

Chapter 2: Politics, Public Policy and Multiculturalism

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A major problem in discussing multiculturalism rationally is that it means many different things to many different people in many different situations¹. This is quite normal for all terms ending in 'ism', which suggests some sort of ideological basis relevant to political and organisational outcomes, such as 'socialism'. The difference is that socialism has been around for nearly two centuries, while multiculturalism was only coined forty years ago. Within a single generation states and individuals have moved from assimilative nationalism and open racism towards the concepts of human equality and cultural variety. Still, many are yet to adopt these novel approaches, or they find them incompatible, and, it remains the case that they are not acceptable to all citizens or political parties. In short, multiculturalism is normally a contested term. In recent years the topic has been further confused by the adoption of alternative terms like integration, which may simply describe a preferred situation very like multiculturalism or alternatives very close to assimilation.

One way of avoiding this dilemma, and analysing Australian multiculturalism in practice, is to concentrate on policy formulation and application within the local political system. The development of multicultural policies has been well documented in official Australian sources, though it is still surprising how few critics seem aware of this and persist in arguing that multiculturalism 'has never been defined'. The basic Australian definition, which has never been significantly altered, was contained in the 1978 report of Frank Galbally's Committee, *Migrant Services and Programs*². Significantly this report was delivered to Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser rather than to the Minister for Immigration, within whose responsibilities most of it lay. Unusually it was produced in ten languages, which was a symbolic gesture rather than an attempt to reach a mass readership. Multiculturalism as a public policy area, has rested uncertainly between two Commonwealth departments ever since, being transferred from Prime Minister and Cabinet to Immigration by John Howard in 1996³. It was eventually taken up at state level, mostly by the 1980s.

1 Parekh, Lord B (2006). *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke (UK); Castles, S, Kalantzis, M, Cope, B and Morrissey, M (1992). *Mistaken Identity: Multiculturalism and the Demise of Nationalism in Australia*, Pluto Press, Sydney.

2 Galbally, F (chair) (1978). *Migrant Services and Programs*, AGPS, Canberra.

3 Jupp, J (2002). *From White Australia to Woomera*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne: chapter 5.

The Galbally report placed its emphasis on language ability, moving away from the previous concern with physical appearance. Assistance was needed for 'those who arrive here with little understanding of the English language'⁴. The responsibility for advising government of immigrant needs was to pass from existing mainstream welfare organisations to ethnic communities. The costs of ethnic welfare services were to fall largely on the budget of the Immigration Department, with the teaching of English to adults to become the largest single cost. Thus policy was centrally concerned with settlement. However it went well beyond that into potentially more controversial areas. The basic principles, which have never been officially abandoned, were summarised as:

- All members of our society must have equal opportunity to realise their full potential and must have equal access to programs and services.
- Every person should be able to maintain his or her own culture without prejudice or disadvantage and should be encouraged to understand and embrace other cultures.
- [The] needs of migrants should, in general, be met by programs and services available to the whole community. But special programs and services are necessary at present to ensure equality of access and provision.
- Services and programs should be designed and operated in full consultation with clients, and self-help should be encouraged as much as possible with a view to helping migrants to become self-reliant quickly⁵.

Thus from its origins, multicultural policy was seen as a national responsibility but a special concern of immigrants of 'non-English-speaking background' - a term not officially changed until replaced with 'culturally and linguistically diverse' by the Howard government in 2002. The report stated firmly that 'migrants have the right to maintain their cultural and racial identity'⁶. Australian multiculturalism differs from the original Canadian approach in being aimed in practice at immigrants, an approach eventually defined by the Immigration Department to embrace those who have arrived within the past two years. However, in practice, and at the state and territory level, multicultural activities extend much more broadly and many engage in multicultural organisations that are Australian-born. The term 'ethnic' more effectively describes the reality, if it is taken to include those not of British and Irish descent. It excludes Australian Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, even though the first *National Agenda*

4 Galbally, F (chair) (1978). *op cit*: 1.9.

5 *Ibid*: 1.7.

6 *Ibid*: 9.6.

for a *Multicultural Australia* of 1989 specifically included them⁷. Indigenous policies and programs have continued to be distinct from those included under 'multiculturalism'.

These ambiguities reflect the fact that multiculturalism is not just an administrative approach but also incorporates certain values and attitudes. Some of these move away from long-standing Australian traditions, such as building a new British nation on the basis of racial purity. To a younger generation these traditions might seem antiquarian. But they were consensual as recently as the 1960s and had lasted for over a century. Many were revived by the One Nation movement of Pauline Hanson, which gained one million votes in the 1998 Commonwealth election, mainly in Queensland and monocultural rural districts of New South Wales and Western Australia. One Nation, in effect, rejected all forms of ethnic variety, favouring assimilation of immigrants and Aborigines, calling on multiculturalism to be 'abolished', for mass immigration to be abandoned and for the ending of welfare services allocated on the basis of Aboriginality or ethnicity. The temporary support for One Nation suggests that it represented a lingering but still widespread adherence to attitudes which the introduction of multiculturalism in the early 1970s was designed to abandon. The rapid collapse of the movement, while largely due to internal indiscipline, marked the end of an era rather than the start of a consistent reaction. However the adoption of some One Nation proposals relating to asylum seekers by the Howard government suggests that resentment against ethnic minorities continues in the background.⁸

The stages of policy development

To better understand the ambiguities and compromises involved in multicultural policy development, it is necessary to look briefly at the various stages through which national policy towards ethnic variety has moved since the start of the post-war mass migration program in 1947⁹. Prior to that the state had strongly favoured British immigration and discouraged or even prevented settlement from other sources¹⁰. Thus there was little ambiguity and the only major controversy surrounded the opposition to migration based on a presumed threat to the wages and conditions of organised labour. There had, in any case, been very little immigration between 1930 and 1945. A refugee intake of Jews fleeing Nazi

7 Office of Multicultural Affairs (1989). *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

8 Leach, M, Stokes, G, and Ward, I (2000). *The Rise and Fall of One Nation*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia (Qld).

9 Castles, S, et al (1992). *Op cit*.

10 Tavan, G (2005). *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia*, Scribe, Melbourne.

Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia had not been met with much enthusiasm among the general public and had been strongly criticised by some of the more reactionary media commentators and conservative politicians. The settlement of the Jewish refugees was left to the Jewish community and the expectation that they would not place a burden on the taxpayer was regularly stated ¹¹. However the post-war situation was very different. For the first time since 1901 the assisted passage schemes were extended to non-British aliens from Europe, of whom 171,000 were Displaced Persons. Most of these came from places which had sent few if any migrants to Australia in the past ¹².

The assimilation phase 1947-1966

The arrival of Displaced Persons in a short period between 1947 and 1954 presented a challenge almost as disturbing as the mass arrival of Chinese gold seekers in the 1850s. However, as they were all of European origin and mostly of Christian religion, the assumption was made that they would not present such a major challenge nor breach the expectation of social cohesion and rapid assimilation on which the White Australia policy was still based. Policy was not determined by any real knowledge of social science analyses of immigration, which at this stage was mainly confined to the experience of the United States. There was considerable confusion in public debate about the American experience, with the descendants of African slaves being lumped together with southern and eastern European 19th century immigrants and blamed for producing 'ghettoes' and 'race riots'. Commonwealth migration to Britain did not take off until the mid-1950s. When it did, Australians concluded that rioting and discrimination in Britain fully justified the retention of White Australia ¹³.

The academic study of ethnicity (other than the anthropological study of Aborigines) and of immigration scarcely existed, apart from the work of Jens Lyng in the 1920s and Lodewyckx in the 1930s. It took off in Australia in the 1960s, with the work of Price, Zubrzycki, Borrie, Jean Martin, Taft and Appleyard. By then the Displaced Persons had been settled for a decade and were being replaced as immigrants by Italians, Greeks, Maltese, Dutch and Germans. Alongside them were still a substantial majority from the United Kingdom, who were of academic interest only to Appleyard and Alan Richardson¹⁴. While the Immigration Department created a research section, this was inhibited by the public policies of racial exclusion and assimilation. Attitude surveys were in

11 Benjamin, R (1998). *'A Serious Influx of Jews'*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.

12 Kunz, E F (1988). *Displaced Persons: Calwell's New Australians*, Australian National University Press, Sydney.

13 Tavan, G (2005). *op cit*.

14 Appleyard, R T (1964) *British Emigration to Australia*, ANU Press, Canberra; Richardson, A (1974). *British Immigrants and Australia*, ANU Press, Canberra.

their early stages, with the most relevant being developed in the Psychology Department of Melbourne University by Oscar Oeser. These showed that assimilation and racial categories strongly affected public opinion. The most popular migrants were British, Dutch and Germans – the least popular ‘Negroes’, Chinese and Jews.

Public policy was largely determined by the hope and expectation that Europeans who ‘looked like’ Australians would rapidly become ‘Australians’, grateful for the freedom and prosperity of Australia and willing to forget the languages, behaviour and ‘ancient quarrels’ of their original homelands. Of course many of the ‘ancient quarrels’ were the very recent suppression of nations by Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. Fierce and lasting opposition to that was fully approved by Australian authorities as the Cold War developed. The Liberal and Democratic Labor Parties both recruited among Displaced Persons, while the ALP found more sympathy among the Greeks, Maltese and Italians. But as a general rule the formation of ethnic organisations with political objectives was not welcomed. Some were of interest to the newly formed ASIO (and to the Soviet embassy until its expulsion in 1956).

Had there been more experience of ethnic variety or more study of American ethnic scholarship, some of the assimilationist policies might have been modified or abandoned earlier than was eventually the case. The crude expectation that individuals would somehow change their personality, language, behaviour and beliefs to become ‘real Australians’ was not only silly but created a great deal of resentment, and was a barrier to effective integration into Australian society. Change was seen as a one-way process whereby the ‘old ways’ were abandoned for the much more progressive, democratic and liberal ‘new ways’. Many otherwise tolerant Australians subscribed to this view, which was by no means confined to conservatives.

Yet in many respect the migrants quickly adopted traditional attitudes based on class solidarity, trade unionism, support for Labor and a sceptical attitude to Australian patriotism, and especially to British imperial pride. The most conservative elements in the post-war migration came from the refugees from Communism. But the Greek, Italian and Maltese arrivals soon formed the backbone of the Labor vote in the major cities¹⁵. Eventually this seeped through into the ranks of the ALP which began to respond to this new constituency, if only slowly. Even the much sought after north Europeans sometimes proved to be very militant, especially the large contingent of Finns in the mining industry.

15 Jupp, J (1998). *Immigration*, Oxford University Press, Sydney.

Integration 1966-1972

By the late 1960s it was becoming obvious that ethnic variety was not about to disappear and that crude assimilationism was antagonising many Europeans who were acquiring citizenship and the vote. There was a growing movement back to (non-Communist) homelands, frustrating the objective of nation building. The persistence of White Australia was also causing concern within the bureaucracy in the light of independence for most of Australia's neighbours. Thus the agitation to end White Australia, which in 1960 was mainly limited to students and clergy, had gained political support by the change of national leadership in 1966 and 1967 created by the retirement of Sir Robert Menzies and Arthur Calwell. Political leaders such as Gough Whitlam, Don Dunstan and Harold Holt were sympathetic to change, as were influential public servants in the Immigration and Foreign Affairs departments¹⁶.

Within the Commonwealth bureaucracy the Immigration Department changed its Assimilation division into the Integration division in 1964. This was more than symbolic and created an obligation to redefine social and political objectives. Essentially 'integration' (which has recently been revived), accepted that ethnic variety and organised ethnic interests would continue and were entitled to some consideration in policy making. This recognised the reality that foreign language media was growing and that ethnic clubs and distinct religions were becoming firmly established rather than withering away as previously expected. Indeed such manifestations still exist, based on the first and subsequent generation of immigrants in many cases.

Strong influences continued to resist the argument that Australia was changing its monocultural character. Among these were the Good Neighbour Councils, set up in 1950 and subsidised through the Immigration Department. These were based on affiliated 'mainstream' welfare, charitable and religious organisations which defined their role in charitable terms but refused to accept affiliation from overtly ethnic counterparts. Politically they were close to the conservative side of Australian politics and continued in a tradition created by similar bodies in the 1920s which had organised a welcome for British migrants. Good Neighbour, in fact, did a reasonable job of welcoming British migrants and had some support among the Displaced Persons and the Dutch. However the Displaced Persons were also actively organising their own structures, which was not quite what Good Neighbour had in mind¹⁷.

More important was the indifference and even hostility of the large numbers of southern Europeans who poured into Australia, and especially Victoria

16 Tavan, G (2005). *op cit*.

17 Martin, J (1965). *Refugee Settlers*, ANU Press, Canberra; Jupp, J (1966). *Arrivals and Departures*, Cheshire-Lansdowne, Melbourne.

and South Australia, between 1955 and 1970. Strong organisations like Greek Welfare or the Italian FILEF and Co-As-It were not given the recognition they deserved. Moreover some trade unions began to cater for their newly enrolled migrant members, encouraging the slow abandoning of traditional suspicion within the labour movement. These trends were enhanced by the radical reform of the ALP in Victoria in 1971 under the influence of the new national leader, Gough Whitlam. He, among others, recognised that the new intake of industrial workers from Italy, Greece, Malta and Yugoslavia were potential Labor voters and outnumbered the strongly anti-Communist DPs, who had previously been the core of the 'New Australian' population. From then onwards those electorates, in which such migrant workers were concentrated, became Labor strongholds, as they still are today.

Integration was a transitional phase in which the continuing reality of organised diversity was accepted by policy makers. However the acceptance of Australian loyalties, the English language and eventual citizenship remained central. The Immigration Department was resistant to some aspects of policy as it developed within the Labor Party context. Indeed the department was abolished altogether during the Whitlam government of 1972 to 1975¹⁸. Whitlam publicly claimed that it was 'racist' because of its continuing commitment to White Australia and in this he was supported by his new Minister for Immigration, Al Grassby.

Integration, then, was quietly buried, a victim of political necessity. In the process a rift was created between the mainstream charities making up Good Neighbour and the rising welfare and cultural agencies created within the ethnic communities. Integration was never effectively defined in public policy, although academics such as Charles Price, Jean Martin and Jerzy Zubrzycki were working in various ways to give the policy a sound rationale. The model was one of toleration and acceptance of new elements in society, but certainly more of dramatic changes to Australian society as a whole. Integration was transformed into multiculturalism fairly painlessly in the early 1970s, just at the point when immigration from continental Europe began its inexorable decline.

Multiculturalism 1972-1996

Assimilation and multiculturalism were essentially opposite concepts. Integration and multiculturalism were much more compatible. The movement from one to the other in public policy was both smooth and bipartisan. It was politically viable because two Prime Ministers, Whitlam and Fraser, were both committed to it. State leaders like Don Dunstan in South Australia and Neville

18 Whitlam, E G (1985). *The Whitlam Government 1972-1975*, Penguin Books, Victoria: 503.

Wran in New South Wales also recognised what was happening in their own jurisdictions in terms of a steadily rising 'ethnic vote'. The main resistance came from the conservative leadership of Queensland under Joh Bjelke-Petersen.

It has been argued by Mark Lopez in his definitive study of the origins of multiculturalism, that a small and dedicated group of Labor activists in Melbourne ran a highly focused lobbying campaign to influence Whitlam and the Victorian ALP¹⁹. This is undoubtedly true, but many of the conclusions drawn from this analysis by later opponents of the policy are illegitimate. The same processes were developing in New South Wales and South Australia, where there had been large intakes of southern Europeans into factory labour. Lopez rightly traces the central role of Victorian Labor supporters but gives inadequate attention to their alliance with ethnic organisational leaders drawn especially from among Greeks, but also including Jews, Italians and Maltese. The notion that multiculturalism was dreamed up by a small clique and was not really wanted by those to whom it appealed is quite inadequate as a description of what was happening in Melbourne in the 1970s. Nor does it give any credit to the parallel developments in Sydney and Adelaide and the work of Migrant Education Action or the Migrant Workers Conference²⁰.

As already indicated, the founding document of multiculturalism was the Galbally report of 1978. It withdrew funding from the Good Neighbour Councils and transferred this to ethnic welfare organisations; it argued for regular consultation with the 'ethnic' population about their social needs; it argued that language and cultural variety were not damaging to national unity and that all Australians should give their first allegiance to Australia and become citizens; it favoured the modest encouragement of languages other than English when responding to a Senate inquiry, although it was to be another ten years before Jo Lo Bianco developed a detailed policy of implementation²¹; it began the creation of the Special Broadcasting Service, which became the icon of multiculturalism until eroded by its acceptance of commercial advertising and increased ratings; it supported Migrant Resource Centres in major areas as a focal point for services to the non-English-speaking (NESB) population which was starting to be concentrated in certain suburbs; it began the process of funding local ethnic community councils within a national body FECCA (the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia), formalised in 1979. All of this drew NESB Australians into political and organisational activities conducted in English and oriented towards public institutions and public policy formation. Lopez notwithstanding, most of this program was designed by the Liberal Party

19 Lopez, M (2000). *The Origins of Multiculturalism in Australian Politics 1945–75*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.

20 *Australian Mosaic* (2009). Issue 23, 23 October.

21 Lo Bianco, J (1987). *National Policy on Languages*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

activist, Petro Georgiou. It was developed at the State level in 1978 by the New South Wales report *Participation* followed by the Victorian report *Access and Equity* in 1983. *The National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* was published in 1989²².

All major political parties gave this program their support for the next decade, with the consensus being broken by John Howard in debates about the 1988 bicentenary of British settlement. The argument that ‘billions of dollars’ were sloshing about uncontrolled to the benefit of migrants was launched by a handful of vocal conservatives. It eventually found its rightful nesting place in the One Nation movement created by Pauline Hanson after her election victory in 1996. This was, of course, an excellent example of the oft-repeated lie which eventually becomes the accepted fact. The largest element in public expenditure at this stage was in the teaching of English to adults and children under two distinct programs which predated the adoption of official multiculturalism. One of the first acts of the Howard government in 1996 was to abolish the modestly funded research and advocacy agencies, the Office of Multicultural Affairs and the Bureau of Immigration Research. This saved very little money but seriously impaired the ability of the new government to conduct wide-ranging research. Neither agency, or its equivalent, has ever been restored and the Immigration Departmental library was also later abolished.

‘Post-multiculturalism’

After eleven years of conservative national government (1996-2007) multiculturalism seemed to have lost its appeal. In 1988 the most influential report on immigration policy had already been very critical of multiculturalism²³. The word was used sparingly by the national government and was specifically rejected by some of its ministers. Other terms began to be modified, including ‘non-English-speaking background’ and ‘ethnic’. The New South Wales Labor government tried to prohibit the term ‘ethnic’ from public use and this was generally the attitude of Liberal state and national governments as well. The emphasis on language ability became less relevant as immigration requirements moved towards English ability and higher levels of overall education. Apart from some relatives in the family reunion stream, very few immigrants were as ignorant of English as the intake between 1947 and 1980. The main, if fairly limited, exceptions were in the humanitarian stream. Increasingly language and welfare provision moved towards this element, which was drawn largely from Asia and Africa, with Yugoslavia providing a major exception in the mid-1990s under a program which the Howard government immediately abolished

22 Office of Multicultural Affairs (1989). *op cit*.

23 FitzGerald, S (chair) (1988). *Immigration: A Commitment to Australia*, AGPS, Canberra.

in 1996. The main users of translating and interpreting services shifted towards this new constituency and its organisations began to influence the national and local ethnic organisational structures.

It was a tribute to the success of multiculturalism among immigrants that this transition was accomplished with little friction. The structures and services remained, although many were subject to competitive tendering. Because 'access and equity' had been adopted by the main service delivery departments, they were able to adapt to new clients as well as continuing to deal with the ageing Europeans. However some of these did present problems, coming from very underdeveloped areas such as Afghanistan, Sudan and the Congo, or from war-torn societies such as Bosnia and Iraq. Under the internment policy of the Howard government towards asylum seekers, the numbers with severe traumatic experiences were also a serious and ongoing problem. This policy was pursued by the same agency – the Immigration Department – which funded many of the services for immigrants. By the late 1990s the emphasis had not only shifted from multiculturalism to integration, but also from welfare to compliance and even repression²⁴.

Multiculturalism was subject to a concerted onslaught by conservatives from the mid-1980s through to the 21st century. It was actively defended by the Hawke and Keating Labor governments and by most of the Labor-controlled states. The Immigration Department shifted its emphasis, staffing and budget away from welfare and education and towards compliance and border protection²⁵. Vast sums were spent on specially built detention centres in Woomera, Baxter and Christmas Island, the first and second now closed and the third replacing the distant island of Nauru as the major off-shore detention centre for those arriving by boat. The detention centre in Nauru was another grossly expensive deterrent, especially as the great majority of its inmates were judged to be genuine refugees and are now settled in Australia.

At the same time Migrant Resource Centres were instructed not to assist asylum seekers and to restrict their clientele to recent 'legal' immigrants. Grant recipient organisations were punished for criticising these wasteful policies by having grants removed with consequent loss of staff. The national body representing the 'ethnic constituency', FECCA, was faced with the dilemma of remaining silent or risking almost its entire income being removed by the Immigration Department. State Ethnic Affairs Commissions fared better as most operated in Labor-controlled states and were not subject to the Commonwealth. Multiculturalism retained a momentum of its own. But with eleven years of consistent discouragement much of the enthusiasm of the past was drained

24 Jupp, J (2002). *op cit*.

25 Mares, P (2001). *Borderline*, University of NSW Press, Sydney.

away. Those organisations which prospered were often financially independent, like some of the Adult Migrant Education agencies, the Queensland ECC, or MRCs like St George (Sydney), which had varied their sources of income.

In some respects the multicultural movement needed a shock to shift it out of the welfare focus of the 1980s and to cater for new realities. One of these was the shift away from southern European industrial workers and towards educated Asian professionals, enforced to a large degree by changes in immigration policy²⁶. The corollary of this was the ageing of the previous European generation and the reluctance of many of their Australian-born children to participate in organisations looking to the past. This compounded the overall decline of social and industrial organisations throughout Australia as in many other developed countries. Those agencies which have prospered have been remarkably successful in bringing together activists from Asia to replace the ageing European pioneers. Particularly favoured have been those from societies where English is widely spoken, such as India, Sri Lanka, Singapore and Malaysia. They in turn have extended a much-needed welcome to the new refugee arrivals from Africa. The dilemma still remains that there is always a pull of loyalties between 'multicultural' and 'ethnic' organisations. Clubs and churches based on a specific nationality often triumph in this competition for sparse organisational talent.

In a sense multiculturalism has to be restructured and revived. This can best be done with positive encouragement from governments and especially from the Commonwealth. State governments, which have given strong support in the past, have been vital in maintaining momentum in trying times. Current attitudes towards the immigrant minorities are still strongly influenced by the expectation that they will 'integrate', even 'assimilate'. With conservatives gaining dominance in the federal parliamentary Liberal Party at the end of 2009 this approach is likely to gain political influence. Yet the fact is that 'assimilation' has not proceeded to the extent wished upon migrants by 'mainstream' policy makers and political advocates. In a democracy people assimilate at their own pace and in accordance with their own traditions and values, regardless of what governments expect²⁷.

This reluctance to give up and disappear into the multitude is the basis on which Australia will remain as a multicultural society catering equitably for all those it has encouraged to come to its shores. Acculturation will occur as it does everywhere and minority languages will probably suffer most from this process. But the history of policy development over the past sixty years suggests that

26 Markus, A, Jupp, J and McDonald, P (2009). *Australia's Immigration Revolution*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.

27 Jupp, J, Nieuwenhuysen, J and Dawson, E (eds) (2007). *Social Cohesion in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne.

working with ethnic diversity is more fruitful in maintaining social harmony and individual wellbeing than is working in favour of uniformity. A monocultural Australia will not return and public policy must adjust to that reality as it has spasmodically over the past six decades. It must also seek to gain the active involvement of elements which now appear to be alienated or remote, such as many Muslims, African refugees or new arrivals such as Pacific Islanders. Australia has built an excellent if under-funded strategy for sustaining social harmony and it would be a pity to waste it.