

POLITYKA



Catherine Earl & Adam Fforde

SPICE IS NICE. AUSTRALIA AND ASIA – CHANGING ATTITUDES, CHANGING PRACTICES

Introduction

In this short paper we try to discuss Australian experiences dealing with migration and what is known here as ‘multiculturalism.’ Australia is now a relatively happy country that combines rapid economic growth with social stability. One of the most striking parts of the ongoing process of redefinition of ‘Australia’ in the past generation is the shift of ‘Asians’ from being excluded to being ‘included’ in much public discussion of what is meant by ‘Australian’. The inclusion we write about is not simply a case of membership or not, but is characterised by degrees of belongingness and acceptance. This is related to changes in the particular pattern of Australia’s international relations: far greater economic links with ‘Asia’ (especially North East Asia), as well as a greater range of social and personal contacts – tourist links are now far more intense than they were.

Yet an examination of just what has been done in Australia to address these changes turns out to have little to say about the particular conditions of ‘Asia’ per se. Had, for example, Australia been situated close to southern Africa, and had, for example, Africa developed economically in as dynamic a way as Asia, then Australia would likely have adapted to a need for new patterns of inclusion, but of Africans rather than Asians. The methods used, we argue, reflect methods of creating ‘unity with diversity’ that have a long and particularly ‘European’ (and British) history, and provide a ‘toolkit’ that may or may not be used, but is available and heavily conditions processes of exclusion and inclusion.

Cultural diversification, we argue, is a social and political strategy that has often been remarkably successful (though not for those treated as ‘outsiders’) and much of Australia’s success in devising and implementing its modern equivalent (‘multiculturalism’) draws upon earlier failures and successes. What appears new in modern variants of this project is the far greater emphasis upon ‘non-essentialist’ notions of the self and the other. This explains in part the ways in which ‘new’ members of the wider Australian community are encouraged to maintain and negotiate for themselves links with their ‘cultures of origin’. This also permits greater pragmatic tolerance of multiple citizenship, medium term stays by business migrants and international students, among others.

1. ‘Spice’

In some perspectives these topics can become too dry and impersonal. A look at street scenes in modern Australian cities would suggest that such perspectives are worth listening to. Australian experience rather suggests that cultural diversification is useful viewed in terms of a metaphor of ‘spice’.

First, in the right quantities, it is a very good thing. Second, in the wrong quantities, it hurts a lot. Third, it is very useful and wise to learn how to use it, but this is best done both through practice as well as through reading cookery books. Fourth, whilst your mother may think she knows how to use spices, and probably has much useful experience, it is a good idea to realize that this is not the only way to do it. There are new ingredients around, new technology, and in any case her granddaughter has come back from a nice holiday in Vietnam with tastes that she does not have, know or understand. But of course, after the granddaughter has been let loose on her kitchen she may well like the results (or not). Fifth, that some people (especially the very old and the very young) often share extreme conservatism in food tastes, and there is practically nothing you can do about this. Food matters. The ways in which it matters, though, can change and be changed. It helps a lot that good food tastes very good indeed.

2. The starting point: Australia in 1945

2.1. *Australia, Poland and ‘multiculturalism’*

In 1945, in some way like Poland, Australia’s cultural make-up was unusual in that people – who had long been used to living within a society that saw itself, and was, heterogeneous – now experienced orchestrated or planned homogeneity. For Poland and Australia the reasons were very different.

We discuss below the inherent cultural diversity of ‘Britain’, as a political project that contained English, Scottish, Welsh and, at times and in different ways, the Irish. In 1945, Australia had successfully managed to greatly erode many cultural differences, so that many foreign observers (and many Australian artists and writers) commented on a lack of cultural variation that was often felt to be dull, boring and monotonous, if not smug. This was particularly marked in important cultural areas such as the arts and food that even the English often complained about. However, it was not until the late 1960s that the Aboriginal population gained *de jure* political and social rights the same as other Australians.

Poland, of course, has a long history of cultural diversity like other European organisations, such as the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. Yet the killing of most of her Jewish population by the Nazis, the departure of many ethnic Germans and the relocation of her borders 200 km west by Stalin each helped to produce a Poland that, in 1945, appeared relatively and remarkably homogeneous.

In some ways, therefore, one can think about interesting points of comparison between Australia since, say, the 1980s, as ‘multiculturalism’ gained momentum, and Polish experiences since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union. It seems to us that the main difference to date is the relative lack of immigration into Poland compared with Australia, and the main commonality is the deep historical experience of multiculturalism. Also, Australia seems to have greater capacity to develop and implement policies, helped by greater control over cross-border movements.

2.2. *White Australia in 1945*

The white population of Australia in 1945 enjoyed a high living standard, dependent upon a number of historical factors.

First, they occupied real estate that was relatively bountiful, which had been acquired rather cheaply by the British Empire. Bountiful real estate gave the country ready supplies of exportable resources: wool, minerals and other primary products. Indeed, during the last global economic slowdown, Australia’s terms of trade actually improved, since the effects of increasing competition in world markets for manufactures and the booming demand for minerals (fuelled to a large extent by China’s rapid economic growth) mean that Australia’s import prices fell compared with those of her exports. Also, since the early years of the 20th century, if not before, the White Australia policy restricted immigration and kept wages high. Early practices of wage setting were that wages were to be set at levels that allowed a man to keep a family. Despite getting the vote relatively early, female participation rates in Australia remain to this day low compared with other OECD countries. The combination of profitable exports and wages set at high levels, under-

pinned by the White Australia policy, meant that Australian society enjoyed high living standards.

Second, the White Australia policy had ensured that immigration had been restricted and controlled to suit a range of interests. Working people saw their wages maintained at high levels, as low wage Asian labour was excluded (unlike, for example, Malaysia) and also because the numbers of white immigrants were limited by the rather low level of attraction Australia held to the inhabitants of the British Isles. The *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* (White Australia policy) originated as a consequence of social unrest caused by the perceived threat represented by immigrant workers since the 1850s, especially by Chinese miners in Victoria and Pacific Islander ‘kanaka’ indentured labourers in Queensland¹.

Although the White Australia policy was gradually relaxed and finally abolished², contradictions remained clear between policy and popular opinion. Here note that this policy had two sides to it. Control of migration both kept out those from Asia who would have worked at very low wages, and also those from other European countries whose presence would have threatened high wage levels. The first review of the White Australia policy in 1949 allowed non-European refugees and war brides to be admitted. At the same time non-English speaking European migrants from Southern and Eastern Europe started to be admitted. These migrants presented linguistic, cultural and religious differences that could not remain ‘invisible’ in the community³. Reviews by the Conservative government in 1957 and 1958 allowed long term residents to become citizens and simplified entry procedures, avoiding references to race and therefore allowing skilled and educated Asians to immigrate. A further review in 1966 introduced criteria for selection based on skills and education that resembles the current ‘points system’ used by Australia and in January 2005 adopted in a modified form by the UK. The final reforms in 1966 eventually led to the effective abolition of the White Australia policy by the left-wing Whitlam government in 1973. However increased migration from non-European countries did not occur until the conservative Fraser government came to power in 1975⁴.

¹ *Australian Immigration Fact Sheet 8 – Abolition of the ‘White Australia’ Policy*. Available online at the Australian Government Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) website: www.dimia.gov.au

² In this same era, after World War Two, the US lifted their own ‘Oriental Exclusion’ policy, Robert M. Cullum, *End of Oriental Exclusion? “Far Eastern Survey”*, 1948 no. 21, p. 247.

³ James Jupp, *From ‘White Australia’ to ‘Part of Asia’: Recent Shifts in Australian Immigration Policy towards the Region*, “International Migration Review”, 1995 no. 1 (Special Issue: *Diversity and Comparability: International Migrants in Host Countries on Four Continents*), p.209. In yet another interesting use of language, racist Australians would often refer to some of the darker-skinned migrants from Europe as ‘Wogs’ – a racist term originally coined in the UK to refer to Asians – ‘Worthy Oriental Gentleman’.

⁴ *Australian Immigration Fact Sheet 8 – Abolition of the ‘White Australia’ Policy*. op.cit.

Third, as an ex-British colony, the Australian state, and the democratic politics that underpinned it, played an active and purposeful role in developing the country. By habit, government devised and implemented a range of policies in fields such as education, infrastructure, institutional development etc., amounting to a 'strong state'. This had been largely successful in creating a prosperous and peaceful country. Partly due to local efforts, and partly due to the British inheritance, Australia had and continues to have a 'strong state', relatively well-resourced and pro-active in developing the country. Social and physical investments were on the whole well-designed and implemented. But political influence over this state excluded the indigenous population, formally until the 1960s and in many ways since. It was therefore relatively easy to develop policies to cope with multicultural settlers as they started to come in after WWII from Europe, and then in the 1980s from Asia. A project to construct 'unity from diversity' was therefore relatively easy to cope with.

Indigenous Australians (the Aboriginals) remained, in reality, an excluded and oppressed group, lacking the political rights enjoyed by other humans and suffering levels of violence equivalent to that inflicted elsewhere, such as that meted out to indigenous Americans by European immigrants. Yet those treated as part of the 'Australian Community', the white majority that resulted, actually included groups who had in the past experienced the bayonets, guns and organized violence that helped create the British Empire (as others). Understanding just how Australia has successfully coped with 'Asia' is helped by understanding the nature of the British political project – how Britain was constructed from old enemies the 'English', the 'Welsh', the 'Scots'⁵, and (here is the rub) the 'Irish'. Amongst modern European states, it can be noticed, the United Kingdom is, perhaps uniquely, an overt and explicit multi-'ethnic' 'community': ask any Scot if they are English, and they will say "No!", but they will self-identify as British, as citizens of the 'United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland'⁶.

The distinction made here is that between Celts and 'the rest': the largely Scandinavian and Germanic population of modern England. Around 1600, say, large proportions of the populations of Ireland, Scotland and Wales spoke local dialects of Celtic languages rather than dialects of English. Further, there were very many Celts. In the mid 19th century, when Ireland was an organic part of the British state, sending MPs to London, the authorities carried out a population census. At that time, before the Great Hunger, some 24 million people enjoyed the direct fruits of

⁵ In some 18th century usages, Scots Highlanders were referred to as 'Aboriginals', not only a striking use of language to modern eyes, but also, since they appear to have migrated there relatively recently from Ireland, as usual historically contentious.

⁶ Compare the likely response to asking a Breton if they are French. What is the Polish equivalent?

government from Westminster, and of these some 8 million lived in the island of Ireland. Around 2 million died in the famines, 2 million left (for the US and the British Empire), but at that time at least one third of the population were Celt⁷.

In 1945, the white population of Australia, which is constructed as 'Anglo', was in fact approximately 1/3 Celt, reflecting its multicultural origins. The much remarked upon, and widely criticized, homogeneity of Australia at this time, therefore, indicated the success of a unity formed from diversity, itself inseparable from 'British' history. But all is relative; inherent to this view of 'unity' is the fact that for many, such as the Irish, self-identity within the 'unity' was in terms of difference. For Irish Australians it was blandly normal during the 'White Australia' era to view themselves as 'both' Australian and 'Irish'. Part of the success, however, of Australian nation-building was to locate 'Irishness' within Australian political and other discourses, in fact greatly de-linked from 'real Irish' concerns. And Irish Australians had been active participants in this nation-building.

3. Australia now: the joys of 'multiculturalism'

Australia in 2005 presents a striking contrast with 1945. Successive waves of migration beginning in the 1950s have brought populations from all continents, from countries and regions where they have been devastated by war and famine, threatened by political uprisings and religious freedoms, or disillusioned by high unemployment and a lack of educational infrastructure. The 'face' of the Australian community is no longer as 'White' as the now defunct policy of that name sought to claim. Asia has been one of the sources for large numbers of recent migrants to Australia. From being widely construed as hostile, dangerous and profoundly alien, 'Asians' are now, for many, seen as part of an Australian community that self-identifies to a great extent as 'multicultural'. Further, this shift has taken place since the 1970s, rather a short time in a wider historical perspective.

Multicultural policies have evolved in Australia through three phases from 'assimilation' beginning in 1901 when non-European migration was officially restricted, to 'integration' beginning in the 1960s when cultural, linguistic and ethnic differences were recognized, and finally since 1973 to 'multiculturalism' as the White Australia policy was abolished⁸.

⁷ Exact calculation is difficult: how many of those living in England were Scots, Welsh or Irish in origin? How should one treat the long-settled English families in Ireland, some of whom would have self-identified as 'Anglo-Irish'? According to some estimates, around half of the (white) population of the US Confederacy were Celt.

⁸ *Australian Immigration Fact Sheet 6 – The Evolution of Australia's Multicultural Policies*. Available online at the Australian Government Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) website: www.dimia.gov.au

Immigration in Australia has reflected economic or social conditions, since early migration waves attracting large numbers of European (including German and Scandinavian since the 1870s⁹) and Chinese labourers (50,000 per year in the 1850s). Specialized programs in the late 19th century were designed to meet specific labour market needs by for example attracting women, Afghan camel drivers to work in the interior and Japanese divers to work in the pearling industry. After World War Two, specialized formal and informal programs were set up to achieve high migration targets by relocating Europeans, including UK residents, ex-servicemen and resistance fighters, displaced people from camps in Europe, and others. Since then, other specialized programs have addressed humanitarian needs for Hungarian and Czech refugees in 1956 and 1968 respectively, from Chile in 1973, from Indochina after 1975, and from Poland after 1981¹⁰.

By contrast with other countries, Australia has remained relatively free from racial or ethnic violence¹¹. During periods of high unemployment, the cities did not experience race riots, attacks on businesses run by members of ethnic groups, or street violence against minorities. Neither, when severe conflicts broke out between countries or regions of origin, such as in Ireland, former Yugoslavia or Somalia, were hostilities openly continued in Australia in any widespread fashion. This positive outcome apparently maintains Australian traditions dating back to the 19th century, when the use of violence between rival immigrant political groups tended to be left behind in the 'home' country by those groups once they had been included in the constructed Australian community¹². Yet, although there were no riots and ethnic violence of the scale experienced in many other countries, there has been considerable racism directed against Asians¹³.

⁹ J. Jupp, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

¹⁰ *Australian Immigration Fact Sheet 4 – More than Fifty Years of Post-War Migration*. Available online at the Australian Government Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) website: www.dimia.gov.au

¹¹ In the years immediately following white settlement, ethnic violence directed against aboriginal communities and against hard-working and cheap Chinese labourers was however common and a result of racial prejudice, ignorance and fear threatening Europeans. See Bain Attwood and S. G. Foster, eds., *Frontier Conflict: The Australian Experience*, Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2003; Bruce Elder, *Blood on the Wattle: Massacres and Maltreatment of Aboriginal Australians since 1788*, Frenchs Forest, NSW: New Holland, 2003; and Gary Woodard, *Australia and China* in: Mark McGillivray and Gary Smith eds., *Australia and Asia*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 136. Recently, ethnic violence has been isolated and relatively local. Examples in indigenous communities include a nine hour riot in Redfern in inner Sydney in February 2004 and the Palm Island incident involving the death in custody of an Aboriginal prisoner in late 2004. This violence is however minimal in contrast to neighbouring states, including Indonesia, Fiji, and Solomon Islands.

¹² An early widely mythologised example is the Ned Kelly legend where conflict was allegedly based on rivalries between Irish Catholics and English administrators.

¹³ Stephen Castles, *The Australian model of Immigration and Multiculturalism: Is it applicable to Europe?* "International Migration Review", 1992 no. 2 (Special Issue: *The New Europe and International Migration*), p. 561.

Each of these demonstrates that the mixing of cultures – in whichever method – is a complicated process: it is spicy. Policy has played an important part in these processes, not least in maintaining basic order, so immigrant groups have had less incentive to self-organize to protect themselves.

4. Policy and politics: a discussion

4.1. *The 'Asia problem' or the 'Australia problem'? Policy and Australia's self-exclusion from Asia*

Asian migration to Australia

Asian migration to Australia since the start of the 20th century has mainly been controlled and limited to skilled professionals and educated workers, however in the 1950s and 1960s migration included students under the 'Colombo Plan'. Business visas, especially benefiting Japanese businessmen in the late 1980s and early 1990s investing in Queensland (Gold Coast and Cairns), further emphasized the economic aspect to Asian migration. This pattern may have promoted tourism and international education.

In contrast there were large numbers of migrants from other places. The *Census of Population and Housing: population growth and distribution, Australia, 2001* indicates that slightly more than half of migrants are European in origin, with a quarter born in the UK¹⁴. A quarter of migrants have arrived from Asia¹⁵ with almost a quarter from other continents¹⁶.

The first mass migrations from Asia since the Gold rush era of the 19th century were relatively late. It was not until the late 1970s that humanitarian issues extended migration to include Indochinese boat people. Resulting policy in the following decades allowed the inclusion of survivors of various independence struggles in

¹⁴ 52% of migrants are European with 33% from North West Europe and 19% from the South and the West of Europe. 24% are UK born. The second largest group at just 9% are Italian born, indicating the diversity within the European population. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2003 *Census of Population and Housing: population growth and distribution, Australia, 2001*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics. Available online www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/cat/2035.0

¹⁵ 24% of migrants are from Asia with 7% from North East Asia including China, 12% from Southeast Asia including Vietnam, and 5% from South and Central Asia. 4% of migrants are from China and 4% are from Vietnam. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2003.

¹⁶ Of the remaining migrants, 9% are from Africa and Middle East with 4% from Sub-Saharan Africa and 5% from North Africa and the Middle East. 15% of migrants are from Oceania and Americas with 11% from Oceania and 4% from the Americas. New Zealand accounts for 9% of migrants. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2003.

China, Timor Leste, Tibet, Burma, Nepal, and Sri Lanka as well as stateless political groups such as the Hmong. Although now severely restricted ‘family reunion’ policies emerged to reunite displaced families as they had done for previous generations of southern and eastern European migrants after the Second World War. Subsequent groups of migrants arriving under humanitarian policy originated in Latin America, the Balkans and the former Soviet world as well as from Africa. By the early 2000s, migrants from the UK, Italy, New Zealand, China and Vietnam made up 47% of the population.

Asian migration to Australia falls into each of the three categories of official migration – family, economic¹⁷ and humanitarian. Asian migrants arriving to Australia since the relaxation of the White Australia policy have included war brides as well as postgraduate students under the ‘Colombo Plan’. Contrary to popular stereotypes that fuel local racism especially in urban Australia, most Asian migrants are well-educated and highly skilled professionals with Indochinese (born overseas) singled out as poorer, less skilled with lower education and, in Australia, higher levels of unemployment¹⁸. The Cantonese ‘community’ is the largest group, having arrived since the 1850s from more than 17 countries¹⁹, with the Indochinese arrived relatively recent with the first mass migrations from Asia since the Goldrush era. It was not until the late 1970s that humanitarian reasons extended migration to include Indochinese boat people. The Vietnamese community in Australia is one of the largest migrant communities in Australia and is the second largest Asian community. Many within the Indochinese community arrived under ‘family reunion’ policies, reuniting nuclear and extended family members with those who had arrived as ‘boat people’ in the late 1970s. The Chinese community however remains the largest Asian community and with Vietnamese, New Zealanders, Italians and British migrants account for almost half of the population²⁰. Half of the eight most spoken languages in Australia apart from English are Asian languages. Cantonese is the most spoken language in third place, ahead of Vietnamese in fifth place, Mandarin in sixth place, and Tagalog (Philippines) in eighth place²¹. Although recent years have seen Asian migration become a key factor in popular stereotypes and public debates (for example those fuelled by the well-publicized right-wing political candidate Pauline Hanson), in contrast are the large numbers of migrants who arrive from other places.

¹⁷ Economic migrants include skilled and educated migrants assessed under a ‘points system’ or via specialized programs targeting skills shortages.

¹⁸ J. Jupp, *op.cit.*, p. 214.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ These five groups make up 47% of the population. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2003.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

The cultural vs. the economic? Australian views of Asian 'neighbours'

In 1945 few could predict how the demographics of the Australian population would change over the following half century. In 2005 the national population is seen as very diverse with a quarter of the population born overseas and communities from over 150 nations represented. The focus on the diverse numbers of communities has shifted within the system of multiculturalism in Australia but has gradually become ethno-linguistic rather than political in character. That is, in contemporary Australia we should now talk about Urdu-speaking, Mandarin-speaking, or Arabic-speaking communities, rather than Chinese-Australians.

At the time of its inception the Australian multicultural project and Australian relationships with Asia were often seen as focused on strategic engagement in economic and political terms in response to perceived 'fear' stemming from regional nationalist movements with the breakdown of the colonial world. In 2005, current situations again involve comparable security risks but these now result from perceived threats of cultural and religious rather than nationalist forces (as predicted by Huntington). It is interesting to observe that whilst the media have been full of stories about problems with border security and protest marches there is still very little social violence attributed to migrant issues.

This is a very different situation to the one evident in 1945 where 'whiteness' was a dominant and almost universal character within the multiculturalism of the day. Ghassan Hage – among others – argues that multiculturalism debates now refer to how 'white Australians' experience cultural diversity. Labelling it a 'white fantasy', Hage links Australia's multicultural experience with Australia's move away from Europe and into Asia²². In our interpretation, this 'white fantasy' reflects, like the Britain project, long-established methods of constructing and reconstructing identity amongst what are initially perceived as diverse groups.

The Australian model of multiculturalism can provide useful impulses, though not ready made answers, for Europe. In his article addressing this issue, Stephen Castles pointed out that it was since 1987, when multiculturalism became a foundational part of public policy, that the economic benefits of a culturally diverse population were stressed, especially in terms of international trade and communication²³.

²² Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: fantasies of white supremacy in a multicultural society*, Sydney: Pluto Press, 1998, p. 141.

²³ S. Castles, *The Australian model of Immigration...*, op.cit., p. 556. See also Stephen Castles, Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope, *The end of multiculturalism?* Stanmore, NSW: Social Literacy, 1986.

Changing attitudes to Asia after WWII

At the time Australia emerged from the Second World War – even though it had developed a keen sense of responsibility for active participation in international politics and a new appreciation for ways that geography linked Australia to Asia and Asian developments – Asian migration continued to be perceived as a threat. Until the government changed in 1949, the White Australia policy remained unmodified and in place²⁴. The later modifications to the White Australia policy specifically addressed non-European (Asian) exclusion. The relatively early date of these initial measures can be understood in terms of long-established social and political practices, which presented politicians and others with ready-made tools to define and redefine Australian identities, using principles of inclusion and exclusion. It is worth pointing out again that at this time Australian Aborigines were still denied the normal social and political rights enjoyed by others.

The ambiguities of Australian multicultural policy – referred to as ‘strategic silences’ by Grattan in 1948 – clearly emerge in Australia’s relations with Southeast Asia²⁵. For example, in the years immediately after the war when Australian housewives were encouraged to boycott Japanese products, exports to Japan increased considerably and imports from Japan almost doubled. Additional to increasing economic links with Asia, cultural relations were also cultivated with fellowships granted to Asian students to study in Australia and educational materials sent into Asia²⁶. In the 1990s, when popular attitudes were much less enthusiastic about increasing links with Asia than official statements indicated, international students studying in Australia mostly originated in Asia²⁷.

The comparisons between the 1990s and the post-war era of the 1950s are further evident in the self-perception of the Australian nation articulated by its political leaders. In the post-war era, in its relationship with Southeast Asia, Australia considered itself a ‘have’ nation, a sort of junior United States, expected to give more than it received²⁸. Prime Minister John Howard’s recent comments about his role as America’s ‘Deputy Sheriff’ in the Asia Pacific resonate with this earlier self-

²⁴ Henry S. Albinski, *Australia Reviews Her Asian Exclusion Policy*, “Far Eastern Survey”, 1959 no. 11, pp. 161–162.

²⁵ C. Hartley Grattan, *Australia and the “Near North”*, “Far Eastern Survey”, 1948, no. 21, p. 245.

²⁶ Werner Levi, *Australia and the New Asia*, “Far Eastern Survey”, 1950, no. 8, pp. 77–78.

²⁷ In descending order of numbers of visas issued: China, USA, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Republic of Korea. The major countries of citizenship for non-business visitors (tourist) were also for the most part from Asia. In descending order by number of arrivals: Japan, UK, USA, Singapore, Republic of Korea, Germany, Malaysia, Taiwan. *Australian Immigration Fact Sheet 2 – Key Facts in Immigration*. Available online at the Australian Government Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) website: www.dimia.gov.au

²⁸ “Sydney Morning Herald” (15 Jan., 1950), quoted in Levi, op.cit., p. 77.

perception. Yet Southeast Asia has tested Australian foreign policy. The days of ‘good neighbourly relations’ are a thing of the past as Australia and Indonesia realize they share an ever-expanding range of fundamental interests. Also, Australia is now less close to the former British dominions of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei as they shifted towards Islam (except Singapore) and major economic developments leave relationship with Australia aside²⁹.

Australia, since the Labour government elected in 1949, believed that it could not afford to ‘alienate either the actual masters of today or the possible masters of tomorrow’ throughout the colonial and postcolonial era of Southeast Asian nationalism, and needed to walk circumspectly rather than strike out boldly³⁰. During the 1950s and 1960s there was a growing awareness that government policies and services needed to respond to the growing complexities of community needs, which led to the evolution of ‘multiculturalism’ as the dominant policy approach to address cultural diversity³¹.

Australia’s relationship with Asia – the 1990s

Australia’s increasing interest in its relationships with Asia have come to the fore since the 1980s when the left-wing government of the day started the attempt to strengthen its expanding engagement with Asia through consolidation of economic interests with additional political and cultural ties. In the 1990s, Asia was, according to some, experiencing a new regional consciousness where increased intra-Asian ties and co-operation were extended to strengthen its position in the global order. In the post-Cold War era within the Asian region, new regional relationships were built in a range of ways through establishing new diplomatic ties, offering financial assistance, and consulting about political and security issues³². Although in the early 1990s actively seeking ‘enmeshment’ with Asia – as former Prime Minister Paul Keating described it, throughout the 1990s Australian leaders continued to exclude Australia from Asia in political and geographic terms³³.

²⁹ Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant, *Australia’s Foreign Relations in the World of the 1990s*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1992, p. 181, pp. 190–191.

³⁰ C. H. Grattan, *op.cit.*, p. 246.

³¹ *Multicultural Australia: The Way Forward* (issues paper). Available online at the Australian Government Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) website: www.dimia.gov.au

³² Yoichi Funabashi, *Asianization of Asia*. “Foreign Affairs”, 1993 no. 5, pp. 80–81, p. 84.

³³ It was claimed that that Australia’s involvement with Asia remained peripheral, at least in these arenas. This claim was made by left-wing politicians Paul Keating (in 1993) and Gareth Evans (in 2001), quoted in Olivia Khoo, *Whiteness and “The Australian Fiancé”: Framing the Ornamental Text in Australia*, “Hecate”, 2001, no. 2, p. 69. Most recently, the current conservative Prime Minister John Howard reiterated the claim in 2004 as an observer at an APEC forum.

Alison Broinowski describes the recent relationship between Australia and Asia as a tide that ebbs and flows between Australia's enthusiasm for Asia and the opposite. She highlights five contributing factors to the receding tide of enthusiasm for Asia in the late 1990s. These include

1. anti-Western and anti-Australian sentiment of some Southeast and East Asian leaders
2. exclusion of Australia from Asia-Europe Meetings (ASEM);
3. sudden collapse of several East Asian economies in 1997-1998;
4. behaviour of Suharto's government in Indonesia in early 1998;
5. nuclear explosions in India and Pakistan in mid 1998³⁴.

Each excludes Australia from belonging to the region politically or geographically. Allan Patience also argues for a shift towards a deepening of cultural ties between Australia and Asia through the development of academic, artistic and media contact and exchanges that target staff and encourage ideas³⁵.

Broinowski reviews literature that assesses the need for Australia to develop deeper cultural understanding³⁶. The assumption is that this understanding extends beyond members of the ethnic community living within Australia to other segments of the population, most notably the white, urban, educated, usually male members of the political elite. That this understanding has not been readily pursued is evident in an assessment of parliamentary members. At present, just one member of federal parliament is fluent in an Asian language³⁷. It is a similar message, but in reverse, that we receive from Samuel Huntington in his now-classic thesis that determines culture over politics as the catalyst to conflict. Huntington describes Australia as a 'torn' nation due to its government's attempts in the early 1990s to 'defect from the West' and redefine itself as an Asian society through cultivating closer ties with its neighbours³⁸. The right-wing Howard Government of the late 1990s took an approach to Asian engagement that resembled the approach taken in the 1950s and 1960s where 'Asians' were accepted as 'neighbours' and it was in the national interest to get on with them, but not to identify with them³⁹. Former Labour Prime Minister Paul Keating now reflects on his government's direction in the early 1990s as 'too ambitious', failing to adequately address racial, cultural and political 'differences' with Asian neighbours⁴⁰.

³⁴ Alison Broinowski, *Asianization and its Discontents*, "Meanjin", 1998 no. 3, p. 441.

³⁵ Allan Patience, *Why Asia needs Australia*, "Quadrant", 1997 (Sept.), p. 24.

³⁶ A. Broinowski, *op. cit.*, p. 448.

³⁷ The only member of Australian parliament to speak an Asian language is Kevin Rudd MP, Member for Griffith and Opposition Spokesman for Foreign Affairs, who is fluent in Mandarin and has lived in China whilst employed in a diplomatic position.

³⁸ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, London: Touchstone Books, 1998, pp. 151-154.

³⁹ A. Broinowski, *op. cit.*, p. 447.

⁴⁰ Paul Keating, *Engagement: Australia faces the Asia Pacific*, Sydney: Macmillan, 2000, p. 299.

Australia's links with Asia are long established economically in terms of the supply of resources and of professional and skilled labour. In some cultural and social areas, Australia is included in Asia. Participation and past hosting of the Asia Pacific International Film Festival is one example where Australia participates in the region. However, the exclusion of Australia from Asian regional sporting competitions, including SEA Games and Tiger Cup (football), suggests that Australia is identified as belonging outside the region.

Social change and policy

Cultural diversity in Australia has – beyond international relations policy – encouraged closer ties with not just its neighbours but geographically distant places through its migrants. At a social level, academic studies addressing cultural diversity focus on transnational migrant groups either through a 'community' approach or a 'diaspora' perspective. Both consider the maintenance of social networks and contacts between families, relatives, and friends in and from the place of origin with the place of settlement as a singular field of interaction that transcends political boundaries. Michelle Lee and Nicola Piper judge that these studies focus too heavily on social and cultural links (micro-level) at the expense of political, legal, and institutional ties (macro- and meso-level)⁴¹.

However, it is precisely the dominance of the social networks maintained between cultural groups in Australia and abroad that demonstrates the advantages of a 'unity from diversity' approach to multiculturalism and consequently influenced public policy as we will explore in the following section. Australian scholars have examined these issues. The ties that bind the migrant social networks are considered by Sheffer, among others, as 'loyalties' akin to the emotions maintained within kin structures⁴². These echo other research and viewpoints. Kin metaphors have been adopted by culturally diverse nations in Southeast Asia as a means for representing relationships within their populations. Vietnam, for example, constructs its population as a 'family' of minority ethnic groups that are bound together by fraternal loyalties. China similarly refers to its minorities as 'younger brothers'.

Social networks within contemporary multiculturalism result in a cultural diversity that leaves Australia not as a 'lonely country'⁴³ but as a place deeply enmeshed

⁴¹ Michelle Lee and Nicola Piper, *Reflections on Transnational Life-Course and Migratory Patterns of Middle-Class Women – Preliminary Observations from Malaysia* in: Nicola Piper and Mina Roces eds., *Wife or Worker? Asian Women and Migration*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003, p. 126.

⁴² Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. See also Robin Cohen, *Global Diaspora: An Introduction*, London: UCL Press, 1997.

⁴³ Allan Patience argues that Australia is isolated and thus 'lonely', but in his argument fails to take into account links between diaspora groups and 'home'. *op.cit.*

with other places through networks that are truly global, even if it is not clearly in line with political boundaries. This spice, then, is felt to be nice.

‘Thinking’ – how multiculturalism was thought and how these ideas were projected into policy

European cultures, of which Australia is clearly one, typically exhibit tensions in how social identity is constructed. Drawing upon deep roots, people can be constructed either in absolute (‘essentialist’) or non-absolute ways. This distinction can be found in a wide range of discourses and practices. Modern European states reflect this in their laws on nationality. German law defines a German primarily in terms of their genetics, thus granting citizen to ‘ethnic Germans’ from Russia; French law by contrast defines Frenchness in terms of cultural markers that should be acquired through standardized processes such as education. British law, typically confused yet avoiding silly attempts to define the undefinable, defines it in terms of a mixture of place of birth and parenthood.

Daniel Chirot considers a distinction to lie between primordial kin-based foundational myths (Russia, Germany) and those that describes absorption of different types through connecting in the nation (France, Great Britain, United States)⁴⁴. In maintaining a sense of original culture in the new location, ‘blood’ and ‘civic’ (assimilationist) definitions of the meaning of nation become important.

These differences come down often to the distinction between ethnicity and culture. Reductionism through a notion of ethnicity as inherent and unchangeable is evident early in the process. Arguments that proceed in terms of the innate characteristics of ‘the native’, the Briton and so on (The Jew? The Pole?) were common in the 1940s and 1950s. They tended to be replaced by distinctions based upon culture, seen as something mutable and negotiable, as new equilibria were reached (as the cake cooled). It is important to note that many people (both policy-makers, intellectuals and the well-informed public) have become aware of these elements of the discussion, increasingly comfortable with the idea that a central element of recent history had been a shift away from ‘essentialist’ to ‘cultural’ differences, with the understanding that ‘culture’ is neither innate nor fixed; so that how change takes place, and who is involved, can then be discussed in social and political fora. Indeed, human dominance over other species is now often linked to our use of ‘culture’ to adapt rapidly to change, compared with other species dependent upon bio-

⁴⁴ Daniel Chirot, *Conflicting Identities and the Dangers of Communalism* in: Daniel Chirot and Anthony Reid eds., *Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe*, Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1997, pp. 17–18.

logical evolution. These fundamental social and intellectual practices are reflected in Australia's multicultural policies and new strategic directions. Many aspects of these practices are of course far from unique to Australia.

Asia and multiculturalism or the Asianisation of multicultural policy

Ideas of 'multiculturalism' are far from exotic to Asia, where 'unity in diversity' has been an overt slogan in many revolutionary and postcolonial countries. Perhaps the best example is Indonesian *pancasila*, though mention can also be made of Ho Chi Minh's Vietnam and Communist China. Yet perhaps the major distinction between many of these models and much Australian thinking is the frequent Asian tendencies to essentialist definitions of local non-dominant cultures, often in the context of a rhetoric that seeks to defend them against globalization and 'the West'.

Australia's revised multicultural policy focuses on inclusion and unity in diversity⁴⁵. Recommendation 4 (p.11) defines Australian multiculturalism as "A term which recognizes and celebrates Australia's cultural diversity. It accepts and respects the right of all Australians to express and share their individual cultural heritage within an overriding commitment to Australia and the basic structures and values of Australian democracy. It also refers to the strategies, policies and programs that are designed to:

- Make our administrative, social and economic infrastructure more responsive to the rights, obligations and needs of our culturally diverse population;
- Promote social harmony among the different cultural groups in our society;
- Optimize the benefits of our cultural diversity for all Australians."

The terms used are worth looking at in greater detail.

Harmony (Recommendation 6, p.12).

The vision for Australian multiculturalism is 'a united and harmonious Australia, built on the foundations of our democracy, and developing our continually evolving nationhood by recognising, embracing, valuing and investing in our heritage and cultural diversity.'

Inclusion (Recommendation 10, pp.13-14)

Inclusiveness seen as is crucial to developing nationhood and Australian identity, high priority is given to the notion and promotion of inclusiveness in future policies and strategies.

⁴⁵ The policy document *A New Agenda for Multicultural Australia* is available online at the Australian Government Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) website: www.dimia.gov.au

The central role of the state – activities are ‘State sponsored’ (Recommendations 14, 15, 16, pp.17-18)

This is a state sponsored project – build bridges of understanding and mutual interest among and between groups, demands leadership and positive, proactive support and commitment by all sectors to minimize threats to community harmony threat from within compared to past threat from outside, and active support from all governments irrespective of political persuasion.

The use of explicitly stated principles.

Four principles (Recommendation 18, pp.18-19) – these are civic duty (support basic structures of society), cultural respect (right to express one’s own culture and beliefs within the law), social equity (entitled to equal treatment and free from discrimination), and productive diversity (cultural, social and economic dividends).

A stress on the importance of enhancing and refocusing multiculturalism (Recommendation 20, p.20)

The need to highlight multiculturalism built on evolving values, sought to ensure balance of rights and obligations, to generate inclusion by acknowledge contribution including British heritage for democracy, stress urgency of reconciliation, to promote acceptance.

Politicisation of inclusion

Leadership (Recommendation 24, p.23) – representation of cultural diversity in leadership to make more successful than ones ‘where all members look and think the same’.

These policy recommendations do not exist in a vacuum. Australian academics and policy-makers are well aware of possibly similar multicultural projects elsewhere in the world. For example, Malaysia’s postcolonial multiethnic project is perhaps comparable to the British project, even though Malaysia is an Islamic state. Malaysia manages its four main cultural groups – Malays, Chinese, Indians and Indigenous groups – with equal representation although privileges remain with the dominant Malays. Like the British, there is a tension between principle and practice.

Most are quick to point out the differences between Australia and its closest neighbour Indonesia, with some claiming no two neighbouring countries on the planet are as different⁴⁶. However, in terms of multiculturalism, striking parallels can be made. In the postcolonial era, Indonesia has become, like Australia, a nation

⁴⁶ G. Evans and B. Grant, *op.cit.*, pp.184–185. The authors stress differences in language, culture, religion, history, ethnicity, population size and in political, legal and social systems.

with a multiethnic population governed by a single political entity⁴⁷. Both nations are managed through state-sponsored multicultural policy. Indonesia's case is more complicated as ethnic violence has been widespread and political suppression of minorities by the state has been employed to maintain the Javanese political power base. However, in each case diversity within the population is encouraged by the state. The degrees to which multiculturalism is accepted can be assessed through language policy⁴⁸. Language policy is comparable in both Indonesia and Australia as both nations have one national language – Bahasa and English respectively – and a large number of local and community languages also in use⁴⁹.

Vietnam, China, and Burma are each diverse with scores of ethnic minority groups governed within their territories. Unlike Australia and Indonesia however, the multiethnic state projects in these socialist and post socialist examples tolerate diversity as long as the dominant culture is not threatened or diminished. This type of multiethnic project although condoned by the state is not a state-sponsored multiculturalism as diversity is seen to be antagonistic to the national 'imagined community'⁵⁰. Challenges to the state and dominant ethnic group, taking the form of ethnic violence and social unrest in these nations, are minority-led from 'bottom up'. Such 'melting pot' models of cultural diversity resemble the US⁵¹. A more contemporary analysis sees such models of diversity resembling Post-Soviet Russia, where youth and younger generations accept ethnic difference so long as in public cultural assimilation results in recognisably Russian language and culture. Urban Russian youth see Russia as multiethnic and pluralistic where all are welcome as long as they obey the laws of the country and the customs of the place⁵². Visible ethnic differences and dress determine the degrees of exclusion within these societies. Australian multiculturalism differs in that the state values diversity and encourages open displays of difference within its national project⁵³.

⁴⁷ J. J. Smolicz, *Migrant Country to Multicultural Nation*, "International Migration Review", 1997 no.1, p. 173. Where Australia is a 'laboratory for multiculturalism', Indonesian ethnic minorities however remain territorially separate, a situation exacerbated by the nation's insular geography.

⁴⁸ J.J. Smolicz, op.cit., pp. 174–175.

⁴⁹ As Australia has been called a 'White fantasy', Indonesia could be called a 'Javanese fantasy' in terms of cultural domination in each case minorities practice their own cultures but are equally aware of the dominant 'white' or Javanese language and culture. Minorities is a problematic term, but, so far, what else is there?

⁵⁰ The term was made famous in Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1991.

⁵¹ O. Khoo, op.cit., p. 69.

⁵² Fran Markowitz, *Coming of Age in Post-Soviet Russia*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000, p. 160.

⁵³ Similar claims regarding visible ethnic markers and social exclusion have however been made Australian multiculturalism, particularly regarding newly-arrived migrant communities in urban locations where overtly racist behaviour has targeted Asian and Islamic groups. See J. J. Smolicz, op.cit., pp. 176–177.

By contrast to much of Southeast Asia, however, Australian multiculturalism – drawing we would argue upon the ‘Britain’ project but moving beyond it – is focussed upon change: upon the ways in which groups of Australians negotiate and renegotiate their self-identity within the wider framework of the country. You will not find, therefore, much effort in Australia to teach about culture in essentialist terms. Rather, school children, students and those who watch television documentaries tend to be exposed to images of ‘how things are in this particular context, for these particular people, at this particular time’.

Within the wider and changing notion of ‘Australia’, people from backgrounds that were called ‘Non-English Speaking’ (NESB) are now constructed as ‘Culturally and Linguistically Diverse’ (CALD) and confronted with the classic liberal opportunity, of self-definition. And of course, if their social environment is one where culture and ethnicity are seen as ‘essentialist’, this can be a source of tensions. The multicultural project, thus, may act as a threat in that it inherently argues for self-definition, against ‘essentialism’, and for mutability and change. This is an old consequence of liberalism⁵⁴.

Getting from there to here: policy, politics and the people – going with the flow or against it?

Perhaps the most significant legacy of British history for Australia in this context can thus be expressed in terms of the question of diversity and how to get it and live with it. Without the Scots, Welsh and (some of) the Irish, the English would certainly have been less successful. However, Australia has faced particular issues, not least its geographical position and relative security weakness⁵⁵. Within

⁵⁴ On liberalism, see Chandran Kukathas, *Liberalism and Multiculturalism: The Politics of Indifference*, “Political Theory”, 1998 no. 5, pp. 686–699. Smolicz (*op.cit.*) does not link ideas of multiculturalism to liberalism so overtly.

⁵⁵ See S. Castles, *op.cit.*, who gives six problems and contradictions (pp. 559–561) as well as five differences and four parallels with Western Europe (pp. 561–562). The six problems and contradictions are, as used for his policy analysis: 1. geography allows for strict border control; 2. based on shifting notions of culture and ethnicity, focus now of cultural identity as dynamic and a legitimate attribute of all citizens and residents, part of private sphere so although not promoted by the state must be protected by the state; 3. multicultural definition of citizenship has no role in specific social policy for ethnic minorities, major problem in contradiction between service delivery segregating based on ethnicity and neglecting special needs by ignoring ethnicity; 4. political influence of ethnic organizations results in presenting homogenous view that does not match current approach to multiculturalism; 5. major institutions still based on British models which disadvantage people who differ as central institutions do not reflect multicultural model; 6. immigration debates continue to take on racist overtones indicating that multiculturalism still has a long way to go. The five differences and four parallels with W. Europe are: Differences – geography regarding border control, relative size of immigrant population, role of immigration in nation building, policy based on permanent settlement, inclusionary concept of the nation (as it is not based on ethnicity). Parallels – large scale post war immigration with recent non-European immigration, institutional and informal practices regarding the segregation of the labour market, residential concentration in urban areas, growing significance of racist discourses.

the overall project, there have been considerable debates. For example, *Multicultural Australia: the Way Forward* – sees three limitations of multiculturalism, and suggests changing emphasis to focus on cultural identity, social justice and economic efficiency. Australian multicultural policies assume all its citizens and residents have an overriding and unifying commitment to Australia, its interests and future above all other loyalties. In addition, all Australians are required to accept the basic structures and principles of Australian society, as well as impose obligations and confer rights, including the freedom to express one's own culture and accept the rights of others to express theirs.

Key features of the Australian model of multiculturalism in the first major multicultural policy from around 1989 included:

1. planning and strict control of entries;
2. entry policy marked by non-discrimination based on race, but selective according to economic and social criteria;
3. rapid access to citizenship and other formal rights;
4. active policies to provide for educational, social and economic needs of migrants; and
5. acceptance of cultural pluralism within carefully defined limits⁵⁶.

Thus Castles concluded that the Australian model of multiculturalism has been relatively successful, based on its efficient management of large scale migration, managed processes of dramatic demographic, social and cultural change with relatively little social tension, recognition of the legitimacy of linguistic and cultural maintenance ensuring ethnic communities have security and self-esteem necessary for a high degree of social participation, and multiculturalism has permitted a shift from an overtly racist and isolationist notion of national identity to a much more open society⁵⁷. There are, of course, a range of opinions as to whether and to what extent this positive conclusion is persuasive. Within diversity can be found people of Asian background who have experienced racism, and those who have not.

This is, of course, a process. Accordingly Jupp argues that important elements of public opinion had yet to accept population, trade and capital movements within the region, but that the younger generation, more recently socialized, will more readily adapt to change⁵⁸. There are, naturally, arguments that social harmony is more likely the less vigorously social unity is pursued⁵⁹. However, it appears to us relatively conclusive that the general sense of success with multiculturalism in Australia draws upon a fundamental lesson of the 'British' project, which, like others, showed that it was and remains possible to construct and reconstruct 'Unity in

⁵⁶ S. Castles, *op.cit.*, p. 558.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 558–559.

⁵⁸ J. Jupp, *op.cit.*

⁵⁹ Ch. Kukathas, *op.cit.*, p. 698