Hard Shell and Soft Center

Australia as a Truly Modern Nation

Andrew Jakubowicz

Abstract

When PM Howard referred to Australia early in 2002 as a 'truly modern nation', he was alluding to a conflation of culture, technology, economic organisation and social ideology. Yet lying just below the surface were a series of policy and social initiatives that were giving concrete form to this presentation.

Modernity has been presented as either a purely western structure of thought and practice to be adopted (either positively or negatively) by other cultures, or a mode of economic organisation susceptible to many cultural manifestations. Australian modernity - the form of the nation state 100 years after its creation – reflects the intersections of history and geography, the effect of the multiple imperialisms in which its has been implicated, and the reformulations of the modernist project undertaken by neo-liberalism over the past decade.

Australian modernity at the national level is thus being tested by resurgent social values of Christian conservatism, active government priorities of disengagement, and a rapidly expanding culture of surveillance and obedience. Yet in the states social democratic governments seem to be in the ascendancy; while heavily influenced by neo-liberalism, they have moved into the more consensual space of the British Third Way (itself influenced by post-Marxist sociology and its reflections on the contradictions of modernity).

How are these trends being experienced? What sorts of transformations are occuring? How is the social fabric being re-constituted?

Three dimensions of analysis are used to explore the tensions that are apparent . These are:

    a. de-communalisation of social relations

    b. de-secularisation of social programs

    c. de-legitimation of social diversity.

Each of these dimensions encompasses an interlinked range of action, reaction and resistance. The central dynamic of change is analysed through an eight point model of orientations to change – instigation, advocacy, support, acceptance, adaptation, avoidance, resistance, and evasion.

The case studies involved will include:

    a. De-communalisation of social relations through the development of social policy in regard to Indigenous people, people with disabilities

    b. De-secularisation and the influence of Christian world views in immigration and social policy

De-legitimation of moral diversity through developments in security legislation, immigration control, and attacks on alternative cultural world views.

Introduction

In the air-conditioned serenity of an Adelaide (South Australia) convention centre, the heat of the southern summer kept at bay by the energy hungry technology, Australian Prime Minister John Howard addressed the delegates at the opening session of the World Congress on Information Technology in February 2002. Five months before, the twin towers of the New York World Trade Center had been destroyed by kamikaze teams that had hijacked other technologies of communication – large passenger aircraft. Low tech weaponry (box cutters) and a sophisticated understanding of American culture and psychology had enabled the hijackers to take over the planes, and then turn them into weapons of serious destruction. Their targets were symbols of global western modernity (the towers) and the heart of U.S. military power, the Pentagon.

It would be nearly another eight months before hundreds of Australians would be killed or injured, along with people of many other nations (both western and Asian) in a terrorist attack on two nightclubs in Kuta, the resort town on the Indonesian island of Bali. Again the weapons would be fairly low tech – commercially available chemicals, a Mitsubishi van and a couple of cell-phones.

Howard proposed to the IT industry delegates from around the globe, at the meeting of its most globalised industry, that:

> You'll find a modern, thriving, innovative nation, you'll find a nation with a strong and growing economy... an Australian nation and ... an Australian people very confident and very positive about our place in the world and the contribution that we can make to it. A nation that identifies itself very strongly with the great liberal democratic tradition. A nation that has aligned itself unambiguously with the leadership of the United States in the fight against terrorism. A nation uniquely placed in the Asian-Pacific region and being steadily enriched by new settlers from that region who are contributing greatly to the diversification of our skills base, ... but also a nation that has very deep roots with Europe and North America. (Howard 2002)

Howard's speech reflected the broad ideology of the national government, and its prospective orientation towards globalization and national interests during a period when national sovereignty would come under increased pressure. The central idea in this speech is the sense of what is entailed by the word 'modern'. Howard himself expands on its implications – through his unambiguous and uncritical celebration of late capitalism, through his nationalist rhetoric, and through his geo-political charter of priorities.

Yet the modern to which Howard referred remains overall an unexplored terrain, the trajectories of modernity that he drew on not systematically analysed. While there has been a considerable discussion of the new conservative program, in the popular media and in scholarly work , the weight carried by the concept of the neo-conservative modern has not been judged. As Carol Johnson notes in her comparison of Blairite Britain and Howard's Australia, the important words - 'modernized', 'imaginative', 'dynamic', 'innovative' – link to a broader cultural agenda that celebrates other hierarchies of power (ethnicity, gender) and avoids more embarrassing, past, imperial moments (Johnson 2002).

Thoroughly Modern

The idea of 'modern' carries enormous political as well as analytical potency; it is set against the pre-modern or the traditional, while it encompasses a future orientation

rather than one nostalgic for an imagined past. Kahn proposes that the modern 'is always more than an objective social process (call it modernisation) , and/or a specific constellation of social forces (call it modernity). It is always also a particular state of human consciousness (call it modernism) without which we could never speak of ourselves as modern. ' (Kahn 2001). Kahn, after Wagner (Wagner 1999) argues that the abstracted modernist process described by writers such as Turner (Turner 1990) and Giddens (Giddens 1991) fails to account for these three surfaces of the modern object, and thus provides an ineffective tool for understanding exactly that process of global influence to which Giddens (1991: 15) for instance sees modernity laying claim.

The mainstream evocation of the 'modern' can be found in the combination of thought derived from Weber Marx and Hegel that celebrates complex modes of production, the rationalization of knowledge and the emergence of the autonomous citizen actor. For Giddens (who went on to be the *eminence grise* to Tony Blair and the theoretician of the Third Way), modernity involved industrialisation of production, a capitalist mode of production, the nation state, and organizational reflexivity.

Kahn argues that the Western, uncritical and evangelical perspective on modernity cannot account for apparently similar phenomena occurring on a world scale, but without apparently all the same social and cultural manifestations as occurred in Europe. The most difficult issue remains the tension between Weberian articulations of bureaucratic rationality with autonomous human subjectivity, as against the tendency in 'non-Western' societies to promote wealth creation and capitalist economic processes, while resisting liberal democratic modes of political process.

Exploring this tension, Charles Taylor contends that two theories of modernity challenge one another – a cultural theory based on the rise in the West of a culture of modernity; and on the other, an a-cultural theory that focuses on reason, secularization, scientific world-views, and social transformations caused by broad economic changes (Taylor 2001). Taylor condemns the a-cultural approach, arguing that it views modernity as a loss of traditional values and the atomization of the social – Weber's *gemeinschaft* /*gesellschaft* transformation, or Durkheim's conceptualisation of the transformation from organic to mechanical solidarity. Rather he suggests, we should recognise that all theorizing is rooted in a cultural framework, conditioned by the dynamics and interests that produce ideology, and that the meaning of modernity is necessarily going to be set by the function (broadly speaking) that the concept will have in the context in which it is used. We also need to recognize that the constellation of western modernity is not inevitable, and that different cultures bring their own histories and ideologies into an engagement with globalizing capitalism, technology and science.

Thus when the modern is extolled – be it in Sydney or Shanghai – we need to ask to what purpose is the concept being put, and for what ends and with what goals is it being mobilised?

Howard's speech raises two questions then about modernity in Australia – what is being claimed, and what is being denied? And therefore, what is the modern artefact that neo-conservatism is constructing in the great south land?

Globalisation and the Modern in Australia

The modern is today closely linked to the processes of globalisation, though what the exact linkages are, and how the dynamic is to be explained, have specific national characteristics. While post-war Australia is in a very real sense the encapsulation of late European imperialism and the post-colonial transformation of colonial settler societies, the rapidity of globalisation has been most apparent in the last two decades. The first national government to embrace a sort of non-aligned global trajectory was the Hawke Labor administration of 1983. Hawke came to power as the Fraser conservative government collapsed around the impossibility of both supporting national capital against , and opening up the economy to, international capital movements. One of the first decisions of the new government, and possibly its most important, was to 'float' the Australian currency. The Australian dollar went into free-fall against the US dollar, and the financial institutions imploded as bank closures, mergers, and openings forever changed the pathways through which capital would circulate.

Much of the aggressive engagement with the global dynamics of late capitalism took place under the guidance and exhortatory supervision of Paul Keating, whose later vision of global integration would have Australia sitting uncomfortably on the edge of the Yen-zone, while the Euro and the US Dollar drew their own regional economies around them. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Australia was pushed by global forces into a new economic bifurcation, with a global, metropolitan and cosmopolitan modernity dominating financial markets, and a more lethargic and suburban/ rural sphere absorbing many of the economic and social consequences of these changes. The cultural trauma generated by this period would settle in deep to form a tense and contradictory modernist political aesthetic by the late 1990s.

The end of the millennium became then a period of managing contradictions – the national government was bent on conceiving and then realizing a vision for a new conservative modernity. Essentially it had both to sustain the trajectory into a globalised world, through strongly supporting initiatives such as the multilateral agreement on investment, while resisting global governance in any codification of morality through the United Nations. Globalisation helped both frame and illuminate what the new modernity would contain.

Cultural Trauma and the Parameters of the Modern

Governments play many roles; one of their most important in terms of social cohesion and solidarity remains the interpretation of the national environment – the telling to the nation of stories about the nation. Such story-telling is a constant process of initiation, reaction, negotiation and integration, a role that becomes ever more critical if the nation is confronted with rapid change that has a traumatic effect. Sztompka and Alexander (Sztompka 2001) have proposed a model of the cultural incorporation of trauma that can be applied to the fashioning of the 'truly modern' Australia.

Australia has been confronted with a series of major changes, sufficiently large and transformational to be considered traumatic. The opening up of the economy to globalisation has been the overarching structural change – with the most significant social consequences. Associated with these economic changes have been changes in terms of population (especially the inflow of 'non-western' immigrants and refugees, and the increasing economic role of women) and culture (global concerns with human rights, and cultural orientations from the U.S.A.). In most recent times other elements

of Australia's geographical/historical location have been foregrounded in domestic politics – especially the 'liberation' of East Timor, the September 11 2001 events, the 'war on terrorism', and the Bali bombings. While these examples may appear disconnected, they each contain significant 'contradictory' elements, generated by deep-seated tensions over social power, cultural hierarchies, and national identity.

The Sztompka/Alexander thesis proposes a sequence of events focused on interpretation and meaning-making, in the face of 'shock'. The first round focuses on the meaning of the shock, and how sense can be made of it. This initial stage-setting is critical – as it is often this initial naming that will frame all future developments. The longer-term process then is fashioned by the way in which carrier groups pick up on and amplify the narratives. This 'elocutionary success' of the initial naming is then carried out into the society as 'explanation', whereby it becomes integrated over time into the core culture of the society.

Much of the success of the Australian national government in sustaining its extraordinary hegemony since 1996 lies in its capacity to mobilize the trauma associated with a series of these 'shocks', and build a sequence of deepening layered and reinforcing narratives of the new modernity. Thus when PM Howard speaks of the modern nation, he can point to a diverse range of phenomena all tied together by the narratives of trauma and recovery, explained by a sustained cultural sense of 'Australian-ness'.

Essential Modernity

In his discussion of the problems with the concept of modernity, Kahn (Kahn 2001)draws on Turner's 'objective sense' of modernity, which is described as the result of:

> [a] process of modernization, by which the social world comes under the domination of asceticism, secularization, the universalistic claims of instrumental rationality, the differentiation of various spheres of the lifeworld, the bureaucratization of economic, political and military practices, and the growing monetarization of values.... (Turner 1990)

These characteristics fit comfortably with the vision espoused by Howard in his February 2002 speech. Yet as Kahn points out, they are curiously de-cultured descriptions, that may be relevant to any society dealing with industrialisation and the extended penetration of capitalist modes of production. So an analysis of modernity in a particular nation state has to draw on each of the dimensions to which Kahn refers – and in particular, the 'consciousness' of the society, that is, the stories it tells itself about what it means to be a member of the nation, and a citizen of the state, what it means to be 'modern'.

Thus the core contest must be the narratives of the modern that challenge each other, on each of the many parameters that Turner and others have identified. The narratives do not of course stand alone – they both direct in prospect and rationalise in retrospect the deeper policies and practices undertaken by governments and large social institutions.

The New Australian Conservative Modernity

The modernist project in Australia comprises two dimensions that are broadly concerned with economic and social change, and three that are concerned with cultural, ethnic and class power. These dimensions intersect, creating a grid of

interactivity , with complex , comprehensible but at times unpredictable outcomes. The introduction of the cultural dimensions suggests that the ideal type model of modernity espoused by Turner is being compromised by specific national systems of meaning and post-colonial rationalization , moving therefore away from those generalisations that the ideal type tries to encompass.

The following matrix identifies one way of conceptualizing the tensions within contemporary Australian modernity, while recognizing that the policy processes involved respond to a variety of social and cultural priorities. Each cell reflects a node of power in the Foucauldian sense, that is, a focal point of contestation and struggle that reveals the processes and relations of power at work. Thus I am not proposing a monolithic and unchallenged behemoth, but rather a complex political terrain across which many battles are being fought.

An Australian Modernity Matrix			
	National/ international Capital interests (class)	**Masculinism/ familialism (gender)**	**White/ Christianism (ethnicity/culture)**
Marketisation	De-regulation of labour market	Re-definition of disability as 15 hrs work capable (affects women overwhelmingly)	De-secularisation of welfare service delivery
	De-regulation of environment		Recovery of holding costs from asylum seekers
	Opposition to Kyoto protocol	600,000+ men on income support lists	Government support for Christian fundamentalist schools
	Sale of Telstra	Women as 'natural carers' and 'homemakers' so they will withdraw from labour market	
	Privatisation of policing and incarceration		
	Private health fund subsidies	Struggle over the role of maternity benefits in sustaining birth rate, and retaining women in the workforce – and whether government or industry should pay	
	Increased user pays in education		
	US/Australia free trade agreement		

	National/ international Capital interests (class)	Masculinism/ familialism (gender)	White/ Christianism (ethnicity/culture)
De-socialisation	Work for the dole	Rising homophobia	Work for the dole
	Welfare sector reforms	Opposition to lesbian IVF	Indigenous land rights reforms
	Reduce government social sector expenditure	Moral panic over unfecund women	Privatisation of pastoral leases
		'Family friendly' payments	Christianisation of community services
	Surveillance and punishment of welfare 'cheats'	Attack on chador as symbolic of terrorism	Anglican bishop appointed as Governor General (at time of crisis in legitimacy of Christian churches – over sexual harassment)
	Polarisation of classes and intensification of income and wealth disparities	Refusal to accept UN CDAW appeal process.	
		National government support for men's groups in Family Court wars	Moral panic over Muslims
			National government support for ethnic/religious schools
De-secularisation	Fragmentation of more traditional relations between ethnicity, religion, class and political position, though stronger links in interaction between religious participation and political conservatism; at same time oppositional forces increasingly focused around religious bodies as class political parties/trade unions dissipate	Reinforcement of the Christian family with male head of household	2003 Honours awards- religion is solely identified with Christianity; Jews are listed under community; no Muslims or Buddhists identified.
		Re-invigorisation of traditional Christian ideas of woman as 'mother'	
		Lyons Forum role in conservative family tax policy 1996, see family as 'God-ordained' fundamental unit of society	Rise in pressure from conservatives on welfarist and interventionist clerics, reflecting awareness of de-secularisation as political battlefield
			Pauline Hanson asserts Christian values underpin the nation
	Strong Christian values among conservative political leaders – Howard Fischer Costello Abbott Kemp		PM Howard includes 'God' in proposed constitutional preamble

	National/ international Capital interests (class)	Masculinism/ familialism (gender)	White/ Christianism (ethnicity/culture)
De-legitimation of diversity	Sustained cultural attack on poor – represented as 'failed' workers, capable of their own salvation	Heterosexual nuclear families seen as the 'norm' against which all other family forms assessed	Attack on multiculturalism; civic identity places white Australia at core
	Ideal of 'real Australia' – battler family against the odds	Women of colour disappear from public life – eg television	National government assertively Anglo Australian (and overwhelmingly Protestant)
		Demonisation of Muslim women and gender relations in Islam	Increased racialisation of social identity; re-assertion of traditional hierarchies based on Anglocentrism and Angloconformity

The horizontal dimension identifies the broad sociological categories underlying the psychological, cultural and material distinctions operating in Australian society (putting to one side for the moment more physiological dimensions such as age, disability and health status). Thus class can refer to any or all of a sense of capacity and individual expectation and ambition, to a shared world view, and to real opportunities to amass wealth and/or control the means of production. Gender is similarly a set of psychological, cultural and material relationships; culture/ religion/ ethnicity are also refer to modes of social relationship at the personal, group and societal levels.

The vertical dimension encompasses specific components of a social agenda, born from ideology and framed by larger global forces and processes. Marketisation refers to a process through which social and economic relations become mediated through a nexus evaluated in terms of financial benefit, so that decisions and engagements are increasingly instrumental. De-socialisation can be understood as a parallel process – where marketisation seeks to introduce exchange models into pre-existing social relations, de-socialisation seeks to erode or destroy relations mediated through the state and previously geared towards sustaining social cohesion without consideration of economic benefit. De-secularisation addresses one of the fundamental lynchpins of what many take to be the modernist project – rationality based on secular philosophy. Social relations mediated by the state or developed through state operated services are targeted for replacement by mediation through religiously-based institutions, or based on religious beliefs about social relations (Maddox 2001) . The de-legitimisation of diversity does not deny diversity, but rather seeks to reassert a traditional hierarchy of cultural power within which diversity is only acceptable within the dominant moral order, and minorities either submit or experience excoriation and marginalisation.

Thus it may appear that some of the directions in which Australian modernity is moving are counter-intuitive within a modern nation, while others are in keeping with Weberian and others' concepts about modernity. Religion is being re-asserted over rationality, charity over rights, homogeneity over difference, hierarchy over equality, competition over collaboration and so on. However there is also a press for instrumental rationality in areas of state provision, a heightening of individuals' responsibility (and at times desperation) for their own survival. Yet here we see that

the general models of modernity have to take account of the national specificities that disrupt simple lines of theoretical arguments about universal modernities.

Australian Empire

Australia is not so much therefore a truly modern nation – a nation state amongst other nation states – but rather an state with imperial contradictions (Hardt and Negri 2001) with two outstanding tasks confronting those who manage its interests. They must defend the nation against external competing empires, and they must ensure total acceptance of the empire within – overcoming any remaining resistance by the original inhabitants and owners, assimilating those diverse peoples brought in from elsewhere, and reassuring those longer term subjects of the empire whose loyalty has to be constantly secured.

The Australian empire is also a satrapy, a subordinate unit of the larger global empire to which Hardt and Negri refer in their discussion of global capitalism and the integration through their economies of nation-states. So to understand Australian modernity this wider context needs to be taken into account. Its unitary nature faces continual dis-aggregation because of the federal form – a national government and six states and two territories. In 2003 we have the curious situation of the national government being an almost unassailable conservative coalition, with all the states and territories apparently unassailable Labor Party governments. How does our matrix model of Australian modernity account for this bifurcation?

The model can only work if the imperial problematic is included – so that we see a 'hard shell' defending the nation against external threats (other empires driven by a desire to take what 'our' forebears had already seized from the indigenous people). The notion of 'us' used here does not require a formal central power - but rather refers to cultural and economic flows that in concert might erode the specific constellation of values and practices that have characterized Australia prior to the large post-war immigration – and especially that from greater Asia since 1975. Set against that 'hard shell' is a softer, more communal inward looking locality – the states with their concerns for security, nurturing and creativity. This dynamic tension generates a field of interlocking political conflicts, where the various tasks of empire come into collision around that central issue in the ideology of modernity, that is the concept of the individual.

Does the desire of the individual within the family –the sanctuary that guarantees the reproduction of the species – stand at the core of the society (the 'God ordained" centre) ?, or are individuals formed by the groups which give them life, and determine their life-long interdependence? Modernity cannot choose between these options; somehow it has to work with both of them - though its capacity to integrate them remains limited and the outcomes of such attempts always appear messy.

This means that celebrations of the individual in the competitive market place (notions of individual responsibility for economic survival) have to be co-located with celebrations of community and communalism in periods of social tension. Sometimes this accommodation is managed through the celebration of volunteerism, an example of active citizenship, where the citizen chooses to act for the social good (thus contributing to social capital). Where choice is replaced by duty, accommodation is achieved through the celebration of selfless personal sacrifice – often in situations where state delivered services have been cut back or privatised (and then become too expensive to use).

The processes through which these changes occur demonstrate the interaction of structure and agency in social relations. Specific social groups with particular agendas respond to perceived social issues through the development of strategies for change. In te contemporary Australian situation the interaction of cultural, political and economic interests touch upon the broad insecurity felt by many of the social realm, and allow for systematic re-orientations of social relations. In particular, the social strategies of modernization and the constitution of a national social democratic modernity implemented in the wake of the Second World War, are been being re-formed, to dissipate the role of government and promote the individualization and modularisation of the social relations.

In the following case studies, offered in outline here, a spectrum of relations to change are proposed – from active instigation to evasion. These 'stances' can be described as *instigation, advocacy, support, acceptance, adaptation, avoidance, resistance,* and *evasion.* A simplified diagram would present such change situations:

Advocate

Instigate

Support

The new modernity

Evade

Accept

Adapt

Resist   *Avoid*
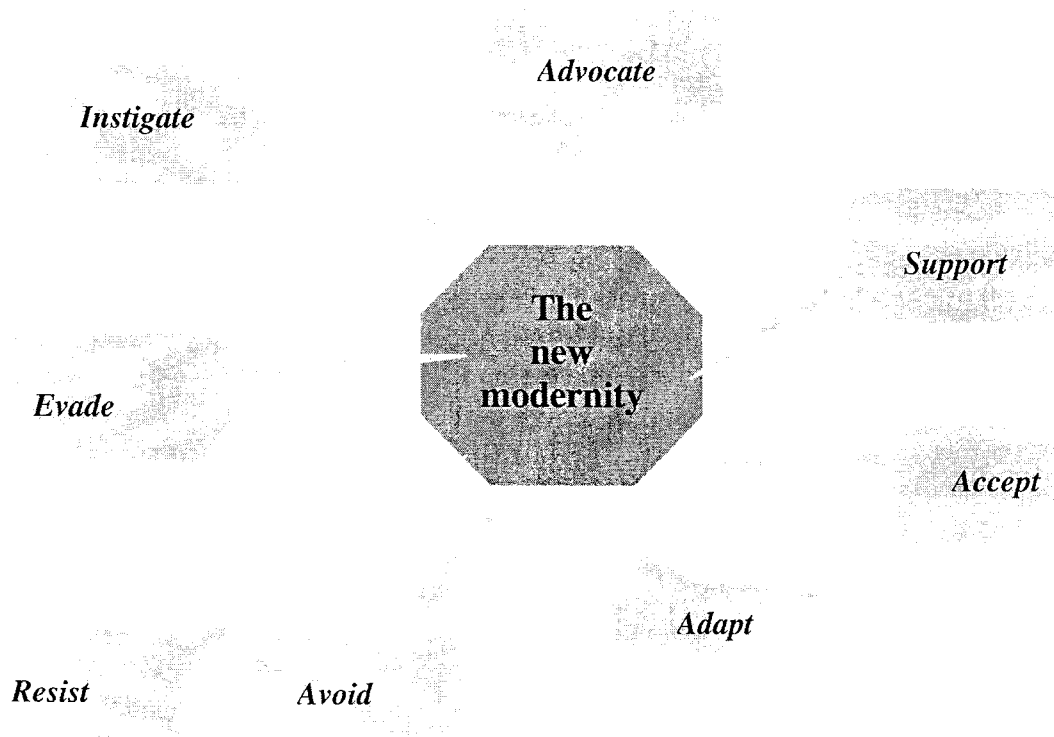
We turn now to three expositions concerning the new modernity, and the contradictions they entail for particular social groups. The model of stances to the new modernity outlined should be born in mind in considering the complex range of possibilities that each situation offers.

De-communalisation – Indigenous People and People with Disabilities

Modernisation theory usually argues that communal or ascribed characteristics will reduce in importance, as achieved and market-based characteristics increase. Thus one of the typical issues in modernity remains the tension between the individualization of populations, and their rootedness in communities of birth – especially for minority cultural groups in colonial settler societies.

The emerging social agenda of the new modernity re-asserts this individualized vision for the future of indigenous people. Recent history has seen essentially a corralling of Indigenous people into locations where culture is undermined and lost, and neither traditional communities nor modern opportunities exist. However the assertion by Indigenous communities of their rights to both these apparently competing goals (as in the arguments by activists such as Noel Pearson) has been met by a new right agenda that seeks to atomise communities, while filtering out those individuals who can meld into the wider society. In ideological terms new right intellectuals such as P. P. McGuinness, editor of the neo-conservative *Quadrant* journal, and authors such as Keith Windschuttle, have been suggesting that traditional Aboriginal society was primitive – almost classically Hobbesian – and that the arrival of the colonial settlers (luckily British according to this line of thought) – saved the indigenous population from destruction, a certainty had the imperial power been Spanish or French. Imperialism was inevitable, thus the question was only what sort of modernity would overwhelm the native peoples. This view seeks to undermine Indigenous claims to communal rights, and mirrors the position taken by the Prime Minister Howard in the late 1990s, through legislation that cut back Indigenous rights to land apparently secured in the Mabo case of 1992. Thus the new modernity offers the individualization of the social world as a form of equality to indigenous people, while disregarding the collapse of social infrastructures that the settlement process has caused.

Disability policy has been a touchstone of community and its expression as a realm of caring. People with disabilities began to build a social movement concerned with identifying and articulating, and then securing rights to equality of opportunity during the 1970s, with a first social milestone being the recognition by the UN of 1981 as the Year of disabled persons. The disability movement is the least well researched of Australian social movements, and is rarely considered in broader discussions of social change in Australia (Meekosha and Jakubowicz 1999). However disabled people are no less affected than others by the new modernity, though in ways that do not fit easily into models based on race or sexual difference. The disability movement seeks rights that are based on the acceptance of the community of interest shared by people with disabilities, irrespective of their particular impairment. It identifies the social relations of disability as the critical nexus, these being the processes through which people with impairments are rendered disabled by societal arrangements.

The new modernity is uncomfortable with ideas of communal rights, as we have seen, and promotes the individual juridical subject laden with responsibilities as a more appropriate model. Disability presents a challenge for such a world view, though not an insurmountable one. During the 1980s the disability rights movement managed to build a relationship with the national government that produced two valuable outcomes – a Disability Services Act (1986) and a Disability Discrimination Act (1993). The first recognized the right of disabled people to autonomy and control of

their own lives as far as possible, and promoted the concept of the least restrictive alternative. The second sought to prevent discrimination and mandated disability action plans for federal government agencies, through which disabled equality could be advanced.

In 2000 the national government appointed a review team headed by a professional from a Christian charity to review welfare services, including federal provision for people with disabilities. The major effect of this review was to provide a framework for reducing the base level federal support to people with disabilities, and shifting large numbers of people who were disabled, from disability support pensions (DSP) to unemployment benefits (and the draconian compliance rules associated with these payments). The underlying argument was that the market was the appropriate place for everyone that could work at least 15 hours per week – and that the DSP masked unwillingness to work – not real disability.

De-secularisation – The Resurgence of Christianity as a Moral and Cultural Code

It should already be apparent that the de-communalisation of conceptions of the social realm are influenced by specific religious attitudes – especially those drawn from conservative wings of the Christian churches. While Australia does not yet have a situation similar to the moral majority's hegemony over the Republican Party in the USA, nevertheless the influence of the so-called Lyons group on Liberal Party thinking has been well documented (Maddox 2001). While the ALP government of the period 19883-1996 was influenced by the moral codes of the progressive Protestants and Catholics, and from social reform agendas of wider social movements, the conservative government more closely relates to evangelical Anglicanism, conservative Catholicism and fundamentalist Protestant groups.

This conservative Christian agenda fits comfortably with the individualized new modernity in its emphasis on the family, the market and the values of competitive individualism. In the wider society the Catholic church has chosen a strong conservative, Archbishop Pell, to lead the Sydney congregation – similarly the Anglican church in Sydney has chosen a conservative best known for his opposition to the ordination of women. More widely the churches have become active in promoting conservative social agendas. Thus the welfare review was headed by a St Vincent de Paul official, while the Drug Advisory Council is chaired by a Salvationist.

The decision by the national government in the wake of the failed referendum on the Republic, to appoint an Anglican Archbishop as Governor General (thus effectively head of state) marked an official turn – in the wake of the socially progressive and Catholic ALP appointment, former High Court judge William Deane. GG Hollingsworth's performance has been widely criticized, and it is clear that in a multicultural society the choice of a representative of the established church in the imperial homeland reflects a conscious statement about hierarchy and power.

De-legitimation – Diversity under Challenge and the Reinforcement of the Cultural Hierarchy of Settlement

The processes already identified indicate that cultural hierarchy has re-emerged as a major dynamic of social and political life. The rise and incorporation of the One

Nation movement into the heart of conservative social policy reflects this process at work, and offers the characteristic tone of the new modernist project espoused by the national government. There is widespread public support for those elements of the conservative agenda that claim to protect Australians from threats from without – especially threats to what are advanced as core values.

The modernity project needs the atomization of peripheral communities and the allegiance of their individual members, while at the same time reinforcing certain sorts of communal association that further embed the settler hierarchy. Thus a multicultural policy (developed over the 1970s and 1980s) that is agnostic about the relative qualities of different cultures and seeks to ensure social cohesion through social justice, meets stiff resistance from a modernity that privileges individual success, and cherishes Christian values (however apparently secularized these may have become). In addition where that agenda needs to continue to secure the loyalty of earlier generations of citizens, it can only do so by celebrating their experience and denigrating or ignoring experiences of groups which are significantly different from the dominant sectors. This process underpins the discussion of cultural relations that suggests the dominance of whiteness, as a shorthand for this constellation of factors (Hage 1998).

The transformation of the multicultural agenda has been quite specific – its adjectival modifier is now 'Australian', its commitment to social justice has been removed, and a re-assertion of a national value consensus has been named – the UN day against racial discrimination is known in Australia as 'harmony day'. Interestingly though, in a globalised age the government recently legislated to allow multiple citizenships, with almost no opposition.

The focal point of the diversity debate has become the question of Islam in Australia – even more than Arabs per se (though few Australians comprehend the intricacies of the differences involved). A decade ago the focus was on Vietnamese refugees, and the rise of drug-related crime. The refugee crisis that has been partly manufactured by the government depends on the Islamic religion of most refugees for its impact, and the alien caste placed upon them. Yet the national agenda is far from simple – Australia still accepts regular intakes of refugees, usually after rigorous screening. For those arriving without permission, holding camps have been established that both process those awaiting determination, and hold those refused refugee status awaiting removal from the country. In addition camps have been established on the Pacific islands of Manus and Nauru.

The national government needs to be seen both to welcome desired immigrants (the high status well educated, wealthy and English speaking) for whom it is in global competition with Canada and the USA, and protect the country from undesired immigrants (low status, poor, low skills, little English) who seek to arrive. In a sense it seeks to import modernity through the population it craves, thereby gaining the investment in human capital made elsewhere. Strangely though there is a mooted recognition that 'real' refugees are often fairly well educated, highly motivated and aggressive – perfect candidates for the future conditions of the new modernity (as indeed so many refugees have proved to be in the past).

Conclusion

The truly modern nation that John Howard described in 2002 is held together by a number of factors that contradict each other. The civil society that modernity requires

in order to sustain the market relations of production, is being continually undermined by attacks on social bonds. At the same time pre-modern social relations can and do act to undermine the civil freedoms that are necessary for a democratic nation. Meanwhile the economic market is generating swathes of a new underclass – marked by ethnicity and locality.

Thus Australia presents on the surface as a society of great solidity, with apparent equality and opportunity. Yet this hard shell is rather more like a lava crust, its surface cohesion always more apparent than real – with the flows of heat beneath liable to turn the hard shell into a soft and dangerous morass.

References

Giddens, A. (1991). Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and society in the late modern age. Stanford, Cal., Stanford UniversityPpress.

Hage, G. (1998). White Nation. Sydney, Pluto.

Hardt, M. and A. Negri (2001). Empire. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.

Howard, J. (2002). Opening Address. World Congress on Information Technology, Adelaide.

Johnson, C. (2002). "The dilemmas of ethnic privilege." Ethnicities 2(2): 163-188.

Kahn, J. (2001). Modernity and Exclusion. London, Sage.

Maddox, M. (2001). For God and Country: Religious dynamics in Australian Federal politics. Canberra, Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Parliamentary Library.

Meekosha, H. and A. Jakubowicz (1999). "Disability, Political Activism, and Identity Making: A critical feminist perspective on the rise of disability movements in Australia, the USA and the UK." Disability Studies Quarterly 19(4): 393-404.

Sztompka, P. (2001). "Sotsial'noe izmenemie kak travma (stat'ya pervaya) [Social Change as Trauma Part 1]." Sotsiologicheskie Issledovaniya.: 6-16.

Taylor, C. (2001). Two theories of modernity. Alternative Modernities. D. Gaonkar. Durham, Duke University Press.

Turner, B. (1990). Periodization and politics in the postmodern. Theories of modernity and postmodernity. B. Turner. London, Sage.

Wagner, P. (1999). "The resistance that modernity constantly provokes: Europe, America and social theory." Thesis Eleven(58): 35-58.