

Auditing Multiculturalism: the Australian empire a generation after Galbally

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Multiculturalism is the Australian Way of Life

The term 'Australian multiculturalism' could be redundant in 25 years as more and more Australians adopt it as a way of life, the Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, Gary Hardgrave, said (July 2003)

“Australia is not a multicultural society.... It is a multiracial monocultural one...!”
Alan Jones 2GB radio (May 2003).

Introduction

These opening quotes demonstrate the gulf between the perceptions held by two very powerful men – the Minister responsible for Multiculturalism, and the Prime Minister’s favourite talk-back “shock jock”. So let me begin with a distinction that is crucial – Australia as a multicultural society, and Australia as a multicultural polity.

Auditing Multiculturalism suggests two related tasks – an audit of the changes in Australia’s demography, sociology, and economy as a consequence of large scale immigration over the past fifty years, and an analysis of the changes in the polity in relation to these transformations. Both tasks are necessary, because “multicultural” both describes our society, and also refers to a controversial trajectory in public policy.

We must think about multicultural Australia within a longer time frame than a few years – or even decades. History does not occur in broken steps, but in a continuing process of challenges and responses. Multiculturalism sits within a process – one that began with the invasion of the Australian continent in the late eighteenth century, and which continues today. Australia is an imperial state – its governments feel compelled to defend the land, taken by force from its Indigenous owners, against other governments or cultural groups that might contest their taking, and they need to control both the Indigenous people and new arrivals internally to ensure a continuing cultural, social and economic order. All governments of all political persuasions face these challenges – the essence of the political process is how they respond, and whether they act with benevolent or malevolent intent towards the various stakeholders – how they envision the future they are creating. There have been and continue to be many decision points, many unexpected consequences, and many opportunities. While state and local governments have played key roles in these

processes, the focus here is on the national government a.k.a. Commonwealth of Australia.

A multicultural society...

The cultural makeup of Australia has changed dramatically over the past generation, the period during which multiculturalism in various forms has been national policy. The most critical changes have been the result of the formal abandoning of the White Australia policy and the rapid increase in global population. At the time multiculturalism was being formulated in the mid-1970s, the then Liberal Party PM Malcolm Fraser was negotiating to take tens of thousands of Indo-Chinese refugees into Australia. Since 1976, when the first Vietnamese 'boat people' arrived, the Vietnamese community has grown to nearly 250,000. Since then there have been wars and revolutions, environmental catastrophes and social disruption, the rise and fall of violent regimes, and the emergence of global terrorism. Australia has become a significant player in the new globalisation, a relentless acceleration in the flow of money, culture and people across borders around the world.

Over the past decade we can identify just some of these changes among the Australian population: the overseas born remain about 22% of the population; those born in a non-English speaking country (NESC) have increased to about 13.3% from 12.8%; speaking a language other than English at home (LOTE) has increased from 14.7% to 15.2%. The proportion of the population identifying as Indigenous has also risen, from 1.6% to 2.2%.

Australian Key Facts Census	1991	1996	2001
Australia			
	1991	1996	2001
Population	16,771,700	17,752,807	18,769,249
Overseas born (OSB)			
Total	3,689,600	3,901,882	4,105,468
As a % of the population	22.0	22.0	21.9
Born in a non-English speaking country (NESC) ¹	2,151,652	2,362,152	2,502,816
Born in a NESC as a % of the population	12.8	13.3	13.3
Born in a NESC as a % of the OSB	58.3	60.5	61.0
Australian born			
Total			
As a % of the population	75.8	74.5	72.6
With both parents born overseas	1,360,717	1,460,201	1,503,689
With both parents OSB as a % of population	8.1	8.2	8.0
With one only parent born overseas	1,756,392	1,880,915	1,924,347
With one parent OSB as a % of population	10.5	10.6	10.3
Aboriginals / Torres Strait Islanders ²			
Total	265,371	352,970	410,003
As a % of the population	1.6	2.0	2.2
Language other than English (LOTE)			

speakers			
Speak a language other than English at home	2,458,445	2,657,751	2,853,829
LOTE speakers as a % of the population	14.7	15.0	15.2

From Australian Bureau of Statistics Census 2001 Table 1

Over the past five years a further diversity has characterised Australia, as new communities have begun to form. Australia’s fastest growing immigrant language group is the Shona-speaking people from Africa, followed by Afrikaans-speakers and Somalis. Four of the six language groups whose numbers have doubled are from Africa. The proportion of the society that regularly uses languages other than English is growing steadily, indicating the sedimentation of a multicultural social reality.

Religion has also taken on a salience that it did not have in multicultural policy debates even ten years ago. Over the past five years the following religious groups have more than doubled their numbers: Maronite and Melkite Catholics, and Albanian Orthodox. Antioch Orthodox has increased by 90%, Buddhism by 80%, Hinduism by 42% and Islam by 40%. In the 2001 Census 6.7 million people identified their ancestry as Australian, 6.4 million as English, 1.9 million as Irish, while Italian, German, Chinese and Scottish each had over half a million descendants.

Recent market research for SBS, with its positive spin, summarised the situation in these words:

The overall picture is one of a fluid, plural and complex society, with a majority of the population positively accepting of the cultural diversity that is an increasingly routine part of Australian life, although a third is still uncertain or ambivalent about cultural diversity. In practice, most Australians, from whatever background, live and breathe cultural diversity, actively engaging with goods and activities from many different cultures. Cultural mixing and matching is almost universal. There is no evidence of ‘ethnic ghettos’. (Living Diversity: Australia’s Multicultural Future, 2002)

What criteria for an Audit?

What are the critical dimensions for assessing the successes and failures of multiculturalism in Australia? In mapping out the arguments in favour of multiculturalism (or cultural pluralism) throughout the 1970s it was proposed by advocates such as Prof Jerzy Zubrzycki that social and economic mobility should not be determined by ethnicity – that is, the system should reward people according to skills and capacities, not according to heritage or skin colour. So we would want to see how different ethnic groups are distributed through the employment market, whether ethnic background made it more or less difficult to get ahead in the public service, in corporate Australia, in the creative industries and in politics and the law. We would want to see whether “non-English speaking background” tended to advantage or disadvantage people – or more specifically, if particular ethnicities meant people were going to have a more or less successful life, compared to everyone else. This in a sense reflects the demographic realities of multicultural Australia. There is another difficult question here – if there are differences between ethnic

groups, are these differences the result of inherent cultural traits, different levels of cultural resources such as formal education, or racist resistance from the host society to particular ethnicities?

What of the policy dimension? How do we assess the working of government initiated and controlled programs? We need to identify what the policies were, what assumptions were made, what goals were set, and what outcomes were achieved. We also need to identify the points of greatest controversy and tension, the decision moments, and the forces that acted on them – and what decisions were then made. On the basis of this assessment we can explore the implicit trajectories for Australia as a society and as a polity over the next decade – identify the decisions that will have to be taken.

The Strategic Crossroads of 1978

When the Protestant landowner Malcolm Fraser invited the Irish Catholic lawyer Francis Galbally to investigate the policies necessary to ensure the integration of immigrant communities into the wider society, the die was cast for a social experiment – three generations of Australians had been socialised into accepting White Australia and assimilation as the heart of the Australian nation. White Australia had been cancelled in 1973, now assimilation would go for good five years later.

Assimilation operated for both Indigenous people and non-Anglo immigrants. It sought to focus government policy on integrating immigrants as individuals into the social fabric. It regarded ethnic cultural practices as residual and declining. It saw ethnic cultural maintenance as problematic and something that should not be supported by government. Assimilationists such as Harold Holt as Immigration Minister in the 1950s assumed a common culture that everyone could recognise easily and would accept without problem.

Throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, a more radical grass roots movement was emerging, challenging the political elites of Australia and testing the culture and its domain assumptions. This movement expressed itself in many forms – opposition to White Australia, antagonism to South African apartheid, opposition to what were seen as imperialist wars against national liberation struggles (especially conscription for the American war in Vietnam). For immigrant activists there was a focus on ethnic rights – the right to English on the job, to ethnically relevant social services, to community language schools, and to activist trade unions that would support migrant workers' rights against exploitative employers and conservative Anglo union hierarchies.

Ethnic Rights activists argued that society should recognise the communal nature of ethnicity and assign rights based on ascriptive criteria (either voluntary or compulsory); it should regard the nation as both culturally and structurally pluralistic. Government should therefore commit social resources to maintenance of communal cultures and delivery of services through ethnic structures. It sought to reconceptualise the nation as composed of cultural minority groups recognised in law.

Multiculturalism emerged then as an attempt to resolve the struggle between assimilationist and ethnic rights approaches to cultural diversity. Multicultural

proponents were able to identify a tension between national cohesion, communal identification and individual rights. Their policy would seek a balance between mainstream services responding to general needs and ethnic services providing culturally-responsive programs. Governments could and would use multiculturalism to assert national core values and allegiance, while recognising the value of diversity in relation to identity and communal support. The adoption of multiculturalism would also serve as a signal that Australia wanted to be part of the new global economy, a world order of cultural diversity and rapid movement of money and people (especially those with money and skills).

But what does “multiculturalism” mean? And to whom?

A generation of national multicultural policies

Since 1978 there have been a series of developments in policies relating to multiculturalism. The inaugural moment was of course the Galbally Report itself and the associated institutions it created. Masterminded by Fraser’s adviser Petro Georgiou the Report was framed by a sense that the mainstream was antagonistic to changes in cultural hierarchy, and would resist delivering effective services to minorities. Three central organizations were established – the network that became the Migrant Resource Centres operating from a community development and ethnic services model, the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) developed in the face of resistance from the ABC to cultural diversity issues, and the Australian Institute for Multicultural Affairs (AIMA), the research and policy think-tank to build alternative world views and document the problems in bringing about change in the mainstream (headed up by Georgiou).

With the demise of the Fraser government in 1983, the Hawke Cabinet tried to remodel the multicultural program as something within government, rather than something criticising government inaction. In 1984 the policy of Access and Equity was announced, concentrating on ensuring government could deliver to all citizens, while maintaining some support for ethnic organizations. As well, attempts were made to roll SBS into the ABC, and reduce expenditure on ethnic services – from education to welfare. Widespread resistance from ethnic leaders to this latter move led to a pullback, intensified by the burgeoning debate about racism occasioned by Prof Geoffrey Blainey’s expressed fears of a tribalised society emerging in the wake of Indo-Chinese refugee settlement.

A period of wider social argument grew in the later part of the 1980s, with John Howard’s 1988 hostility to multiculturalism polarising the community around “race” and its proxy, “social cohesion”. The Labor government was not unaffected by this debate, worrying at how to clarify its position and articulate a policy that would hold together its partisan supporters, as well as the well-established ethnic communities, newcomers and the wider society. The National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia released in 1989 stressed a combination of national cohesion and social justice, and set in place the ‘principles’ that exist in a modified form today. Its institutional expression would be found in the new Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) in the Prime Minister’s department, and the expanding Bureau for Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research (BIMPR).

In the slipstream of the growing debate about multiculturalism as the harbinger of tribalism, the Labor government tried to find a way of speaking to all Australians, to demonstrate the national value of multiculturalism. By this stage the antipathy to refugees and ethnic minorities was increasing, with the media in Sydney in particular focusing on crime and violence in the Indo-Chinese community. The collapse of the Soviet bloc had also contributed to a sense of growing unease about the international order, and Australia's place in it. Government policy in 1993 found its response in Productive Diversity, arguing that cultural diversity was an economic plus in the world of the new Asian Tigers. The final expression of this trajectory was the 1995 Global Diversity conference, held in Sydney under PM Keating, and show-casing Australia as the exemplar of a cohesive multicultural community.

With the return of the Howard conservative coalition in 1996, and the election of the first One Nation parliamentarian, the agenda changed dramatically. The Government closed the BIMPR, effectively shunted OMA off to Immigration and reduced its already limited freedom of action, and made it clear that multiculturalism was a suspect concept that had no place in the new world of free speech and individualism. Under the advice of two conservative think-tanks, the Institute for Public Affairs in Melbourne, and the Centre for Independent Studies in Sydney, a sustained attack on the underpinnings of multiculturalism was accelerated.

For the next two years the multicultural policy community sought to re-establish itself as a part of the sphere of government priorities. The collapse of the Asian Tigers, the over-throw of Suharto in Indonesia, the revolution in East Timor, and civil wars in Yugoslavia, and the meteoric rise of One Nation under its leader Pauline Hanson, all tended to erode public confidence in any 'non-Anglo' directions. In response to Hansonism, during 1997 the government commissioned research into social attitudes to diversity policies, research kept secret to this day under the personal instruction of the Prime Minister. Finally in 1998 the government's advisory body the National Multicultural Advisory Council concluded its public consultations. Its recommendations to the Prime Minister were massaged by its chair Neville Roach and Council member New Right ideologue Melbourne academic and Israel lobbyist Colin Rubinstein, in conjunction with the PM's Chief of Staff Arthur Sinodinos, to find a form of words that the Prime Minister would accept. Out of that process came the term 'Australian multiculturalism', stressing the adjective, and asserting the critical role of social cohesion, and allegiance and responsibility to Australia. Social justice was excised from the policy (replaced by a vague notion of equity), and productive diversity enhanced.

The reviews of this policy since 1999 (the latest in 2003) have been anodyne, celebrating the step-by-step movement forward, ignoring the lack of resources, and focussing on harmony as the leitmotif in addressing social issues. Despite claims by some that the new policy accepts all the recommendations of the NMAC report, critical priorities were ignored – especially those on social justice, reconciliation, and a role for multicultural policy development in the Department of the Prime Minister. As part of the reflection on the Galbally legacy the review of migrant resource centres in 2003 proposed that their services be put out to tender as market-based units. Community development plays no part any more in this concept of service. The PM's website in December 2003 lists the many achievements of his government – there is no mention of multicultural Australia in any shape or form.

How have governments (Commonwealth and state) addressed cultural diversity?

The preceding broad chronology of the Commonwealth's policies can throw some light on the links between wider ideologies, social change and specific policy positions. Issues emerging in a culturally diverse society can be addressed in a number of different ways. Over the past generation four types of approaches have been developed, each addressing a different type of problem.

The first pathway was a direct consequence of the decision by the conservative coalition government of Harold Holt in 1966 to sign the International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Australia's key reservation lay in its refusal to legislate to criminalise racism – opting rather for civil and administrative strategies. It would take nearly a decade for this to eventuate in the Racial Discrimination Act 1976 (RDA), to be administered by a Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission through a Race Discrimination commissioner. The RDA was based on the notion of individual rights, to be defended against individual transgressors. There was little scope for any community action on broader issues, a situation reflected in the models of the state Anti-Discrimination Boards operating under departments of attorneys-general.

The second approach lay in legislation for some form of group rights, which is always difficult territory in common-law jurisdictions where individual freedom is held to be paramount. There was little Commonwealth legislation – the states created the Ethnic or Multicultural Affairs commissions, units and departments to deliver direct services, organise translation services, and monitor state government service delivery in health, education and community services.

A third orientation reflected the access and equity approaches from the 1980s – where codes of practice for government agencies were established to guarantee capacity and competency in responding to a diverse clientele. This orientation found its expression in various 'Charters', for a public service in a multicultural society – at the national and some state levels.

The final approach, and one which is still being explored, engages with the idea of multicultural citizenship. The clearest attempts to do this can be found in the report of the Commonwealth inquiry into citizenship, with its statement of seven core values, and the NSW Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural Society Act, with its discussion of small 'c' citizenship. Both of these documents find the idea of ethnic differentiation somewhat problematic, and look for a way of emphasising commonality of interest and the importance of the commitment to a set of democratic values that respect difference.

A Mind Map of the Morality of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism remains a complex and often confusing concept. Minister Hardgrave has argued that there was a 'wrong' multiculturalism (under Labor) where the society felt the 'M' word was only about advancing ethnic groups as special interests, and providing them with added benefits not available to other Australians – and people feared that this would that would solidify the dangers of 'tribalism'. Now though,

‘Australian multiculturalism’ stresses its policy relevance to all Australians, noting its importance in utilising cultural capital and providing returns to the whole society.

If we map the content of current policy we can see the underlying moral order to which multiculturalism is directed. Firstly it fits closely with a free enterprise liberal model of capitalist economies, a market-oriented world-view. Individuals are perceived as primarily economic actors with cultural capital (generated by family socialisation, ethnicity, education and life experience) who should be able to mobilise that capital to create wealth in their own interest, with wider societal flow-ons from a multiplier effect. Some ethnicities are welcomed and feared for this apparent inherited skill – eg Chinese and Jews.

While the economy is market-focussed, there is a hierarchy of cultural values that are emphasised through national leadership, social institutions and expectations of behaviour in social interaction. This remains the essence of Australian multiculturalism, a structure of beliefs that places Anglo-Australian culture at the apex, and retains the control of the cultural economy in these hands. Thus other cultures are acceptable so long as they do not challenge this hierarchy, and accept the determining role of the core values of the dominant order – minority cultural retention is permitted but not mandated, and should be resourced by the groups according to their desires and capacities. There is no sense that the whole social order benefits from cultural diversity, a social version of free-range organic farming.

Contemporary multiculturalism has revitalised the world of religious disputation. Religious diversity has become the central trope of cultural debates, not merely in the “clash of civilisations” discourse of the Right, but in the day-to-day practices of multicultural policy. Islam has become problematised, and interest in religious beliefs is growing – along with conversions. Religious leaders find themselves central to the political stage, representing broader cultural trends. In part this reflects the resurrection of conservative Christian values in the Commonwealth government, in part the growth of pentecostal Christianities, and the strengthening of evangelical Anglicanism and Catholicism in the wider community, and in part the role of religion in cultural identity

The final dimension of the contemporary scene can be found in the close links between policy settings and a resurgent Patriarchialism. Key social institutions are overwhelmingly male – and masculinist values permeate social policies. Multiculturalism is increasingly read as reinforcing traditionalist values, the power of the older men in communities and society more widely.

The Old Ethnicities and Social Power

Much of Australian history has been the working out of the old tensions deeded to Australia by the British empire – between the settlers and the Indigenous owners of the land, between the English and Scottish Protestant ascendancy and the Irish Catholic underclass. These continuities remain. In 1996 there was a period of exactly one month in which Irish Catholicism was able to see itself recognised in the three key roles of the nation – Prime Minister Paul Keating, Chief Justice Gerard Brennan, and Governor General William Deane. It had taken a century for this elision to become possible; with the return of the Protestants a month later a series of equally

symbolic statements occurred – the Governor General was replaced by an Anglican cleric and then by a Christian warrior, the PM a conservative Protestant, and only the Chief Justice was replaced by a Catholic, Murray Gleeson. All men, all white, all Christian.

Indeed the High Court is now all male, all white and there are no Jews or Muslims or Buddhists. There have been no non-Anglos appointed by government to the Board of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation since 1996 (and few before that). Cabinet itself is overwhelmingly male, all white and professedly Christian – again no Jews, no Muslims, no Buddhists.

Thus if we want to see how multiculturalism has affected social power in the public sphere, then the evidence is that not much has happened at the apex, whatever shuffling of places has occurred further down the ladder, and the ladder rungs seem to be more or less unchanged. Perhaps nobody notices or cares about these dimensions, or is it widely noticed and absorbed as the real lesson of the proclamations of cultural diversity?

Harmony

The decomposition of the Galbally and later institutions of multiculturalism has been progressing apace. The Coalition government had a particular agenda on multiculturalism when it came to power in 1996, and acted rapidly to remove the influence of the multicultural lobby. Many of these actions have been referred to above; I want to turn here to the primary policy, that of ‘Living in harmony’.

In the wake of the 1990 Inquiry into Racist Violence and under some pressure from HREOC, the Keating government had attempted to develop a Racial Vilification law to move beyond the reservations expressed nearly thirty years before to the 1966 Convention. Conservative and libertarian opposition to criminal sanctions caused an impasse, with the Coalition promising that it would commit \$10 million to community education instead of agreeing to the ALP proposal for legal recourse. The amendments finally passed to the RDA reflected this approach – and left the incoming government with a promise on which it had to act. The first step was a market research exercise (\$185,000) to determine the best way to ‘sell’ anti-racism. This research took place at the height of the Hansonite trajectory, with community attitudes volatile and angry. The research itself became an issue when a journalist published some of the questions, themselves inflammatory in that climate. The PM ordered the research not be released.

As the local social environment has become even more frayed after 9/11, and suspicion of difference has intensified, the national government has tried to balance the ‘alert but not alarmed’ message with one of ‘harmony’. The ‘harmony’ label was derived from this still-secret research (both the Minister and DIMIA say that they are ‘unable’ to release the material – but that it is not ‘secret’), that showed (during the height of Hansonism) that cultural differences could fracture into deep social cleavages if national leadership pointed that way. This is not the place to explore the detail of the struggle over Hansonism and its curious meanderings; however Hansonism was seen as threatening enough for the government to look for some way

of rebuilding social cohesion while avoiding the unacceptable ‘political correctness’ of multiculturalism and anti-racism .

People were looking to government to cool things out, to reduce tensions, and to let people get on with their lives – multiculturalism was seen as divisive and talk of racism antagonised many people who felt that their prejudices were rational. According to the government, ‘National research has confirmed that the overwhelming majority of Australians genuinely respect and value the diverse make-up of our community and support the concepts on which the initiative is based’ - (DIMIA Website accessed Nov 2003). This statement may refer to the 2002 SBS research, but clearly does not refer to the early secret work.

According to those insiders who have been permitted to view the 1996/7 research, it would have to be a highly selective interpretation of the findings, almost akin to regarding desperate refugees as baby slaughtering marauders (as in ‘The Children Overboard’), to see the population as supportive. The evidence suggests, at that time, the overwhelming majority of people did not understand the concepts, grudgingly accepted diversity, and were hostile to any benefits they perceive might accrue to people based on their ‘difference’ – reflecting the discourses both of Hansonism and the government at the time. They wanted English to be spoken, they preferred people with similar cultures to their own being admitted to Australia, and they resented any suggestion they were intolerant.

The strategy that flowed from this research went something like this:

1. do not use racism or multiculturalism (these words have crept back more recently);
2. look for a symbolic day for ‘Harmony’ (choosing the International Day for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination thus killed two birds – no mention of Racial Discrimination and a way of celebrating harmony)
3. develop a program to fund harmony activities stressing ‘mainstream’ groups and inter-group harmony activities.
4. blame any problems on the previous government, claim all advances for the present government, and refuse to release any hard data by which claims could be tested.

It is also significant that the Australian Labor Party has not has a policy on multiculturalism and cultural diversity since the ‘small target’ policy conference of 2000.

Major achievements of multiculturalism

Over the past twenty five years Australia’s public culture has been transformed by policies of multiculturalism. The advances have been significant, and though some appear to have been eroded recently, the benefits are quite impressive.

Thus the public face that continues, can be found in the operation of the Special Broadcasting Service Corporation, now a government company competing in the wider arena of multiple media pathways. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, despite its truncated powers and reduced budget, still maintains a role as an instigator of public debates and a reflector for public experiences – as in the

current Isma project on Islamic communities and racism, and in its representation of wider public attitudes in the contribution to the UN Conference on racism in Durban in 2002. The dialogue between Indigenous and immigrant communities has been improved, though resources for reconciliation have been dramatically curtailed. There is a national day ('Harmony Day') to examine inter-cultural relations, and funding program to advance inter-cultural communication and co-operation.

In recognition of the global circulation of populations, Australia now allows multiple citizenships (the only concrete outcome from the Citizenship inquiry). The Commonwealth Public Service now operates under a charter that identifies its responsibilities to a culturally diverse community. The government is seeking to advance its Productive Diversity agenda, albeit slowly and with little ground being made in corporate Australia. Racial discrimination and vilification legislation is in place, albeit bureaucratic, demanding and tortuous to activate. A successful prosecution of Internet racism has been achieved under the RDA, and there is now governmental consideration of legislation to outlaw Internet racism. Arts for a Multicultural Australia still remains a priority for the Australia Council, if not for the government in its appointment of Council members.

Significant Failures

The other side of the balance sheet looks less exciting, with many potential opportunities avoided and major decisions refused. There is no longer a 'product champion' for multiculturalism at the national level – the last was the former chair of NMAC and Fujitsu CEO Neville Roach, who resigned in disgust at the government's policies over the incarceration of asylum seekers in early 2001. His replacement, Benjamin Chow, is closely linked to the Liberal Party and has a low public profile on multicultural issues. With the closure of most research programs on multiculturalism, the remaining independent public commentators include Bob Birrell, who is usually identified as a dedicated opponent of the policy, James Jupp, a liberal advocate of a different era, and Laksiri Jayasuriya, the last partisan for moderate ethnic rights approaches.

There were institutional directions Australia might have taken, but has thus far rejected. There is no either constitutional or legislative Bill of Rights, so individual identity choices have no basis, and can be removed by government decree. Australia is now the only Common law jurisdiction without some such rights framework.

Unlike Canada, Australia has no Multiculturalism Act. Thus everything that government provides to culturally diverse communities is subject to arbitrary change, and there is nothing guaranteeing that Australians can even get to know about the issues affecting their diverse population. Unlike the situation affecting women where affirmative action covers the whole society, there is no affirmative action in relation to ethnic differences. Only the public sector is covered by positive strategies, while the private sector is only subject to racial discrimination laws. There is no Commonwealth contract compliance that would mandate the private sector to reflect the diversity of the population in their employment practices.

Knowledge about multicultural Australia is constrained by the program-directed funding of favoured researchers by DIMIA, or the marketing-directed investigations

sponsored by SBS. Research is restricted to politically safe avenues that accord with government priorities. Only an occasional Australian Research Council project surfaces to create independent knowledge, as in the ground-breaking work by UNSW social geographer Kevin Dunn. We have already seen how any controversial research within government is kept under lock and key, its findings subject to hardly subtle spin-doctoring at the political level.

The key institutions over which government has control do not represent the diversity of Australian society at all – the monocultural Cabinet (0/17), the monocultural High Court (0/7) and the monocultural ABC (0/7 government appointees) are the ones at the tip of the iceberg. Public representation on government advisory boards no longer has to reflect cultural diversity, where most participants are selected for their willingness to accept government cultural priorities.

Trajectories

If we bring these various elements together we can discern manifest and latent trajectories in the social changes at work in Australia and the policy engagements with these changes. The manifest trajectories are those that appear in the public discourses, are the every day stuff of government media releases, and the realities of the implementation of those priorities.

We are seeing policies that celebrate low level and local cultural collaborations; assert national social priorities; assert the importance of a cohesive national identity; make economic profitability a priority; marketise services; and recruit ethnic leadership into ‘B list’ elites (those with little influence or power). There are those who promote these directions because they believe this is the best that can be accomplished in the current climate.

The latent trajectories lie deep below these public discourses. They reinforce traditional cultural hierarchies; isolate Australia from global civil society; build a culture of fear and hostility in many directions; reduce human rights; reduce services and service quality; force greater use of voluntary female labour to meet human needs; intensify exclusion and urban segregation; and intensify the sedimentation of an impoverished ethnically delineated underclass. These remain the critical questions confronting the decision-makers and stakeholders in multicultural Australia.

Conclusion

This audit has traversed a multitude of issues, touching many where we would want to go deeper. What I hope to have provided is a framework for interrogation, enhancing the capacity of the stakeholders in multicultural Australia to clear the fog from the lens, and focus their experience and intellect on defining how they want the future to be. In Jakarta in 1997 I presented the Australia Lecture entitled “Is Australia a Racist Society?” My conclusion then was that we had a racist past, but we were trying to move beyond what could be a racist future. My Indonesian commentator reflected on how futures are written – he said that multicultural societies can only work if the script is still being constructed, and everyone can participate in its writing.

As Australia readies itself for a changing generation of leadership, the paradigm shifts

that multiculturalism can promise still lie ahead. We cannot afford grudging acceptance of diversity; we need respect and co-operation and recognition of how cultural resources are crucial to our future security and survival. We cannot afford marginalisation and exclusion, the creation of ghettos of privilege or emiseration, the use of anger instead of intelligence as the basis of social development.

This audit indicates that some of the settings are in place, some of the action has been implemented, but that the next steps will be crucial in permitting the nation to move forward. If we decide as a nation to avoid the 'path less travelled', then we are fated to sacrifice Australia's potential to be a creative, compassionate and inclusive society.

Ends

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