon. Secondly, there's the endeavour to ensure the wide range of good ideas is fully incorporated into our thinking, thus avoiding the dangers of too much abstraction and the bad policy that can follow. In thinking through the issues related to multiculturalism, this second aspect is particularly important because we are dealing with universals *and* particulars, individuals *and* groups *and* nations, liberty *and* equality, and *all of* civil, political and social rights at the one time (or at least we should be, if we are seeking sustainable and just outcomes). So too are we faced with the tricky issue of working through the relationship between the majority and minorities, a challenge that can't be avoided if we support both democracy and human rights.

A shift from a cultural pluralism to a democratic pluralism is my focus. Democratic pluralism is a layered concept. It means starting with an understanding of the inevitability of difference, moving to a cultural pluralism that accepts and

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2 On that value-add, see Esther Rajadurai, *Success in diversity: the strength of Australia's multiculturalism*, discussion paper, The McKell Institute, December 2018.

respects such differences, and finishing up with a unity in and around those differences, rather than one that is radically separated from it. It certainly means, too, the avoidance of a structural pluralism that precludes a 'common sharing' and can lead to ugly forms of separatism.

Democratic pluralism is more than just liberal, in that it means going beyond an understanding of citizenship as "a legal status embodying rights – civil, political and social" to one that recognises the full participation of the "different".<sup>3</sup> We are taken beyond a "conventional view of citizenship" that "is disinclined to recognise difference in matters of public policy through for example, affirmative action or differential treatment of minority groups. Australia shares with most democratic societies a reluctance to particularisms such as those of ethnicity in matters of public policy". It's the view that differential treatment "violates the principle of non-discrimination"; we hear it often.<sup>4</sup>

This is why a good multiculturalist will ask questions like, does the focus on cultural needs and interests associated with cultural pluralism "minimise or neglect the more material and instrumental needs of ethnic groups in the public domain"?<sup>5</sup> Are racial and ethnic minorities being given a fair go when it comes to appointments in government and business? When important matters are being discussed, are minorities given a proper chance to contribute? It obliges us to ask hard questions about our society and the way it works, and this can hurt because it raises the question of power and influence: who has it and how do they keep it? Will a majority appreciate the power they have? No one should think the search for good answers to these questions is easy, politically or substantively, but they can't be ignored or wished away.

Hard thinking like this was precisely what we sought with the WA Charter of Multiculturalism, which reframed multiculturalism around four principles (Civic Ideals, Fairness, Equality and Participation).<sup>6</sup> What binds us, as I said in the Charter, "is not a traditional culture but the principles upon which this society is governed, including mutual respect, freedom from prejudice and discrimination, equality of opportunity, and full participation in society".

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3 Laksiri Jayasuriya, *Transforming a 'White Australia': issues of racism and immigration*, SSS Publications, 2012, p. 151.

4 Laksiri Jayasuriya, 'The Political Foundations of Australia's Pluralist Society', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 1994, p.327.

5 *Ibid*, p. 322.

6 On the ideas behind the Charter, see Geoff Gallop, *Living with Difference: Does Multiculturalism Have a Future?*, Walter Murdoch Lecture, Murdoch University, 17 September 2003, and Laksiri Jayasuriya, 'Australian Multiculturalism Reframed', *Australian Quarterly*, Vol.80, Issue 3, May-June 2008.

## A new and just relationship

A significant part of our approach to living in a world of difference was a Statement of Commitment to build a “new and just relationship” between the Aboriginal people of WA (represented by the WA ATSIC State Council and supported by the three major Aboriginal peak bodies) and the Government of WA. It set out the principles and a process for the parties to negotiate on the agreed basis that the Aboriginal people are “the first peoples” of WA, something like what is intended for the proposed Voice<sup>7</sup> but not with the constitutional recognition being sought for that Voice. Its ambit was regional as well as statewide, providing a framework for negotiated regional agreements, again a bit like the Voice. It was forged in the knowledge that we were dealing with the intersection of two histories. The need to respect the land and cultural rights of Aboriginal people followed, as did the need to address their political and social rights as a disadvantaged minority.

Incorporating the question of Indigenous rights into the debates around multiculturalism is not without its controversy but is still important because it ensures we are reminded of the range of sources for difference in our society (one of these in Australia being indigeneity). Whereas British and Migrant Australia brought their own histories and traditions to a new land, all too conveniently regarded by the British as unoccupied, Indigenous Australia has 60,000 years or more of history and culture related to that land. It is one of those facts about difference and the unavoidability of deep moral and political disagreement that we tried to extinguish with the doctrines of Terra Nullius and Assimilation. Aboriginal peoples, their languages and their culture and their history pre-white settlement cannot just be extinguished as our predecessors thought possible.

That a sense of pride and spiritual connection with this history is carried forward by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians today should be easy to understand by a British Australia that celebrates – and rightly so – its history of liberal and democratic achievements from the past, for example in relation to the Magna Carta (1215).

Earlier attempts in our history to de-legitimise and then destroy this very idea of Aboriginality were wrong, and did not and could not work. Initiatives like the Voice and our own Statement of Commitment are constructive and unifying; citizens of the Commonwealth Indigenous Australians remain and so too does the Constitution as the Nation’s primary document. What is added is recognition of Aboriginal prior occupancy and jurisdiction, and institutionalisation of a right

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7 The common reference to the current initiative to develop formal mechanisms to include Indigenous people in local, regional and national governance including constitutional recognition – see: [indigenous.gov.au/topics/indigenous-voice](http://indigenous.gov.au/topics/indigenous-voice).

to be heard. It's a constructive step that builds on achievements like the Race Discrimination Act (1975) and Native Title (1992).

### **Substantive equality**

Just to say all Australians, born locally or overseas, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, are equal in civil and political rights only takes us so far down the road of a genuinely democratic pluralism. Formal freedoms may lack the back-up of capacity and opportunity to make them effective. The right to vote is important but still there will be minorities as well as majorities, and how the relationship between the two plays out can be as subtle as a wink and a nod, unseen and unacknowledged, or as obvious and hurtful as a torrent of abuse on a bus or train.

So it was that the concept of 'substantive equality' became a central element in the Gallop Government's multicultural armoury, its advocacy and transmission being given to a unit in the Equal Opportunity Commission. Formal equality prescribes "equal treatment of all people regardless of circumstances" and is "equated with fair treatment" but doesn't take into account "the accumulated disadvantage of generations of discrimination or the disadvantage faced by groups in a system that fails to recognise different needs". Substantive equality, on the other hand, "recognises that equal or the same application of rules to unequal groups can have unequal results."<sup>8</sup> It is a reminder of the tension between ideas in general and ideas in practice.

What is being recognised here is that the legislation making it unlawful to discriminate on the ground of race in certain areas of public life, including the provision of goods, services and facilities, needs to be backed up by a deeper understanding of how inequality plays out in the community and in relation to government (for example an understanding of the difference between accessibility and responsiveness, both being needed if services are to play the role intended of them).

Critics talk of the splitting of the nation into two peoples, one with rights to representation not enjoyed by others, and see this as a recipe for ongoing conflict; one Australia not two, they preach! In relation to substantive equality, critics say involvement and integration into our society and its government does not require special measures as much as it requires individual and group commitment, something that is lost if minorities see themselves and are seen as victims. Positive or negative attitudes to migration – the numbers and the mix

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8 Western Australia Equal Opportunity Commission Substantive Equality Unit, *The Policy Framework for Substantive Equality*, Government of Western Australia, 2005, p.6.

– are also part of the package that underpins these disagreements. Attempts to take historical and structural inequality out of politics eventually fail, community-wide reflections on how power and influence is distributed being at the heart of the human condition and our individual consciences.

### **Racism and extremism challenges**

Racism is another distinguishing feature of the politics of social and political inclusion. It is dangerous because it does not seek consensus via the balancing of values like liberty and equality, but rather seeks to impose a narrowly based conception of life, community and government. The ends are bad and often the means to achieve them even worse.

“This [is] vividly expressed by the cryptic slogan presented as a conflict between those who ‘flew here’ and those who ‘grew here.’”<sup>9</sup> It becomes a case of prioritising ‘our culture’ against ‘their culture’, our culture being defined much more widely than may be assumed to follow from a democracy-inspired patriotism. Underneath, too, lies the view that, as much as they may try, nations accepting and promoting multiculturalism will inevitably find themselves engulfed in serious conflict.

The challenge faced by multiculturalism is not just to deal with these types of racism (which quite often manifest themselves as connected parts of one, always ugly whole), but also to face up to the reality of religiously justified Islamic extremism, be it homegrown and/or internationally inspired. Ultra-nationalist and ultra-religious extremism feed off each other, encourage separatism and create fear.

Add to that speaking out against prejudice and racism directed at minority communities. As Tim Soutphommasane put it in relation to Muslim communities: “If we are to expect Muslim communities to repudiate extremism perpetrated in the name of Islam, our society must be prepared to repudiate extremism that targets Muslim communities.”<sup>10</sup>

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9 Laksiri Jayasuriya, *Transforming a ‘White Australia’: issues of racism and immigration*, SSS Publications, 2012, p. 116.

10 Tim Soutphommasane, *The success of Australia’s multiculturalism*, Speech to the Sydney Institute, 9 March 2006.

## **Australian values**

Surely there has to be some set of over-arching principles that can allow unity and diversity to live together? Does the state need to be completely neutral on the question of values? Our Citizenship Pledge states, “From this time forward, I pledge my loyalty to Australia and its people, whose democratic beliefs I share, whose rights and liberties I respect, and whose laws I will uphold.” For those of a religious disposition, the words “under God” can also be used.

Adding other aspects of ‘Australianness’ to the equation becomes an important issue to explore. For example, the Commonwealth says this, regarding its expectations of migrants: “People are also expected to generally observe Australian social customs, habits and practices even though they are not normally legally binding.”<sup>11</sup> That is vague but provocative; on the surface perhaps understandable, but when you dig deep all sorts of hostilities may be given licence: for example, the clothes we wear, the food we eat and the events we do or do not celebrate. Indeed, it can be a code for prejudice.

What, then, of the prospect of consensus when it comes to unity and diversity? There is a culture war going on in which a conservative sees a once resilient status quo under attack, successful in defending our political inheritance from Britain but losing out in relation to traditional values associated with life, gender and sexuality. They plead, why interfere with a society and system that’s worked well? In relation to the politics of culture that means *priority* for their version of Australian values and experience. In this frame, the obligation of newcomers to integrate into that history is given emphasis. To minorities, they say, opportunity is yours to grasp more than it is ours to promote.

Democratic pluralists, on the other hand, celebrate the freedoms associated with multiculturalism, seeing them as providing a dynamic base for both stability and progress. They are more aware of the power and influence of the new racism described above and the range of structural factors that affect life chances. They refer to active versus passive tolerance again, they understand that “mutual respect goes beyond passive tolerance in asking for styles of conduct and speech consistent with co-existing in a world of difference”.<sup>12</sup> They do not ignore the realities of inequality and are much more open to the changes that can happen as different peoples come together, respecting each other’s uniqueness and keen to explore new ways of doing things.

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11 Department of Immigration and Border Protection, *Life in Australia: Australian Values and Principles*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2016.

12 Geoff Gallop, *Living with Difference: Does Multiculturalism Have a Future?*, Walter Murdoch Lecture, Murdoch University, 17 September 2003, p.13.

*Geoff Gallop*

*This is an abridged version of the inaugural Laki Jayasuriya Oration given at UWA on 10 March 2020.*

*The Honourable Geoff Gallop AC is the former Premier of Western Australia and Emeritus Professor at the University of Sydney.*



# In what sense is Australia a multicultural society?

## Planning for/with multiculturalism

Paul J. Maginn



According to the Australian Government's 2017 statement *Multicultural Australia: United, Strong, Successful*<sup>1</sup>, Australia is “the *most successful* multicultural society in the world, uniting a multitude of cultures, experiences, beliefs and traditions”.

The claim that Australia is *the* most successful multicultural country is open to debate however. Questions abound in relation to: (i) *how* multiculturalism is defined – demographically, sociologically and politically; (ii) the overarching aims and objectives of multicultural policy – assimilation, integration and multiculturalism; and (iii) the criteria for measuring the successfulness of multiculturalism and multicultural policy – visibility, representation and participation in social, economic and political life.

In short, multiculturalism is more than just a demographic measure of the overall degree of cultural diversity at any given spatial scale – national, state, metropolitan, regional or suburban. This is, of course, not to dismiss the value of cultural diversity on the overall social, economic and cultural fabric of Australia.

The Commonwealth government's use of the term “*successful* multicultural nation” conveys the idea that all groups, especially immigrant and ethnic/racial minority communities, are integrated into the host society. Furthermore, the term ‘integration’ suggests that aspects of the identities, beliefs and practices of culturally diverse minorities are in some way surrendered, subsumed and even

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Government, *Multicultural Australia: United, Strong Successful, Australia's multicultural statement*, Australian Government, 2017.

rendered subordinate within, by and to the dominant white Judeo-Christian culture.

By way of a simple example, Australian migrant communities tend not to be referred to as 'African-Australians', 'Asian-Australians', 'Indian-Australians', 'Italian-Australians' or 'British/Irish-Australians' within political, policy or public discourses. This differs from the US where the ethnic and/or ancestral background of 'minority' Americans are commonplace – African-American, Asian-American, and Native-American. Such terminology itself acts as a signifier of cultural diversity.

Relatedly, whereas white migrants to Australia from countries such as the UK, Ireland and Europe are often (self-)described as 'expats', migrants from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD) tend to be defined as immigrants. When used, both of these terms signify a process of 'othering' whereby the former (expats) are deemed to have greater social status than the latter (immigrants).

People who migrate to Australia are encouraged (and expected) to become *Australian* and sign up to so-called *Australian values* – respect, equality, freedom and security – that underpin Australian democracy. These are, of course, worthy values but they are by no means uniquely Australian *per se*. While they underpin Australian democracy and are outlined in both Commonwealth and state government multicultural policy documents, not all migrant/minority communities enjoy the same level of respect, equality, freedom and opportunity as the wider white Australian population.

If this were the case, then a truly successful multicultural nation would look very different. That is, we could expect to see greater visibility, representation and/or participation of ethnic minority groups within all aspects of Australian society. More specifically, there would be greater cultural diversity in senior/leadership roles within the business, media, arts and culture, science and technology and academic worlds – a point echoed in Shamit Sagar's essay 'Is Australia at ease with itself?' in this volume.

### **Ethnic diversity at state level**

The same would also be true of all levels of politics and policymaking – national, state and local. Since local government is the level of government closest to the people, and the socio-spatial governance level where culturally diversity is most visible, we might expect to see greater cultural diversity in terms of local

councillors and professional staff. This is not the case in WA/Perth.<sup>2</sup> Greater diversity among our elected officials and policymakers might therefore translate into a policy environment more aware of cultural diversity.

In fact, it is curious that multiculturalism does not feature more prominently within government policies in Western Australia. After all, WA is a culturally diverse region with some 39.7 per cent of the state's population, according to the 2016 Census, born overseas. This is greater than both NSW (34.5 per cent) and Victoria (35.1 per cent). Furthermore, WA has had a Charter of Multiculturalism<sup>3</sup> since 2004. It states:

“The purpose of the Charter is to explicitly recognise that the people of Western Australia are of different linguistic, religious, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and to promote their participation in democratic governance within an inclusive society.”

The Charter goes on to note that it is important for policymakers to be sensitive and responsive to the fact that although culturally diverse groups may have many of the same needs as the wider white Australian population they also have culturally specific needs.

“Despite the adoption of policies on multiculturalism for some decades, there is still a lack of appreciation that the needs of Indigenous people and people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse background can be different, and that flexibility in service provision is required to cater to these differences. It is important to note that the flexibility in service arrangements to cater to different needs does not necessarily translate to parallel services.”

The Charter does not appear to have been adopted and championed within state government policy domains. In terms of urban and regional planning policy, for example, the State's two most important strategic planning frameworks – *State Planning Strategy 2050* and *Perth and Peel @ 3.5m* – only make tacit reference to cultural diversity. Relatedly, WA State Government population forecasts (WA

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2 Paul J. Maginn and Fiona Haslam-McKenzie, *Census of Western Australian Elected Members 2016*, Centre for Regional Development, School of Earth and Environment, The University of Western Australia, March 2017.

3 Government of Western Australia, Office of Multicultural Interests, *WA Charter of Multiculturalism*, Government of Western Australia, November 2004.

*Tomorrow: Medium-Term Age-Sex Population Forecasts 2016 to 2031*) provide no kind of analyses on cultural diversity and what implications this might have on planning and public policy more generally, in relation to issues such as housing, education, employment, health and so on.

### **Urban and regional planning**

The absence of a meaningful policy commitment or interest in cultural diversity within urban and regional planning at the state level means that there is unlikely to be a substantive policy commitment to multiculturalism – beyond recognising and celebrating cultural festivals, harmony day, and NAIDOC week – at the local government level. Again, this is not to discount the role of this type of multicultural policy expression; these events are good starting points in acknowledging and promoting cultural diversity. Indeed, other simple policy actions could be developed in order to enhance and promote the fact that Perth/WA is a multicultural society.

In terms of local government planning being more responsive and inclusive of cultural diversity, the ideal policy space for this to occur is the local planning strategy (LPS). All local governments in WA are required to develop an LPS, and as the title of this particular planning policy document indicates, its function is to respond and translate long-term strategic planning directions of the State Government to the local level.

The City of Stirling and the City of Vincent are two of the most culturally diverse local government areas within the Perth metropolitan region, with the share of overseas-born population accounting for 45 per cent and 44 per cent respectively of total population in 2016. Stirling is also the largest local government area (LGA) by population within Perth, with some 208,400 people, and covers a large geographical area that comprises a diverse mix of residential, industrial and commercial suburbs. In contrast, Vincent is a relatively small inner-suburban LGA, with a population of around 33,700 people.

Despite the high level of cultural diversity within both LGAs, multiculturalism does not appear to permeate either councils' LPSs in any meaningful policy sense. The term 'cultural diversity' appears once in the City of Vincent LPS, as part of policy recommendations relating to Built Form:

“Build on the sense of place evidenced by the area’s history and cultural diversity.”<sup>4</sup>

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4 Government of Western Australia, Department of Planning, *City of Vincent Local*

Ironically, the City of Vincent LPS makes a bold statement about its multicultural character under the vision statement in its introduction:

“A Community of Communities...In 2024, Vincent is a place of colour and immense personality, a **rich cosmopolitan melting pot of cultures** from every part of the globe. With our warm and open attitude, people from all walks of life choose to live here. Abundantly endowed with **memorable places**, intriguing and fascinating elements, and every imaginable convenience, Vincent has an outstanding residential quality of life.”

Similarly, the City of Stirling LPS only mentions “cultural diversity” once and this in a rather matter-of-fact statement:

“There is strong multi-cultural diversity within the City of Stirling which includes people born in over 35 countries other than Australia.”

Interestingly, the City of Stirling LPS seeks to enhance the cultural diversity of the local government area by attracting more international visitors by offering diverse attractions<sup>5</sup>:

“The City currently lacks a diversity of tourist attractions to meet the future tourism trends. These trends include entertainment, shopping and other urban activities to service the emerging tourism markets in China, Singapore, Malaysia and other Asian countries. However the City is strategically positioned to take advantage of these tourism trends by growing and diversifying the City’s major Activity Centres and Corridors.”

The absence of a substantive policy commitment to cultural diversity within the LPSs of the City of Stirling and the City of Vincent (and, presumably, those of other councils) appears largely due to the fact that cultural diversity does not feature in state planning policy discourses. Since local councils generally take their policy cues from the state government, if there are no clear policy signals that multiculturalism is a policy priority there can be little expectation that many councils will give it due attention.

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*Planning Strategy*, Government of Western Australia, November 2016.

5 Government of Western Australia, Department of Planning, *City of Stirling Local Planning Strategy*, Government of Western Australia, October 2019.

Ultimately, a more nuanced and substantive policy commitment to multiculturalism is required if we are to ensure Indigenous and ethnic/cultural minority communities are given a ‘fair go’ at reaping the benefits of the opportunities Australia has to offer its citizens and residents. A step in this direction will move us closer to laying claim to being a *successful* multicultural nation.

### **The new Multicultural Policy Framework**

The WA State Government has recently (February 2020) taken up the mantle of multiculturalism with the endorsement of the Multicultural Policy Framework<sup>6</sup> (MPF), which scaffolds off the Charter of Multiculturalism. The MPF is designed to get state-level public sector agencies to become more responsive to cultural diversity by developing multicultural plans that must include “strategies, actions and key performance indicators”. The MPF is somewhat similar to Disability Action Plans that government agencies are required by law to develop to ensure people with disabilities are treated fairly. Both reflect a philosophy of sensitising public policy to meet differential needs.

Although the MPF does not apply to local governments, there is potential for policy changes brought about by it at the state agency level to filter down to local councils. And, the State Government has indicated, “local government authorities and community and non-government organisations may wish to adapt the framework to their needs”. This provides an ideal opportunity for major culturally diverse councils such as Stirling and Vincent, along with the City of Perth, City of Canning and City of Gosnells, to be leaders in multicultural policy development.

### **Some proposals**

In terms of urban and regional planning, and playing a developmental and more instrumental role in enhancing multiculturalism within WA (and particularly within the Perth metro region), a number of broad policy ideas are proposed below.

First, in light of the recently endorsed MPF, the Western Australian Planning Commission (WAPC) should consider the development of a State Planning Policy (SPP) on multiculturalism. SPPs are the highest level of planning policy guidance within the WA planning process. They are used by the WAPC to guide it on strategic decisions relating to land subdivision and development approval, and to guide local councils on relevant matters pertaining to the preparation

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6 Government of Western Australia, *Western Australia Multicultural Policy Framework*, Government of Western Australia, February 2020.

of local planning schemes (it is also assumed here that such guidance would apply to local planning strategies, since this policy framework informs planning schemes). An SPP on multiculturalism would eradicate the apparent policy vacuum within local government planning on substantive multicultural policy.

Next, there should be more structured and developed training on multiculturalism for both state and local government planners so policy-making is more critically sensitive and responsive to the land-use and humanistic issues underpinning cultural diversity. Relatedly, there should also be better multicultural training and education for all elected officials within state and local government. For example, an increased understanding of cultural traditions in relation to familial/household structures, religious practices, educational requirements, social practices and the role of structural, institutional and individual discrimination will help create better-informed planning policies.

Third, when state and local government planners engage in consultations and participation exercises, they should monitor the profile of those who participate in any such events or processes. If minority groups in culturally diverse areas are absent and/or under-represented then alternative steps should be taken in an effort to reach those groups before any decisions are finalised.

Fourth, the cultural diversity within WA/Perth is also accompanied by linguistic diversity. Despite this, it is not often we see other languages used explicitly in public spaces, by public services or on public signage. Furthermore, in light of WA's shifting demographic profile – with increasing numbers of migrants from China and elsewhere in Asia – plus our increasing economic relationship with these same countries via the resources sector, tertiary education and tourism, a multi-lingual strategy should be developed. In short, public transport services, road signs and other public service signs should provide information in a range of languages over and above English.

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# Multiculturalism in Australia: the triumph of self interest

Mike Nahan



Most objective observers agree Australia has done multiculturalism well.

Over the last 25 years, we have become a truly multi-ethnic, multicultural society. This has been achieved by a large expansion of our immigration intake in tandem with an increasing proportion of new migrants from across Asia.

It's not just the degree and speed of change to our cultural mix but the generally harmonious nature of multicultural Australia; while there have been tensions at times, these have been nowhere near the level seen in other countries.

How did it happen? Primarily, it occurred because of the economy. Australia, prior to the 2020 coronavirus recession, experienced just under 20 years of unbroken economic growth, including one of the largest resource booms in its history. During this period, unemployment was low but at the same time there were skill shortages, and our economic success was largely based on the expanding markets in Asia. Consequently, Government reached out for people and skills, and Asia was the logical source.

Additionally, governments, with differing degrees of success, regained public support for immigration by refocusing policy on the needs of the labour market and, more controversially, by limiting and controlling the intake of unskilled migrants.

One of the great ironies of this process has been the role of former Prime Minister John Howard. Mr Howard had, prior to winning government in 1996, expressed concerns about multiculturalism and the ability of the nation to absorb a large range of diverse cultures, specifically from Asia.

As such he was, and arguably still is, perceived by many as no friend of multiculturalism. Yet the policies of the Howard Government, through a wider

appetite for new migration, resulted in the flourishing of multiculturalism in Australia, specifically from Asia. As respected journalist Paul Kelly correctly stated in 2005, “Howard is now one of the main architects of Australia as a multicultural society.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Populate or perish: multiculturalism’s foundation**

Of course, Australia’s multicultural experiment did not start with the Howard Government, but with the Curtin and Menzies governments, and was further developed by successive governments. Following World War II, there was an accepted need for Australia to populate or perish, and to build a new industrial Australia. This gave rise to the requirement for people and labour beyond those who could be drawn from what was then perceived as the mother country.

Over the next twenty-five years, millions of migrants from all over continental Europe were welcomed to Australia to meet its needs. Most of the migrants were unskilled; however, they met the needs of the time, based on an economy that remained highly agricultural and focused on primary industries.

There was next-to-no government assistance available to migrants other than plenty of job opportunities and, as such, they posed no financial burden to the existing population. While they did face prejudice early, this dissipated over time through a strong work ethic, good citizenship, economic success and intermarriage. Eventually their cultures became part of the Australian culture. They established the core foundation of multicultural Australia.

Even though there was a large increase in migrants from non-traditional sources in the 1950s and 1960s, migrants from the UK continued to dominate Australia’s intake. Notably, during those decades people deemed to be non-European were prevented from migrating here by the White Australia policy. During this time, Australia experienced full employment, with the unemployment rate cycling around two per cent. Consequently, the economy was able to absorb high levels of migration, including low-skill migrants.

From the 1970s to the early 1990s, Australian governments confronted a number of fundamental challenges. First, and most importantly, population and industrial development policies of the past were fraying, resulting in growing unemployment, particularly for low-skilled labour. From 1974, unemployment rates began to ratchet upward, reaching six per cent by the late 1970s. It was pushed up again to 10 per cent by the recession of 1982–83. It remained high

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1 Paul Kelly, *Howard and his haters miss real migrations story*, *The Australian*, 21 December 2005.

throughout the 1980s and once again rose to 11 per cent during the recession of the early 1990s.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, there was a move by major western nations – including Canada, the US, the UK and Australia – towards an open, non-discriminatory immigration policy. The White Australia Policy, which had been the cornerstone of Australia's immigration policy since the federation, was abandoned by the Holt Government in 1966.

Furthermore, the focus of government changed from creating growth and jobs to the creation of the welfare state.

Finally, Australia confronted the need to assist in accommodating waves of refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, Lebanon, China, former Yugoslavia, Sri Lanka and Timor. Most of these refugees were unskilled, non-English-speaking, poor and traumatised.

Not surprisingly, successive governments from Whitlam through to Keating adjusted Australia's migration policies to meet these challenges and changed conditions. In response to rising unemployment, governments cut the permanent intake. The migrant intake was reduced from a post-war record high of 185,099 in 1969–70, to post-war low of 52,752 in 1975–76.

The migrant intake remained low until 1986, when it was allowed to increase to around 140,000. With the increase in unemployment in 1990, however, the permanent intake was cut back to between 60,000 and 80,000 by the mid-1990s.<sup>3</sup>

The last vestiges of the White Australia policy were eliminated by the Whitlam Government. It also introduced the Racial Discrimination Act, which made discrimination based on race or religion illegal. The Hawke Government subsequently put in place a non-discriminatory immigration policy and introduced skilled categories.

As part of its welfare agenda, the Whitlam Government introduced a family reunion program that increasingly came to dominate Australia's migration intake, accounting for 80 per cent of total intake by the mid-1990s. Subsequent Australian governments responded to the relevant waves of refugees by accepting them on a controlled and limited basis. Despite attempts to claim otherwise, there has been (with perhaps the exception of the Fraser Government) a commonality in approach, policies and even the rhetoric of consecutive governments from

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2 Jerome Fahrer and Alexandra Heath, *The Evolution of Employment and Unemployment in Australia*, Research Discussion Paper 9215, Reserve Bank of Australia, December 1992, p.4.

3 Janet Phillips, Michael Klapdor and Joanne Simon-Davies, *Migration to Australia since Federation: a guide to statistics*, Background Note, Parliamentary Library, Parliament of Australia, October 2010, p.4.

Whitlam to Morrison regarding refugees. For example, the Whitlam Government established a specific refugee programme in 1975, largely retained by successor administrations. The number of refugee places varied over the years, peaking under the Fraser Government at 21,917 in 1981–82.

Governments established a range of programs designed to assist refugees. Even decades after they arrived, many struggled in the workplace, with one-third or more of recently arrived migrants depending on welfare as their main source of income.<sup>4</sup>

By the early 1990s there was growing concern with the ability of the Australian community to absorb refugees and unskilled migrants. While there was relatively limited ethnic conflict, migrants, particularly refugees and family migrants, tended to struggle in the job market. These issues naturally translated to broader community concerns with the immigration program and multiculturalism. These concerns largely rose and fell with unemployment levels, a trend that continued into the 2010s.<sup>5</sup>

The FitzGerald Report of the Committee to Advise on Australia's Immigration Policies, commissioned by the Hawke Government in 1988, warned “of a clear and present need for urgent immigration reform,” and widespread concerns about multiculturalism.<sup>6</sup>

## Howard's changes

In response to these concerns, the Howard Government, elected in 1996, made major changes to Australia's migration program.

First, the skills categories were expanded and given priority, and after a few years the overall permanent intake was expanded dramatically. Between 1996 and 2006, Australia's intake of skilled migrants increased more than threefold, and then went on to double again by 2013. In 2017–18, skilled categories accounted for about 70 per cent of the total permanent intake, compared to around 30 per cent in 1996. The permanent intake reached a historic high in 2013.<sup>7</sup>

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4 Robert Birrell, *Immigration Reform in Australia: Coalition Government Proposals and Outcomes since March 1996*, Centre for Population and Urban Research, Monash University, 1997.

5 The Treasury and Department of Home Affairs, *Shaping a nation: population growth and immigration over time, Commonwealth of Australia*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2018, Figure 35.

6 Stephen FitzGerald, *Immigration: A Commitment to Australia, Report of the Committee to Advise on Australia's Immigration Policies*, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1988, chapter 1.

7 Leith Van Onselen, *Australia's skilled migration programme is a giant fraud*, Australian

Australia's refugee program was cut by the Howard Government and then held there by subsequent governments. The family reunion category has been kept more-or-less constant in absolute terms, but declined sharply as a share of total intake. In short, subsequent governments have sought to limit the number of unskilled migrants.

Subsequent governments – Labor and Liberal – have maintained Howard's basic approach and priorities.

While the family reunion category was effectively capped, family migration was supported under the skilled migrant programs, as skilled migrants were allowed to bring their immediate family with them.

The Howard and subsequent governments also introduced and expanded a range of temporary programs to meet the needs of workforce and businesses. These programs have largely remained uncapped, and grew significantly from 660,590 new visas in 2008–09 to 816,719 in 2017–18.<sup>8</sup> The largest categories are student visas, followed by working holiday visas. Overall, there were 1.6 million temporary migrants in Australia in 2017.<sup>9</sup>

Consistent with the aim of encouraging permanent settlement, many of the temporary visa categories have been provided with pathways to permanent residency. The Australian Treasury identified more than 5,500 different pathways for people to move from a temporary to a permanent visa. These opportunities have been taken up at an increasing rate. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship estimated that in 2007–08, about one-third of the permanent intake came directly from temporary visa holders.<sup>10</sup> Treasury found in 2018 this trend had increased to around 55 per cent.

It is clear that the Howard Government's immigration policies have had a profound impact on the nation. They have resulted in the doubling of the overall population growth rate, limited the aging of the population, provided needed skills (particularly during the recent resources boom), laid the foundation for Australia's international education industry – now one of the nation's largest, which has provided vital funding to our universities and TAFEs – and underpinned the growth in the housing market, amongst other things.

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Economy, Macro Business, 14 March 2018, <https://www.macrobusiness.com.au/2018/03/australias-skilled-migration-program-is-a-giant-fraud/>.

8 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Migration Australia 2017/18*, 3412.0, 2019.

9 The Treasury and Department of Home Affairs, *Shaping a nation: population growth and immigration over time*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2018, 19.

10 Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Annual Report 2009-10*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2010.

## Australia's ethnic mix

These policies also led to a significant shift in Australia's ethnic mix. Over the last 25 years, people from Asian countries have increasingly come to dominate permanent migration. In 2017–18 Asia accounted for 64 per cent of Australia permanent migrants, while Europe (mainly the UK) accounted for just 25 per cent. This was almost a complete reversal of the proportion in 1996.

India was by far the largest source of permanent migrants in 2017–18, followed by China, the UK and the Philippines (together accounting for 43 per cent of the permanent intake).<sup>11</sup>

The changes to immigration policy and to the source countries have resulted in the majority of residents born overseas coming from Asian countries rather than Europe. This is a remarkable change that illustrates a significant transformation in the multicultural character in our nation.

What is extraordinary is that the change in the scale and composition of our migrant intake has been accompanied by a high level of support for immigration.

As shown in Figure 1, public support for Australia's migration program has increased from a low of 25 per cent in the early 1990s to more than 60 per cent in 2016. There is a number of reasons for this increased level of support.

Firstly, the last 25 years have been a period of sustained low unemployment and solid economic growth. Secondly, the public recognises the very real benefits of the expanded migration program and the need for skilled immigrants.

An international survey by the Pew Research Centre<sup>12</sup> recorded a 78 per cent level of support for skilled migrants in Australia. The survey also found that 62 per cent of Australians who were critical of high immigration generally, supported the migration of skilled people.

Lastly, new skilled migrants acclimatised well and quickly, and were net contributors to their new society immediately. Asian skilled migrants have a high level of workplace participation, higher-than-average incomes, low levels of welfare, a good command of English, and have settled into the Australian way of life.

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11 Department of Home Affairs, *Permanent Additions to Australia's Population 2017-18*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2018.

12 Jacob Poushter and Stephen Cornibert, *Americans and Germans Disagree on the State of Bilateral Relations, but Largely Align on Key International Issues*, Spring Global Attitudes Survey, Pew Research Centre, 2019, Q53c.

## **The picture today**

In 2019, the Morrison Government reduced the permanent intake planning target from 190,000 to 160,000, arguably heralding further reductions in the future. The Government has also tightened up by extending waiting time for migrant access welfare and replacing the 457 temporary visa class to limit pathways to permanency. It is also putting in place policies aimed at ensuring temporary migrants work in regional areas for a greater proportion of their overall time, following dispersal programs that have been adopted (with mixed success) in Canada.

With the severe economic challenges facing Australia for the foreseeable future due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I expect there to be a review of Australia's migration program. The Government will be required to focus on the recovery of the domestic economy and the high levels of unemployment.

As I have outlined earlier, Australia's migration policy has largely been dictated throughout its history by the nation's labour market and economic needs. Here in Western Australia, there was already little capacity throughout the domestic economy before the crisis hit us.

Many skilled migrants in recent years have had to take up unskilled work to obtain employment and develop an income stream. With millions of people rendered unemployed due to the closure of businesses across Australia, there will be minimal capacity for the nation to accept new skilled migrants from overseas. Consequently, the Commonwealth Government will be forced to wind back immigration levels, perhaps to historic lows, although this will not dissipate a large increase in demand from abroad from skilled people seeking a safer, better life in Australia. While the demand for refugee entry will only increase, Australia should continue to control its intake according to its needs and capacity.

This is a unique time in Australia's history, as historically we have been required to look abroad to boost population and meet skill shortages. In the short to medium term, however, policy-makers will be confronted with a different challenge.

In short, the Government will continue to alter the migrant intake and immigration policies to meet Australia's labour market and economic needs. If they do, as it has in the past, it will bode well for multiculturalism in Australia.

*The Honourable Dr Mike Nahan MLA is the Member for Riverton in the Parliament of Western Australia.*





# Australian ethnic change and political inclusion: finding strength in diversity in responding to global crises

Juliet Pietsch



Shortly after the COVID-19 epidemic broke out in the Chinese city of Wuhan, Australians with migrant or ethnic heritage, especially Asian-Australians, reported an increase in racism, hostility and other forms of intolerance, especially on public transport. In the period when the outbreak was still centred in Wuhan, the Australian Human Rights Commission noted that about one in four people who lodged racial discrimination complaints during January and February 2020 were targeted because of the fear that

the COVID-19 disease would spread to Australia.<sup>1</sup> Chinese and Hong Kong international students were particularly at risk because of their visible markers of difference and their prior experience of infectious diseases such as the SARS outbreak in 2002-2004. Those who had lived through similar pandemics overseas had quickly learnt of the importance of wearing protective facemasks to protect others in the community. This learned community response, however, was a marker of cultural difference that subjected some to experiences of stigmatisation or racial hostility.

The negative experience of Asian-Australians was no doubt emboldened by political leaders, such as President Trump referring to the coronavirus as the ‘Chinese virus’ or the ‘Wuhan virus’. The World Health Organisation repeatedly advised political leaders not to target any nationality or ethnicity in references

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<sup>1</sup> Jason Fang, Erwin Renaldi and Samuel Yang, *Australians urged to ‘show kindness’ amid reports of COVID-19 racial discrimination complaints*, ABC News, 3 April 2020, [abc.net.au/news/2020-04-03/racism-COVID-19-coronavirus-outbreak-commissioner-discrimination/12117738](http://abc.net.au/news/2020-04-03/racism-COVID-19-coronavirus-outbreak-commissioner-discrimination/12117738)

to the COVID-19 as it could lead to racial profiling against Asians in migrant-receiving countries around the world. Mike Ryan, executive director of the WHO's Emergencies Program, reminded political leaders that "viruses know no borders and they don't care about your ethnicity, the colour of your skin or the money you have in the bank".<sup>2</sup> In Australia, Pauline Hanson, Queensland Senator for One Nation, felt these comments were not justified. In a Twitter statement, she suggested that, "China must be called out and any attempts to attack or criticise people for referring to COVID-19 as a 'Chinese virus' should be pushed back on", which generated more than 3,500 retweets and 9,400 likes among her Twitter followers.<sup>3</sup>

What is disappointing is not so much Pauline Hanson's comments – which have always represented those with a genuine fear of globalisation and new patterns of migration – but rather the silence in the broader political debate on the importance of protecting migrant and ethnic-minority communities from stigmatisation and racial hostility in times of perceived external threat. During such times, there is an even greater need for political leaders to promote cultural diversity as a source of strength, especially in addressing some of the biggest global catastrophes and challenges of our time. Cultural diversity can bring to the table a variety of different perspectives, experiences and viewpoints to address a common goal. For example, political leaders from Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong have had very different views on the importance of wearing masks as a community response to COVID-19. This is just one example of the need for different experiences in political decision-making.

In a recent study on temporary migration, Anna Boucher from the University of Sydney noted that the coronavirus pandemic brings not only a health and economic crisis but a migration crisis, which is closely related to the long-term shift from permanent migration to temporary migration.<sup>4</sup> The bulk of Net Overseas Migration (NOM) is now primarily made up of temporary migrants, which, as Boucher observes, has largely contributed to Australia's economic success story. Further to this, one of Australia's biggest export markets is international students. In 2018, international students collectively contributed more than \$35

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2 Morgan Gstalter, *WHO officially warns against calling it 'Chinese Virus,' says 'there is no blame in this'*, The Hill, 19 March 2020, [thehill.com/homenews/administration/488479-who-official-warns-against-calling-it-chinese-virus-says-there-is-no](https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/488479-who-official-warns-against-calling-it-chinese-virus-says-there-is-no)

3 Pauline Hanson (24 March 2020), [twitter.com/paulinehansonoz/status/1242290462615990272?lang=en](https://twitter.com/paulinehansonoz/status/1242290462615990272?lang=en), [Twitter Post].

4 Anna Bucher, *Covid-19 is not only a health crisis, it's a migration crisis*, The Lowy Institute, 2 April 2020, [loyyinstitute.org/the-interpretor/COVID-19-not-only-health-crisis-it-s-migration-crisis](https://www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpretor/COVID-19-not-only-health-crisis-it-s-migration-crisis).

billion to the Australian economy, supporting 240,000 jobs, while also partly filling the shortfall in declining federal government funding for Australian universities. Yet, international students and other temporary visa holders were not considered eligible for financial support at the commencement of Australia's coronavirus lockdown. Instead, Prime Minister Scott Morrison remarked that if international students were unable to support themselves, "there is the alternative for them to return to their home countries. Australia must focus on its citizens and its residents to ensure that we can maximise the economic supports that we have".<sup>5</sup>

Migrants of East Asian descent and international students have not been the only targets of stigmatisation and hostility during the COVID-19 crisis. Temporary migrant workers and asylum seekers are also easily forgotten about, often carrying with them a great deal of knowledge, skills and experience, not to mention a great deal of resilience necessary for coping in times of crisis and upheaval. Migrant workers living in overcrowded hostels and asylum seekers in detention centres are experiencing great difficulty in following government directives on social distancing. While more than 80 per cent of asylum seekers have been found to be genuine refugees under the UN convention, they are currently living in conditions that can be regarded as dangerous, with many having existing health conditions that place them in the high-risk categories for COVID-19.

International students, migrant workers and asylum seekers, who now have no access to social welfare, also find themselves between a rock and a hard place, as their home countries are facing COVID-19 outbreaks that are quite likely to be much worse than Australia's. Even if they wanted to go home, with limited access to employment many no longer have the financial means to purchase a return flight. Of course, that's even if there are available flights to their home country. With QANTAS and Virgin Australia grounding virtually their entire fleets, and almost all other international carriers doing the same, finding a flight home is an increasingly unlikely scenario.

What is clear in the present crisis is that 'Team Australia' – a phrase frequently used by politicians – is not inclusive of many migrants and ethnic minorities who are significant contributors to the Australian labour market and social fabric. Their exclusion not only exposes existing social and political inequalities but also whether or not Australia is truly committed to the values of multiculturalism and inclusivity within its democracy. One reason why stigmatisation and racial

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5 Jano Gibson and Alexis Moran, *As coronavirus spreads, 'its time to go home' Scott Morrison tells visitors and international students*, ABC News, 3 April 2020, [abc.net.au/news/2020-04-03/coronavirus-pm-tells-international-students-time-to-go-to-home/12119568](http://abc.net.au/news/2020-04-03/coronavirus-pm-tells-international-students-time-to-go-to-home/12119568)

hostility towards migrant and ethnic-minority groups continues in Australia without any real challenge is the lack of ethnic political representation and leadership. In a case study of India, Simon Chauchard (2014) shows that improving ethnic representation in politics matters for intergroup relations, because their presence in leadership roles signals that members of disadvantaged groups ought not to be treated with hostility.<sup>6</sup> The numerous benefits of ethnic representation have been found in other democracies with culturally diverse populations. For example, across Europe, Bloemraad and Schönwälder (2013) find that “political parties are gradually recognising that they need to broaden their appeal to reach out to residents of migrant origins and to represent this new diversity in their membership and leadership.”<sup>7</sup> Other studies in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom have similarly demonstrated the symbolic and material benefits of descriptive representation for racial and ethnic minorities.<sup>8</sup>

Greater ethnic representation and inclusion in politics not only brings about important symbolic social change but also includes migrants and ethnic minorities in decision-making processes more generally, especially on issues such as racism that have a disproportionate impact on new migrants with markers of difference to the majority population. Internationally, research has shown political representatives with experience of stigmatisation and racial hostility are more likely to make a stand on racism and the protection of marginalised communities from harm. For example, Heath *et al.* (2013) demonstrated the similarities in the political agendas and opinions of ethnic minority candidates on issues such as combating racial discrimination and labour-market disadvantage.<sup>9</sup> Of course, not all ethnic candidates are likely to have similar views on social and political issues that influence party-political decision-making. However,

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6 Simon Chauchard, ‘Can Descriptive Representation Change Beliefs about a Stigmatized Group? Evidence from Rural India’, *American Political Science Review*, 108 (2), 2014, p. 403-422.

7 Irene Bloemraad and Karen Schönwälder, ‘Immigrant and Ethnic Minority Representation in Europe: Conceptual Challenges and Theoretical Approaches’, *West European Politics*, 36, 2013, p. 565.

8 Susan Banducci, Todd Donovan and Jeffrey Karp, ‘Minority Representation, Empowerment, and Participation’, *Journal of Politics*, 66, 2004, p. 534-56; Karen Bird, ‘The Political Representation of Visible Minorities in Electoral Democracies: a Comparison of France, Denmark, and Canada’, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 11, 2005, p. 425-65; Karen Bird, Thomas Saafeld and Andreas Wüst (eds.), *The Political Representation of Immigrants and Minorities: Voters, Parties and Parliaments in Liberal Democracies*, Routledge, 2011; Didier Ruedin, ‘Ethnic Group Representation in a Cross-National Comparison’, *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 15, 2009, p. 335-54.

9 Anthony Heath *et al.*, *The Political Integration of Ethnic Minorities in Britain*, Oxford University Press, 2013.

in terms of combating racism, preliminary evidence in Australia suggests those with a migrant or minority background are more likely to make a stand. As an example, 21 March was the UN's International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. With the spike in COVID-19 related racism cases, it seemed like a good opportunity for senators and MPs to remind Australians of the importance of combating racism, xenophobia, stigmatisation, hostility and other forms of racial intolerance that are known to increase in times of perceived external threat. However, any gestures of support were limited to just a handful of politicians with a relatively recent experience of migration or racism.

In scanning the official digital platforms senators and MPs use to connect with local constituents, it is clearly evident those with a personal experience of migration or racism are the ones most likely to post or tweet an acknowledgment of the value of cultural diversity and the need to protect minority communities from harm. On 21 March, the Egypt-born Anne Aly, Member for Cowan, asked Australians to “use today to reflect, and remind ourselves of the need to be ever vigilant against hatred and division in our society”.<sup>10</sup> The Malaysia-born Penny Wong, Senator for South Australia, called for Australians to “make Australia more inclusive, accepting, respectful and equal”.<sup>11</sup> Peter Khalil, Member for Wills and with parents born in Egypt, has acknowledged the importance of the Australian-Kurdish community in his electorate and its contribution to Australia's multicultural society. Maria Vamvakinou, Member for Calwell, acknowledged that the COVID-19 crisis meant that “For those Australians who have lived through war and depression, who have experienced expulsion from their homes and the destruction of their lives, understanding the current threat to our lives, here in this lucky country, will come easier than to those of us who have not had such experiences”.<sup>12</sup> Finally, Linda Burney, Member for Barton and an Indigenous Australian, highlighted the challenges faced by Chinese restaurant owners and grocers in her electorate<sup>13</sup> (as well as Indigenous and remote communities) who are disproportionately at risk of catching, and perhaps dying from, COVID-19.

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10 Anne Aly (21 March 2020), <https://www.facebook.com/annezzaaly/posts/today-march-21st-is-the-international-day-for-the-elimination-of-racial-discrimi/1035582463490283/> [Facebook Post].

11 Penny Wong (21 March 2020), <https://twitter.com/welcomingaus/status/1241155728502472704> [Twitter Post].

12 Maria Vamvakinou (21 March 2020), [https://www.facebook.com/pg/mariavamvakinou/posts/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/mariavamvakinou/posts/?ref=page_internal) [Facebook Post].

13 Linda Burney, *We stand with you and we are going to get through this together*, Speech at the House of Representatives, 27 February 2020, <https://www.lindaburney.com.au/speeches>.

The examples above show racial and ethnic representation in politics matters. While there are always exceptions, on the whole the academic literature in migrant-receiving countries has found those with a relatively recent experience of migration or racism are more likely to make a stand on changes to legislation and policies that have a disproportionate impact on migrants and ethnic communities.<sup>14</sup> Having one or two voices in Parliament is a step forward in making symbolic change. However, a stronger collective voice is more likely to result in substantive policy changes that address racism as well as promote the benefits of diversity as a source of strength. At present, that only a few politicians in Australia regularly make a public stand during times of crisis, economic instability or perceived threat is a possible reflection of a lack of wider party buy-in. In this sense, Australia is an outlier compared to other Western immigrant societies and stands out as not only having limited ethnic representation compared to other parliaments around the world, but also as having a weak political voice necessary to stand up against racism and drive change in social attitudes. This is perplexing in a country that prides itself on its multicultural successes.

The world we live in is far more globally interconnected than ever before. While there are always initial social, cultural and policy challenges with each migration wave, Australia needs to ensure that all of those living within its borders are treated with care and dignity, and are seen to be part of the solution to national and global crises rather than the cause. It is the acknowledgment, strengthening, equipping and resourcing of Australia's migrant and ethnic communities that will assist with the kind of innovation and problem-solving needed to address some of the most difficult social and political challenges. Following the coronavirus pandemic, other crises – such as climate change, mass human displacement, terrorism and extremism, global poverty, economic insecurity and violence towards women and children – await urgent attention. Australia will need a well-resourced and valued migrant population to contribute to solving some of the serious problems that lie ahead. This will require strengthening our commitment to the value of diversity within Australia's core political institutions as a first step. The next step may require a rethink on migration policy more generally. The global health crisis has exposed a possible fragility in migration policy, as demonstrated by the sudden experiences and feelings of insecurity within Australia's comparatively large migrant and ethnic-minority population.

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<sup>14</sup> Juliet Pietsch, *Race, Ethnicity and the Participation Gap: Understanding Australia's Political Complexion*, University of Toronto Press, 2018.

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# An immigration economy that lacks ethnic diversity in its politics and government

Benjamin Reilly

## Introduction



This short piece surveys three big challenges for migration, democracy and diversity in Australia.

The first challenge is our historically exceptionally high rate of immigration, which for the past two years has been increasing our population at a faster rate than our national economic growth. Even though immigration contributes to economic growth, it has now reached the point that per capita income levels are, for the first time in a generation, declining.

A second major challenge is the differential impact of migration on our cities and regions. Migration in Australia is not evenly distributed, but is accruing overwhelmingly in Sydney and Melbourne, while other cities, and in particular regional areas, are missing out. Australia's fastest-growing city, Melbourne, received 120,000 additional residents in 2018 – 2,400 a week. Most of this population growth (65 per cent) was due to net overseas migration and concentrated in outer suburbs. In comparison, the rest of Victoria could attract less than 20,000 people all year. This is causing great congestion, bottle-necks and problems of basic servicing of outlying areas. Various government schemes to try to address this problem – by incentivising migrants to settle in rural areas, for instance – have had some success at the individual level but have done little to shift the balance in terms of overall numbers.

A final challenge is one for our political system, and our political parties and parliaments in particular. These key institutions of democracy are no longer themselves representative of the diversity of our society. The composition of our

immigration has changed dramatically – most now comes from the Indo-Pacific, rather than Europe, as in the past. India and China have overtaken traditional migration countries such as the United Kingdom and New Zealand as our top source countries. But our politics has not kept pace, and recent research has found that our parliaments in particular are highly *unrepresentative* of our diversity. We fall well behind other comparable countries on most measures and in some ways the problem is getting worse, not better.

## Discussion

Immigration has been a great boon for Australia – indeed, it was successive waves of post-war immigration that, more than any other factor, saved Australia from global marginalisation, domestic parochialism and economic decline. Our country has been immeasurably benefitted by the new entrants from all parts of the world. Australia’s population has doubled in size over the course of my lifetime, and today almost half the population were either born overseas or are the children of someone born overseas.

But with this change has come a new and troubling dependence. Australia’s economy is now addicted to immigration. This has been very good for the size of our economy and for those who can afford to live in well-serviced areas of major cities. But for those who are pushed into the outer suburbs, which includes a large proportion of immigrants themselves, things are much harder. Commuting time, public transport and basic infrastructure for example, simply have not kept pace with our immigration-fuelled growth.

There is also a deeper problem. Immigration has changed from a situation where those outside Australia are lured here by a growing economy to one where our growing economy is a result of that very migration itself. We are in danger of turning immigration itself -- rather than innovation and productivity improvements -- into a major driver of economic activity, with growth stemming purely from the infusion of new people and the resulting demand for housing and services.

Without new migrants from Asia each year, Australia’s economy would quickly slide into recession. Indeed, on estimates of per capita GDP, Australia has been in a per capita recession since 2019. The reason is not the composition of migration but the rate. For the past decade, we have been increasing our population via international migration at over 200,000 migrants per year. In recent years, that figure has been higher, increasing our total population by almost one per cent a year. As a result, since 1990, Australia’s population has increased by almost

50 per cent – an historic and unprecedented pace of growth even when compared to other settler societies such as the US or Canada.

As *The Australian's* Adam Creighton has argued,

“Politicians crow about the scarcity of our recessions – by convention, two quarters of negative GDP growth – but the relentless influx of people means it’s nigh on impossible to have one.

Consider that US net overseas migration was 595,000 last year; in Australia, with less than 8 per cent America’s population, it was about 240,000. Indeed, when adjusted for population, Australia has had recessions in 2000, 2006, late 2008 and is almost certainly in the midst of one now.

GDP growth is being propped up by immigration-fuelled population growth. When you account for population growth, the Australian economic ‘miracle’ quickly evaporates. In fact, on a per capita basis, Australia is one of the worst performing economies in the developed world”<sup>1</sup>

Some analysts go further, arguing that immigration in Australia has the characteristics of a Ponzi scheme, in which ever-increasing infusions of new entrants are needed to stave off an inevitable collapse. Sydney University’s Salvatore Babones, for instance, argues that Australia has become “the world’s first immigration economy”:

“As Australia’s population grows, the country needs exponentially more and more immigrants in order to continue to reap the same economic benefits. As a result, Australia’s heavy reliance on immigration to float the economy and fund government budgets runs the risk of turning into a giant immigration Ponzi scheme. So far, Australia has more or less been able to stretch existing infrastructure to accommodate a much larger population. But sooner or later, things will come to a head. When they do, Australia may experience the world’s first immigration economic crash.”<sup>2</sup>

Universities are both the beneficiaries of this shift and part of the problem. In 2019, the total number of international students in Australia hit an all-time high

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1 Adam Creighton, *GDP has never been an ideal measure of nation’s health*, *The Australian*, 25 February 2020.

2 Salvatore Babones, *The world’s first immigration economy*, *Foreign Policy*, October 2018.

of 613,000 – many of whom are attracted by the prospects of post-study work visas. But despite all the rhetoric about skills and targeted occupation lists, many students and indeed skilled visa holders find their post-study careers mired in low-skilled work. The Grattan Institute has found that of the one million temporary visa holders in Australia – a huge number for a country of 25 million people - almost 60 per cent of the 600,000 who are in work are in low-skill occupations.

A quarter of all workers with temporary skilled visas are in low-skilled occupations. As well as being a poor investment for the students and temporary workers themselves, this has created a large pool of workers competing for the low-skilled entry-level jobs on which many of Australia's young people and those from disadvantaged backgrounds rely for the first steps in employment. This strains social cohesion and could also undermine popular support for immigration more generally.

A final challenge for democracy and diversity in Australia is our increasingly unrepresentative politics. An ever more diverse Australian society is represented politically by parliaments which look less and less like the population at large. This is not just a case of needing to catch up with a changing society. Our federal parliament, for example, is far less diverse in its ethnic composition than comparable assemblies in Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, despite ours having on most measures a higher degree of societal diversity.

Consider some statistics. According to one survey, one in 10 MPs elected in the recent British election are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. At the 2019 Canadian federal election, 15.1 per cent of MPs elected were what the Canadians call 'visible minorities'. In New Zealand, Maori seats are reserved in Parliament, over six per cent of all MPs hail from the Polynesian region and another six per cent from Asia. By contrast, only nine of 227 or four per cent of Australian federal MPs have non-European heritage. Under-representation extends to senior leadership levels. Not a single Australian federal minister is from an Asian-Australian background. In stark contrast, upon becoming Prime Minister, Boris Johnson said he would form a "cabinet for modern Britain", including four British Asians in senior positions. In Canada, six of the 37 members of the Cabinet are Canadians of Asian heritage. Australia lags behind its peers in every aspect of political representation of culturally diverse minorities.

Studies by Juliet Pietsch<sup>3</sup> have found that in comparative terms, Australia's

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3 Juliet Pietsch, *Race, Ethnicity, and the Participation Gap: Understanding Australia's Political Complexion*, University of Toronto Press, 2018. Juliet Pietsch, 'Trends in Migrant and Ethnic Minority Voting in Australia: Findings from the Australian Election Study', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 40(14), 2017, p. 2463–2480.

very low rates of immigrant and ethnic minority political representation are particularly concentrated in the federal House of Representatives, where governments are formed. This democratic deficit suggests the existence of persistent ethnic hierarchies within our formal political institutions – including our political parties, who are responsible for recruiting and nominating candidates – which is inconsistent with democratic ideals of representation and accountability in pluralist societies.

The paradox here is that our major political parties, while struggling to put forward diverse candidates, are extremely attentive to ethnic voters. Our major parties have consistently sought to incorporate ethnic voters into their fold. The research on migrant voting in Australia shows that the “ethnic vote” has almost disappeared. Today, migrants come from an array of countries (with India and China the fastest-growing source), but tend to vote in similar ways to the rest of the population, following class cleavages rather than ethnic origins. In 2013, India was Australia’s largest source country, making up 23 per cent of the total migration program, with China second largest and Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Korea and Singapore all in the top 10 for skilled migrants in Australia. The disappearing ethnic vote at a time of increased migration from abroad is the dog that did not bark of Australian politics.

Nonetheless, Australian politics does have a clear problem in terms of ethnic representation in the leadership of our parties and particularly in our parliaments. Osmond Chiu has written about this situation from the perspective of a Chinese Australian. He argues Asian-Australians face a range of barriers to political participation. In most seats, political parties do not see pre-selecting Asian candidates as electorally advantageous, while Chinese-Australians face additional hurdles due to the foreign interference debate. While parties have courted Asian-Australian communities, these are primarily vehicles for financial donations with no role in party decision making. This means that engagement is often ‘transactional’ and focuses on fundraising or numbers for support in pre-selections rather than improving representation.<sup>4</sup>

One positive consequence of this situation is that even as Australia’s parties struggle to nominate diverse candidates, they remain broad-based in their electoral strategies. I believe that we are lucky that Australian politics has never featured ostensibly ethnic parties of the kind common in many diverse democracies, including comparable countries such as the United Kingdom

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4 Osmond Chiu, *What should Australia do about ... its politics being too white?*, China Matters Explores, January/February 2020, <http://chinamatters.org.au/policy-brief/policy-brief-january-february-2020/>.

(e.g. the Ulster Unionists and Sinn Féin), Canada (Parti Québécois) or New Zealand (*Māori Party*). One reason for this is our political institutions: the combination of compulsory voting, majoritarian elections, preferential balloting and impartial redistricting has made elections a contest for the political centre, and protected the positions of the major parties of government.<sup>5</sup> This has made it difficult for ethnically-based movements to emerge – including in the Senate, which offers much lower barriers to entry. Although some might argue that populist insurgent parties such as One Nation are an example of a ‘white right’ ethnic party themselves.

### **Policy recommendations**

- » The federal and state parliaments should publish data on the cultural diversity of its parliamentarians.
- » Political parties should foster internal diversity in party membership, party executives and candidate pre-selection processes.
- » Political parties should adopt targets, e.g. 20 per cent of culturally diverse candidates for winnable seats.
- » GDP per capita should be used as a relevant indicator and migration rates adjusted when it turns negative.
- » Skilled migration visas should not be available for unskilled labour.

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5 Benjamin Reilly, *Democracy in Divided Societies: Electoral Engineering for Conflict Management*, CUP, 2001; idem, ‘Centripetalism and Electoral Moderation in Established Democracies’, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 24(2), 2018, p. 201–221.

# Is Australia at ease with itself?

Shamit Sagar



Commentators, who are used to comparing countries, particularly across the rich, developed world, take Australia in their stride. Its economy, schooling, healthcare, infrastructure and social values are regularly put up against those of Western Europe and North America, allowing intelligent comparisons to be drawn. Like is compared with like.

But when it comes to the ethnic composition of its population these comparisons are distorted by history. The unspoken twist is that, until two generations ago, Australia practised a policy of racial exclusion. The nation-builders of federation sought to place a tight straitjacket on the ethnic complexion and character of future Australians, reflecting the values of the early post-Victorian age. This policy persisted into the 1970s and meant that Australia remained, for a very long time, in Asia but certainly not *of* Asia.

In 2020 it is possible to see the results of this social experiment. Very few older Australians beyond their fifties are of non-European descent, and this demographic feature is now hard-baked into politics and policy debates. There is a danger that political and business leaders, seeing little ethnic heterogeneity in their ranks, absent-mindedly miss the very real changes that have taken place in a country much browner than when they grew up.

The over-fifty white Australians have also grown up as the first generation that has had to share legal rights and citizenship with Indigenous Australians. They have done so starting from a low base but progress has been glacial.

## Differences and distinctions

In policymaking terms, these changes also affect how smart, evidence-based policies are formulated to meet changing circumstances. For example, each new slew of proposals concerning health and social care, taxation on higher

earnings and property ownership is perceived very differently by white Australians than their ethnic-minority counterparts. This is chiefly because the former are structurally older, better off and homeowners, so they are more reliant on (and exposed to changes in) these services and policies.

Equally, younger Australians are considerably more likely to be of Asian (and increasingly of African, Middle Eastern and Pacific Islander) heritage, and are disproportionately impacted by policy proposals in tertiary education, access to the housing market and international visa regimes that give them access to overseas labour markets and public benefits. These are the parts of public life in which they participate in larger numbers. Besides generational differences, Australia's Asian groups are concentrated in urban areas and mostly untouched by social care needs, so policies to expand infrastructure and services in those areas will have similar uneven impacts.

Much the same happens in other ethnically plural, developed societies. For example, as the UK began a dramatic shift to a mass higher-education system 25 years ago, it was possible to predict that a very large slice of the new participants would hail from its young ethnic minority groups, the parents and grandparents of whom had settled there a couple of decades previously.

In other words, a subtle yet significant ethnic twist is contained in each of these policy areas and therefore in the formulation of future public policies. The question is how much emphasis should be given to these differential exposures and impacts, regardless of how important we think that ethnic differences are in themselves.

By not taking these demographic facts into account it is easy to imagine a major lacuna in policymaking. In the early phase of the COVID-19 public health crisis, the Commonwealth government sought to support employment through a wage subsidy program, but specifically excluded temporary skilled visa holders, substantial proportions of whom are from Asia and India in particular. The uneven effects of the policy are not hard to see.

### **Dealing with the past**

Modern Australia is a tale of its racial history benignly distorting the present. Meanwhile demographic destiny is not only about the past, in which White Australia was the only Australia. Indigenous Australia remained outside the realm of official recognition until the 1960s, and national reconciliation continues to elude government to this day. It is wise to remember that for much of the post-war period, Australia's leaders anguished over the need to populate or perish, heralding the large migration of white Europeans to the young, hopeful country.



But it remained a white past and a white future. Demographically, the country had changed, but its major institutions, including politics, higher education, media, the arts and the public service, failed to reflect this.

That hangover can affect many parts of Australia, not least the majority white group's sense of their attachment to national cultural norms, symbols and practices; it also fuels fears among some that these are being watered down or too rapidly eroded in favour of newer, more inclusive national baggage. Tim Wilson, MP (Liberal), stepping into a political row over religious freedom in 2016, argued that there was "a cultural concern about whether we're preserving the best type of society we've been in the past...based on Western traditions of freedom of religion, freedom of speech and liberal democracy".<sup>1</sup> Indigenous people and early Chinese migrants would have been excluded from his sense of a mythical white past. That past contains many other tensions. For example, most country towns in the 1940s and 1950s were divided between Catholics and Protestants, who were rarely allowed to associate with one another. Inter-marriage caused all sorts of problems for families who had not been allowed to speak to each other.

In that sense Australia's advocates of maintaining faith in institutions steeped in the past are connected to similar disputes across Europe and North America. A large slice of President Trump's appeal in 2016 rested on reversing the erosion of a white settler past. Dealing with the past in all of these places has been controversial, ranging from statues of Cecil Rhodes in Oxford through to calls for state reparations for historic crimes such as the slave trade. Cultural and ethnic polarisation is both a symptom and a cause in these disputes.

## **Ethnic penalties**

The past can also be overlaid with exclusion and resistance. If success was correlated with whiteness, a lack of success should not be so hard to explain.

It is frankly embarrassing that in modern-day Australia almost all senior roles in government or business are held by middle-aged white men – a point also made by Paul Maginn in his essay 'In what sense a multicultural society? Planning for/with multiculturalism' in this volume. One (sympathetic) spin on this is that they have grown older and more successful because their cohort was hard-wired to be ethnically homogeneous, and they grew to trust and work collaboratively with those 'just like us'. For them, it is hard to notice that which is ubiquitous. Another interpretation is that they have never had to compete

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1 Kathy Marks, The racial discrimination law dividing Australia, BBC News, 6 December 2016, [bbc.com/news/world-australia-38205024](http://bbc.com/news/world-australia-38205024).

with a wider pool, and continue to behave rationally to restrict competition in order to maintain their privilege. As a group, they were never required to learn to trust and work alongside others who ‘are not like us’. Many mediocre, white men have been excused from competing as a result.

Juliet Pietsch’s recent study on Australian federal politics<sup>2</sup> drives home this point and complements my own recent work on top jobs and professions in the UK.<sup>3</sup> Both signal that these gross disparities in the complexion of those at the top matter, and for two reasons. One is that manifest unfairness in opportunity structures. This should be tackled as a priority so that better outcomes are secured for those who are held back. The other reason is, if anything, more important. It is about the reputational stain afflicting those organisations that are slow to reform, and the danger of second-generation migrants beginning to buy into grievance politics because they sense they are being overlooked. Their patience is stretched if we expect them to stand politely behind those they can comfortably outperform.

### Setting the pace of change

How fast should governments go to address these issues? Conventionally, academic experts and commentators have erred towards caution. They held that the majority white electorate was easily antagonised by policies and gestures that favoured ethnic minorities in areas such as education, jobs and housing.<sup>4</sup> Any political party perceived as minority-friendly, whatever its intentions, would be punished by the median white voter who had weaned on a formula of soft hostility to newcomers. This outlook has dominated Australian politics and underscores Sam Roggeveen’s recent warning about the potential for black and brown immigration to polarise Australian public opinion and poison the country’s politics.<sup>5</sup>

Other countries, by contrast, have gone faster and further, even though many of the same electoral fears have existed. In this volume, Ben Reilly notes that a tenth of the UK national parliament comprises visible minorities, and Boris

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2 Juliet Pietsch, *Race, Ethnicity, and the Participation Gap – Understanding Australia’s Political Complexion*, University of Toronto Press, 2018.

3 Shamit Saggat et. al., *Bittersweet Success? Glass Ceilings for Britain’s Ethnic Minorities at the Top of Business and the Professions*, Policy Exchange, 2016.

4 Sarah Cameron and Ian McAllister, *Trends in Australian Political Opinion: Results from the Australian Election Study*, School of Politics and International Relations, ANU, 2019, p.125.

5 Sam Roggeveen, *Our Very Own Brexit: Australia’s Hollow Politics and Where It Could Lead Us*, Penguin, 2019.

Johnson's still-newish Cabinet includes several big hitters of South Asian heritage. The substantial over-representation of South and East Asian figures at the top of US tech and social media giants has not gone unnoticed. Australia's best-known example – *Shemara Wikramanayake*, presiding over Macquarie Bank – appears to be an exception to prove a rule. It may seem tough at the top in Australia but, by any accounts, fresh and overdue competition from ethnic minorities will be make it considerably tougher.

The transformation has ebbed and flowed, fuelled by two factors. First, the demographic wave in Australia has been smaller and began moving later, compared to the UK and North America. There, very large concentrations of non-white ethnic minorities are now well or highly educated, hold good jobs, seek out prestigious education for themselves and their offspring, and have aspirations that are not lightly deflected. Their path to integration is set and accelerating and, while they may be held back by unfair and unaccountable practices, their drive has been enough to get to their destination.

Secondly, Australia still lacks reliable data on its ethnic composition, itself a prerequisite for an informed view about whether, or how far, people's ethnic and cultural background affects their material opportunities. Through complex analysis of labour market data, the performance of white majorities and visible minorities in acquiring, holding onto and progressing in employment can be measured, taking account of the facts about their skills, qualifications, experience and other pertinent factors that are unevenly distributed across groups.

In Australia, we know with clarity that being of an Indigenous background – all else considered – remains a significant disadvantage in employment. Some other ethnic minority groups (primarily but not limited to those of African heritage) limp along the bottom of the jobs market, earning much less than similarly qualified white Australians. Other groups such as Indians (through the international student pathway to Australian residency and citizenship) are succeeding in accessing employment. That is the good news. The bad news is that many are now working in occupations that provide a poor return to their investment in their education. The worry is that, while holding postgraduate degrees, Australia's Indian Uber drivers grow resentful of an outcome they had not imagined.<sup>6</sup>

The case for reliable data is not predicated on demonstrating ethnic disadvantage. It is not definitive evidence of discrimination at work but instead a

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6 Damien Cave, Get to Know Your Overqualified Uber or Ola Driver, *The New York Times*, 22 March 2018, [nytimes.com/2018/03/22/world/australia/uber-ola-immigration-multiculturalism-letter50.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/22/world/australia/uber-ola-immigration-multiculturalism-letter50.html).

very heavy hint that the ambitions of whole groups are being thwarted. Evidence from mystery shopping using CV tests is much better at making this case.

That points to a further danger: that Australia's reputation for fairness will become eroded in the eyes of its future generations. Young, educated, urban, white Australians may also object to discriminatory practices going unchecked and call for tougher actions by government. Dr Imran Lum, a young banking executive at NAB, makes the pointed observation that there are not many people who look like him at the snowy white peaks of his industry and others like it.<sup>7</sup>

### Immigration's pace

These are not minor risks for Australia to be at ease with itself. They are heightened by Australia's very high net migration rate, which hovers at around a quarter million each year – a staggeringly large figure, comparatively speaking, given the country's population base. Setting aside debates about the economic aspects of current inward migration, it is clear that Australia is becoming browner and especially more East and South Asian in its major metropolitan areas.

The politics of immigration are not so straightforward. For one thing, following the Tampa refugee crisis in 2001, national party competition has revolved around an unwritten rule that tough border controls should be upheld and seen to be upheld. Any hints of irregular migrant flows into the country quickly dominate and paralyse the debate. Secondly, Australia is situated close to populous countries with potential instabilities. Not so long ago, Indonesia was viewed in sceptical terms by immigration hawks, and today its democratic and economic successes have calmed many of these concerns. This may not be for long if Indonesia and other South East Asian countries struggle to deal with the COVID-19 public health crisis.

Finally, fresh, non-European migration into Australia is a regular reminder that the ethno-cultural fabric of the country is changing at a rapid pace, and this gives rise to first-order questions about common values. For instance, in the decade ending 2016, Australians in the General Census who self-identified as Muslims rose from 340,000 to 604,000, Buddhists from 419,000 to 564,000 and Hindus from 148,000 to 440,000.<sup>8</sup> This level of diversity of faith is uncharted territory for Australia.

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7 Speaking at the Western Australia-ASEAN Trade and Investment Dialogue (Perth, 15 November 2019).

8 Andrew Markus, *Mapping Social Cohesion 2019*, The Scanlon Foundation Surveys, Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, 2019.

## **Multiculturalism's future**

How far can the values and preferences of Australia's non-European groups be fused together with pre-existing ideas about what Australia is and what it means to be Australian? The multicultural framework has created more than an agenda for this to happen, although in practice the national debate has been highly reactive and event-driven.

One useful metric is the Scanlon-Monash Index of Social Cohesion, an element of which examines levels of backing for governments who support ethnic minorities to maintain their customs and traditions. By 2019, two-fifths of Australians endorsed this principle. Meanwhile, just 14 per cent fully signed up to the claim that "accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger", although to put this in some context the true disbelievers (who strongly or very strongly rejected this claim) stood at 28 per cent. Overall, those who agreed (with different levels of intensity) amount to seven in 10 respondents.

Perhaps the biggest challenge lies in clarifying how multiculturalism is understood by Australians today. Most of the debate is centred on a broad-based celebration that the country's rich and quite recent ethnic diversity has come about without great political rancour. The opposition of One Nation supporters and identifiers has mostly surged and peaked, with its appeal limited (and, over time, diminishing) to the misgivings of older, less educated voters. The other concentration lies among rural and regional voters, for example in regional areas of North Queensland, and Ipswich on the outskirts of Brisbane (typically big mining and working-class towns that have been more exposed to global shocks than elsewhere in Australia).

The fulcrum of this celebratory account is in the sense of the absence of overt conflict – i.e. that European-style discord has been largely avoided in Australia. Harmony has prevailed, therefore. Few minorities have taken to hard-line oppositional politics, let alone pursued violence in support of their viewpoint. This outlook can mask complacency, however, since harmonious relations are likely to be papering over frustrations about the extent of equal opportunities and fair chances in education, employment and housing. The true extent of Australia's 'Fair-Go' mantra will depend not so much on the transmission of older values and symbols to newer ethnic minority Australians, but more on their experiences and perceptions of level playing fields.

The immigrant dream is often cited, containing the idea that the hardships and setbacks of the first generation are warranted on the implicit understanding that tomorrow will be a brighter (and fairer) day for their offspring. It is a simple and credible test of Australian national inclusion and of a society at ease with

*Shamit Saggar*

itself, with great application to the country's future success. 'Making it', for Asian, African Middle Eastern and Pacific Islander Australians, rests on translating that ideal into lived experience.

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# Australia's Muslim story: Future opportunities

Samina Yasmeen



Australia's Muslim story is not new. Traditional links between indigenous communities in the north and Muslims from the Makassar region left cultural imprints long before the Europeans arrived. British control of the continent, and later the formation of the Commonwealth of Australia, turned it into a migration story. Cameleers arrived from British India, including a large contingent of Muslims, who made their mark across the continent by constructing mosques and practising their religion. After the First World War, migrants from Turkey and Albania added to Muslim numbers, followed by the arrival of Lebanese Muslims in the 1970s. But it was only after the end of the Cold War and the resulting instability that the number and cultural diversity of Muslims increased.

According to the 2016 Census of Population and Housing, 604,240 Muslims constituted 2.6 per cent of the total population in 2016. Of these, nearly two-thirds (62 per cent) were born overseas and 93 per cent lived in urban areas across the country. The median age for this population was 27 years – one of the two youngest religious communities in the country.<sup>1</sup> Estimates suggest that Muslims are likely to account for 4.9 per cent of the total Australian population by 2050, ranking as the second-largest religion in the country after Christianity.<sup>2</sup> Ensuring their inclusion in social, economic and political spheres marked by substantive equality will be necessary in a multicultural Australia.

- 1 The other group includes those holding Aboriginal traditional beliefs. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census reveals Australia's religious diversity on World Religion Day*, Media Release, 18 January 2018.
- 2 Pew Research Centre, *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050*, 2 April 2015, p. 234.

The growing negative perception of the wider community towards Muslims (and Islam) presents a major challenge on the path towards ensuring both broader and deeper inclusion of Muslims in Australia. While Muslims were historically ‘othered’ as part of the Asian immigrants, the tendency to essentialise Islam as inherently antithetical to Australian core values, and Muslims as harbouring aims that threaten Australian security, has gained strength in the post-9/11 decades.

That some Muslims have engaged in anti-state terrorist planning and activities, and also joined the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, could explain this negativity. But it does not take into account that only a tiny minority among the Muslim minority communities of Australia have participated in the militant space. Instead, in line with the expression popularised by the Runnymede Trust (UK) in the 1990s, “‘closed’ views of Islam and Muslims have come to dominate the language of ‘othering’ Muslims. Islam is perceived and portrayed as a monolithic religion marked by irrational, primitive, sexist and violent values”.<sup>3</sup> Muslims are seen as committed to introducing Sharia law in Australia, which would run counter to the core Australian values. Some alarmist concerns are also based on the faulty assumption that Muslim women’s birth rate far exceeds that of the mainstream Australian females (4.5 children per couple as opposed to 1.5 children per couple for the national average). This trajectory is seen as shifting the demographic balance in a couple of generations, with a Muslim majority in Australia that may vote in Sharia law.<sup>4</sup>

Islamophobic views have contributed to prejudicial portrayals of Muslims in the media as much as everyday conversations. Muslim women who subscribe to traditional Islamic dress code have borne the brunt of such prejudices: they are harassed, often publicly criticised and sometimes physically threatened. The frequency of such violence increases in times of crisis, such as the Sydney siege (2014), when Muslim women were afraid of travelling alone.

Public attitudes also limit Australian Muslims’ access to employment. Research findings indicate that unemployment/non-participation rates among working-age Muslims are 43 per cent, compared to the national average of 24 per cent. To some extent this imbalance may reflect a current cultural preference among Muslim women to forsake employment in favour of bringing up children at

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3 The Runnymede Trust, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*, Report of the Runnymede Trust Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, 1997, p. 3.

4 Liz Allen and Nick Parr, *Factcheck Q&A: the facts on birth rates for Muslim couples and non-Muslim couples in Australia*, The Conversation, 24 July 2017, [theconversation.com/factcheck-qanda-the-facts-on-birth-rates-for-muslim-couples-and-non-muslim-couples-in-australia-81183](http://theconversation.com/factcheck-qanda-the-facts-on-birth-rates-for-muslim-couples-and-non-muslim-couples-in-australia-81183).



home – a preference not grounded in religious beliefs. But even then, the fact remains that the Muslim male employment rate is the lowest, at 70 per cent as opposed to the national average of 81 per cent.<sup>5</sup> This is despite the fact that educational qualifications of both Muslim men and women either equal or are better than the national average.<sup>6</sup>

The relative lack of access to the labour market impacts on family dynamics, including domestic violence. Though definitive research findings on the prevalence of domestic violence directed at women is not available, groups focusing on Muslim women's rights in Australia place it at par with the national rate of incidence. Anecdotal evidence suggests that it is closely linked to the assumption that male members are to be the breadwinners in a family. Hence, if Muslim men are unemployed or employed at a level that is not commensurate with their qualifications, they feel a loss of power and status within the family sphere. The sense of powerlessness contributes to them adopting restrictive or violent attitudes towards women, and other members of the family. Some of these men erroneously justify such violence in terms of religious teaching, which, in their view, accords men a higher status in the family.

The lower socio-economic status of Muslims in Australia, coupled with the growing Islamophobia, also has inter-generational implications. Other than restricting the possibilities of the next generations of Muslims for upward social and economic mobility, negative perceptions also affect Muslim children. A collaborative research project on children and Islamophobia being conducted by researchers from Charles Sturt University, Western Sydney University and the Centre for Muslim States and Societies at UWA indicates some Muslim children are indirectly and directly facing the effects of Islamophobia. Focus-group discussions with young Muslims at university level have also revealed concerns among the youth that they are mistrusted by their fellow students and wrongly assumed to be supporting jihadi violence. Given that, according to the 2016 Census, 37 per cent of the Australian Muslim population is below 19 years of age, it is possible that a proportion of the Muslim youth could be growing up feeling perceptually, economically and socially excluded from the mainstream Australian community. This could even impact on Australia's

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5 Sushu Das, *Fact Check: Are more than half of Australia's working-age Muslims not in the workforce?*, ABC News, 6 September 2018, [abc.net.au/news/2018-06-04/fact-check-muslim-workforce/9800656](http://abc.net.au/news/2018-06-04/fact-check-muslim-workforce/9800656).

6 Riaz Hassan, *Australian Muslims: A Demographic Profile of Muslims in Australia*, International Centre for Muslim and Non-Muslim Understanding, University of South Australia, 2015.

reputation – particularly in the Indian Ocean region – as a country hostile to its Muslim population.<sup>7</sup>

Developing appropriate policies to address both the current and future impediments to promoting Muslim substantive inclusion is entangled with an associated challenge: who to engage from within the Muslim community to deal with the situation? Historically, Muslim men have dominated the structures and associations established to communicate Muslim issues, voices and suggestions. The rapid growth in the number and ethno-national origins of Muslim immigrants has altered the situation to some extent in the post-9/11 era. Muslim women across all ages are also exhibiting activism to counter both misperceptions and negativity towards Islam and Muslims.

But the extent to which these new voices and agents are actively engaged by state and federal government is determined by the tendency prevalent even among governmental institutions to essentialise Islam and Muslims. The tendency to treat Muslims as a monolithic community – severely distorting in the face of ethnic and sectarian diversity characteristic of the Muslim communities – and the privileging of orthopraxy as the site where partners could be found, has often resulted in state and federal governments missing out on the full array of possible partners from among Muslims.

A tendency persists of engaging imams and other Muslims who subscribe to more traditional interpretations of Islamic teachings as a pathway to promoting more substantive inclusion of the Muslim community. Such approaches fail to appreciate the diversity of views and approaches within the Australian Muslim community: in line with the global trends, transnationalism has contributed to the emergence of progressive, conservative and Sufi networks among Australian Muslims. This multiplicity, coupled with the arrival of a generation of professional Muslims including doctors, engineers and IT specialists in the new millennium, has meant that not all Muslims privilege orthopraxy. Nor do they all view imams and mosques as the source of guidance and engagement. This diversity is also present among Australian-born Muslims, who comprise 36.3 per cent of the total Australian Muslim population.

Devising strategies to promote Muslim inclusion through appropriate agents of change, therefore, requires nuanced approaches. The project must take into account the effect of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the rates of unemployment increase in the wake of the coronavirus, Muslim communities will

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7 The Christchurch attacks by an Australian citizen in March 2019 have already been used by some Muslims in the region as evidence of ‘rampant Islamophobia’ in Australia.

also be affected. It is too early to estimate the true extent of this impact, but it is not inconceivable that the downward economic trend and increased unemployment rates would further worsen the situation for Muslim families. The problem is likely to be compounded by continuing, if not increasing, Islamophobia. The fear and stigmatisation of the 'others' has already commenced, with Chinese and Asian communities being blamed for the virus, but it is conceivable that this negativity would extend to and encompass all those who are visibly different, including Muslims. Under these circumstances, both federal and state governments need to focus on altering the perceptual blockage – or Islamophobia – in society as a pathway to dealing with equitable access to employment and preventing inter-generational negative impacts on Muslim communities.

Public statements by leaders at state and federal levels occupy a significant place in addressing Islamophobic ideas. The existence of jihadi narratives and associated militant acts within Australia and overseas sometimes prompts Australian political leaders to seek 'reformation' of Islam, or suggestions that the Muslim community needs to be more 'proactive' in tackling terrorism. Such reactions reflect the prevalent tendency of essentialising Muslim identities that are not restricted to Australia, but they reaffirm negative views among some in the mainstream community while simultaneously conveying to Muslims that they are being viewed suspiciously, despite not condoning violent interpretations of Islam. This, in turn, undermines prospects of countering Islamophobia and promoting Muslim inclusion in the society. The project of promoting Muslim inclusion, therefore, necessitates that government leaders avoid such generalisations when addressing acts of militancy.

Declared statements that do not essentialise Muslim identities, however, need to be supplemented with creating spaces in which Muslims across all ages can collaborate in projects with members of the wider community as citizens. It is mainly through the active and collaborative interaction between Muslims and members of the wider community to address issues being faced in their localities that a shared sense of citizenship and belonging can be fostered. For example, this would be promoted through fresh state government funding for schools that bring students from diverse backgrounds to identify and operationalise projects that could serve their communities. This could be designed along the model developed by APEX Australia – which has operated in Australia since 1931 and has been engaged in 'transforming communities at grass roots level' and raising funds for numerous charities – but it would need to be structured for school-age children. Similarly, specific allocations could be made in funding for community engagement projects managed by the Federal Government that

engage Muslim men and women in distinct spaces to collaborate and work with others in the wider community.

The success of this approach is closely intertwined with selecting appropriate leaders-cum-influencers from within the Muslim community. As previously mentioned, privileging religious leaders and orthopraxy would limit the nature of Muslim engagement. While continuing to engage children enrolled in Islamic schools or areas with Muslim majority population, for example, it would be as much use – or even more useful – to engage Muslim children enrolled in state schools as well as Muslim professionals (both male and female) as leaders.

Expectations matter, and it is important to recognise that instantaneous solutions to the emerging Islamophobia are not possible. But creating spaces for collaboration across different members of our communities would provide a long-lasting and more resilient pathway to dealing with misperceptions about Muslims in the wider community, and vice versa.

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# Can business support multicultural inclusion?

Edward Zhang

## Multiculturalism and multicultural inclusion



In the introduction of the WA Charter of Multiculturalism formulated in 2004, Geoff Gallop states, “Today, Western Australia is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multicultural society, whose members are drawn from a rich heritage of cultural traditions and histories. Such cultural diversity brings with it many and varied benefits, not least of which is a creative, sustainable and successful economy that can meet the challenges of the 21st century. The diversity also

brings with it many challenges that we as a society must collectively address.”<sup>1</sup>

The Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Western Australia 2016 Census shows that 28.5 per cent of Australians were born overseas. People of Western Australia have their origins in more than two hundred countries and regions, and speak more than 270 languages.

In the contemporary political context, multiculturalism has opened a new perspective to cope with the challenges that accompany Australia’s ever-growing cultural, linguistic and religious diversity. Only through the better inclusion of culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) groups can the many challenges be appropriately addressed.

Multiculturalism has enriched and vitalised the Australian society since its beginnings in the 1970s. Businesses have played an important role in its shaping and evolution, and in supporting multicultural inclusion. Multiculturalism as enunciated by the Charter enables all Western Australians, irrespective of their differences on the basis of culture, religion,

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Western Australia, Office of Multicultural Interests, *WA Charter of Multiculturalism*, Government of Western Australia, November 2004.

history and other variables, to have the opportunity to participate equally in the political, social and economic life of this society.

As Inclusion WA puts it, “Inclusion is acceptance of all people regardless of their differences. It is about appreciating people for who they are. Inclusion allows people to value differences in each other by recognising that each person has an important contribution to make to society.”<sup>2</sup>

Multicultural inclusion provides CaLD groups and individuals with the opportunity to find a valued role and to cultivate a sense of belonging in Australian society. Members of multicultural communities thus require equal opportunities to be involved in social, cultural, political and economic activities, and can achieve their goals and aspirations through participation in those activities.

Multicultural inclusion is by no means a synonym for ‘a melting pot’, as used in the United States in its early migration history. In that context, a melting pot is a society in which members of minority groups are expected to assimilate into the dominant culture, in contrast to one in which members of minority groups can maintain their distinct collective identities and practices.

Businesses can support multicultural inclusion in many ways internally and externally.

Internally, they can support their CaLD employees by giving them the opportunity to maintain their respective languages and cultures while using English as their main language of communication. Multicultural inclusion in a business means that such employees have the opportunity to participate in a welcoming environment, and that the role such employees play is valued by the business.

Externally, businesses provide opportunities for groups and individuals to participate in activities, campaigns, sports and recreational events that celebrate and help maintain different cultural practices, and that are organised by governments, mainstream communities and other CaLD organisations.

At the same time, businesses themselves, which may have different cultural backgrounds, also need to be included in the Australian economy and society. However, ethnic minority businesses, for example those owned by Chinese and Vietnamese migrants, are often more concentrated in certain sectors including real estate, groceries, international trade, and so forth, though some of their business activities may not be confined to their respective communities. The barriers they face when trying to enter other business areas may vary, from lack of support to discrimination.

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<sup>2</sup> [inclusionwa.org.au/about-us](http://inclusionwa.org.au/about-us)

The larger issue has to do with why such businesses owned or run by ethnic minorities succeed to begin with. While some undoubtedly exist and thrive to support real demands within those communities (e.g. grocery provision, fashion and apparel, specialised travel services), many of these businesses serve to provide some employment for those who have been rebuffed in mainstream job markets. Individuals who are discouraged by discrimination and scarce opportunities may find it rational and attractive to set up on their own. Only some of them will serve their own communities as their primary markets, whereas many others will branch out to innovate and serve demand across society as a whole. It is the latter who have the greatest chance of affecting dynamic change to reshape the wider business environment.

### **Need of business support for multicultural inclusion**

Encouraging multicultural inclusion requires effective policies and support from government, and – equally important – assistance and action from the business sector.

Increasing multicultural inclusion not only benefits CaLD communities, which are generally relatively low socio-economic communities and low participation groups, but the Australian society as a whole.

Multicultural inclusion is not just about including people of different backgrounds in the public life, but also about sharing cultural heritages, so all Australians can learn from each other, appreciate the beauty of different cultures and languages, and present a unique and brand-new Australian image.

One of the principles of the WA Charter of Multiculturalism is to encourage the full and equitable participation in society by individuals and communities, irrespective of origins, culture, religion, ethnicity and nationality, and encourage a sense of identity and belonging as Australian citizens within a multicultural society.

With the increase of migrants, the backgrounds and profile of the Australian workforce have inevitably changed, with more and more CaLD people being trained and employed. To include them in all walks of life has become a key factor in building a harmonious society in Australia.

According to the WA Department of Local Government, Sports and Cultural Industries, only half of Western Australians who were born in non-English speaking countries participate in an organised physical activity, that is, have memberships at local and state sporting clubs.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> [dlgsc.wa.gov.au/sport-and-recreation/participation/community-inclusion](http://dlgsc.wa.gov.au/sport-and-recreation/participation/community-inclusion)

To encourage the other half to be included, businesses have lots to contribute and to offer, for example, providing financial and organisational assistance.

### **Case study: WA Chinese community**

It is not only long-established, large enterprises (such as mining companies) that can meaningfully support multicultural inclusion. In a sense, businesses set up by multicultural communities can contribute even more in this regard.

In the last thirty years, with a mining boom and the resulting economic growth, Western Australia has attracted more and more new migrants, who, being the first generation of migrants, rarely have family or other support networks and resources. This is where support from business proves to be crucial. Among new migrant communities, the WA Chinese community, with 103,683 people, i.e., 4.2 per cent of WA's total resident population in 2016, is the fastest-growing ethnic minority community.<sup>4</sup>

Businesses in the Chinese community collaborate with arts and sports groups and associations to identify opportunities of participation, from single projects to building long-term relationships with organisers and organisations. They provide financial support and organisational capacity so certain individuals or groups can afford to take part in events and activities that incur costs, fees or other expenses.

Since the Labor government formulated the WA Charter of Multiculturalism and started the inception of the Office of Multicultural Interests (OMI), businesses operated by members of the Chinese community have contributed tremendously to the formation and development of the multicultural society of Western Australia.

In the 190 years since the first Chinese man (called Man Chow) arrived in WA, businesses owned by migrants with Chinese heritage have emerged, from carpentry, gardening and restaurants in the early days to education, tourism, publishing, real-estate development, importing and exporting, religious and cultural products and practices, in the last thirty-odd years. The Chinese community – consisting of people of Chinese heritage from China, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam and other countries – has brought culture that has enriched the multicultural fabric of Australia. Lion dancing, dragon dancing, Chinese painting, calligraphy, Chinese, Malaysian and other Asian cuisines and ingredients, commodities and articles have since entered the local market.

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4 Government of Western Australia, Office of Multicultural Interests, *Western Australia Multicultural Policy Framework*, Government of Western Australia, February 2020, p. 6.



As a result, the Chinese community sees more successful entrepreneurs, business owners and individuals emerging – mostly new migrants in the last three decades – who actively support multicultural inclusion.

Three businesses owned by Chinese migrants are reflective of this. Australian Education and Migration Services Pty Ltd, established in 1999, with customers in more than 32 countries, has developed close business relationships with government agencies, local businesses, universities, colleges and schools in WA and nationwide to promote Australian education and other business and investment opportunities to overseas customers. In 2018, the company initiated the Alpha Innovation Contest, which attracted contestants from different cultural backgrounds and with a panel consisting of multi-national professionals. Its purpose is to promote Australian technologies, innovations and start-ups, as well as funding opportunities, commercialisation and markets through international links and partners.

Australian Natural Biotechnology Pty Ltd was established in 2009. Besides selling and exporting Australian health products, the company is now focusing on beekeeping and honey production. They have imported high-quality beekeeping equipment and facilities for local beekeepers, whose costs are greatly reduced as a result. The company has been trying to include people of different backgrounds in the beekeeping and honey-producing industry, for example the Noongar people, to whom they have donated beehive boxes and provided beekeeping skills.

Sunlong Fresh Foods, established in the early 1990s, has employees from around twenty countries and regions, including China, Cambodia, Vietnam, India, Iraq, Japan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Greece, United Kingdom and Italy. Sunlong has financially supported the dragon boat team of Chung Wah Association, the first Chinese association in WA, incorporated 100 years ago. Chung Wah staged the first Chung Wah Cup Dragon Boat Competition on 12 June 2016, attended by about eight hundred people. Dragon boating is a traditional Chinese watersport and cultural event, but for many years, Chung Wah Dragon Boat Team was not even a member of the Dragon Boating WA Inc (DBWA), the state governing body for the sport. Two years ago, with Sunlong's support, Chung Wah Dragon Boat Team became a member of DBWA for the first time. Last year, the team participated in the competition organised by DBWA, and outperformed most teams.

Like the dragon boating, events organised by the Chinese community – such as the Chinese Cultural Festival, the Chinese New Year Festival, the China Day Racing Event, the Chinese Idol Singing Competition, and Dragon Dancing, Tai Chi and Kung Fu – have included many CaLD groups and the mainstream community.

Chinese background singers, dancers and artists participate in cultural events demonstrating their own cultural characteristics, which have formed a new and unique facet in our multicultural society. They are employed, contracted or invited to perform with professional music or artistic bodies such as WASO, AusDancing, and Voice Moves. They are seen on the stage at different cultural events such as the Perth Festival, the Swan Valley Festival, the Mandurah Chinese New Year, the Christmas Pageant, and the WA Australian Asian Association's multicultural dancing festival.

### **Challenges and suggestions**

However, there are still difficulties and challenges when businesses – especially businesses with Chinese background – support multicultural inclusion in certain areas of life in Australia, especially in politics. Multicultural inclusion in these areas remains inadequate and weak.

First, there is further scope for business support for multicultural inclusion to be provided in an organised or well-planned way as a result of systematic backing from government. Businesses need government policy and incentives to strengthen their actions on multicultural inclusion, such as preferential taxation policies, funding and rewards.

Second, challenges mentioned in the introduction to the WA Charter of Multiculturalism still exist today. “Multiculturalism is still a contested idea, often because it is misunderstood and perceived either as a policy which compartmentalises on the basis of culture, or as a policy which provides special treatment to some minority groups.”<sup>5</sup> Promotion of multiculturalism still has a long way to go.

Third, there are challenges to refine and adapt strategies to best include people of different cultures and religions. Businesses need support to develop cultural awareness to acknowledge differences such as taboos, protocols and offences. There is tremendous practical know-how available that can be richly deployed in our state.

Fourth, a constant challenge confronting CaLD communities is the cultural shock experienced by first-generation immigrants. Support is needed for a CaLD community to maintain its original culture, language and social habits, so it can help reduce this shock and enable new immigrants to settle down more smoothly.

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5 Government of Western Australia, Office of Multicultural Interests, *WA Charter of Multiculturalism*, Government of Western Australia, November 2004.

Last, but not least, racial discrimination still exists in certain areas and, to certain degrees, adversely affects multicultural inclusion. Thus, there is an onus on government to develop smarter policies to bear down on discrimination. Another approach is for government to develop better recognition and rewards for medium and large businesses that have achieved the most in terms of workplace inclusion. These leaders have invested in their diverse workforces and can act as a powerful force to mobilise other businesses that are supportive in principle but lack suitable know-how to get started. The UK's *Think, Act, Report* initiative<sup>6</sup> – dealing with gender equality – is an excellent example that can be used to shape change in WA.

In February 2020, the State Government launched the Western Australia Multicultural Policy Framework as a guideline for government departments and agencies to implement the WA Charter of Multiculturalism. The Framework emphasises the centrality of evidence-based policies, programs and services that are culturally responsive, in order to achieve equitable access and outcomes for all.<sup>7</sup>

In conclusion, to address the challenges, government departments and agencies need to improve their communication with CaLD communities through effective channels to be officially established. Businesses should be encouraged to employ CaLD staff, provide language services and run cultural training programs among their staff members. For this, more support is needed from federal, state and local governments in opportunities, policies and funding.

Australia is a pluralistic society, and its ethnically diverse communities are valuable resources in developing its economy, establishing cooperative relationships and building a healthy and harmonious multicultural society. CaLD groups should not just be included in our society, they should be regarded and treated as a pivotal force.

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<sup>6</sup> [gov.uk/government/publications/think-act-report/think-act-report](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/think-act-report/think-act-report)

<sup>7</sup> Government of Western Australia, *Western Australia Multicultural Policy Framework*, Government of Western Australia, February 2020, p. 12.



# About UWA PPI

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# Re-imagining Australia: Migration, culture, diversity

Practical suggestions on the challenges and opportunities ahead

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