

## The landmark of Cronulla

Jock Collins

In Sydney on Sunday, 11 December 2005, riots on Sydney's Cronulla beach sent a tremor through Australian community relations. Images of thousands of mainly drunk white males chasing and bashing isolated men and women of 'Middle Eastern appearance' were compelling viewing for media audiences in Australia, and overseas (Poynting 2006). Days later, a retaliatory gang of males of 'Middle Eastern appearance' sought revenge in a smash, bash and flee raid in their cars on the suburbs surrounding Cronulla. For months afterwards, an unprecedentedly large police presence dominated the sandscape of Sydney's famous beaches, successfully preventing further reverberations and escalation of racial conflict. The ramifications and significance of these events should not be underestimated.

Sydney is one of the greatest immigrant cities in the world today. At the 2001 Census 58 per cent of Sydneysiders were first- or second-generation immigrants, with some 180 birthplaces recorded for the city's resident population. Australia overall has, in relative terms, more immigrants from a greater diversity of backgrounds than most countries in the world today, making it one of the most cosmopolitan of contemporary Western nations.

To some international commentators (Huntington 1997, 2004), the clash of ethnicities and religions, mostly a product of immigration policies, threatens Western societies in fundamental ways, particularly after 9/11. Recent events overseas and in Australia associate immigration and ethnic diversity with conflict and violence. To the critics of Australian immigration and multiculturalism, these riots, combined with instances of ethnic conflict in Europe and North America, were confirmation that immigrant minorities inevitably bring conflict to their host country, threatening social cohesion and dividing the nation, particularly when these immigrants include minorities from Asia, the Middle East and Africa.

But can these conclusions be derived from the Cronulla incident? In order to help gauge the severity of the social conflict at Cronulla beach, and get a sense of proportion, it is important to review other incidences of ethnic conflict and violence involving immigrant minorities internationally and in Australia. This chapter explores inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic violence in Australia and other countries to provide a lens for viewing the Cronulla riots. It also investigates the context of the riots and explores how they help to understand the relationship between immigration, ethnic diversity and social cohesion and conflict in Australia. The chapter also considers the policy implications of the riots, including the lessons for Australian multicultural policy and other responses in Sydney.

The events at Cronulla beach can only be understood within the broader lens of the changing, and uneven, processes of the racialisation (Miles 1989, 1993) of immigrant minorities in Australia and what determines it. The chapter concludes that cohesion and conflict coexist in cosmopolitan Australian society, with most evidence suggesting that cohesion is the norm and conflicts such as Cronulla the exception. Nevertheless, Cronulla provided a wake-up call against complacency; it reminded us of the challenges and benefits in cosmopolitan societies and the political responsibilities of leaders to manage ethnic diversity, as well as the dangers of political opportunism in exploiting racist undercurrents for short-term electoral ambition.

### Theoretical aspects

Social cohesion is hard to define and study. Its opposite is social conflict. But all societies exhibit conflict between different groups over time, oscillating between moments of cohesion and conflict. How much or what kind of conflict shifts a society from cohesive to divisive? In making this judgement, it is also important to acknowledge that social conflict is not necessarily a bad thing. The feminist movement in Western countries like Australia in the latter part of the 20th century, for example, had to confront existing power structures and ideology to gain a footing for gender equality. And the African National Congress, led by Nelson Mandela, had to resort to extreme forms of conflict to overturn apartheid in South Africa. Perhaps the medical metaphor of good and bad cholesterol is useful here: what sorts of conflict – when, where and between whom – are good and what bad? The answer lies partly in the theory of society that researchers employ, and partly on different interpretations of particular instances of social conflict.

According to the Marxist view of capitalist society, class conflict is the driving force of history; a society without it would be one without a past, present and future. On the other hand, Talcott Parsons (1949: 182–99) saw cohesion as a central category, with society held together by shared values in which every individual or subsystem had a function conducive to the well-being of the whole. Conflict in this sense was 'dysfunctional'.

For the Chicago school of sociology, conflict by ethnic groups was a necessary stage in the path to successful immigrant assimilation. In Robert Park's (1922) early theory of a 'race relations cycle', ethnic conflict was an inevitable but

intermediate stage that all new ethnic groups traversed on the way to assimilation in a Western metropolis:

The most obvious source and origin of most, if not all of the cultural and racial conflicts which constitutes our race problems, are, therefore, conflicts of the 'we groups' and the 'other groups' . . . They are, in fact, individual instances of an irrepressible conflict between the folk culture of the provinces and the civilization of the metropolis. (Park 2000: 111)

Other approaches to ethnic conflict see conflict or prejudice as emerging from human nature, relegating racism to human pathology (Ardrey 1967). Social psychological approaches, on the other hand, relate individual attitudes which lead to conflicts – such as racism and prejudice – to social problems and social structures. Hence Max Weber (1970) saw ethnic conflict as a rational behaviour of ethnic groups designed to maximise the IR power in the marketplace. But as Cope and colleagues (1991: 26) argue, this ignores class relations and the links between economic and political power.

### International views

Inter-ethnic conflict in Western societies has appeared regularly on television screens in the past few decades. In the most extreme recent examples – the 'ethnic cleansing' in Bosnia and the mass slaughter in Rwanda – the conflict was not related to diverse immigration programs, and Yugoslavia was a country of emigration rather than immigration. Most other European and North American countries with varying histories of international migration have seen social conflict involving settler minorities (Castles & Miller 2003).

Britain experienced 'race riots' in Brixton in the early 1980s (Solomos 1989). Decades later in 2001, ethnic conflict ignited in Burnley and Oldham (Ascherson 2002). While the causes of these conflicts are complex, the Stephen Lawrence affair identified racist policing as one key underlying element. The 1999 Macpherson report (Cathcart 2000) into the death of Stephen Lawrence exposed the extent of police racism in Britain and proposed a series of police reforms. Young men of Afro-Caribbean and Asian background were the focus of this conflict. Following the bombing of the London Underground on 7 June 2005, youth of Middle Eastern and/or Muslim background have been perceived as a new threat to British society.

In the Netherlands, Pym Fortuyn's rapid rise into the Dutch political limelight in 2002 ended with his assassination on 6 May, just nine days before he could test national support for his List Fortuyn party in national elections. Fortuyn was opposed to Muslim immigrants and had argued that 90 per cent of street crime in Rotterdam was committed by Moroccan and other immigrants (Osborn 2002), once again linking recent ethnic conflict to alleged ethnic criminality. More recently, the Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gough was murdered after he made an anti-Islamic film. In this instance it was the Muslim immigrant minority that was seen as threatening Dutch social cohesion.

In France in November 2005, following the electrocution of two Muslim youth fleeing from police, their kinsfolk who lived in the public housing estates in the north-western suburbs of Paris initiated a series of riots that spread to many other suburbs for nearly a month. Thousands of cars were burnt and confrontation with police and authorities a nightly occurrence. The unemployment rate for Muslim youth in these north-western suburbs, characterised by poor public housing, was over 50 per cent (Symons 2005).

None of these instances of social conflict involving immigrant minorities in Europe could match the extent of the conflict generated in the Los Angeles 'race riots' of May 1992. When the flames were doused and law and order restored to the streets of LA, the enormous magnitude of the social conflict emerged: 54 dead; 2383 injured; 17 000 people arrested; 5200 buildings damaged or destroyed by fire; losses estimated to be \$US1 billion (*Newsweek* 18 May 1992, p. 45). This was not a simple black versus white conflict. Black Americans joined recent Latino immigrants on the streets in looting and rioting. Their anger, born out of persistent economic disadvantage and political disenfranchisement, was not just directed at white LA police but also at wealthy Korean immigrant entrepreneurs who owned businesses in black areas of the city but lived elsewhere. This was not a race but a cosmopolitan riot.

In the same month in 1992 in Toronto, Canada's largest immigrant city, 'a mob of about 1000 people, mostly youth of various races, ran through downtown Toronto streets on Monday Night vandalising property and breaking into stores' (*Globe and Mail* 6 May 1992). The 'Toronto riot' shocked Canadians more than the events in LA: Canada in general and Toronto in particular prided itself in being a tolerant, multicultural society where all cultures mingle freely and equally. Like the LA riots, racism among police was found to be a major factor in the Toronto killing (Collins & Henry 1994).

These instances of ethnic or racial conflict in Europe and North America had a number of things in common. The young male immigrant minorities at the centre of the conflict, who generally came from socially disadvantaged families and neighbourhoods, had problems identifying with the mainstream of the new society. In each case, relations between immigrant minorities and police before and during the events of ethnic conflict were a catalyst, with subsequent inquiries often recommending substantial changes to the methods, attitudes and practices of police. In each case right-wing politicians strengthened their anti-immigration and anti-multiculturalism rhetoric.

### Australian perspectives

In the history of Australian immigration before 1947, conflict and violence appeared at regular intervals. In the middle of the 19th century anti-Chinese riots occurred on many goldfields, including at Hanging Rock in 1852, Bendigo in 1854, Buckland River in 1857 and Lambing Flat in 1861 (McQueen 1970: 44–5). Massive mobilisation against Chinese immigrants in New South Wales and Victoria and Kanaka labour in the Queensland cane fields laid the ground for the White Australia policy to be introduced at Federation in 1901, with unusually

widespread support (Price 1974; Saunders 1975: 180; Markus 1979). In the first decades of the 20th century, the opposition to Southern European immigrants from Greece and Italy, who replaced Chinese immigrants as unskilled labour, led to violence and conflict that derived from, in the words of the Ferry Commission that reported in 1925, 'Australia's fear and suspicion of Southern Europeans' (de Lepervanche 1975: 98–9). In 1934 anti-Italian riots occurred in Melbourne when Italian immigrants were used as strike-breakers by employers on Melbourne's wharves. An even more serious conflict occurred the same year in Kalgoorlie when more than a dozen shops owned by Southern European immigrants were looted and at least five Italian, Greek and Slav clubs and hotels were burnt to the ground (Price 1963: 210). At least two people died and countless others were wounded, with Church (2005: 188) describing these events as 'Australia's worst race riot'.

After World War II, following the start of the ambitious postwar immigration program, instances of inter-ethnic conflict are hard to find. It is true that there are records of a number of antisemitic activities; of conflict between Vietnamese and Turkish youth in Broadmeadows, Melbourne (Chauvel & Petanski 1986); and of Greek community marches in the late 1980s opposing the naming of Macedonia. There were also clashes between supporters of ethnically based soccer teams, such as that of 2004–05 in Sydney at matches between teams with Serbian and Croatian followers. This led Soccer Australia to end ethnically based teams and develop a national competition of city-based ones (the National Soccer League). In February 2007, fights between supporters of two Sicilian teams led to the deaths of two policemen and the suspension of the Italian Series A and all other football competition. But when judged against earlier Australian experience, or recent international experience of ethnic conflict, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the post-1945 Australian immigration experience has been remarkably free of serious ethnic conflict.

Among the worst instances of inter-ethnic conflict in Australia in the postwar period are those suffered by Muslim, Sikh and other visible minorities following the Desert Storm war in 1990 and the invasion of Iraq in the early 2000s. One consequence of these events, for example in the early 1990s, was that Australians of a Muslim and/or Arab background were subject to extensive racial vilification, abuse and physical attacks (HREOC 1991). A report by the Committee on Discrimination Against Arab Australians (1992) documented racist incidents against Arabs and Muslims for the period November 1990 to July 1991. Many families reported harassment at their homes and in the streets, shopping centres, schools and communities. Many women wearing the hijab reported harassment from passing cars and in parking lots. Physical violence was also widespread, with reports of Arabs being spat at or incurring physical injury, including women who had their hijab pulled or torn. In one incident, a car was deliberately run into and damaged, while in another an Arab man died of a heart attack after being racially harassed by a group of teenagers. Widespread property damage was also reported. A Muslim school and restaurant in Perth, Western Australia, were subject to arson attacks after threatening phone calls, and in other homes and restaurants broken windows and graffiti were common. Many mosques and offices of Arab and Muslim organisations were attacked repeatedly, while staff

received threatening phone calls and mail threats. One Islamic Centre in one outer Sydney suburb was fire-bombed in January 1991.

Immediately after the events of 9/11, a Hot Line established in New South Wales on 13 September 2001 recorded a significant number of incidents of physical, verbal and sexual assault; threat; racial discrimination or harassment; and damage to property. While this was mostly directed at Australians visibly of a Muslim or Arab background – half of all victims were female with over half of all calls received from Arabic speakers – it was not confined to these groups, with Australian Sikhs also reporting abuse and violence (UTS Shopfront 2005).

A national consultation by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), with 1423 Arab and Muslim Australians, conducted an audit of 100 local and state government groups and community organisations after 9/11 and the first Bali bombing. It found that most Muslims consulted had experienced escalating prejudice that ranged from 'offensive remarks about race or religion to physical violence' (HREOC 2004: 2). The report noted that 'people readily identifiable as Muslim because of their dress or appearance were particular targets of racist violence and abuse' and that 'Muslim women who wear the hijab, niqab or chador have been especially at risk' (ibid.: 45). Physical attacks, threats of violence and attempted assaults were widely reported, as were a number of incidents of vandalism on what was identifiably the property of Muslim organisations or individuals, with one mosque in Queensland fire-bombed and burnt to the ground (ibid.: 49). These incidents were reported as having occurred on the street, at home, in private and public transport, in shops and shopping malls, at school, college and university and at work.

### The Cronulla riots

On 11 December 2005 Australian and international television screens carried shocking visual footage of a violent, drunken mob of some 5000 mainly 'white' male Australians, most with beer can in hand and many draped in the Australian flag, verbally abusing, attacking and beating the few individuals of 'Middle Eastern appearance' they could find nearby. The gathering was a widely publicised and promoted response to 'save our beaches' in the aftermath of a fight between three surf lifesavers and a group of four Lebanese-background young men that had occurred at Cronulla beach the weekend before. This fight was widely reported and condemned as 'un-Australian' in the Sydney print and electronic media, which also reported that a rally – called 'the battle of the beach' by the Sydney tabloid the *Telegraph* – was to be held the following weekend to 'reclaim' the beach. Mobile phone text messages called on wide support at the rally. The *Telegraph* ensured that those who were not party to the texting network were aware of it, by reprinting the following message:

This Sunday every Aussie in the Shire get down to North Cronulla to help support Leb and wog bashing day . . . Bring your mates and let's show them that this is our beach and they are never welcome . . . let's kill these boys.

The shock-jocks used their airwaves to promote the rally. After reading out this message during his radio program on radio station 2GB, Alan Jones, one of the most prominent and widely syndicated of the Sydney shock-jocks, encouraged widespread support for the rally with the words 'Come to Cronulla this weekend to take revenge' (Poynting 2006). Callers to his program recounted many instances when young 'Aussie' women had been insulted by Muslim, Lebanese or Middle Eastern men who were alleged to have no respect for women (Manning 2006: 257–64). The call was clear: in the tradition of the ANZAC soldiers who died at Gallipoli, it was the duty of young red-blooded men to defend their women and their nation from the enemy within – immigrants from countries in the Middle East – on the sands of Cronulla beach.

Journalist Paul Sheehan (2006: 351–71) had a different perspective, telling the story of the young whites who sided with the mobilisation against the Lebanese/Muslim/Middle Eastern community. In this account the behaviour of Lebanese/Muslim/Middle Eastern males justified the response as a protest against racism (the racism of those of Middle Eastern appearance towards whites) and dismissed the arguments that those whites participating in the riots were in any way racist themselves (ibid.: 362).

What are the implications of the Cronulla riots for assessing social cohesion and racism? Some (ibid.) see the events as proof that Australia's immigration and multiculturalism policies are not working. This is ironic, since the program of Australian multiculturalism (Castles et al. 1988; Collins 1991) was dismantled after the election of the Howard government in 1996. Indeed, by the end of 2006 both the Howard government and the Labor opposition had replaced multiculturalism with 'integration' as the key word expressing the essence of Australia's settlement philosophy and policy for new immigrant settlers.

In my view, more multiculturalism, not less, is required. The roots of much disquiet among Middle Eastern minority youth in Australia and their conflict with white Anglo-Celtic youth lie more in the realm of socio-economic disadvantage, masculinity and youth subcultures than it does in ethnic difference. Issues of masculinity and territoriality have led to violence between groups of young men in Australia well before the postwar immigration program changed the face of Sydney and Australian society. Strategies related to education, employment, local neighbourhood facilities and infrastructures, policing and the media for immigrant minority youth are more likely to yield positive results than continual questioning of the functionality of the Australian immigrant communities. For decades Australian multiculturalism has emphasised policies and programs to help new immigrants at school, in the community and at work, as well as the right for the cultural and linguistic difference of immigrant minorities to be respected and expressed in public. The backbone of Australian multiculturalism policy, at least in its first decades, was social justice for all, irrespective of language or cultural or religious background. Today there is a need for an urgent revitalisation of Australian multiculturalism, not its abandonment.

The issue of Australian racism has also come into the spotlight since 9/11 (Anti-Discrimination Board of New South Wales 2003) and, more recently, Cronulla. To his credit, NSW Labor Premier Morris Iemma criticised the racism from the white crowds, and labelled their behaviour un-Australian. But racism is not

exclusive to whites in Australian society. It has emerged from elements of Lebanese and Middle Eastern communities – including those involved in the retaliation violence after the Cronulla beach riot – as well as from many other immigrant and indigenous minorities. It suggests that anti-racism must be a central plank of Australian multiculturalism, and that innovative programs to refresh and renew it are required today.

Other commentators have seen in the events of Cronulla a fulfilment of Geoffrey Blainey's fears (1984) that non-British immigrants were a threat to cohesion. However, the fact that the events of Cronulla are so rare is evidence for a counter-view, which is that, despite all odds to the contrary, Australia's ethnic diversity has occurred mainly without social conflict. People from all corners of the globe live in Sydney. At any moment some of Sydney's immigrant communities are in conflict somewhere in the world. And yet rarely does this international conflict overflow into the streets and neighbourhoods of Australian life. It was popular to conclude from the LA riots in 1992 that ethnic diversity will inevitably bring conflict. But the lesson of the LA riots is different. It is that unless everything is done to ensure that new immigrants have as much opportunity to work, live and participate in society at all levels as non-immigrants – and this was not the case in the United States, where there is political disenfranchisement, social alienation, and no adequate safety-nets – ethnic diversity will probably lead to conflict. The United States does not have the Australian tradition of multicultural programs and services to assist new immigrants to settle and to climb up the ladder of American society. In this important sense Australian multiculturalism is the safety-net that has helped steer our culturally diverse society towards social cohesion and away from social conflict between ethnic groups.

### Cronulla and multiculturalism

The Cronulla riots were an expression of ethnic tensions in one of the world's most cosmopolitan cities. But set against the history of ethnic relations and ethnic conflict in Australia, Europe and North America, they hardly constitute sufficient evidence to support the arguments of the critics of immigrant minorities and non-discriminatory immigration policy. The Cronulla beach riot did not appear in the frontline suburbs of diverse, immigrant minority settlement, such as those south-western Sydney suburbs of Lakemba or Fairfield or Liverpool (Collins et al. 2000), but in a white enclave. No one died, though there was personal injury and property damage, as well as much undermining of Sydney's international reputation. The riots were not the darkest of Australia's recent experiences with ethnic conflict, a badge worn by Australia's Islamic or 'Middle Eastern appearance' community in the post-9/11 years.

The background to Cronulla included the international events of post-9/11, the 2001 Australian national election and its contentious 'children overboard' incident (Marr & Wilkinson 2003), as well as the Sydney context of a political-opportunist law-and-order debate built on the moral panic about ethnic crime (Collins et al. 2000; Poynting et al. 2004). Cronulla can thus also be read as the latest chapter in anti-Arabic and anti-Muslim inter-ethnic conflict in Australia.

In the words of journalist Peter Manning (2006: 266), 'we are in grave danger of seeing all Arabic and Muslim Australians as "the enemy"'. But the cloud of a crisis in social relations between Arab and Muslim Australians on the one hand and white Australia on the other has a silver lining: the realisation that these conflicts in Australia have not reached the levels of other countries today or earlier periods of Australian history. Prejudice and tolerance coexist in Australian history. That tolerance seems to win out on most occasions, however, does not redress the ugliness or seriousness of the moments of inter-ethnic conflict anywhere in Australian cities.

The seriousness of Cronulla and the sentiments that propelled it should not be denied. In many ways, Cronulla is a wake-up call to Australian society, particularly its cosmopolitan metropolises. It exposed the ever-present tension between tolerance and prejudice, racism and multiculturalism, cohesion and conflict, and is a call to highly multicultural nations of the need to tread carefully: to nurture inter-ethnic relations and not undermine them for opportunistic political purposes. The Cronulla riots are a rather crude reminder of the responsibilities that go with non-discriminatory immigration policy at a time when increasing globalisation is increasing the size and diversity of immigration flows around the world.

The Los Angeles and Paris riots and others are sometimes cited as evidence that ethnic diversity means social conflict. Australian cultural diversity is now a permanent feature of contemporary and future Australian society, requiring a settlement policy designed to deal with diversity and to achieve social cohesion. An abandonment of multiculturalism is exactly the opposite of what is needed. The lesson from the LA riots is not that ethnic conflict is the inevitable consequence of a society becoming increasingly culturally diverse through immigration. Rather it is that culturally diverse societies require policies and programs, with substantial public sector investment, to give all people the opportunity of economic advancement, social inclusion and participation in public life and public spaces. The safety-net of social security payments and access to health, education and other services are important here. If ethnic diversity is not supported by welfare and other programs and services, particularly during the initial settlement period, the ensuing economic, social and political exclusion of ethnic minorities will threaten social cohesion. Consequently, multiculturalism needs properly resourced programs of English language tuition, recognition of qualifications, translation services, education, health, housing and welfare programs, and services to help new immigrant minorities who are today keenly sought by Australia in a fierce global competition to fill labour market shortages and skill gaps. It also needs to resolve past weaknesses in multicultural policy, especially the place of Indigenous peoples. Multicultural policy can be developed to overcome these weaknesses, but it is not clear that a new integration policy would be able to do so. Unless integration policy aims to give all Australians every chance to participate equally and cohesively in all aspects of social and economic life, it is unlikely to succeed.



**AUSTRALIA HAS SUCCEEDED** in harmoniously absorbing millions of immigrants from a great diversity of cultures. Divisiveness has been minimal. Indeed, Australia is one of the world's most cohesive societies: since 1788 it has never experienced revolution, invasion or assassination of a major public figure. Helping secure this outcome have been steady economic growth, high living standards, stable democratic institutions, and isolation from conflict. However, there is no denying that problems have been encountered.

With contributions from some of Australia's leading experts, this book addresses the threats to Australia's social cohesion and asks how they can be countered. Issues covered include the social exclusion of Indigenous communities; feelings of marginalisation of young people; tension between mainstream and new religious groupings; inter-ethnic relations in the wake of security legislation; the relative status of overseas-born workers; and the tendency of the media to devalue non-conformist minorities, values and ideas. This important new book deserves to be read by anyone with an interest in Australia's social fabric – its past and its future.

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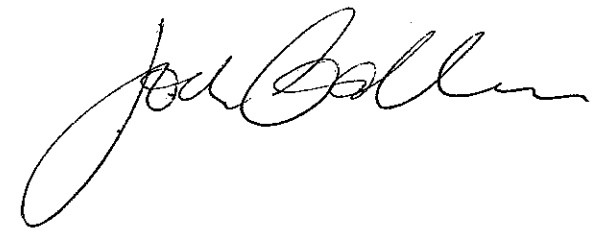
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# SOCIAL COHESION IN AUSTRALIA

James Jupp & John Nieuwenhuysen  
with Emma Dawson



### Social Cohesion in Australia

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## Foreword

Australia is one of the world's most diverse societies. It is a country of immigration, nearly half of whose population was born, or is the child of a parent born, overseas.

Down the decades, successive Australian governments have pursued planned immigration intake programs, accompanied by settlement services. In addition, ever increasing temporary migration and tourism have been facilitated and encouraged, enlarging further the diverse composition of Australian society.

It is a substantial achievement that this persisting population expansion from a multitude of varying cultures has been achieved with very little divisiveness, though the lack of Indigenous equality remains a thorn.

With the unparalleled persistence of steady, strong economic growth in the past 11 years, skill shortages and bottlenecks have emerged despite the immigration program and temporary entry of workers. And it is highly likely that substantial increases in immigration intake targets will ensue, even though current levels are at their highest for 20 years.

It is clear that, in order to achieve and accommodate this larger inflow, social cohesion will be especially important at a time when there are potential tensions arising indirectly from the international 'war on terror' and the freer movement of people in a globalised world.

*Social Cohesion in Australia* is, therefore, a well-timed publication. Its 16 chapters by distinguished scholars from a variety of universities and from the Commonwealth Government, cover an excellent range of topics, from the quest for harmony, to social cohesion and sport, the arts, education, the workforce, Indigenous communities, the media, inter-ethnic marriage, the landmark of Cronulla, the Commonwealth's view, human rights, and definition and measurement.

*Social Cohesion in Australia* is part of the Scanlon Foundation's major Social Cohesion Research Project and has been undertaken through Scanlon funding provided to a partnership between the Monash Institute for the Study of Global Movements and the Australian Multicultural Foundation.

We congratulate the editors and authors of this important volume. Their work makes a major contribution to understanding and knowledge about the constituent parts of social cohesion in a country whose experience is of interest not only to its inhabitants but also internationally.

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James Jupp John Nieuwenhuysen Emma Dawson

# Introduction

John Nieuwenhuysen

There are many features of a society that can undermine its cohesiveness. These include the distribution of income, wealth, employment and opportunity, as well as access to services, voting rights or citizenship among various segments of the population. This book is, however, concerned with one principal question: how can Australia, with its considerable cultural diversity and continuing high (permanent and temporary) immigrant intake, remain socially cohesive? The volume is by no means encyclopaedic. But it covers, with contributions by 16 authors, an important series of aspects of several of the perceived indicators of social cohesiveness in Australia.

Part I surveys the historical quest for harmony in Australia, and the conditions and possible means of measuring social cohesion, as well as current federal government initiatives to attain it. The chapters in Part II consider the landmark of Cronulla; ethnically based youth groups; religious resurgence and diversity; Indigenous Australia, and aspects of cultural fragility; and educational attainment and inter-ethnic marriage. Part III covers unions and the workplace; education; the media; sport; terrorism and politics; and human rights.

The book concentrates on immigration, which has been a central part of Australia's history since first European settlement in 1788. It has been at the heart of the creation of a dynamic society and has helped economic growth. Much of immigration's success has depended on the absence of marked social conflict and division through the arrival from overseas, in peaks and troughs, of so many millions of people from extremely diverse backgrounds.

Current (2007) immigration intakes under the planned program are at their highest levels in 20 years. They are expected to rise substantially in the near future, and are exceeded by even greater numbers of temporary arrivals. As in previous years, immigration policy remains controversial. But public opinion polling has seldom indicated that it is a major issue, ranking it as of very secondary importance in the public mind relative to the economy, employment, health and education.

But there are two special features in the current debate which mark a turning point from the past. The first is an ever more rapidly globalising world which includes a much freer movement of people. The second is the violent attacks on civilians in different countries, in response to which a 'war on terror' has been joined by the Australian government. Security and other legislation have ensued, casting suspicion on the Muslim community (which numbers 300 000, of which one-third are locally born). Riots in the Sydney suburb of Cronulla in December 2005 unleashed scenes which shocked Australia. This led to much

activity by governments and Muslim and other community leaders, engendering public discussion and plans to alter federal government multicultural policies. It is in this context that the book is set.

There are variations in the conception of social cohesion among the different authors from the perspective of several disciplines. Consequently, the editors have left it to them, within a broad frame, to apply these conceptions of social cohesion, and how it can be maintained or undermined, to their analyses. Nonetheless, there are many shared aspects of the definitions used. These derive mainly from the idea that social cohesion reflects the strength of shared values, a sense of common identity and of belonging to the same community. Khoo (chapter 10) points out that recent work in Western societies suggests five dimensions of social cohesion: belonging (shared values, identity, commitment); inclusion (equal opportunities for access); participation (engagement in structures and systems); recognition (respect and tolerance); and legitimacy (pluralism). Each of these, as well as those mentioned by Jupp, appears in the various chapters of the book.

Overall, the editors have adopted Jenson's (1998a,b) conclusion that 'there is no single way of even defining [social cohesion]. Meanings depend on the problem being addressed and who is speaking'.

In chapter 1, James Jupp notes that Australia is among the most cohesive and harmonious societies on earth, one based on 'stable institutions, high living standards, economic expansion and isolation from zones of conflict'. Why then, he asks, is there so much anxiety about social cohesion? While much of the debate about serious divisions resulting from multiculturalism is 'quite hysterical', there remain problems in the area of social justice and equality. He gives a substantial list of the means by which social cohesion is maintained, including a sound economy with equitable distribution of goods and services; a basic stock of values and traditions; and a high level of trust between citizens and authorities.

In chapter 2, Andrew Markus and Liudmila Kirpitchenko provide Canadian, British and other definitions of social cohesion. The Canadian quotations emphasise that social and community cohesion is a 'set of processes', which entail instilling in individuals a sense of belonging and recognition. The British examples view a cohesive community as possessing a common vision, with the diversity of the backgrounds of its members being positively valued and the provision of equal opportunities for all in society.

In chapter 3, Nick Economou notes that observers have some facility in providing varying definitions of social cohesion and saying how it might be assessed. But they are 'much better at identifying those moments where social cohesion breaks down'. After reviewing different approaches to social cohesion and its definitions in Europe, North America and elsewhere, he draws attention to 'the potential for the notion of "social cohesion" to be contentious and value-laden, particularly where analysts seek to quantify the extent to which there are shared values within a community'. He illustrates this by citing ambivalent attitudes to linguistic diversity: viewed positively by multiculturalists but negatively by assimilationists. He provides a brief review of the different ways of measuring social cohesion. The difficulty of defining social cohesion is reflected in the complexities of the means of measurement that he outlines. The concept of social cohesion is value-laden and so is the task of finding adequate measuring rods.

Nonetheless, it is an important task and is part of the Scanlon Social Cohesion Research initiative, of which this book is one project.

Concluding Part I, chapter 4 is an outline of the Commonwealth's policies and approaches to creating a socially cohesive and economically thriving country under a planned long-term immigration program. Presented by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, this paper gives a very positive view of migration to Australia and its consequence for society and the economy. It celebrates Australia's success in integrating people from many nations and cultures around the world – 'respecting people's differences and providing opportunities for everyone to belong and participate as full members' – and lists several factors that contribute to this social cohesion.

Part II commences in chapter 5 with Jock Collins' analysis of inter- and intra-ethnic conflict, a commonly used indicator of the degree of divisiveness in communities. He uses overseas experience as a lens through which the riots at Sydney's Cronulla beach in December 2005 can be viewed, and set in proper perspective. While not denying the ugliness of the riots, he highlights their more extreme, sustained and violent counterparts in other eras and countries. He also details desirable policy responses to the riots, including jobs, education, urban renewal, public housing and space, more sensitive and less sensational media coverage, and community relations. He concludes that the Cronulla riots were 'an expression of ethnic tensions in one of the world's most cosmopolitan cities'.

In chapter 6, Rob White deals with one of the most important aspects of social cohesion and its maintenance in Australia: the transformation of social difference into social deviance, where people who have grown up here are vilified as outsiders. The response of many of these people is to affirm their social presence by joining a gang. Three intervention issues are identified: perceptions that youth gangs are a danger to the community generate action from police, irrespective of what is happening at the grassroots level; political and economic conditions for potential growth in gang-related activity do exist, and need to be forestalled; most discussions of gangs have been racialised, with ethnic minority youth the main subject of attention.

In chapter 7, Gary Bouma and Rod Ling note that the global movement of ideas, people and capital has accompanied religious renewal, and altered the flow of influences in religion from north to south to the opposite direction. Numbers of religious groups have been increasing as well as their diversity, and include a growing variety of uncontrolled and less organised forms of religious life. The previous policies for managing this diversity are under challenge, demanding new sensitivities to gauge whether religion helps create or diminish social cohesion. For this challenge, it is critical to distinguish between revitalising and radicalising influences in religious activity.

In chapter 8, Tim Rowse suggests that the way in which people in Australia view cohesion between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations will be affected by how they think about cohesion within Indigenous Australia. Indigenous Australians have the double challenge of how to live within a country where they are disadvantaged, and how to live with each other. Of special importance are the views of Noel Pearson that Indigenous people have been 'poisoned' by their access to welfare benefits.



Closely related to Rowse's work is Robert Nelson's chapter 9, where he discusses the relationship between arts and social cohesion by alluding to the uniformist impact of globalisation, where people of diverse background are brought together. He notes Australia's success as a cohesive peaceful multicultural society, but adds that this 'miraculous peaceful multicultural existence' has been bought at the expense of Indigenous Australians. He makes an impassioned attack on globalisation, which 'entails a new persistence of persuasive commercial language, in which ownership of the ideal way to be, look, think, and aspire, inheres in foreign places; and meanwhile the old local and natural modes of deportment are expropriated, deemed unfashionable, redundant, backward and embarrassing'.

In chapter 10, two other important and well-established indicators of Australian social cohesion – educational attainment and inter-ethnic marriage – are reviewed by Siew-Ean Khoo. Education is seen as contributing to social inclusiveness through provision of greater human capital, enabling increased economic participation and integration. Inter-ethnic marriage is also regarded as one of the most definitive indicators of immigrant integration into the local community, since 'it is seen as the outcome of close social interaction between people of different communities'. Khoo reaches encouraging conclusions for the future of social cohesion in Australia on both counts: statistical evidence shows that levels of educational attainment are higher in young than adult migrant generations, and implies greater engagement with the general community; and there is also clear evidence that migrants in the second generation are more likely than their parents were to marry outside their own ethnic group. And the third generation, as Australian-born children of Australian-born parents, is even less likely to maintain the ethnic culture of their grandparents.

Part III deals with the influences and responses in searching for social cohesion in Australia. In chapter 11, on employment and the unions, Santina Bertone emphasises that employment is even more important for new arrivals to a country than to longer established residents, otherwise they become marginalised. Her analysis reveals some growing pressure points in the Australian labour market which threaten social cohesion: the disproportionate representation of workers of non-English-speaking background in the lower jobs, and the baneful impact on these people of federal industrial relations legislation. These, together with anti-refugee and anti-Muslim rhetoric, point towards future social unrest and friction.

In chapter 12, Hurriyet Babacan cites Durkheim's observation that society depends for its existence on 'a sufficient degree of homogeneity. Education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child, from the beginning, the essential similarities that collective life demands'. However, she notes that both the definition and measurement of social cohesion in the context of education's contribution to it are problematic. This is partly because education's impact on social cohesion 'may well be greatly outweighed by more powerful institutional and cultural factors at the national level'. She notes the major challenges confronting education in its relationship with social cohesion. These are both micro issues such as cultures, languages and experiences of students and their families, and macro issues such as racial stratification and inequality.

Andrew Jakubowicz's chapter 13 notes the position of the media in providing avenues for debate and negotiation in complex societies; in fact 'the media are the

primary machinery in the promotion of both social cohesion and social conflict'. In reviewing the evidence, and using Cronulla as a part case study, he concludes that there is a need to view the media's overall effect on social cohesion with considerable discernment.

In chapter 14, Brett Hutchins notes a lack of critical perspective infusing much popular writing about sport, which is 'a social activity that divides as much as it unites'. In recollecting and celebrating past sporting feats, it is often forgotten that many sports have blemished records of appealing to those of non-English-speaking backgrounds, Indigenous competitors, and women. There is a need 'to reframe the problem of sport and social cohesion'. It is unrealistic to suppose that sport can somehow 'fix social problems or transcend cultural divides'.

Jenny Hocking in chapter 15 trenchantly outlines new security legislation and its impact on inter-ethnic relations. Since September 11, 2001, the federal government has passed more than 30 pieces of legislation to combat acts of terrorism, and the agencies of state concerned with security have received dramatic increases in powers and resources, creating an 'effective second tier of quasi-judicial process outside the established criminal justice system and free of key legal protections'. She points to several aspects of the new security regime, among them Executive proscription powers, which have, in their selective application, disturbing implications for inter-ethnic relations. In concluding, she notes the irony of Australia's imitation of overseas anti-terrorist legislation, quoting Malcolm Fraser: 'The country that has most successfully handled multicultural issues over the last 50 years is to go down a track, practised by countries that have handled these same issues less well and with less harmony.'

Finally, in chapter 16, Gabrielle McKinnon asks, would a bill of rights enhance social cohesion in Australia? Australia is the only Western democratic nation which remains reluctant to make human rights enforceable through a domestic bill of rights. Opponents argue that any legislative protection of human rights of individuals over the community as a whole would erode the cohesiveness of Australian society. She reviews the possibility that an Australian bill of rights could assist social cohesion by providing a set of common values relevant to a multicultural society and a mechanism for mediating conflict between competing interests within the community.

The essays in this book describe a mixture of the overall success of the immigration program over recent decades, under multicultural policies, and some problematic questions for the future. Australia's cosmopolitanism has grown apace but without some of the problems (for example ghettoisation) experienced in other immigrant-receiving societies. The inflow of people to Australia has been supported by settlement services, in particular English language training facilities, which have assisted employment opportunities and economic mobility for new arrivals. And on some key indicators of social cohesion, for example greater community engagement of young second-generation migrant groups, the omens are good.

Nonetheless, several question marks are raised by the various authors: issues of marginalisation of the overseas-born in the workforce; the consequences of security legislation for inter-ethnic relations; the media's proclivity to devalue minorities who appear not to conform to core cultures; the social estrangement

and exclusion of Indigenous people from the prosperity and degree of economic participation of the broader population; the difficulties which some mainstream religious organisations and the population generally have in coming to terms with new, less familiar groupings, and the reduced capacity of older religious structure to deliver social cohesion; and the feelings of marginalisation and alienation among young people, in the face of hostility and vilification, which leads them to affirm their social presence and validate their lives by joining a gang.

As in other countries, such as Britain, one of the major new challenges to social cohesion policies in Australia is a greater and deeper diversity among new residents. Sometimes that greater diversity, as part of a globalised world, means that imported tensions are being reflected in Australian public places. Among these are the consequences for inter-ethnic relations of security legislation designed to prevent in Australia the violent terrorist attacks which have occurred in overseas countries, such as the United States, Britain, Spain and Indonesia. For some communities in Australia, life has started to feel different since the attacks in New York in 2001 and their successors in London, Madrid and Bali.

At the same time, some resident Australians question alleged 'special treatment' for immigrants, and develop resentment and grievance.

In this, there is a remarkable similarity between the Australian scene and that elsewhere, for example Britain. The British Parliamentary Secretary for Communities, Ruth Kelly, could have been speaking of Australia when she said:

The issue became a catalyst for a debate about who we are and what we are as a country. About what it means to live in a town where the faces you see on the way to the supermarket have changed and may be constantly changing. I believe this is why we have moved from a period of uniform consensus on the value of multiculturalism, to one where we can encourage that debate by questioning whether it is encouraging separateness. (Speech at launch of Commission on Integration and Cohesion, London, 28 August 2006.)

Echoing this in political theory are several voices, including Francis Fukuyama, who considers that the 'old multicultural model' of countries such as the Netherlands and Britain needs to be replaced since, out of a 'misplaced sense of respect for cultural difference', it 'ceded too much authority to cultural communities to define rules'. But, he adds, liberal societies have their own values and 'cultures that do not accept these premises do not deserve equal protection'.

In international and Australian debate basic questions are being asked. The Australian government for its part has formally distanced itself from the long-established era of multiculturalism. After showing distaste for the word 'multiculturalism' over its first ten years of office, the Howard government has changed the name of the former Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). State governments in Australia are unlikely at present to follow this example. But the Australian government's move makes the messages of this book especially topical and important. They stress the success of Australia's past. But caution and care are necessary lest the bases of that success are neglected by all the various governments, agencies and communities concerned in coming to terms with the fresh challenges of today and tomorrow.

## **PART I**

### **DEFINING, MEASURING AND SEEKING SOCIAL COHESION**

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