



Globally Speaking - The Politics of Globalisation

Program 4: Where to Australia?

How can Australia respond to the processes of globalisation? In the more than 200 years of white settlement, Australians have struggled to define a sense of national identity while accommodating successive waves of migration.

And now Australia is faced with the challenge of how to fulfil its responsibilities as a good global citizen to refugees, as graphically illustrated by recent experience with the Kosovars and East Timorese in Australia.



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Rena Sarumpaet

Hello, I'm Rena Sarumpaet and welcome to the fourth program in our series - GLOBALLY SPEAKING - The Politics of Globalisation. Today, Advance Australia Where?

Chinese poem

I'm a man of multiple identity, born in the year of pigs, left the country in the year of chicken, I came to Australia because I was told that this is a multicultural society which suits me fine. But I'm not happy about what I see here. For example, in our workplace during the tea break people form into groups according to their different nationalities. They buy and they read their own newspapers written in their own.....

Rena Sarumpaet

One of the oldest landmasses on earth is one of the newest societies. Unless you're an indigenous Australian, you can only trace your origins in this country for just over 200 years and for the vast majority only since World War Two.

In relation to other societies Australia may seem rather unformed when it comes to matters like identity, national traditions, and regional orientation. But in an increasingly globalised world, a society that encompasses the full range of global cultural diversity is open to the varied possibilities that globalisation holds out.

Professor Wang Gungwu, from the National University of Singapore, believes that we should not become complacent about our rich cultural heritage.

Professor Wang Gungwu

It's a country built by migrants, it will continue to be a migrant state in the sense that migration has been part of the richness of the history, and to recognise that, to see how that could be built upon as the basis of a stronger and richer country. I think that is the kind of attitude we should have.

My only concern is that from time to time I sense a kind of an analogy here that Australia has taken for granted the great inherited wealth of the country, and I don't mean just physical wealth and natural wealth, but also cultural wealth, and that is part of the heritage. But having

taken it for granted and not studied it as closely or taken it ahead or developed it further as an Australian thing, then we lose that motivation and the sense of momentum and the sense of growth in the cultural values that was part of the heritage. And once you lose that momentum and you let things slide as it were you feel less confident that you can stand up to the new peoples, the new cultures coming in.

Rena Sarumpaet

Cultural and ethnic diversity, whilst rich with possibilities, brings with it hazards and challenges. Neglect or a kind of cultural laissez-faire can bring about confusion and lack of direction. Managed wisely however, the positive gains to be achieved from creatively blending different influences become attainable.

Professor Mary Kalantzis is Dean of the Faculty of Education, Language and Community Services at RMIT University in Melbourne.

Professor Mary Kalantzis

Professor Mary Kalantzis believes Australia has become isolationist and stalled on issues like multiculturalism and reconciliation. But she also believes that we are well placed to take on the challenges of globalisation by drawing on our experiences in dealing with diversity.

Transcript

This country decided that if you brought people of difference, if you recognised indigenous people, that had some significance for the way you made laws, had significance for the way that you built products, significance for the way you did media, that it wasn't just about isn't it wonderful, aren't we diverse? Or isn't it terrible? It actually meant you had to do something, and what you got was government, and it was government leading particular strategies in response to demand from people. But it was a two-way thing. So I think that's very important, and there's a message there for the whole globalisation agenda as well, that you can't enter globalisation and the benefits of that, whether it's the movement of commodities or people or ideas, unless you also engage in the regulatory mechanisms and the values that go with that.

So you can't just say the free flow of these things is enough between nations, nations have to participate as governments would at a national level, at an international level to say well, what are the values when people move around? How do you look after people when workers move from one country to another? If we think of multiculturalism not only as a description but also as a prescription. You know what are the things you have to do to ensure that it leads to positive outcomes rather than negative outcomes, and I think that's the lesson that Australia could have shown to the world, but at the moment it's retreating and almost being isolationist.

Rena Sarumpaet

Viewed from the perspective of the middle range of nations, the scale of globalisation can seem overwhelming. The question arises, how much influence can smaller nations like Australia have on the shape and direction of globalisation?

Dr. Patrick Wolfe is a research fellow in the Europe Australia Institute at Victoria University in Melbourne.

Dr. Patrick Wolfe

It's important not to mystify globalisation. Globalisation isn't some abstract being that's come in from outer space and is covering the world like a virus, that's beyond human control. Globalisation is the result of very specific human intentions being put into practice, governed in principle by the profit motive. Thus it's very, very important for us not to see ourselves as passive receivers of globalisation who can't do anything about this trend but might hope to find some shelter or some space within it. Rather we need to be proactive, we need to act to shape globalisation to try to recuperate some of the momentum and some of the direction from international corporate leaders.

Otherwise globalisation is a profoundly undemocratic thing. It makes us think that we can't introduce public regulatory mechanisms which will reduce this kind of world to a democratic order. It is therefore very important for us to appreciate the human dimension of globalisation, which makes it a space for possibilities so far as human intervention

goes.

Rena Sarumpaet

The relationship between globalisation and democracy has proved to be controversial. On the one hand the new communication technologies, which have been so effective in reducing the world to a global village, are seen to be highly democratic. On the other hand, when we shift from the technological to the economic dimension, global inequity is steadily on the increase.

Wang Gungwu again.

Professor Wang Gungwu

Globalisation has come to Australia in a way that some people couldn't understand and therefore fear it, and it's true that the globalisation has led to a greater gulf between the better off and the worse off, if not the rich and the poor, and that these gaps which are happening everywhere in the world has come to a country which is not accustomed to that kind of phenomenon, and that the rural areas have suffered whereas the urban areas have benefited from certain features of globalisation, and that the whole question of migration from Asia, the number of new immigrants to have come to challenge the native peoples of Australia. What I mean by natives of course, those who have been there for many generations, and therefore the need for competitiveness and toughness to deal with the challenges of a highly rapidly developing world - all these I think they added to the sense of insecurity.

Rena Sarumpaet

A traditional perception in Australia was one of isolation from Europe. Australians have often viewed their geo-political environment as alien and threatening. But the tide of globalisation has substantially eroded the walls of Australia's isolation. To fulfill its global obligations Australia has had to take refugees from East Timor and Kosovar for example. The new arrivals have brought with them historical experiences and ways of doing things that not all Australians have found easy to live with.

But Mary Kalantzis believes there are a range of reasons for this new found anxiety, which Australia's political elites must confront.

Mary Kalantzis

There is truly a gap that's growing between the rich and the poor that I think people feel it, they're conscious of it, even the rich I think are feeling a little uncomfortable about the ease with which you can get rich if you have particular capabilities. And certainly we're talking about that a lot, so I think there is a great consciousness that there are winners and losers in the new economy.

But the second reason I think is that Australia has for unhelpful reasons missed out being part of any economic bloc, and we're beginning to feel I think, alone. We're not part of the EU, we're not part of the North American Economic Bloc and we've messed up being part of Asia, and we're feeling I think terribly anxious.

And thirdly, and I think equally important is that we didn't deal with the backlash. When people complained about some groups having advantages rather than others, when a whole bunch of politically correct strategies like reconciliation or multiculturalism, when people complained about those matters, which are at the core of our diversity, instead of dealing with them we shut down. Instead of investing in a system for people to understand that what we'd done in the past in terms of opening up our society was in the interests of all, we said oh dear, there's some truth in all that, oh dear, you know how do we make people feel better, how do we not have a divisive society? Well we won't take onboard what Aboriginal people say, we won't take onboard what immigrants say. We'll stop refugees and asylums seekers. There is anxiety that people like refugees, although our heart is open to them we're really nervous that they're going to come and take some bit of our

patch, either our identity or our jobs.

Rena Sarumpaet

Anxieties about economic liberalisation and the gap between the rich and poor are not confined to Australia. The unease Australians have been experiencing has been itself an echo of wider global uncertainties.

Patrick Wolfe again.

Dr. Patrick Wolfe

There is this tendency to say globalisation is increasing the divide between the rich and the poor and it certainly is, without making clear whether we are talking about the distinction between the Third World as a group of nations and say the First World, or the distinctions between the poor who may or may not originate in the Third World within the First World, and richer people within the First World. Globalisation cuts through individual nations so that in the poorest of Third World countries there is invariably a wealthy governing elite, therefore we shouldn't see the whole country as poor, we should see the internal structure of that individual nation as itself a kind of microcosm, a smaller reflection of the global order as a whole. And it's in that double sense that we need to understand globalisation.

Thus when we are dealing with the multicultural situation in a country like Australia where migrants from all over the world have brought with them different histories of globalisation which then come to encounter each other and to co-mingle on the streets of say Australian cities, each local neighbourhood, each community becomes itself a kind of microcosm of the global order.

Rena Sarumpaet

You're listening to Globally Speaking - The Politics of Globalisation - Program 4 - Advance Australia Where?

Just as globalisation has brought the world home to Australia - ironically enough globalisation is bringing Australia home to the world. Nowhere is this more the case than where indigenous rights are concerned. Indigenous people in Australia like their counterparts in other settler colonies are increasingly turning to international forums to air their grievances and bring the weight of international public opinion to bear on Australia.

Professor Henry Reynolds has written the history of indigenous Australians since white settlement.

Professor Henry Reynolds believes that within ten years there will be global standards about the treatment of indigenous people. Meantime, he says, Australia's Aborigines can and should take their concerns to international forums.

Professor Henry Reynolds

There are two forces at work - there are those in Australia who say this is an internal issue, it is our own concern, the rest of the world should butt out, and Australians shouldn't go appealing overseas, this is entirely a domestic matter. Now that view I think is to the distinct disadvantage of Aborigines and Islanders. Throughout the last two hundred years people who have tried to advance the cause of indigenous people have always appealed overseas - it used to be to Britain, now it is to the UN or other global agencies. This has been a pattern apparent from the beginning, but since the 1940s with the drawing up of the great international human rights documents Aborigines do have a ground to appeal beyond Australia, which they of course do.

Transcript

And I think there is a growing desire to create rights for indigenous people, there is currently a draft convention on the rights of indigenous people going through the United Nations process. The organisation of American states, their human rights bodies have confirmed this view and are developing their own charter of indigenous rights. I think within ten years there will be global standards about the treatment of indigenous people, which will be at least accepted intellectually, if not politically, and legally on the ground, and ultimately Australia will have to conform to

those world standards, and we don't at the moment.

Rena Sarumpaet

If Australia is vulnerable to international criticism for its treatment of indigenous people, multiculturalism presents a different story. With the abolition of the White Australia Policy from the 1960s, Australia developed a brand of multiculturalism that in many senses became the envy of the world. In stark contrast to the degradation of many Aboriginal communities, most migrants succeeded, sometimes within the span of a single generation, in transforming lives that have often been marred by persecution or poverty.

Mary Kalantzis again.

Mary Kalantzis

We had a most extraordinary immigration program. We've taken more people than anyone in the world in a shorter period of time. 1945 we were seven million people, now we're 18, no country in the whole world has incorporated as many people as we have from as many different backgrounds with an extraordinary set of policies to match that. Now we have a very weak sense of who we are, we're not quite sure - are we Irish, are we English, are we Scottish, are we indigenous, are we Greek? We're not quite sure about it, and that is healthy. It means we're open to the possibility of creating our identity around the diversity of peoples that are in this country, and maybe not around some ethnic descriptor. And I think that was the strength that Australia had over the rest of the world that's fought bloody wars to establish their nationalism.

And I think we were very late in dealing with indigenous people. We didn't deal with them at the moment of assimilation, we dealt with them in the moment we were talking pluralism. Therefore we were able to do something more profound had we let it play its course, which was self-determination and reconciliation, the path we'd begun with Mabo and after that.

Rena Sarumpaet

Amidst all the successes of multiculturalism though, indigenous people strike a discordant note - their difference is not merely one of culture, race or ethnicity, rather they are the prior owners of Australia - owners whose dispossession continues to create social and political problems that Australia is yet to resolve.

So far as indigenous people are concerned therefore, the gratifications of a successful multiculturalism are premature. Patrick Wolfe again.

Dr. Patrick Wolfe

A note of caution, we must be aware of just lumping together find sounding notions like reconciliation and multiculturalism as if because good people believe in such things they automatically belong together in a harmonious way. There are all sorts of tensions for instance between indigenous rights and multiculturalism, in particular multiculturalism encourages us to lose sight of the historical specificity of the indigenous situation. They alone are the dispossessed, it is their dispossession that this nation state is built upon and continues to be structured by.

The migrants whether they're Anglo migrants or migrants from elsewhere in relation to indigenous people are all migrants. Now there's a certain celebratory multiculturalism, which tends to erase this indigenous specificity, this indigenous history and replace it with a kind of carnival celebration of culture. I think the example of the telephone book with which we're all familiar which has rows and rows of multicultural faces all kind of smiling coming from all different parts of the world invariably there will be an indigenous person or two in there, and in their inclusion in that gallery of pictures, the specificity of being indigenous is lost, instead it's replaced with the kind of celebration of cultural difference, skin colour difference, differences in appearance, a whole lot of relatively trivial superficial differences which cover over this specific history of

dispossession which is a precondition on which the Australian state is built.

Rena Sarumpaet

It's cause for some satisfaction, that compared with other countries with large migrant intakes, Australia has only this one glaring exception to its otherwise successful program of multiculturalism. Yet the issues surrounding indigenous Australians stem from white settlement and show no signs of going away.

Aboriginal people insist on their own particular identities and on their right to conduct their own affairs. In particular, they have consistently resisted policies of assimilation. But surely multiculturalism brings an end to assimilation? Not so, argues Patrick Wolfe.

Dr. Patrick Wolfe

As soon as you use that word assimilation in relation to indigenous people of course the alarm bells ring, and so they should. The assimilation policy had all the time in the world for people of unmixed genetic ancestry, people who in the terms of that policy were called full bloods. Those Aboriginal people were left alone. Aboriginal children who showed any signs of white ancestry were to be taken away, were to be assimilated into the mainstream, were to be bred white. Now that we all know is a thoroughly discredited genetic policy whereby Aboriginal people were increasingly to disappear, to be eliminated, to be bred out as generation after generation they produced more mixed blood children who will be taken away by the Australian state and merged into the white population. That's a genetic construct.

What happens with multiculturalism and where culture becomes most important? Well whilst it is no longer the case that Aboriginal people are being bred white, it is nonetheless the case that in taking Aboriginality and submerging it into the general plurality of the multicultural whole one is not breeding out, but one is acculturating out Aboriginality, one's assimilating it into a new plural mix - it's no longer a dominant white Australia to which Aboriginality is being assimilated - it's now a dominant multicultural Australia within which the specificity of Aboriginal cultures and Aboriginality in general is also being lost. Aborigines in other words run the risk or are threatened in the context of multiculturalism with becoming just another tile in the multicultural mosaic.

Rena Sarumpaet

If Australia is seen to have stalled on indigenous rights and multiculturalism, how then should we proceed in the face of globalisation?

Wang Gungwu again.

Professor Wang Gungwu

We are at a kind of critical stage, a kind of crossroads where we can go towards globalisation at a greater speed and hope that we can all cope with it, or we can say that this is going too fast, it needs to be slowed down a bit so that more people can learn to accept it and cope with it. When people can cope with something then they're confident, then they will learn to like it, use it for benefiting their lives and their societies. But when they can't cope with it that is when you get then your negative impact.

So it's a question of making sure that something that has to happen or should happen happens with the understanding of those who are the most affected by it. And finding that kind of balance between what one believes is probably inevitable in the long run and to make sure that it is accepted by those people affected by it. I think that is the challenge that is the task that we all have to face and get engaged in. In that context I lean towards the optimistic because the last couple of hundred years of history suggests that human beings are extremely enterprising, skillful, adaptable, basically intelligent and rational, and that given that

opportunity, given the chance to harness the forces of reason we've ample evidence that it can succeed however tough the challenge may be at any single time.

Rena Sarumpaet

But optimism need not be utopian. We can be optimistic in the face of challenges and globalisation is certainly not short of these. John Wiseman is the author of 'Global Nation: Australia and the Politics of Globalisation'.

John Wiseman

It's the greatest challenge for young people, it's the greatest challenge for the education system to develop the skills and the understandings of how to live in a world where information and financial flows are accelerating so that increasingly distant actions do have local effects. That the challenge to understand the links between the local and the national and the global and the challenge of learning the skills to do that in very practical ways of course for Australians that means learning to on the one hand be able to have the skills to work in Australian and local contexts, but to have the language skills, the analytical skills, the cultural skills, the cultural understandings to work with other people in our region - in the Asia Pacific region - and beyond that.

Rena Sarumpaet

So are Australians up this challenge? Is our apparently boundless national capacity for optimism unrealistic? Mary Kalantzis argues that in a world where national and cultural differences are increasingly becoming life and death issues, managing diversity should be seen as an Australian success story. She believes that we can draw on our past experiences to handle the challenges of globalisation.

Mary Kalantzis

We're a very laconic pragmatic people, and we've actually dealt with difference I think in an extraordinary positive way, really have dealt with it. I mean even assimilation which people are critical of, I mean before we had that idea people said no one else could be like us, you know the Chinese couldn't be like us, the Aborigines couldn't be like us, they had to either die out or be thrown out. But then we said they can assimilate, they can be like us. The minute we said that us changes. So I mean that's not a small thing, that's quite a big thing, and I think our history has shown us how we can deal with those difficult issues. Because we're a young nation, because our traditions have come from all over the world and we're building what I call an indigenous sense of belonging, it can be built out of sensibilities that are drawn here from all over the world. And what we need to recognise is a love for the physical country I think which we all have and to name it both in its urban and its bush context, but particularly in its urban. We've got to love the cities, we've got to love the suburbs again and fashion them in a way that makes them places that are wonderful places to be in. So I think that's one of the most important things that we need to do.

And secondly then say that our ties to each other come out of dealing with diversity, having the skills, the capabilities, the sensibilities to engage with difference, be it you know sexual orientation, or eating habits or linguistic, that those are part of the rich tapestry of what it is to be human, and all that difference produces products and services which make you rich! They don't make you poor, rich both in a spiritual sense and a financial sense.

Rena Sarumpaet

Mary Kalantzis.

Next week, in our fifth program, 'Global Cities', we look at how globalisation is changing the face of cities around the world.

Visit our website too at abc.net.au/global that's abc.net.au/global

'Globally Speaking - The Politics of Globalisation' is a joint project of Radio Australia and Victoria University in Melbourne. The program was produced by Sue Slamen by Barry Clarke. Academic advisor, Patrick Wolfe, Technical production, Darren McKenzie.

I'm Rena Sarumpaet, bye for now.



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