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Chapter 3

From Social Justice to Social Cohesion: A History of Australian Multicultural Policy

Christina Ho

Australia was one of the first countries in the world to officially adopt a policy of multiculturalism, in the early 1970s. Until that time, the White Australia Policy had restricted non-European immigration, and there was no official recognition of the cultural difference of immigrants who had settled in Australia. The policy of assimilation, in force from 1901 to the mid-1960s, expected immigrants to abandon their cultures and languages and blend into the mainstream society. This approach proved unsustainable and was replaced by the policy of integration, in place until 1972. Integration did not expect immigrants to shed their original cultures and languages, and moreover recognised that new arrivals often experienced hardships and required specific assistance.

By 1973, the White Australia Policy had been abolished, and multiculturalism introduced. There is debate over the role played by key migrant advocates and organisations in realising the policy of multiculturalism, but its fundamental approach of recognising and valuing Australia's cultural diversity reflects the work of migrant groups and associations, who for many years had been promoting the survival of their language and heritage, and lobbying for funding and services for their constituents.

Since the 1970s, Australian multicultural policy has evolved through several stages, reflecting different ideological orientations and political contexts. This chapter presents some of this history, focusing on three phases:

- social justice (1970s and 1980s)
- productive diversity (1980s and 1990s)
- social cohesion (2000s to the present)

These phases sometimes overlap, and elements of one often continue to feature in others. Moreover, the core principle of multiculturalism – acknowledging and respecting Australia's

culturally diverse society – has been steadfastly maintained throughout the decades. However, the way in which this principle is enacted has varied, sometimes remarkably.

Shifts in multicultural policy typically reflect broader changes in government approaches to public policy, and prevailing ideological orientations. The rise of neo-liberalism in the 1980s and 1990s is one example. As social and economic policy generally became increasingly preoccupied with concerns of economic efficiency, multicultural policy followed suit. However, the more recent concern with social cohesion, reflecting global anxieties about terrorism and the place of Muslim minorities, has taken the spotlight off neo-liberalism, despite the continuing commitment to market-led approaches in policy-making more generally. In documenting multicultural policy history, this chapter analyses policy shifts as products of their historical contexts. Let's begin with the period leading up to the official introduction of multiculturalism in Australia.

Social justice: ethnic welfare through patronage

By the 1960s, it had become evident that many migrants were suffering from various forms of disadvantage, living in isolation and poverty, and confined to low-paid jobs.¹ In the 1970s, the Australian Ethnic Affairs Council (AEAC) identified language and employment as two main areas of migrant disadvantage, and warned that the concentration of migrants in low socio-economic strata 'devalues and stigmatises' ethnic communities and damages migrants' own self-image.²

Migrant disadvantage therefore framed most of the discussion of multiculturalism in the early 1970s. The Whitlam Labor Government (1972–75) increasingly recognised migrant communities as a part of Australian society, but primarily only in relation to socio-economic inequalities. Ethnic communities were

perceived as 'disadvantaged' groups, needing state intervention to address the injustices that they suffered.³ Castles notes that the Whitlam Government's approach to multiculturalism was not based on a notion of ethnicity, but was part of the overall development of a welfare state based on the assumption that class was the primary determinant of life chances.⁴

At the same time of course, the Australian Labor Party (ALP) realised that migrants represented a significant proportion of working-class voters, with potentially decisive votes in some urban constituencies. As Castles⁵ describes, the ALP set out to woo the 'migrant vote', organising Greek and Italian sections, and addressing migrants' educational and welfare needs.

The Whitlam Government's centrepiece of social policy reform – the Australian Assistance Plan – placed a special emphasis on migrant disadvantage. A Migrant Task Force consulted with migrant groups, and there were specific measures on pensions, housing, insurance, and childcare, among others.⁶ At the time, Martin wrote that the Australian Assistance Plan had the 'most potential for change' in relation to migrant questions, providing 'the vehicle by which the scattered groups of migrant and migrant-oriented welfare organizations could move towards the centres of political power' and acting as a catalyst to the development of more integrated and articulate migrant organisations.⁷

The conservative Fraser Government (1975–83), while downplaying the language of class and social justice, continued the emphasis on the provision of multicultural services, and more clearly articulated the principles of multiculturalism as official policy. The government-commissioned Galbally Report, the 'foundation document of multiculturalism',⁸ released in 1978, cemented the association between multiculturalism and welfare delivery, identifying the need for services for all migrants to ensure 'equal opportunity to realise their full potential' and 'equal access to programs and services'.⁹ The report noted that while the needs of migrants should, in general,

be met by mainstream services, 'special services and programs are necessary at present to ensure equality of access and provision'.¹⁰

In adopting the recommendations of the Galbally Report, the Fraser Government expanded existing settlement services, such as English language classes, migrant accommodation and orientation programs, interpreting and translating services, and assistance with overseas qualifications recognition. It also established multicultural resource centres to enable ethnic communities and voluntary agencies to cater to the welfare needs of migrants.¹¹

In emphasising migrant disadvantage and ethnic welfare, policy approaches in this era defined the problem as an 'ethnic problem', rather than one implicating Australian society as a whole. As Foster and Stockley¹² write of the Galbally Report, the assumption was that because Australian society was essentially democratic and egalitarian, the 'disadvantage' suffered by some migrants 'was directly related to deficiencies within those groups (for example, lack of competence in English and job skills) rather than being located within the structure of Australian society'.

The ethnic welfare approach ultimately constructed migrants as being deficient, confining multiculturalism to addressing migrant 'disadvantage'. For example, the Commonwealth Government's Child Migrant Education Program, inaugurated in 1970, targeted linguistically 'disadvantaged' children of non-English-speaking background (NESB).¹³ As the AEAC noted at the time,¹⁴ while the evidence did suggest that large numbers of NESB children under-achieved at school, defining them as deficient in the first instance (as those 'with little or no knowledge of English', as opposed to 'fluent in some language other than English') was likely to have been detrimental to their progress.

Nonetheless, the initial framework of social justice committed the government to addressing social inequality, bringing migrant issues squarely into the domain of welfare policy. At a time when

migrants fared poorly in almost all indicators of well-being, including employment, education and health, a welfare approach was well justified, despite its entrenching the image of the 'migrant as victim'.

This is not to imply that welfare for migrants was particularly generous, especially under Fraser's 'razor gang', who implemented stringent cuts to many areas of government spending. Fraser's cost-cutting saw the privatisation of migrant services, a strategy that also aligned well with ideologies of self-help and democratic inclusion of minorities. The Galbally Report had emphasised that multicultural policy needed to be informed by the experiences of migrants themselves, and urged that migrant organisations be funded to deliver services to new arrivals:

We believe that the ethnic communities themselves and the voluntary agencies can meet the welfare needs of migrants more effectively than government agencies and we recommend a special program of multicultural resource centres ... involving the local communities to the greatest possible extent in their management and operation.¹⁵

This position in part reflected the increasing mobilisation of migrant community organisations, which were agitating for greater political representation and access to mainstream political processes.¹⁶ Under Whitlam, consultation processes had encouraged the formal constitution of ethnic organisations. Bodies such as the Australian-Greek Welfare Society, the Italian welfare agencies CO.AS.IT and FILEF, and the Ecumenical Migration Centre became active in defining issues and policies. As Castles notes, 'A migrant rights movement developed, leading to the formation of Ethnic Communities Councils (ECCs) in all states'.¹⁷

Under Fraser, ethnic organisations grew more rapidly, as they were now funded to deliver many of the welfare services previously directly provided by the state. Castles¹⁸ argues that this 'ethnic group model', apart from being

cost-effective, was also a means for developing ideological legitimisation for an ethnically diverse society, and for enhancing social control over minorities. Multiculturalism was confined to 'the private sphere of the family, the ethnic association and the colourful festival'.¹⁹ The Galbally Report, in emphasising community delivery of services, reinforced a patron-client relationship by 'locking -in ethnic organizations to dependence on the Government' while simultaneously stressing the need for ethnic self-reliance.²⁰

Some scholars of multiculturalism have argued that the Fraser Government deliberately co-opted particular ethnic group leaders, 'tying their interests in maintaining power and status with the Government's interest in asserting a pale celebration of ethnicity as one means of managing and containing ethnic pressures for a more significant socio-cultural role in Australia'.²¹ Castles et al.²² argue that the Galbally Report was 'designed not to meet a mass demand, but to achieve a limited political goal: the incorporation into conservative politics of the ethnic middle classes'.

The outcome was the creation of an 'ethnic affairs industry', constructing a particular form of ethnic identity, as represented by ethnic organisations,²³ and building relationships of patronage between governments and ethnic communities. Government policies of this time offered more systematic recognition to migrants, 'but drew them into a hierarchy of political patronage'.²⁴

The 'ethnic affairs industry' created a new generation of migrant community 'leaders', attracted by the prospect of state funds and political power. These leaders typically came from the professional and business classes of migrant communities, and the most successful were those who could convert their financial, political or social capital into 'ethnic capital'.²⁵ These were the individuals able simultaneously to secure loyalty from their communities as effective guardians of their interests, as well as to maintain a leadership role in the eyes of state representatives.²⁶

Even at the time, there was uneasiness about the dominance of migrant community organisations in mediating between government and migrants. In 1977, the AEAC urged that migrants be given the opportunity to take part in community consultation 'as both individuals and members of ethnic groups'. It explained that 'while an important channel of communication between government and non-English speaking people is the ethnic community, it should never be assumed that all people of non-English background will want to communicate in this way'.²⁷

The corollary of granting official recognition to established migrant organisations was that it was difficult for other migrant voices to be heard. The Jupp Report²⁸ noted that many government agencies were inexperienced in engaging with migrants, tending to overlook them entirely, or to operate through the 'already overburdened channels of the Ethnic Communities Councils and their Federation'. It stated, 'There is an urgent need to widen the field of those formally consulted, and to use innovative means of consulting those who are often overlooked'.²⁹

Castles³⁰ suggests that the ethnic group model, which assumes the common interests of a particular 'ethnic community', may have had some justification with regard to the first generation of southern and eastern European migrant workers of the 1950s to the 1970s, but became less and less legitimate as migrant communities diversified, both in terms of birthplace and age.

Additionally, in assuming the internal homogeneity of migrant communities, the ethnic group model often reflected a male representation of community issues. As Martin writes, when pluralism boils down to ethnic pluralism, 'the claims of women are always secondary to, or a sub-clause of, the ethnic claim'.³¹ In a United States context, Okin³² has even asked whether multiculturalism is 'bad for women'. She argues that group rights for minority cultures may entrench gender inequality, because minority communities are invariably led by men, who are granted official recognition and legitimacy, even

when their communities engage in discriminatory practices against women and girls. At the most extreme level, recognition of minority group rights can lead to failure to intervene in cases of domestic violence, honour killings and the like, as these are seen to be 'traditional' cultural practices.³³

This can place women in a 'double bind', subjected to a convergence of racism and sexism in the majority society as well as sexism and male domination in their own community.³⁴ Speaking out about violence in their own community can fuel racism from the majority society, providing 'evidence' for racist claims about primitive or barbaric immigrant cultures. Meanwhile, women's own communities view them as traitors.³⁵

These tensions are still very much felt by many immigrant women in contemporary Australian multicultural society, despite the decline of the ethnic group model since the 1980s. At this time, the Hawke Labor Government attempted to bring migrant welfare services back into the mainstream.³⁶ The 'access and equity' strategy was introduced in 1985 to improve access to government services and programs by people of NESB. Commonwealth agencies were officially required to 'make their programs and services responsive to the needs of a culturally and linguistically diverse community'.³⁷ The emphasis was now on removing 'barriers to participation', based on ethnicity or gender. Rather than funding ethnic organisations to provide services to migrants, the 'access and equity' approach focused on ensuring that migrants could be catered for by mainstream services. Meanwhile, multiculturalism was increasingly framed in terms of addressing 'all Australians' rather than only immigrants.³⁸

The early focus on social justice goals soon largely gave way to considerations of economic efficiency, as the next section explains. Meanwhile, the demise of the ethnic group model altered the relationship between migrant community organisations and the state. With the 'mainstreaming' of services to migrants, ethnic organisations no longer enjoyed the same degree

of patronage from the government that they once did. However, the legacy of this patronage continues into the present era, in the form of often tightly controlled migrant organisations that still attempt to represent their communities to the government and mainstream society. While these organisations can contribute to the functioning of an effective civil society, as feminists and others have argued, ethnic community leadership often continues to operate in an exclusive and exclusionary manner, meaning that not all community members' interests are equally championed.

Productive diversity: multiculturalism meets neo-liberalism

From the late 1980s, multicultural policy shifted from migrant settlement services and redressing disadvantage to emphasise the economic benefits of cultural diversity. In an era of rapid globalisation and, in particular, greater economic engagement with Asia, a culturally diverse workforce, and an open multicultural society, came to be recognised as assets. In helping to improve Australia's overall economic performance, multiculturalism could be shown to benefit all Australians, rather than just ethnic groups, and policy increasingly turned to strategies for reaping the economic benefits of diversity.

This policy reorientation was also a response to growing community anxiety about immigration and multiculturalism, symbolised by the 'Blainey debates', sparked off by historian Geoffrey Blainey, who in a 1984 speech criticised the level of Asian immigration to Australia. During a period of economic downturn, concerns about migrants 'taking our jobs' were also becoming widespread. With critics of multiculturalism portraying the policy as providing undue benefits for 'special interests', adopting the more neo-liberal approach of emphasising economic benefits was an effective way of legitimating multiculturalism in the eyes of the general community.

One of the early indicators of this shift was the 1988 report of the Committee to Advise on Australia's Immigration Policies, chaired by Dr Stephen Fitzgerald. The Fitzgerald Report advocated reforming immigration policy according to economic principles. It argued: 'Selection methods need a sharper economic focus, for the public to be convinced that the program is in Australia's interests'.³⁹ Specifically, the report recommended that Australia's immigration program be refocused towards 'skilled, entrepreneurial and youthful immigrants'.⁴⁰ This was a break from the previous emphasis on family reunion migration, which did not assess applicants based on economic criteria.

In multicultural policy, the Hawke Government's 1989 *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* emphasised social justice (the right of all Australians to equality of treatment and opportunity, and the removal of barriers of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, gender or place of birth) but also introduced the dimension of economic efficiency (the need to maintain, develop and utilise effectively the skills and talents of all Australians).⁴¹ The *National Agenda*, 'the key government statement on multiculturalism for the rest of the millennium',⁴² stated:

By seeking to improve the management and use of our human resources, and thereby to contribute to a sustained improvement in our standard of living, multicultural policies serve the interests of all.⁴³

Some key policy initiatives in this era included the National Policy on Language, adopted in 1987 to encourage the learning of languages of economic and strategic significance, especially Asian languages, as well as maintaining the 'community languages' of migrant communities.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition was established in 1989 to streamline the transfer of migrants' skills to the Australian workforce.

Building on the *National Agenda*, in 1992, the Keating Labor Government (1992–96) introduced

a 'productive diversity' strategy, aimed to capitalise on the linguistic and cultural skills, business networks and market knowledge of Australia's diverse population.⁴⁵ While 'productive diversity' was an Australian term, its origins lie in the concept of 'managing diversity', drawn from the US organisational behaviour literature, which has connotations of containing or avoiding cultural conflict, as well as capitalising on the benefits of a diverse workforce.⁴⁶ Unlike the US context, where the term 'diversity' tends to be defined broadly, often encompassing religion, sexuality, age and lifestyle, Australian usage of 'diversity' has referred almost exclusively to ethnicity.⁴⁷

Productive diversity was hailed as a new 'Australian model' of work and management,⁴⁸ enabling organisations to recognise and take advantage of diversity in the workplace in a post-Fordist era. How does cultural diversity benefit Australia economically? The main benefits include:⁴⁹

- familiarity with diverse cultures and languages of global and domestic business partners and customers
- access to networks in many countries through personal contacts and relationships, and the ability to build trust in inter-cultural communications
- competitive advantage in provision of services that need language and other inter-personal cultural skills, for example, hospitality, tourism, call-centres, consultancy, health and education services
- staying in touch with trends and new developments around the world.

The productive diversity framework was adopted in many policy areas beyond multiculturalism. For example, the Industry Commission's 1994 report, *Enterprising Nation*, identified 'Capitalising on the talents of diversity' as a key area for action to upgrade management performance.⁵⁰ Australia's official foreign investment promotion material also emphasised the key asset of a culturally diverse workforce and market. In 1999, Invest Australia stressed that:

Within the Asian regional context, Australia's 21st century business case is based on: an open vibrant culture, quick to accept ideas and attractive to both Asian and Western business people ... and strong cohesion, based on ... an acceptance of cultural diversity.⁵¹

Other Invest Australia material referred to one in twenty Australians being born in Asia, and one in five having an Asian background.⁵² A brochure distributed by the New South Wales Government in 1996 promoted Sydney as 'The Call Centre Capital of the Asia Pacific', explaining that Sydney had 'a large, multilingual workforce skilled at operating in both Asian and Western business environments' and 'the widest range of Asian language skills in the region'.⁵³

The concept of productive diversity was prominent throughout the 1990s. At the end of the decade, the 1999 National Multicultural Advisory Council's report, 'adopted almost wholly by the federal government',⁵⁴ named 'productive diversity' as one of the four principles of Australian multiculturalism, arguing that 'the significant cultural, social and economic dividends which arise from the diversity of our population should be maximised for the benefit of all Australians'.⁵⁵

The report's language drew heavily on economic terminology, such as maximising 'diversity dividends', 'investing' in diversity, 'optimising the benefits' of diversity, utilising the 'assets' of diversity, and so forth. The following statement, regarding the funding of multicultural programs, is typical of the report's language:

[I]t is important to recognise that most of these costs are investments that enable Australia to maximise the benefits from its cultural diversity. These investments, many of which are frequently grouped together under the banner of productive diversity, serve our strategic national interests and produce substantial dividends that accrue to the entire Australian community.⁵⁶

The report then continued:

Cultural diversity enables nations and organisations to meet the challenges and reap the benefits of global markets, global competition and continuous rapid change in a number of ways and Australia, as one of the most multicultural nations in the world, is particularly well placed to obtain all such benefits.⁵⁷

By 2000, the Department of Immigration was pursuing multiple initiatives to educate businesses on capitalising on cultural diversity, including: a conference in 2000 titled 'Twenty-first Century Business – Delivering the Diversity Dividend'; research projects involving partnerships between business schools and businesses; and developing a range of management resources in partnership with business.⁵⁸

Multiculturalism was effectively 'redefined as a national economic asset',⁵⁹ increasingly overshadowing social justice issues.⁶⁰ As Bertone and Esposto⁶¹ note, productive diversity had the potential to enhance employment and career opportunities for immigrants. However, in placing such a heavy emphasis on the contribution of skilled immigrants, issues of access and equity were largely sidelined, family reunion migration became less justifiable, and the contribution of less-skilled workers and issues facing retrenched blue-collar workers were marginalised.

Ultimately, Bertone and Leahy⁶² argue that productive diversity offered limited benefits to most minority groups, because in spite of the rhetoric, migrants still faced discrimination and disadvantage at work. Benefits accrued only to a limited number of elite immigrants (highly skilled, bicultural and bilingual), and a limited segment of customers (those affluent enough to be targeted for niche marketing programs). But, Bertone and Leahy explain, productive diversity had never been conceived for equity purposes: 'Its main purpose was to increase market share and profits'.⁶³

While the term 'productive diversity' is no longer as ubiquitous as it was in the 1990s, economic efficiency continues to be a key guiding principle behind Australian immigration and multicultural

policies. The 'skilled' stream comprised 68 per cent of the 2011–12 migration program, and the 'family' stream just 32 per cent.⁶⁴ The 2011 multicultural policy, *The People of Australia*, emphasised four principles of multiculturalism, the third one being: "The Australian Government welcomes the economic, trade and investment benefits which arise from our successful multicultural nation".⁶⁵ The policy document notes that immigration has strengthened trade relations, broadened business horizons and made us 'more open to the world'.⁶⁶ The economic case for multiculturalism remains prominent, but since the 2000s, particularly since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 in the USA, the emphasis has shifted to more social concerns, as the next section details.

Harmony and social cohesion: multiculturalism eclipsed

The ascendancy of the conservative Howard Government (1996–2007) marked a low point in official support for multiculturalism. Howard had been famously opposed to the concept since the 1980s, and in government, his approach to multiculturalism was to frame the policy as a mainstream concern. Multiculturalism was less about the rights of immigrants than it was about ensuring social cohesion among a diverse population.

Under Labor, multiculturalism had been defined as being fundamentally 'about the rights of the individual' – to equality of treatment, to being able to express one's identity and be accepted as an Australian 'without having to assimilate to some stereotyped model of behaviour'.⁶⁷ Levey⁶⁸ describes this as a social justice-cum-citizenship model of multiculturalism, which the Howard Government replaced with one emphasising national identity, social cohesion and community harmony. In the 1999 *New Agenda for Multicultural Australia*, the discourse of obligations was strengthened, as opposed to that of rights,⁶⁹ and social justice goals were replaced with vaguer notions of 'equity'. And the policy was now known

as 'Australian Multiculturalism' to indicate that 'our implementation of multiculturalism has been uniquely Australian'.⁷⁰

From the beginning of his term, Howard sent a strong message that multiculturalism was to be downgraded as a national policy priority. Soon after taking office, he abolished key agencies like the Bureau of Immigration, Multiculturalism and Population Research, set up by Hawke to conduct independent research into immigration, and the Office of Multicultural Affairs, which had been 'a strong, well-resourced and powerfully-placed institutional base for multicultural programs and policies under Labor'.⁷¹ In addition, the government reduced funding for ethnic organisations and curtailed their advocacy and lobbying functions.

Galligan and Roberts claim that by 2001, 'multiculturalism had been effectively gutted as a national policy'.⁷² In the wake of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the War on Terror, multiculturalism became even more about managing the threats to national security and social cohesion that were allegedly presented by cultural minorities, particularly Australian Muslims. The shift in focus to unity and cohesion was evident in the 2003 policy statement, *Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity: Updating the 1999 New Agenda for Multicultural Australia: Strategic directions for 2003–2006*.⁷³ A 'Living in Harmony' initiative was framed in terms of 'promoting Australian values and mutual obligation', as well as addressing intolerance.⁷⁴ The harmony framework has been a 'soft' approach to multiculturalism, emphasising community-level initiatives to promote dialogue and inter-cultural exchange. It has been deliberately upbeat and celebratory in tone, attempting to associate multiculturalism with positive imagery of an open, inclusive Australian nation.

On the flipside, however, the focus on 'harmony' has been depoliticising and incapable of addressing the 'hard' issues of racism and inequality. Multiculturalism has been framed primarily in terms of inter-personal relations

and addressing intolerance through localised interchanges, symbolised in initiatives such as inter-faith dialogue programs. This is in addition to public festivities such as Harmony Day, celebrated each year on 21 March. Much of this activity has comprised 'feel good' attempts to experience arguably superficial aspects of other cultures (food, costume parades, performance and so on), and discover 'what we have in common'.⁷⁵ In this context, raising questions of deep-seated inequality or hostility is next to impossible.

Ultimately though, a core dimension of multicultural policy under Howard focused narrowly on crisis management, to address the potential threats posed by Muslim Australians who had failed to integrate into Australian society and now allegedly undermined social cohesion and even the 'Australian way of life'. As Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, Gary Hardgrave, stated, 'there are threats to Australia and our way of life in the post-9/11 era', necessitating the articulation of 'a coherent set of national values'.⁷⁶ Consequently, the Citizenship Test was introduced in 2007, to ensure 'cohesion and integration', while from 2005, substantial multicultural funding went into a National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security, targeted squarely at Australian Muslims.

The assimilationist push was evident in many of the government's public statements of the time, with Howard frequently urging Muslim Australians to assimilate. In a 2007 radio interview, he stated:

Well there's every reason to try and assimilate, and I unapologetically use that word, a section of the community, a tiny minority of whose members have caused concern and after all once somebody's become a citizen of this country the best thing we can do is to absorb them into the mainstream.⁷⁷

The term 'multiculturalism' was virtually eradicated from official discourse, as evidenced in the 2007 removal of the word from the newly renamed Department of Immigration

and Citizenship. In much popular discourse, multiculturalism has almost become code for discussing 'Muslims'. It is telling that of the members of the Australian Multicultural Council, established in 2011, half are from Muslim backgrounds.⁷⁸ More than a decade on from the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, Muslim Australians still sit at the heart of public anxiety about multiculturalism, and subsequently, in many circles, respect for cultural difference continues to be eclipsed by the allegedly more urgent priorities of promoting harmony and social cohesion.

Conclusion: multiculturalism rehabilitated?

The advent of the Labor Government in 2007 brought no significant change in Australian multicultural policy. Labor's key social policy framework of social inclusion was framed almost entirely in terms of addressing socio-economic inequality. Issues of diversity were added belatedly and have yet to gain significant traction within the social inclusion agenda.

However, after three years of silence on the issue, the Labor Government released its multicultural policy, *The People of Australia*, in 2011. The policy was remarkably short on detail, but among other initiatives, it established a National Anti-Racism Partnership and Strategy, focusing on research, consultation and public education, and committed the government to strengthening 'access and equity', to ensure that government services are responsive to the needs of all Australians.⁷⁹ Releasing the policy, Chris Bowen, Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, hailed what he termed the 'genius of Australian multiculturalism', in stark contrast to European leaders' assertions about the failure of multiculturalism. He stated that he was 'not afraid to use the word "multiculturalism"', and announced the reinstatement of the term in the position of the renamed Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs.⁸⁰

At the time of writing, it is too early to discern the likely impact of the government's newest multicultural policy, but its symbolism is significant, if only because of the willingness to re-embrace the term 'multiculturalism', which had been in danger of disappearing altogether from official discourse. The willingness to recognise the importance of anti-racism is also significant, and marks a shift from the 'soft' harmony approach to multiculturalism, although 'harmony' is still very much part of Labor's multicultural lexicon. Overall, however, the scantness of the policy document, and the distinct lack of fanfare and debate associated with its release, perhaps indicate the continuing low priority of multiculturalism in the Labor Government.

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