

# Images of Australia

An Introductory Reader  
in Australian Studies

Edited by Gillian Whitlock  
and David Carter

University of Queensland Press

# Contents

Introduction	1
<b>Part One</b>	<b>Whose Australia?</b> 5
1	James Walter: Defining Australia 7
2	Richard White: Inventing Australia 23
<b>Part Two</b>	<b>White Australia Has a Black History</b> 59
3	John Rickard: Aborigines 61
4	Colin Tatz: Aboriginality as Civilisation 75
5	Ros Bowden (compiler): Being Aboriginal: Raised to Think White 94
<b>Part Three</b>	<b>A Multicultural Nation?</b> 101
6	Jock Collins: Migrant Hands in a Distant Land 103
7	Stephen Castles, Mary Kalantzis, Bill Cope, Michael Morrissey: Mistaken Identity 129
<b>Part Four</b>	<b>Identifying Women</b> 143
8	Gail Reekie: Contesting Australia 145
9	Marilyn Lake: The Politics of Respectability 156
10	Barbara Jeffers: The Drover's Wife 166
<b>Part Five</b>	<b>A Country Practice?</b> 177
11	Russel Ward: The Australian Legend 179
12	Graeme Davison: Sydney and the Bush 191
13	J. B. Hirst: The Pioneer Legend 205
<b>Part Six</b>	<b>Neighbours?</b> 227
14	Sean Glynn: Urbanisation in Australian History 229
15	Tim Rowse: Heaven and a Hills Hoist: Australian Critics on Suburbia 240
Notes	251
Sources	269

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Castles, S., Kalantzis, M., Cope, B. and Morrissey, M. *Mistaken Identity: Multiculturalism and the Demise of Nationalism in Australia*. Sydney: Pluto Press, 1988.

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Jupp, J., ed., *The Australian People: An Encyclopedia of the Nation, Its People and Their Origins*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1988.

The federal Department of Immigration and the Office of Multicultural Affairs also publish excellent booklets, available through Commonwealth Government Bookshops.

### Reading 6

## Migrant Hands in a Distant Land

Jock Collins

### Australian immigration

The impact of international capital and migration on the Australian economy has been more significant than on almost any other advanced capitalist country, with the exception of Israel. These factors have fundamentally shaped post-war Australian society.

The basic tenet of Australian immigration policy for over 100 years was "White Australia". Before Federation, the Colonies introduced anti-Chinese immigration restriction acts as a response to the influx of Chinese during the Gold Rush. Federation was accompanied by the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act, better known as the White Australia policy. Black labour from the Pacific Islands, the "Kanakas", were expelled from Queensland sugar plantations and the Chinese were to be kept out. Australia needed immigrants, but only whites were welcome. This policy was reiterated by Arthur Calwell who, as the first Minister for Immigration, launched the post-war immigration program. It was only in 1972 that the White Australia policy was formally buried. The Australian immigration story is inextricably linked with racist laws and practices.

By 1947, with a population of just under seven million, Australia had nearly three quarters of a million overseas born residents, the majority of whom were British. Immigration policy had achieved a "White Australia"! Only a small percentage of non-British migrants had managed to enter before and during the days of the White Australia policy, with Chinese, Italians, Greeks and Germans being the most prominent. Australia had selected its migrants to ensure that a racially homogeneous society would confront the challenges of the post-war era.

The post-war immigration program was to be the largest planned immigration intake in Australia's history. By 1981 the net intake from immigration was just under three million. At that time 21 per cent of the Australian population was born overseas, with another 20 per cent the Australian-born children of at least

one migrant parent. More than four out of ten Australians today — some six million people — are therefore direct products of the post-war immigration program.<sup>1</sup> Immigration has thus had a greater impact in Australia than in any of the other major countries experiencing post-war immigration. Only Israel, with its unique history as a state created for the resettlement of Jews from all over the world, can exceed Australia in this regard.

The Australian immigration experience is notable not only for its relative size, but also for the ethnic diversity of its post-war migrant intake although this was not the intention of the architects of the post-war immigration program. Arthur Calwell emphatically planned to continue White Australia and preserve the homogeneity of Australian society. He gave assurances that “for every foreign migrant there would be ten from the United Kingdom”.<sup>2</sup> But even in the first years of the program, insufficient British migrants were available and Calwell turned to Eastern Europe and the “Displaced Persons” (refugees from the Second World War) to fill immigration targets.

This pattern of the desired ethnic composition of the immigration intake undermined by availability was repeated throughout the following decades as immigration targets were under-subscribed by the preferred British. The immigration net was, reluctantly, cast wider and wider: first to the “more cultured” migrants from Northern Europe; then Southern Europe; the Middle East; and so on until the early 1980s, when the Indo-Chinese were the largest ethnic group in the immigration intake.

A policy which had initially been planned to continue a homogeneous and racially pure society had, by default, produced one of the most ethnically diverse of all immigration programs, with migrants from over 100 nationalities and ethnic groups making the long journey to Australia . . .

Although they were the largest birthplace group in the immigration intake, British migrants fell well short of Calwell’s “nine-out-of-ten” ideal. Indeed a major feature of post-war immigration is the relative decline of British migration. Assessing Australia’s net settler intake (arrivals minus departures) for the period 1947 to 1980, demographer Charles Price estimated that just over one third were from the United Kingdom and Eire. Just under one fifth came from Southern Europe, with the Italians and Greeks

the largest birthplace groups after the British. Another 13 per cent came from Eastern Europe, with the Yugoslavs the next largest birthplace group. The other third of post-war migrants came from a great diversity of countries, as the Australian immigration net had been cast to most corners of the globe.

“Populate or perish” was Calwell’s catchcry to sell his immigration program. The Australian population has more than doubled, from the 7 million in 1945 to over 16 million today. Of this population increase, more than three million were born overseas. Between 1947 and 1973 immigration contributed nearly 60 per cent of Australia’s population increase, if the Australian-born children of immigrant parents are included in the calculation.<sup>3</sup> This enabled Australia to have the highest population growth rate of all the OECD countries in this period.

As was the case in Western Europe, immigration in Australia is closely tied to labour market needs. Migrant men and women were the major source of workforce growth in the post-war period, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s. By January 1987, 25.2 per cent of the labour force was born overseas, with overseas-born men 26.2 per cent of the total male labour force and overseas-born women 23.8 per cent of the female labour force.<sup>4</sup>

Comparing the Australian-born workforce with the overseas-born workforce taken as a whole there seems to be little difference in terms of occupational and industrial distribution in the labour market. However there is a distinctly different labour market profile between migrants of different ethnic origin. A useful distinction is that between migrants from the main English speaking countries (ES migrants) and those from non-English speaking countries (NES migrants).<sup>5</sup> ES migrants closely approximate to the labour market profile of the Australian-born, while NES migrants are disproportionately concentrated in the “dirty jobs” of unskilled or semi-skilled manual work associated with migrants in many other countries. The major exception to this generalisation are the Northern Europeans who, while not English speaking, appear to have a labour market profile more similar to ES migrants and the Australian-born. Any discussion of Australian migrants as if they were a homogenous grouping, that is all “dirty workers”, misses the most salient aspects of Australian immigra-



tion: differences within migrants in Australia are as important as differences between migrants and the Australian-born.

The major problems faced by NES migrants relate to the economic domain. They are concentrated in the worst paid, hardest, most monotonous, dangerous and dirtiest jobs of the male and female segments of the labour market, particularly in the manufacturing sector. Consequently NES migrants have the lowest income, highest incidence of poverty, and highest rate of unemployment in non-Aboriginal Australia. It seems clear from the available evidence that NES migrants bore the brunt of the economic recession that has gripped Australia intermittently over the last decade. Even the most recent period of economic recovery seems to have bypassed the NES migrants, with the evidence that the improved labour market conditions of 1984 benefited the Australian-born and ES migrants to the exclusion of NES migrants. But even here generalisations are difficult: the newly-arrived NES migrant groups — particularly the Indo-Chinese, Turkish and Lebanese — are much worse off than the Italians and the Greeks who arrived decades earlier.

This difference between ES and NES migrants is not limited to the labour market. Studies of the major socio-economic indicators such as income inequality, poverty, housing, health, education and access to legal services are unanimous in suggesting that NES migrants are severely disadvantaged when compared to ES migrants. This is mirrored in all dimensions of Australian society, whether it be the political, economic, social or ideological. This disadvantage seems to persist over time, although their children, the second generation migrants, appear to move into white collar jobs and achieve greater educational success.

NES migrants have had greater problems adjusting to Australian society. Language and cultural differences — small obstacles for ES migrants — become major hurdles for NES migrants. These problems relate not only to the workplace, but also to the home and community. Intergenerational conflict between migrant parents born overseas and their Australian-born children, worries about religious and social customs in an alien Australian environment and a sometimes hostile or indifferent reception by others — be they Australian-born or other migrants — all provide day-to-day problems for NES migrants. So, too, do gender relationships.

The subordination of women in cultures from the Mediterranean and Middle East, for example, and the dual role of migrant women as mothers and workers in a new society are often sources of conflict and difficulty, particularly as most did not work in the "old country".

Nevertheless, Australia's NES migrants seem better off than their counterparts overseas in terms of status in their new countries. Welfare services are available on arrival in Australia. Citizenship is a mere formality with the residential qualifying period being reduced from three years to two years in 1983 for non-British migrants, while political rights are available to all migrants once they are naturalised. Not all migrants avail themselves of this privilege; only 1.5 million of the overseas-born were citizens at the 1981 Census.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the right to citizenship in Australia is in sharp contrast to recent Western European government actions to restrict further migrant rights, that are already limited, when compared to the indigenous population.

Australia's post-war migrants also seem to have escaped the sharp edge of racist attacks and anti-migrant mobilisations that characterised community relations in many other countries over the last decade. Post-war migrants did of course enter a country with an entrenched history of racism, embodied in immigration laws and practices by the state, and in deep-rooted attitudes of prejudice and intolerance in the Australian people. Community opposition to newly arrived migrants achieved public attention during what has been called "the Blainey debate". Blainey argued that the majority of Australians opposed the increase of migrants from Asia.

In many ways it seems surprising that the large change in the ethnic composition of Australian society in the post-war period — and in particular the Indo-Chinese intake which dated from 1975 — did not give birth to such debates earlier. It took just under a decade of economic recession before public concern and debate raised immigration policy from a curiosity to national controversy. While far-right political groups such as the National Front agitated around "Keep Asians Out!" slogans, the failure of the Blainey view to achieve widespread support suggests that Australia's experience of anti-migrant feeling is of a different order to that experienced in some overseas countries recently.

The rise of fascist groups, and the extent of popular support for and the intensity of racial violence in Western Europe and the UK, had no parallel in Australia. Indeed, one of the most remarkable features of Australia's rapid growth into one of the most multicultural countries in the world is that it has been achieved without serious social turmoil. This has not been because of an enlightened government, public, or trade union movement, nor because Australia is a 'lucky country'. Like the diverse ethnic composition of the immigration intake, Australia has managed to avoid serious racial conflict directed towards migrants more by default than by design.

\* \* \*

#### *Multiculturalism: uniting or dividing Australia?*

... What has been the theory and practice of government in relation to the new migrant settlers? Perhaps here is the answer to the success of post-war Australian immigration. Is it the case that the Australian state has had an enlightened attitude to migrant settlement, responding to the increasingly multicultural society with sensitivity and generosity? Has the state been quick to recognise, and respond to, migrant disadvantage? And has government promoted models of migrant settlement designed to advance equality, acknowledge and respect cultural differences and thereby tackle prejudice?

The term *multiculturalism* has come to mean much more than an empirical description. It refers to the officially-sanctioned philosophy of the place of migrants in their new country.

Multiculturalism is the current ideology of migrant settlement, reflecting government attitudes and policies to post-war migrants once they arrive in Australia. In the mid-1970s, multiculturalism replaced the ideologies of *assimilation and integration* and while it is still supported by both major political parties in Australia, it has been severely criticised by the Right and the Left of Australian politics. Critics from the Right and the Left have argued that multiculturalism is a conspiracy designed to serve the interests of their political enemies.

The view from the Right is that multiculturalism is a radical conspiracy, promoting the interests of "ethnics" above those of the Australian-born. According to the most vocal right-wing

critic, Professor Geoffrey Blainey, multiculturalism is a "confidence trick" imposed on the mass of unsuspecting Australians who are opposed to multiculturalism. Blainey claims the result is that the public is very suspicious of immigration policy and increasingly uneasy about migrants themselves. In *All For Australia* he stated, "An immigration system set up originally to serve the nation had been undermined. Now it is the nation that exists to serve the immigrant."<sup>7</sup>

At the other end of the political spectrum, those on the Left often take the view that multiculturalism is a means of maintaining conservative political control. They argue that multiculturalism's function is to keep migrants in their place by funding conservative parts of the ethnic communities at the expense of radical groupings, and by stressing peripheral "cultural" aspects to the neglect of workplace inequalities. One of the most trenchant left-wing critics, sociologist Andrew Jakubowicz, refers to multiculturalism as "one of the most innovative dimensions of conservative political strategy."<sup>8</sup>

\* \* \*

The multiculturalism debate is not just academic; it affects the provision of migrant services and programs and the lives of previous, current and future migrants. More generally, the multiculturalism debate is a platform for reassessing the role of migrants in Australian society and the relationship between migrants and the Australian-born. At stake, according to the protagonists, is a united or divided Australia . . .

#### *Assimilation and monoculturalism*

In the first decades of post-war immigration, assimilation was the dominant philosophy of migrant settlement. This was a "non-policy"; the "new Australians" were expected to conform to Australian cultural norms, including language, and quickly discard their "cultural baggage". Billy Snedden, who was an immigration selection officer in Italy and England from 1952 to 1954 and subsequently Minister for Immigration in the conservative Coalition government, commented as late as 1969:

We must have a single culture. If immigration implied multi-cultural activities within Australian society, then it was not the type Australia



wanted. I am quite determined we should have a monoculture with everyone living in the same way, understanding each other, and sharing the same aspirations. We don't want pluralism.<sup>9</sup>

Initially assimilation was a reassurance for Australians that non-British immigration would not undermine their way of life. When 180,000 Displaced Persons arrived in the late 1940s, promises to retain a British/White Australia could no longer be guaranteed, but as Harold Holt, Immigration Minister in 1952, stated in an address to the Third Citizenship Convention:

Australia, in accepting a balanced intake of other European people as well as British, can still build a truly British nation on this side of the world. I feel that if the central tradition of a nation is strong this tradition will impose itself on [the various] groups of immigrants.<sup>10</sup>

One way of maintaining the Australian tradition was to expect all "new Australians" to adopt the Australian culture completely. This entailed a break with the "old country", its language, traditions of dress, dance, cultural ceremonies and social relationships. As Jean Martin argued, this would ensure that non-British migrants "could be as readily assimilated as the British: that is, they were capable of being absorbed without strain."<sup>11</sup>

The ideology of assimilation not only helped reduce public antagonism to an immigration program that, in terms of ethnic composition, had failed as soon as it had begun, but it also absolved the state of the responsibility to introduce services to help "new Australians" settle. Assimilation asserted that migrants had no problems with Australian settlement, that assimilation was rapid and trouble-free. To provide "new Australians" with special services was an anathema to the ideology of "sameness". Treating migrants no differently from other Australians was at the heart of assimilation.

One of the clearest manifestations of this was in the area of education and language. Most of the Displaced Persons were not fluent in English, but pamphlets directed to these "new Australians" were written in English. In response to claims that the material would be better understood if the migrants could understand it, T.H.E. Heyes, the first secretary of the Department of Immigration and a powerful bureaucrat who did much to shape Australian immigration policy, replied:

A knowledge of the English language is the first prerequisite for a Eu-

ropean migrant to help his assimilation into the community. Any obstruction to his learning the language should be strongly resisted. We think that catering for him in his own tongue would constitute such an obstruction.<sup>12</sup>

This view permeated education policy for migrant children. Despite their language problems, the assimilation ideology asserted that it was not necessary to introduce bilingual teaching aids, or to provide extra educational resources for teaching non-English speaking migrant children. To treat these migrant children differently would run counter to the policy of *Anglo-conformity*. As one primary school headmaster in a migrant holding center stated in 1951:

The child must learn to think in English from the start . . . English is to be the basis of all instruction. It is the avenue to mutual understanding. It is the key to the success of the whole immigration project . . . English must be spoken to the pupils and by them, all day and every day, in every activity, in school and out of it.<sup>13</sup>

Migrants were trapped in a Catch 22. They had to learn English to successfully assimilate, yet they were not given any special support in this process.

The ideology of assimilation permeated all government services and programs. In areas such as health, welfare and the law there were no provisions for translation, no bilingual material produced, no special resources allocated to overcoming migrant difficulties in settlement and no recognition of the problems that migrants' cultural pasts incurred. However, contradictions between the official, confident pronouncements of successful assimilation and the experiences of those who worked with migrants began to emerge. Rather than successful settlement, it was a case of disadvantage and difficulty, particularly among those migrants from NES countries. By the mid-1970s special migrant assistance in areas such as education, health and welfare was being demanded.

This was exacerbated by the spreading of the immigration net from the Eastern European refugees to Northern and Southern Europeans. Not only were non-English speaking migrants coming in larger numbers, but they arrived from numerous countries, with different languages, cultural backgrounds and traditions. The gap between the rhetoric and the reality of the assimilation ideology

became increasingly apparent, not least to the migrants themselves.

The area in which this credibility gap was first exposed was in the schools. By the end of the 1950s, only South Australia had recognised the difficulties that NES migrant children were experiencing at school. Other states were less perceptive. Harold Wyndham, the Director General of Education in NSW, stated in 1958, in response to requests for special reading material for migrant children, that the "great majority" of NES children had made "such rapid progress with the language that they have little need for special reading material".<sup>14</sup> Subsequent evidence dispelled such confident pronouncements and confirmed the lower academic achievement and persistent language difficulties of NES children, particularly in schools with a high migrant density.

Independent evidence of migrant disadvantage in the schools corresponded to individual experiences, causing the ethnic communities to become increasingly vocal. They began to demand the right to maintain their own cultural traditions rather than having them discarded and insisted on resources to overcome educational disadvantage. The self-proclaimed success of assimilation was increasingly being challenged, much to the distress of the "anglo-conformists". An ostrich-like response from the government was increasingly difficult under mounting evidence and mobilisation against migrant disadvantage.

Growing government concern over the difficulties of migrant settlement was not based solely on humanitarian considerations. The Immigration Department was experiencing difficulty in attracting and keeping migrants. While the Immigration Department underestimated the departure rate of migrants, Charles Price estimated that for years 1959-65 settler loss was over 16 per cent. By 1966, more than one-fifth of all post-war German migrants, 18 per cent of Dutch and 13 per cent of Italian migrants had abandoned Australia.<sup>15</sup> Improving conditions in Western Europe made it difficult to attract new migrants from Northern and Southern Europe, particularly given the increasing competition from Western European countries seeking "guest-workers" from Southern Europe. Many British migrants also became disillusioned about settlement in Australia — the origins of the "whinge-

ing pom') stereotype — and returned home in significant numbers.

Clearly Australia had to improve its treatment of newly arrived migrants. The ostrich-like, assimilation approach to migrant problems may have been useful in dispelling Australian fears of the "new Australians", but it did not endear the migrants themselves to this land of "endless opportunity". The stage was set for a more enlightened response by the Australian government, an approach which recognised the problems of migrant settlement, particularly for those from non-English speaking countries.

### *Integration: the second phase*

In the period from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, assimilation broke down and a multicultural policy gradually emerged. This was a period of transition, and is often referred to as the period of "integration", the second phase of official government attitudes to migrant settlement. This shift in policy was symbolised by a change in name for the appropriate section within the Department of Immigration. The Assimilation Section became the Integration Section in 1964, although the actual policy changes were less clear.

Integration seemed to imply that migrants no longer needed to totally and immediately discard their cultural past and become part of an homogenised Australian culture. As Jean Martin pointed out, in the mid-1960s integration was not much more than a "two-stage" assimilation process, a recognition that it would take time for migrants to fully assimilate.<sup>16</sup> Cultural differences were seen as valid in the short term, but the expectation was that they would eventually be merged with the mainstream. This phase of integration was associated with a belated recognition of migrant disadvantage and of the need for government policy to redress the most blatant examples.

The government lifted its head out of the sand to acknowledge the concerns of increasingly vocal migrant communities. The Department of Immigration began to fund migrant welfare via Grant-in-Aid programs channelled through ethnic community organisations such as the Italian agency Co-As-It in the late 1960s. In 1970, Phil Lynch, the Immigration Minister, announced that the government would fund a child migrant education program in state and independent schools, with the government assuming the



responsibility for teacher training and providing appropriate materials. However, these developments were an ad hoc response rather than a systematic, philosophical, policy orientation. This was to occur in the early 1970s.

#### *Multiculturalism: the third phase*

By the mid-1970s a new political consensus emerged. Both major political parties supported a policy shift as multiculturalism became the official guiding principle for migrant settlement. Distinctive migrant cultural trappings such as dance, dress, food, religion, language and social relations, were to be celebrated and encouraged as multicultural enlightenment and diversity replaced assimilationist homogeneity. Cultural pluralism had replaced monoculturalism. Or to use the terms popularised in the United States, the "melting pot" was replaced by the "salad bowl". No longer were migrant cultures expected to disappear and melt into some sort of homogenised ockerism. All the different cultures could be maintained, each adding a distinct "flavour" to the salad.

Michael Liffman, in a paper to the 1983 Committee of Review of the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs, suggested that there were six key factors in the emergence of multiculturalism in Australia.<sup>13</sup> First, the "undeniable reality" that Australia was a multi-cultural society in its ethnic composition. Second, "the phobia of many Australians was waning". In other words, prejudice was slowly being translated into tolerance as the reality of living with migrants began to outdistance the stereotypical fears. Third, the migrant communities themselves were becoming more confident and articulate, with young second and third generation professionals emerging as strong and effective advocates of multiculturalism. Fourth, this led to the expansion of migrant and ethnic community groups and a broadening of their concerns from "cultural" to welfare and political issues. Fifth, the Labor Party's Immigration Minister from 1972 to 1975, Al Grassby, acted as an important catalyst and, finally, the early 1970s followed decades of full employment and economic boom, allowing social reform to rise in the political agenda.

There are two sets of landmarks on this road from assimilation to multiculturalism. One relates to the individuals and publica-

tions which promoted the concept of a multicultural society and cultural pluralism; that is multiculturalism as theory or ideology. The other relates to the institutional response, or multiculturalism in practice.

#### *Multiculturalism as theory*

Al Grassby, the flamboyant, British-born Minister for Immigration in the Whitlam Government was, as Liffman suggests, an important catalyst in the promotion and acceptance of the notion of a multicultural society. In 1973 he issued a statement entitled *A Multicultural Society for the Future*, which set out the concepts of ethnic heterogeneity and cultural pluralism.<sup>18</sup> Grassby suggested that without such a multicultural society, NES migrants would become "non-people". He advocated the concept of "the family of the nation" as a means to stress the contribution of migrants to Australia and of the need to recognise, rather than dismiss, their distinctiveness.

Academics further developed the concept of cultural pluralism and multiculturalism. Most prominent was sociologist Jerzy Zubrzycki. In 1977 Zubrzycki argued that the lack of equality of opportunity for migrants in Australia was one of the key reasons for the high departure rate of migrants. He promoted the need for equal opportunity for all Australians, migrant and non-migrant alike. This required the acceptance in theory and practice of "cultural pluralism", since "justice for all Australians" was only possible "within the framework of cultural pluralism but not structural pluralism and that ethnicity, ethnic ties, and primordial ties play a major and constructive role in this nexus."<sup>19</sup>

The Australian Ethnic Affairs Council (AEAC), with Zubrzycki as chairman, supported the notion of cultural pluralism. It concluded:

*We believe, therefore, that our goal in Australia should be to create a society in which people of non-Anglo-Australian origin are given the opportunity, as individuals or groups, to choose to preserve and develop their culture — their languages, traditions and arts — so that these can become living elements in the diverse culture of the total society, while at the same time they enjoy effective and respected places within one Australian society, with equal access to the rights and opportunities that society provides and accepting responsibilities to wards it.*<sup>20</sup>

The AEAC argued that the three key principles of a multicultural society were social cohesion, cultural identity and equality of opportunity and access.

Five years later, the Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs (ACPEA), a merger of the AEAC and the Australian Population and Immigration Council (APIC), reaffirmed multiculturalism as "the most suitable model for relations between all ethnic groups in Australia and as the preferred basis for government ethnic policies".<sup>21</sup> The ACPEA extended the three principles of multiculturalism adopted in 1977. It suggested that Australian institutions should adapt to reflect the diverse composition of the Australian population and so ensure social cohesion; it supported the retention of cultural heritage, including minority languages, in order to maintain cultural identity, and stressed that equality of opportunity in the spheres of work and politics was an essential part of multiculturalism. Acknowledging that government assistance was necessary in achieving a multicultural society in Australia, the ACPEA favoured "an emphasis on the use of mainstream services by minority groups, wherever practicable, rather than the creation of a separate network of services".<sup>22</sup> The ACPEA also added a fourth principle to multiculturalism: equal responsibility for, commitment to and participation in society. It advocated that the majority of Australians should accept minority groups, while minority groups must accept "a primary loyalty to Australia".

Since Al Grassby first floated the concept of the "family of the nation", political parties in government and opposition have embraced multiculturalism as official policy. Despite this level of formal bi-partisan agreement, there is still considerable debate about the theory and practice of multiculturalism. Much of this centres on cultural versus structural pluralism, which loosely translates in practice to emphasising either lifestyle or life chances. Zubrzycki and others have long championed cultural pluralism as the central aspect of multiculturalism, with its emphasis on maintaining ethnic identity and cultural practices. Others, including Jean Martin, have maintained that structural changes at the economic and political level are required if migrant disadvantage in the labour market and under-representation in the broad political structures are to be

overcome. We will return to this debate after considering the practice of multiculturalism since the early 1970s.

### *The practice of multiculturalism*

*Committees of Inquiry.* While multiculturalism emerged, and was rapidly accepted as a philosophy, governments have been much slower to develop a multicultural practice. The Fraser Government had re-established the Immigration Department which, under the Whitlam Government was subsumed under other departments as immigration intakes were reduced. It was renamed the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs in July 1976. 'Ethnic affairs' had asserted a legitimacy unknown decades earlier. However, when assessing migrant policy prior to 1977, Jean Martin concluded that the federal governments from Whitlam to Fraser were generally "non-committal", with no coherent policy.<sup>23</sup>

In 1977 the Fraser Government established an inquiry chaired by Melbourne lawyer Frank Galbally into post-arrival programs and services for migrants. The inquiry's findings, published in 1978 as the *Galbally Report*, were a landmark in multicultural practice, introducing a more systematic and diverse framework for migrant services. The four principles on which the Galbally committee based its policy recommendations were: equality of opportunity and equal access to programs and services for all; the right of all Australians to maintain their culture; the need for special programs and services for migrants to ensure equality of access and provision; and that these programs should be designed and operated in full consultation with migrants, emphasising self-help.<sup>24</sup>

The *Galbally Report* made 57 specific recommendations involving additional expenditure of \$50 million over three years. These recommendations covered a broad range of areas, including aiding settlement (\$12 million), improvement of English language tuition for adults and children (\$10m), translation services and improved communication and information (\$4m), establishment of multicultural resource centres (\$1.34m), and grant-in-aid programs to ethnic communities and trade unions (\$1.65m). The *Report* also recommended the establishment of an Institute of Multicultural Affairs (\$1.8m), the extension of ethnic radio



(\$3.23m), and the establishment of an ethnic television task force (\$7.13m).

In May 1978 the Fraser Government announced that it accepted the proposals of the *Galbally Report*. A review of the Galbally proposals by the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs (AIMA), published four years later, found "an impressive record of implementation", with expenditure matching the provisions of the *Report*. By June 1981, 112 grants had been made, including 49 to ethnic agencies, under the grant-in-aid scheme; 19 migrant resource centres had been established; and 146 "once-only" grants had been awarded under the Migrant Project Subsidy Scheme. The ethnic media had been enhanced particularly through the establishment of Channel 0/28, set up under the Special Broadcasting Service, which was praised by the *AIMA Review* as "a watershed in the development of Australian multiculturalism". The *AIMA Review* concluded that the implementation of the *Galbally Report's* proposals had been of substantial benefit to newly-arrived and longer-established migrants, giving Australia "perhaps the most comprehensive system of migrant and multicultural services in the world".<sup>25</sup>

Despite this lavish praise the *AIMA Review*, which was established to monitor the progress of ethnic affairs policy, found a number of inadequacies in migrant programs and services. This was evident in the area of English language teaching, child care, occupational health and safety and the labour market, where migrant disadvantage persisted. The *AIMA Review* made a further 89 recommendations, at a net additional cost of \$6 million.

Four years later, in 1986, the Hawke Labor Government initiated another review of multiculturalism. The 1986 Committee of Review, chaired by political scientist James Jupp, occurred after the Blainey debate, when multiculturalism was the subject of severe criticism.

The *Jupp Report* was stage one of a two-stage review, with stage one to "advise on the Federal Government's role in assisting overseas-born residents to achieve equitable participation in Australian society" and stage two to evaluate key programs and services already in place. Stage one of the review concentrated on developing principles for migrant policy until the end of the 20th century.<sup>26</sup> The *Jupp Report* comprehensively reaffirmed multi-

culturalism as the appropriate government philosophy for the next decade, refusing to accept the critique made by Professor Blainey. At the same time, multiculturalism was redefined as "equitable participation". In this sense the *Jupp Report* broke important ground, shifting the emphasis of multiculturalism policy away from lifestyle to life chances. The *Jupp Report* clearly outlined the persistent disadvantage many migrants still faced in Australia, despite more than a decade of multicultural policy, and argued for the removal of structural inequalities. Moreover, unlike the earlier *Galbally Report* and *AIMA Review* which largely ignored the labour market aspects of migrant disadvantage, the *Jupp Report* identified the labour market as "the major determinant of whether certain persons or groups will be disadvantaged".

Identifying four key principles, the *Jupp Report* argued that all Australians should have:

- equitable opportunity to participate in economic, social, cultural and political aspects of life;
- equitable access to and a share of government resources;
- the opportunity to participate in or influence government policies, programs and services;
- the right to maintain their religion, culture and language in Australia.

It also suggested the following strategy for the implementation of these principles:

- migrants should be equipped with the basic resources;
- government and non-government institutions should change their decision-making processes;
- a program of community relations which respects the rights of all should be adopted;
- measures should be introduced to enable people to maintain their cultural heritage and identity.

The 32 recommendations of the Jupp committee were mainly concerned with bureaucratic reshuffling and improvements to existing services. These included the improvement of translation facilities, the recruitment of bilingual staff, establishing mechanisms to enable migrant qualifications and skills to be assessed prior to arrival in Australia and the setting up of a Standing Committee on Ethnic Affairs and Multiculturalism. The *Jupp Report* also called for the establishment of an Office of Ethnic Affairs to coordinate

and monitor progress in achieving equitable participation of migrants.

*Institutional embodiments of multiculturalism.* Multiculturalism has given birth to a number of institutions, often characterised by subsequent reformulation or ultimate abolition. The major post-war overseeing body on immigration matters, the Australian Population and Immigration Council (APIC) was reformed and a new organisation, the Australian Ethnic Affairs Council (AEAC), established in March 1977. In April 1981, the APIC, AEAC and the Australian Refugee Advisory Council were collapsed into one body, the Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs (ACPEA). To facilitate the development of ethnic media in Australia, the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) was established in August 1977, the Ethnic Television Review Panel in May 1978, and the Independent and Multicultural Broadcasting Corporation (IMBC) Implementation Committee in 1980. The Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs (AIMA), established in 1979 by the Fraser Government after the *Galbally Report*, was disbanded in 1987 by the Hawke Government and replaced by the office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA).

Paralleling the emergence of these institutional embodiments of multiculturalism by the federal government were developments from the state governments. The NSW Labor Government established the first State Ethnic Affairs Commission (EAC) in 1977. The NSW Premier is also Minister for Ethnic Affairs. This was followed by the South Australian EAC, set up by a Liberal government in 1979. In Victoria an Ethnic Affairs Commission was established by the Cain Labor Government in 1983, with a Minister for Ethnic Affairs also being appointed. The Burke Labor Government in Western Australia created the first Minister for Multicultural Affairs and established an EAC. Queensland is the only mainland state without an Ethnic Affairs Commission, although it established a Department of Ethnic Affairs in 1982.

The Ethnic Affairs Commissions, although varying from state to state, are generally involved in research, policy and relations with the ethnic communities and their organisations. The NSW EAC has recently initiated legislation requiring all state government departments and tertiary educational institutions to prepare

annual Ethnic Affairs Policy statements. Other developments in federal and state legislation require attention to be paid to aspects of migrant employment and settlement. Since the late 1970s, anti-discrimination legislation has been adopted by the Commonwealth and several state governments. The Racial Discrimination Act was amended in 1975, the Human Rights Commission established in 1981, Equal Employment Opportunity provisions are becoming widespread and Affirmative Action legislation was passed by the federal government in 1987. Employers and governments are now compelled to address more formally the most blatant aspects of migrant disadvantage and prejudice.

In the last decade, a politically bi-partisan adoption of multiculturalism has spawned a multitude of inquiries and studies, in-stitutions and legislative activity. Despite agreement between the major political parties and acceptance by many ethnic organisations, Australian multiculturalism has had its critics from both sides of the political spectrum. A review of the multiculturalism debate provides an opportunity to more acutely judge the success of a decade of multicultural theory and policy and its impact in practice on the lives of migrants.

### *The right-wing critique of multiculturalism*

The Right found a champion in the guise of Melbourne historian, Professor Geoffrey Blainey. His views of multiculturalism can be gleaned from the following quotes:

Multiculturalism . . . is a recipe for trouble, but coated with platitudes and golden syrup. [Melbourne Herald, 30 August 1984]

The multicultural industry is divisive and parochial. [Australian, 20 September 1984]

Sadly, multiculturalism often means: "Australians come second". [Melbourne Age, 21 September 1984]

Our current emphasis on granting special rights to all kinds of minorities is threatening to cut this nation into many tribes. [Sydney Morning Herald, 25 January 1986]

With massive federal and state grants, the multicultural industry has become an ardent propagandist, pouring shame on Australia's past. [Melbourne Herald, 16 October 1986]

Blainey has found more support for his views on multicultural-



ism than he did for his assertions about Asian immigration. The political Right, whose views are expressed through journals like *Quadrant* and by commentators such as Frank Knopfelmacher and journalist Des Keegan, share Blainey's concerns. L.J.M. Cooray, in a *Quadrant* article entitled "Multiculturalism in Australia: Who needs it?" was disconcerted that there "are notions of multiculturalism which assert the right of each ethnic community to maintain its language and culture on Australian soil, if necessary with the assistance of public-funded programmes."<sup>27</sup> Cooray sees a clear choice between an Australian culture or a collection of distinct ethnic cultures. Frank Knopfelmacher, in an article in the *Melbourne Age* entitled "Save Australia's British culture", expressed a similar view. He supported Blainey's yearning for the old days of a British Australia and continued: "The most damaging aspect of the multiculturalism approach was the implicit, and sometimes explicit, insistence that Australia should be and will be disanglified. For this is what Australians do not want."<sup>28</sup> Des Keegan of *The Australian* wrote:

Racial hatred has erupted everywhere the mixture has been too disparate . . . Why should Australia be flooded with people on the run from societies incapable of civilised behaviour, or of rational economies or of social harmony under common law.<sup>29</sup>

According to the Right, multiculturalism is costly and divisive. It has given the "ethnic industry" a position whereby it can influence government spending in favour of their minority interests and divert money away from other Australians, while at the same time antagonising the "Australian" people who strongly oppose such policies. Instead of this recipe for social tension and divisiveness the Right yearns for the "old days" of assimilation and a British Australia.

. . . The evidence of public opinion is not as strong as the Right would claim. Moreover, even if they were correct, it is questionable if an enlightened government should follow public opinion in perpetuating the material disadvantage and cultural isolation of NES migrants. To do so would entrench further NES migrants as inferior, second-class citizens. An Australian society based on such institutionalised inequality would be more likely to produce the divisiveness and conflict that the Right claims already exists. Multiculturalism's goal of equity and equality for all Australians,

irrespective of their country of birth, in the economic, social, political and cultural spheres of life is a more likely path to tolerance and understanding.

### *The left-wing critique*

Left-wing critiques of multiculturalism have persisted since the emergence of multiculturalism in the late 1970s. Unlike the right-wing critics, who question migrant access to special programs and services and the maintenance of ethnic cultural identity, the Left base their criticism on the failure of successive governments to extend multiculturalism from the cultural to the economic domain. In other words, the Left argues that multiculturalism has failed to fulfil its promise of equity and access for migrants. The other criticism from the Left relates to the conservative politics embodied in the operation of multicultural policy.

To date multicultural policy has tended to concentrate on the "cultural" aspects of life in Australia, such as dance, dress, food and language. While this makes daily life for migrants much more tolerable, the Left's concern is that it is vital to concentrate greater resources on migrant disadvantage in the labour market and in the other areas such as education. This is crucial to ensuring migrants have equal life chances. As Laksiri Jayasuriya wrote in 1984:

Whereas the stress on "lifestyles", a concern for ethnicity and cultural maintenance, had merit in easing social adjustment for newcomers, the continued preoccupation with these issues through policies solely directed to preserving and sustaining cultural diversity and identity is misguided, irrelevant, and inimical to the best interests of ethnic minorities today.<sup>30</sup>

Nearly a decade of funding directed to multiculturalism has not, however, been able to overcome migrant disadvantage in terms of their standard of living. But of the three government inquiries into multicultural programs and services, only the *Jupp Report* explicitly addressed the need to reduce the structural inequality facing migrants in Australia, particularly in areas of the labour market and English language education. However, the *Jupp Report* did not recommend any specific initiatives to overcome this disadvantage. While government now pays lip-service to this area of multicultural policy, only a small proportion of the funds allocated to multicultural programs and services are di-

rected to labour market programs. The inability of multiculturalism to significantly reduce structural inequality is a serious shortcoming of Australian multiculturalism.

More controversial is the Left's critique of the "hidden political agenda" of multiculturalism. Sociologist Andrew Jakubowicz has been the most consistent critic in this regard. He argues that multiculturalism is a clever strategy for containment of migrants as a political force. In 1984 Jakubowicz said 'It is essentially about sustaining the existing social order and the existing core values, however sexist or oppressive they may be.'<sup>31</sup> This view is supported by Marie de Lepervanche, who stated in her review of ethnic policy published in 1984 that ethnicity, 'When harnessed by the state and promoted as multiculturalism, gave priority to ethnic rather than class differences, and thus provided an effective means of social control.'<sup>32</sup>

Jakubowicz's argument is that when ethnic organisations began to demand attention be paid to migrant problems, and when migrant workers, particularly in the car industry, demonstrated a militancy which went beyond the control of their union leaders, multiculturalism was used to create federal and state institutions (an ethnic industry) which by concentrating on the non-class cultural aspects of reform could contain and defuse legitimate working class migrant demands and militancy. To quote Jakubowicz:

In the Australian context, state action began at the Federal level in support for the cultural liberation of ethnic minorities. Over time such concerns were submerged in politically astute analyses of the changing base of Australian political life, and in a period of heightened class struggle and economic restructuring, the opportunity to use ethnicity to mediate and defuse class conflict.<sup>33</sup>

There is some evidence to support this view. Since the *Galbally Report*, multicultural funds for programs and services have been directed to ethnic groups and associations. However, since all the communities have a variety of associations representing different regional, political or religious differences, governments have to choose which ethnic groups to fund. It is here that politics enter the domain. As Jakubowicz argues, post-Galbally multiculturalism led to "the reinforcement of the client-patron relationship between politically acceptable ethnic organisations and the state."<sup>34</sup>

The ethnic media under the Fraser Government provides an interesting example of conservative politics influencing the shape of multiculturalism in practice. In 1974 a sub-committee of the Migrant Task Force, set up by Al Grassby, reported on the desirability of introducing community language broadcasting. Radio 2EA in Sydney and 3EA in Melbourne began broadcasting in June 1975, the same year in which the ABC introduced a new multilingual access radio station, 3ZZZ in Melbourne. In the words of one foundation staff member, "We hoped that 3ZZZ might not only reflect the diversity of Melbourne, but act as a catalyst in building a multicultural society."<sup>35</sup>

3ZZZ posed a particular problem for the Fraser Government, since as an experimental access radio station, it was open to less direct editorial control than 2EA and 3EA. As an access station, 3ZZZ allowed various ethnic groups editorial control over their programs, leading to sustained political in-fighting within ethnic groups and between the government, the ABC and 3ZZZ management. Right-wing ethnic groups protested loudly to the government over what they saw as a left-wing bias in programs broadcast by Palestinians. In June 1977, the Fraser Government forced the ABC to close 3ZZZ. As Joan Dugdale argued, the closure was for political reasons, with open access for ethnic groups regarded as a dangerous experiment:

3ZZZ gave people the opportunity to speak across social and ethnic barriers and to share with politicians and experts the right to broadcast an opinion. It allowed an injustice done in one area to be communicated rapidly in many languages to other possible victims; it allowed rights, which are often buried in fine print, to be publicised. At 3ZZZ people who thought they had nothing in common discovered they shared a valuable asset in a radio station. They were beginning to learn that they also shared a city and a future which, together, they could influence. Such political activity was not welcomed by either a Labor or a Liberal Government.<sup>36</sup>

Another criticism of multiculturalism in practice relates to the growing "ethnic industry" and the ethnic leaders who have emerged as spokespeople. It is claimed that a "bureaucratic aristocracy" has been created by the state as a means to introduce conservative ethnic leaders into the mainstream of political life and block those who represent working class migrant interests, even though most migrants in Australia are working class. Marie



de Lepervanche, for example, has argued that "Most ethnic leaders and spokespeople are men, and they represent male and bourgeois interests rather than those of women or the working class majority."<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Jakubowicz suggests that conservative politicians have cultivated ethnic leaders who are reluctant to publicly criticise the actions of government.<sup>38</sup>

#### *W(h)ither multiculturalism?*

The history of the state's policy relating to migrant settlers is one of decades of neglect. Migrant disadvantage was simply not acknowledged by successive post-war governments until the mid-1970s when the state adequately acknowledged its responsibilities. Despite a decade of multiculturalism, the most enlightened government philosophy of migrant settlement, migrant disadvantage persists. The hypothesis that the success of Australian post-war immigration is due to enlightened government policy fails dramatically.

Nevertheless, via multiculturalism, governments do have the potential to redress the major areas of disadvantage experienced by many migrants, particularly newly-arrived NES migrants. Unless migrant disadvantage is more systematically challenged, many NES migrants will be entrenched further as second-class citizens in Australia, which will be a recipe not only for individual hardship, but also for the escalation of racial unrest and prejudice. Multiculturalism, in its latest version in the *Jupp Report*, stresses the importance of aiming to achieve equitable participation of migrants in Australian life. This is an important principle, even if it would, if heeded, throw back the cause of migrant rights to the days of assimilation and the attendant personal hardship, prejudice and institutionalised inequality that this embodied decades ago.

Multiculturalism does have a hidden class agenda, despite its positive contribution in areas of cultural pluralism. However, multiculturalism is essentially contradictory, a fact not always appreciated by the most prominent left-wing critics. It has positive and negative benefits for the majority of working class migrants. Ethnic affairs policy in the post-war period began with decades

of assimilationist ideology which denied migrants their past, implicitly condoning racist prejudice and intolerance from the British-Australian population. In the last decade of multiculturalism, important advances have been achieved and can be seen as significant influences in the dilution of prejudice in Australia. However, multiculturalism has not paid sufficient attention to migrant disadvantage in the labour market and education system and further efforts must be made to redress the unequal life chances of migrants. The *Jupp Report* acknowledges this point, and made an important advance in the theory of multiculturalism by stressing structural, as well as cultural, pluralism. But if multiculturalism does not extend its brief to empowering the disadvantaged, working class majorities of the migrant population it will be open to charges of elitism and conservatism.

In the changing economic and political climate of the past few years some positive aspects of multiculturalism practice have been questioned and undermined. Professor Blainey and his cohorts challenged the very validity of programs and services for migrants, and it has been necessary to defend multiculturalism from such critics who do not even recognise the importance of cultural pluralism, let alone structural pluralism. Moreover, the economic recession of the early 1980s, and the subsequent conservative economic strategy of the Hawke Government, has led to cutbacks in the already inadequately funded areas of migrant education and English language tuition. The high cost of teaching migrants English is an anathema to the budget-cutting Hawke-Keating economic strategy. "Holding the line", rather than extending inadequate services, has become the key political fight.

One tempting solution for government and treasury officials is to press for the rapid "mainstreaming" of multicultural programs and services. Since the emergence of multiculturalism it has been argued that special migrant programs and services are a temporary second best. The *Galbally Report*, for example, proposed the view that "services to migrants should as far as possible be through general reforms directed at the whole community."<sup>39</sup>

This view was endorsed by the *AIMA Review*, while the *Jupp Report* remained largely agnostic on the question. In an ideal world, all government departments would embody a recognition of the special disadvantage of migrants and adopt appropriate

policies and programs. However, the attraction of "mainstreaming" in today's economic and political climate seems to lie with the short-term cost savings rather than any long-term policy focussing on the best interests of migrants. This view is taken by researchers at the University of Wollongong's Centre for Multicultural Studies, who see "mainstreaming" as a possible "fourth phase" in state/migrant relations in post-war Australia. After outlining the cuts to NES migrants in the 1986 federal budget, Stephen Castles, Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope argued, in an article entitled "W(h)ither multiculturalism?", that "mainstreaming" might simply come to mean cutting multiculturalism:

Mainstreaming represents a fourth phase. Although mainstreaming aims to strengthen multiculturalism — and, if sensitively handled, would have that effect — it could become a pretext for dismantling the capacity of services and programs to meet special needs.<sup>40</sup>

Today it is important to defend multiculturalism from its right-wing critics and treasury officials aiming to trim government expenditure. Defending and extending multiculturalism must be a central part of government immigration policy in the coming years. If the Australian government is not prepared to meet the responsibilities of past and present immigration policy through an adequate provision of programs and services, the case for increased immigration intake, a path being followed by the Hawke Government, is severely undermined.

## Reading 7

### *Mistaken Identity*

*Stephen Castles, Mary Kalantzis, Bill Cope, Michael Morrissey*

#### *A Nation without Nationalism?*

According to Benedict Anderson, 1987 was the 200th anniversary of the birth of the nation state. The "extraordinary invention" which was to become an "unproblematic planetary norm" came to the world, says Anderson, in the shape of the Constitution of the United States of America.<sup>1</sup> The nation whose 200th anniversary we are called upon to celebrate in 1988 was founded just one year later. That would make it the first completely modern nation.

This view of Australia may put quite a strain on our credulity: did the convicts know they were coming to found a nation? Did they want to? Do the descendants of the Aborigines who saw the First Fleet land see things that way? Was a nation founded at all? After all, our monarch still lives overseas; many of our basic institutions are imported from our former Imperial ruler. If so, when was it founded? In 1788, in 1901, with the Statute of Westminster in 1928, or when appeals to the Privy Council were abolished in the mid-1980s? But what is a nation anyway in a world in which crucial economic and political decisions are no longer made at the national level, especially for the smaller states?

This book will attempt to grapple with some of the more significant recent attempts at making nationhood. In particular, it will focus on the conscious attempt to define the Australian nation as multicultural. The expression was first used in a public and official way by Al Grassby, as Immigration Minister of the Whitlam Government in 1973. The policy was elaborated by various government advisory bodies, in which the sociologist Jerzy Zubrzycki played a leading role, and was adopted by the Fraser Government. Its social policy consequences were mapped out in the Galbally Report of 1978. By the end of the 1970s multiculturalism had become not only a new Australian word, but also a full-blown "ism": a comprehensive ideology of what Australia was supposed to be and to become. The policy was taken over by the Hawke