INTERNATIONAL APPROACHES TO INTEGRATION: AUSTRALIA

ABSTRACT

This article briefly traces key features of the evolution of Australian multicultural policies over three decades. In evaluating the outcomes, it is noted that many of the gains for successful incorporation of immigrants are under pressure from other government policies, in particular those associated with the pursuit of the War on Terror, which are creating increasingly overt hostility towards Muslim groups in Australia.

From the commencement of European settlement in 1788, migration has played a critical role in Australian demographic, economic and social development and was featured extensively in political debates. Migrants currently constitute nearly one-quarter of the population of 20 million while over one-fifth of those born in Australia have at least one migrant parent. This figure of nearly half of the population with recent migrant background is similar to that in 1901 when the Commonwealth of Australia was constituted through the federation of the six former British colonies.

The multicultural paradigm

While multiculturalism has been the official policy guiding immigrant settlement and incorporation for three decades since the 1970s, for most of Australia's history the favoured policy was that of assimilation which assumed, and required, that immigrants would rapidly adopt Australian culture and practices and become "invisible." By the 1960s, after two decades of post-war mass migration intended to increase the population by 1% a year, the inevitability and speed of immigrant assimilation was being questioned as was its desirability amidst concerns about the negative social effects of migrant inequality for migrants as well as the wider Australian society. The first response in the late 1960s was a new policy (called Integration), which took a longer-term view of the settlement process and envisaged that, even if assimilation was the long-term objective, cultural diversity might continue in the privacy of the home. However, this did not address the concerns of diverse groups including migrant communities, teaching, health and other professionals for more pro-active policies which, following the Canadian example, were labelled as "multicultural."

Following the election of the socially reformist Australian Labor Party government in 1972, the then Minister for Immigration released a paper entitled *A Multi-cultural Society for the Future*. By the late 1970s national and State commitment to multicultural policies were flagged in the 1978 *Report on Participation* (Ethnic Affairs Commission of New South Wales 1978) prepared by the New South Wales State government and the 1978 *Galbally Report* (Galbally 1978) on the provision of migrant services prepared for the Australian federal government. Rather than relying on the universalistic delivery of services by mainstream agencies, the reports emphasized the importance of funding to address the specific needs of diverse ethnic and migrant groups and the role that these groups could play in the delivery of services. The initial focus was on migrants from countries where the majority of arrivals were not English speakers. Language differences became a shorthand to highlight other differences from the majority Anglo-Celtic population involving cultural practices and institutional experiences which affected access to welfare and settlement services.

In the three decades since then, there has been ongoing evolution in the multiculturalism policy paradigm.[1] One area of major change has included an extension of the policy from migrants to their children. This shift is indicated by the adoption of the term NESB (non-English speaking background) and indicates a realization of continuing diversity and potential disadvantage. By 1989 a further widening of the relevance of the policy was made clear in the *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* (Office of Multicultural Affairs 1989), which stated that policies of multiculturalism were directly relevant to *all* Australians, including those of Anglo-Celtic and indigenous (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) backgrounds. This was a very specific effort to counter views that it was only the migrants who had anything to gain from policies of multiculturalism. The area which the *National Agenda* specifically emphasized in thus legitimating multiculturalism was the economic advantages provided by having people from diverse cultures and backgrounds whose knowledge and

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contacts could facilitate international opportunities for developing economic and trading links with their countries of origin. The strategic directions of the most recent statement *Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity* (2003) is due to be revised in 2006. The current statement of the policy emphasizes four principles as "a framework for maximizing the social, cultural and economic benefits that cultural diversity brings to all Australians." But more than that, it actively promotes "good community relations and social harmony among us all." The principles that refer to responsibilities and rights are:

- *Responsibilities for all.* All Australians have a civic duty to support those basic structures and principles of Australian society which guarantee us our freedom and equality and enable diversity in our society to flourish;
- *Respect for each person.* Subject to the law, all Australians have the right to express their own culture and beliefs and have a reciprocal obligation to respect the rights of others to do the same;
- *Fairness for each person.* All Australians are entitled to equality of treatment and opportunity. Social equity allows us all to contribute to the social, political and economic life of Australia, free from discrimination, including on the grounds of race, culture, religion, language, location, gender or place of birth;
- *Benefits for all.* All Australians benefit from…the significant cultural, social and economic dividends arising form the diversity of our population (2003, 6).

This latest statement, developed in the wake of the overseas events of September 11, 2001 and the 2002 Bali bombings that killed nearly 100 Australians, emphasizes harmony, equity in access to government services and harnessing the benefits of diversity. In this it differs from earlier periods when the emphasis shifted between addressing issues of disadvantage and inequality and providing support for cultural maintenance.

A significant complement to language-related services are a variety of educational and training programs that are designed for both migrants and the wider population to gain the knowledge and skills to operate in a diverse, multicultural society.

Institutional bases for multiculturalism

The major bases for the policy of multiculturalism are contained in a range of administrative measures and government reports beginning from the 1978 *Gabally Report* (Galbally 1978) and summarized in the 1989 *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* (Office of Multicultural Affairs 1989). This reliance on administrative practice rather than extensive legislation reflects Australian political culture's preferences in policy formulation. The Australian constitution lacks a *Bill of Rights* in its Constitution although at the national and State level there is a range of anti-discrimination legislation.

At the national level there have been a series of government agencies with major responsibility for the implementation of multiculturalism policies throughout the bureaucracy. The current responsibility lies with the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. At the State level there are similar overview agencies although these, too, have changed their roles and often their names as in the case of the NSW Ethnic Affairs Commission which was reconstituted as the Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural NSW in 2001. Advisory councils and boards drawn from the community provide input to many of these agencies although since July 1, 2006 the national Council for a Multicultural Australia has lapsed.

The existence of these central agencies reflects the emphasis on monitoring change within the bureaucracy. At the State and national level the major government service delivery departments and agencies concerned with areas such as health, education and welfare all have units responsible for developing and implementing policies for their ethnically diverse clientele and for training staff to provide appropriate services. However, service provision is often confused with the implementation of internal staffing policies to avoid discrimination in appointments and promotion. Also in the key policy-oriented departments, such as those concerned with economic policy, a major challenge has been to ensure the national Access and Equity strategy is considered when policies such as those concerning economic restructuring are being developed.

As a federation, Australian states retain constitutional responsibility for a range of areas directly affecting incorporation such as education, health and the legal system. However, through its substantial control of funding, the national government has the ability to exercise considerable influence by setting preconditions for the use of the funding it gives the states. Another feature directly relevant to multiculturalism policy is a preference for reporting mechanisms which require government departments, agencies and businesses to report on the numbers of staff and students from targeted backgrounds rather than mandating the operation of ethnic quotas in the labour market and education.

Service delivery

In contrast to assimilation policy, where services did not target specific ethnic or cultural groups, in the early years of multiculturalism, government and community organizations, particularly those involving migrant and ethnic communities, were the major providers of services and support. A major source of funding for ethnic communities – often poor – to provide these ethnospecific services came from government funding. This also allowed

the government to control the type of services and activities provided. A tension exists between this type of service delivery and that referred to as "mainstreaming," which involves all clients being catered for by the one organization or government agency regardless of whether it has staff with the linguistic or other culturally relevant knowledge. Given the diversity of Australian ethnic groups and, also, the ever-changing origins of immigrants, there are special challenges to providing services to new and smaller immigrant groups.

Over the last decade Australian governments have increasingly shifted their general welfare model to one based on "user pays" rather than on identified need while, at the same time, also outsourcing responsibility for these services to private, for-profit organizations and religious charities. The general shift to "user pays" and cutbacks in the provision of welfare services has had an inevitable impact on access to services, including among migrants. A particular issue is that it is not always self-evident that commercial providers are either aware of the needs of an ethnically diverse client base, or willing, to adapt their service delivery model to them.

Historically, Australia provided services to both citizens and those on permanent resident visas without differentiation. This reflected the expectation that permanent residents were "citizens in waiting" and should be accorded the same rights as citizens. Except for the right to vote and to hold permanent positions in the public service or the defence forces there is little to distinguish permanent residents from citizens. Despite this, high levels of naturalization are common in Australia which does not require those taking Australian citizenship to renounce their existing citizenship. From the 1970s, Australia also allowed all permanent residents to apply for naturalization after only two years residence and without extensive tests of English competency. Those in Australia on temporary residence visas, which now includes a number of asylum seekers on temporary protection visas, are not, however, entitled to apply for citizenship. Nor are they able to access services on the same basis as permanent residents. A recent revision to the Citizenship legislation, introduced in response to terrorism concerns and anticipated to come into operation in January 2007, will increase the period of residence to three years, a figure similar to other major immigrant receiving countries. This change coincides with increasing debate about the "loyalty" of various immigrant groups, not least those from Islamic backgrounds.

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The range of services

Since the advent of mass air travel, settlement services for migrants and their families are normally provided after their arrival in Australia. The major exception involves those migrating under the skilled migration program who are required, as part of their acceptance for permanent residence, to establish that their qualifications have been accepted for work in Australia. Upon arrival in Australia access to services specifically targeting migrants such as information and adult English language classes, as well as immediate access to more general welfare benefits, are available but under increasingly restrictive conditions.

As a predominantly English speaking country, one of the major areas of provision for migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds has involved extensive provision of translation and interpreting services throughout government agencies. These are complemented by the development of a Telephone Interpreter Service which provides immediate access to an interpreter in many languages. The Adult Migrant Education Service (AMES) was established to provide free language and orientation classes to all adult immigrants although it now is required to compete with a range of private providers to win contracts to offer classes. From the 1970s, English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers have been available to the majority of students from NESB backgrounds. Special Intensive Language Centres have also been established for secondary school arrivals to provide intensive English teaching alongside the normal curriculum and orientation to Australian school culture before these students move into ordinary secondary schools where ESL teachers are also available.

Other language related provisions have included the establishment of the government Special Broadcasting Service, which provides radio programs in all main immigrant languages. It also operates a television channel which, as well as offering a range of films and international news services in a variety of languages, has the mission of providing programming of particular interest and relevance to migrant and indigenous groups although they are also widely watched by the general population. Schools can now teach a very wide range of languages although the diverse language backgrounds in school populations and competition from other subjects mean that, in practice, few secondary schools teach more than two languages other than English. However, in states with large NESB populations, special Saturday Schools have been established by the government so that secondary students can attend them and study the languages for the end of secondary schools examinations. In NSW in 2005 over 6,000 students in these schools studied 24 languages ranging from Arabic and Armenian to Ukranian and Vietnamese. Partly reflecting the very diverse language backgrounds in many

schools, bilingual education is not common in Australia although specialist community language teachers in primary schools do sometimes offer transitional bilingual programs. Other government initiatives involve funding non-profit ethnic community groups to run out-of-hours language schools while offering curriculum and professional development support for their teachers.

A significant complement to language-related services are a variety of educational and training programs that are designed for both migrants *and* the wider population to gain the knowledge and skills to operate in a diverse, multicultural society. Labour market programs have been particularly important for skilled arrivals. Equally important, however, have been the range of formal and informal educational initiatives that target the whole population. These start at school level where curriculum content has been extensively widened to reflect the diversity of Australian cultures and experiences and progress through to tertiary and vocational courses where professionals are equipped with knowledge and skills to work with a diverse range of clients and patients.

Also important have been the many changes in institutions and organizational structures to take account of the population's diverse experiences and cultures. These involve areas of society as diverse as the legal system and the arts. Thus the Law Reform Commission has reported on issues affecting the operation of the legal system while the major arts funding organization, the Australia Council, has developed specific programs catering for multicultural and community arts initiatives. As this brief summary indicates, a distinctive feature of Australian multicultural policy is that programs target the whole population as well as migrants. They have also involved significant institutional reform.

After 30 years of program development and institutional change, the current key multicultural programs identified by the national government are:

- *Living in harmony*, which includes Harmony Day;
- *Fairer government services and programs*, which involves its Access and Equity strategy;
- *Diversity works!*, which is concerned with promoting the benefits for business and the economy of using the cultural and linguistic skills of the Australian workforce;
- *Muslim Community Reference Group*, which was set up following the July 2005 bombings in London;
- *National Action Plan*, which will formulate a government and community approach to address increased global, religious and political extremism threatening Australia's national security and social cohesion.

Many of the government's achievements in overcoming the disadvantage of immigrant groups and changing Australian attitudes to diversity are, paradoxically, being put at risk by other government policies which have increased popular fears of terrorism and of those, such as Muslims, linked with it.

Evaluation

After three decades of increasingly diverse and substantial immigration coinciding with a policy of multiculturalism, Australia has become a far more cosmopolitan society with greater diversity in cultural practices, daily life and institutions than would have been envisaged at the end of the 1960s. There has been widespread public support for many of the changes in areas such as gastronomy, entertainment, the arts and sport. There have also been relatively high levels of inter-ethnic marriage. Accompanying this diversity there has not been the development of ethnic ghettoes in the way commonly found in many other urbanized societies. There is also evidence of economic mobility for migrants and their descendants at a level which, with Canada, exceeds that in other Western industrial societies (Inglis and Model, in press). Underlying this economic mobility is a pattern of educational attainment which, again with Canada, exceeds that in other comparable countries with substantial migrant populations. This has been identified as linked to the substantial commitment to teaching English (OECD 2006) and, one might also add, other educational innovations to cater for diversity.

Despite these indications of success, the future is problematic. Until recently, in spite of ongoing debates about multicultural policy, there were few signs of the overt conflict and threats to social cohesion that many local and international critics predicted would accompany a policy not predicated on the basis of cultural homogeneity. One reason was that Australia's approach to multiculturalism had successfully managed the difficult task of supporting diversity while at the same time developing a unifying commitment to the wider Australian society, albeit a society which has undergone major changes in its institutions and structures over three decades.

Over the last decade many of the factors that were important in the successful implementation of the early changes have declined. These include the acceptance of government responsibility for social welfare; the existence of a system of labour market regulation supportive of workers rights; and commitment from political leaders not hankering for an unconsidered retention of the "old" Australian values and culture. Policies intended to restructure the Australian economy to meet the challenges of economic globalization and based on principles of economic rationalism have affected both immigrants and long-established Australians as have cutbacks in government spending on welfare and support services for the most disadvantaged in the community. One indication of the fault lines in social cohesion was the success of the

populist Pauline Hanson One Nation Party in state and national elections in the mid-1990s. Its success has been linked to popular concerns sparked by the economic and social changes which found expression in anti-immigrant and anti-indigenous social policies and hostility towards many results of economic restructuring. It also was fuelled by claims that multiculturalism was a threat to "Australian values" and the "Australian way of life." The reluctance of key political leaders to take a stance against the more outrageous and inaccurate claims of the One Nation Party further fanned the flames of prejudice. A consequence was that many people from Asian backgrounds, who were the major target of One Nation hostility, began to question their ability to become fully incorporated and accepted into Australian society. Another consequence was that political parties shifted their agendas to attract these populist causes.

Since 2001 and the Australian government's active commitment to the War on Terror, Australia's diverse Muslim population of nearly 300,000 people (1.5% of the population), one-third of whom are Australian-born, have increasingly felt themselves marginalized and depicted as being "un-Australian," as stereotypical international images of Muslims are applied to those living in Australia. The rioting in December 2005 in Sydney when gangs of predominantly Anglo-Celtic youths attacked Muslim beachgoers in retaliation for the alleged attack by a group of "Middle-Eastern" youths on a lifeguard the previous weekend, highlighted the extent to which anti-Muslim sentiment built up in support of the War on Terror fuels hostility towards Australians perceived to be from that background. Despite national shock about the events and the role played in them by media identities calling for protection of the "Australian way of life," represented in this case by enjoyment of the beaches, the subsequent responses by government, the legal system and the media led to increasing the alienation of many Muslims who felt that they, rather than the youths who began the rioting, were being cast as the real villains (Inglis 2006).

In earlier periods of Australian history, when assimilation was the dominant policy, immigrants also became the targets of hostility in times of economic recession and war. What is now evident after three decades of multiculturalism in Australia is that, despite educational efforts directed to understanding cultural diversity and the need for racial tolerance within the framework of a commitment to Australian values such as democracy and the rule of law, accusations that a particular group, such as Muslims, lack a range of often vague or unspecified "Australian" values, especially when expressed by prominent social figures, can still gain populist support. Indicative of worries about irresponsible statements are the threats of resignation by several members of the government's hand-picked Muslim Community Reference Group concerned at remarks by the Prime Minister on the radio, and repeated in a popular newspaper, which singled out sections of the Muslim community as resisting integration by not embracing Australian values and culture, being unable to speak English and not understanding that men and women have equality (*Daily Telegraph*, 2 September 2006).

As the incident highlights, many of the government's achievements in overcoming the disadvantage of immigrant groups and changing Australian attitudes to diversity are, paradoxically, being put at risk by other government policies which have increased popular fears of terrorism and those, such as Muslims, linked with it. The unfortunate aspect of this outcome is that it has the potential to increase alienation among young Muslims, many of whom also have been less economically successful than their peers in other communities. If this happens and young Muslims do, indeed, become involved in terrorist activities, the blame should not be immediately placed on multiculturalism without examining other government policies and actions which are undermining integration and social cohesion.

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Note

[1] A brief summary of the official account of these changes and associated policy statements can be found on the Website of the Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/06evolution.htm). The more detailed implications of these changes in relation to programme delivery up to the early 1990s are discussed in Lanphier, M. and O. Lukomsky (1994).