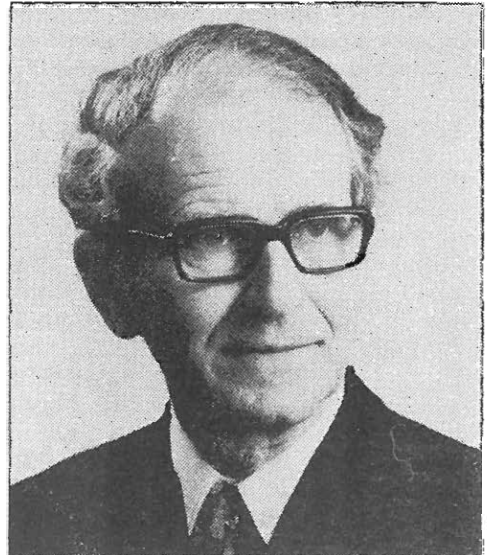Jerzy Zubrzycki

Australia as a Multicultural Society

Immigration has been a major feature of Australian history since the early days of European settlement. Over the last two centuries immigration has played an important role in shaping Australias economic and social character.

The recognition of the role of immigration in population building in Australia received its policy expression in the principle of assisted migration from the early beginnings of British settlement in 1788. From the foundation of the first settlement to 1939 about half of the 2.5 million settlers who reached Australia were assisted. Of the 4.5 million who came to Australia since World War II more than one-third had received passage assistance. An overwhelming majority of these assisted settlers came from the British Isles.

The declining proportion of assisted settlers since the War signified a change in the ethnic mix of immigration: those who came unassisted represented a diverse group of settlers initially from North Western and Southern Europe, Middle East and, latterly, from South Eastern Asia. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate and discuss the challenges that the established structures and institutions in Australia.

The institutional arrangements that had been consolidated in Australia as the country emerged from World War II were based on the assumption of an essential

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and continuing cultural homogeneity of British Australia. When the Labor Minister for Immigration, A.A. Calwell made his historic announcement in 1945, declaring that immigration was to be pursued as a population-building exercise to help achieve a total population growth of 2 percent per annum, he went on to reaffirm the Government's commitment to the principle 'that our population shall remain predominantly British'. 'It is my hope' he said that for every foreign migrant there will be ten people from the United Kingdom.

The Minister's statement reaffirming preference for Britain as a source country clearly reflected the general attitudes of the time. The actual immigration experience of the following decade, however, showed that the British target could not be attained on anything like the scale envisaged by immigration planners.

In the immediate postwar years Britain experienced severe shortage of manpower due, in large part, to a declining birth rate since the 1930's and a high death rate during the war. In addition, there was a shortage of shipping to transport migrants to Australia. The result was that, despite the introduction in 1947 of the United Kingdom-Australia Assisted Passage Migration Agreement, British migration was slow to start.

At the same time, however, there were still about 1.6 million persons in Europe who had been displaced as a result of the war. In 1947 Australia entered into an agreement with the International Refugee Organization (IRO) to accept an annual quota of up to 20,000 a year if the IRO could find the necessary ships. The target was more than exceeded during the following three years during which some 170,000 settlers came to Australia under the Displaced Persons Scheme.

Once it was seen that the economy was quickly absorbing not only the demobilised Australian servicemen but also the carefully selected refugees more immigrants from Britain, Greece, Cyprus, Malta and other persons including some 15,000 Jewish refugees and many Dutch citizens from Indonesia arrived between 1947-51. Total arrivals in this period were of the order of half a million migrants of whom only 40 percent were British.

The 1950's and 1960's saw a relative decline in migration from the United Kingdom although it still continued as the largest single source. The majority of new settlers came initially from North West Europe and Italy but following establishment of the European Economic Community,

Greece, Yugoslavia, Turkey and later Lebanon became major source countries.

The 1970's and early 1980's have been characterised by a progressive reduction in the level of migrant intakes brought about by a worsening of the employment market and affecting primarily immigrants from the United Kingdom. The one category of immigration which was not affected by the onset of economic recession was the movement of refugees fleeing the civil war in Lebanon and the war and its aftermath in Indo-China. The deteriorating political and economic situation in Vietnam, following the fall of Saigon in 1945, and subsequently in Kampuchea and Laos forced Australia to act quickly by accepting large numbers of the "boat people" who sought initial refuge in Thailand, Malaysia, other countries of South East Asia and occasionally after a perilous journey, in Northern Australia.

The numbers of the boat people selected for settlement in Australia rose quickly from a couple of thousand in 1945/46 to 15,000 in 1979/80 and again in 1980/81. Between July 1975 and June 1985 some 120,000 people from Indo-China were resettled in Australia. Together with smaller numbers of settlers from other countries of Asia Vietnamese refugees accounted for a higher proportion of the total intake than British settlers in 1979/80 and again in 1980/81.

In retrospect we can see how the broadening of the range of source countries has been a notable feature of post-World War II immigration. In 1947 when Arthur Calwells ambitious plan for population building was being launched nearly 97 per cent of the population were persons of Anglo-Celtic (i.e. mainly British) origin; by 1988 that proportion fell to around 78 per cent or, in round figures, about 4 million people in the total population of 16.5 million. More than one third of these people (i.e. of the non-Anglo Celtic or "ethnic" population) regularly use a language other than English, and over

500,000 of them are estimated to suffer severe disadvantage because of their lack of English.

These facts highlight the extent of Australias demographic and cultural diversity. In the world league of major immigrant countries which includes Canada and the USA Australia occupies number one position in terms of its proportion of people of migrant stock, i.e. foreign born persons and their native-born children. Given the dramatic change in the composition of Australias population the nature of the conditions under which members of the non-English speaking minority groups were to be absorbed into the Australian society has become a major issue of public policy. In brief, as Jean Martin argued in a major piece of research undertaken for the National Population Inquiry, in the 1950's and the 1960's the non-English speaking migrants were essentially a supplement to the established pattern of Australian life and the important thing was to assimilate them to this pattern as quickly as possible. By 1970 it was becoming recognised that migrants were people with "problems" and were the responsibility of governments. Since 1975 the situation had changed still further and migrants were now becoming recognised as a minority pressure group with rights to power and participation. This involved the transition from thinking primarily about migrants to thinking about ethnic groups, i.e. culturally diverse entities which could form established, legitimate structures within Australian society (Martin, 1978).

The challenge of ethnic pluralism

The transition from an assimilationist to a pluralistic policy reflects, in the first place, significant changes in community attitudes in Australia in response to the demographic changes described above. In addition the Australian public opinion has been influenced by the resurgence of in-

terest in cultural pluralism which grew out of the black power and civil rights movements in the United States in the 1960's. It has been accompanied by ethnic rights movements which have spawned everywhere and which posed the fundamental issue namely that ethnic pluralism, to be visible, must have structural roots in the society at large.

This very issue featured widely in the debate on minority group rights in Australia during the seventies. The policies of assimilation of the decades of the fifties and sixties made it difficult for governments and Australian community groups to develop any mechanisms that would bring non-English speaking minority groups into recognised relationship with the "main-stream", Australian group life. Consequently migrant group organisation became "focussed around activities which the migrants themselves (could) control without risk of outside interference or direction: religious ceremonial, European-oriented political interests, cultural festivals, the education of their children in the ethnic language and culture, and the care of aged and sick" (Martin 1971: 106). This was then the case of emasculated pluralism restricted to the migrants' needs as members of ethnic groups but not related to their needs and rights as members of the wider community.

What was needed, as a response to the call heard all over the world for ethnic pluralism with strong structural roots, was what Martin called a "robust pluralism" which goes beyond mere encouragement of ethnic folk dancing, social clubs, sporting groups, and the use of foreign languages in the family circle, to the development of group identity based on the primordial ties of common ethnic origin. A robust pluralism has the necessary implication that ethnic groups with strong identities will press political demands. Not necessarily *party* political demands, but demands on the policy for the meeting of ethnic needs and rights. In Australia, Mar-

tin argued Ethnic pluralism ... is not ... the safely cultural, apolitical phenomenon that some bland interpretations could lead us to think" (1976:25).

The reality of Australia, ethnic pluralism or of "A multicultural Society for the Future", to give the title of an historical address given in 1973 by the then Minister of Immigration, A.J. Grassby, was the subject of two major reports commissioned by the governments of opposing political philosophies: the final report of the Committee on Community Relations chaired by Walter Lippman presented in 1975 and the paper drafted by Jean Martin and Jerzy Zubrzycki and published in 1977 under the imprint of the Australian Ethnic Affairs Council (AEAC).

The Lippmann Committee contained one of the most eloquent expressions of the position developed in the contemporary Australian debate on this issue and one which emphasised the significance of ethnicity as a source of structural but *unthreatening* division and an anchor for identity. The committee supported the notion of the pluralistic concept of integration and recommended that "community relations in Australia should be restructured in terms of a concept of pluralism which denotes the willingness of the dominant groups ... to promote or even to encourage some degree of cultural and social variations within an overall context of national unity ... a consensus or a common realm of political rights and social valuations can co-exist with a recognition of ethnicity and ethnic identity ... the viewpoint of cultural pluralism, as advocated by the Committee does enable ethnic groups, if they so desire, to establish their own structures and institutions usually of a cultural and social nature, for example, the media, clubs and restaurants, shops, and community organisations ... while recognising the utility and value of ethnic structures in achieving the ends of pluralistic integration, it has to be borne in mind that an excessive emphasis on self-inter-

est programs may prove harmful both to ethnic groups and the host society. *These inherent dangers - really the dangers of stuctural pluralism* - can be avoided if the exchange and interaction between all groups is sustained at all levels and in particular through their common participation in the shared and 'universalistic' stuctures of the wider society ... the concept of pluralistic integration within a framework of equality of opportunity provides an effective model for determining the objectives of a community relations program in Australia" (Australia, 1975: 48-51, Emphases in the original text).

The key social issues of national unity, equality of opportunity and cultural identity which confronted Australia as a 'multicultural nation' and which were correctly identified in the Lippmann Report were highlighted two years later in the Australian Population and Immigration Councils Green Paper *Immigration Policies and Australias Population* (Australia, APIC). The Australian Ethnic Affairs Council (AEAC) was then requested by the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs to prepare its response to the Green Paper and it took the form of a 16-page document *Australia as a Multicultural Society* (Australia, AEAC).

Multiculturalism in theory and practice

The paper *Australia as a Multicultural Society* was tabled in the Australian Parliament in 1977 and quickly became the subject of widespread public discussion. The paper addressed the three key social issues which had been highlighted in the Lippmann Report and in the Green Paper released a few months earlier. Arguing that social cohesion, equality and cultural identity are interrelated the paper point out, however, that "the philosophies underpinning them and the social policies the imply are not always the same and may even be inconsistent with one another" (AEAC:4).

The point of this statement can be seen in the range of definitions and examples given in *Australia as a Multicultural Society*.

"Social cohesion. It is easier to say what social cohesion is not than what it is. It is not the same as homogeneity nor does it imply absence of dissensus, confrontation and conflict, which are integral to any democratic society. It does imply accepted institutional arrangements for allocating social reources and for dealing with conflict over what are social resources and over what the basis for such allocation should be. As used here, the term thus embraces the concept of the 'social good', the use of social resources towards the well-being of the society as a whole rather than sectional groups within it. Although we do not develop the issue in this paper, we also wish to emphasise that questions of immigration policy (like many other questions) are ambedded in a much wider concept of social cohesion than this: namely, the 'social good' of humanity as a whole. From this point of view, Australia may be a sectional group in a wider international system and the good of the wider system may override the well-being of Australia considered in isolation.

Equality. The crux of our argument is that Australia is already a society of multiple cultural identities, or a multicultural society, and that equality can best be promoted (perhaps can *only* be promoted) through policies that harness it to cultural identity. Both are means and both are ends: equality depends on and strengthens multiculturalism, multiculturalism depends on and strengthens equality. They are 'ends', however, only in the sense that they are the touchstones that guide our thinking and proposals, not in the sense that we see 'an equal society' or 'a multicultural society' as a tangible final social condition.

We shall treat equality as equal access to social resources. Equality in this sense means above all that individuals are neither advantaged nor prejudiced in their access to social resources by belonging to some category of the population that is irrelevant to the resource in question. Thus equality is denied where skin colour stops one person from getting a job or another from renting a house. It is also denied where sex, family wealth or place of residence gives one child a better education than another.

As the examples given above illustrate, besides ethnic origin there are many other bases for the kind of categorising that undermines equality. And even in an ethnically diverse society, other kinds of categorisation may be more important than ethnicity in determining the individual's access to social resources. Poor children from different ethnic backgrounds, for example, may be more alike in their access to education than children from the same background but in different economic circumstances. In the present context, however, we shall concentrate on categorisation by ethnic origin.

Cultural identity. Cultural identity is the sense of belonging and attachment to a particular way of living associated with the historical experience of a particular group of people. Multiculturalism exists where one society embraces groups of people with different cultural identities.

There are many kinds of multiculturalism and some are grossly incompatible with Australia's political and social system. In a simplified scheme we can say that multiculturalism develops by three principal processes:

(1) Cultural stratification. Socio-economic stratification coincides with ethnic stratification to produce a hierarchy of cultural layers. Slave societies are the obvious and extreme example.
(2) Differentiation by cultural regions. Each geographical region has its own distinct culture: Switzerland is an example. (Regional differentiation may also be associated with stratification, as in Canada.)

(3) Differentiation by cultural communities. Ethnic communities are the carriers of different cultures, but these communities do not form distinct regions nor distinct socio-economic strata. Australian society is multicultural in this sense" (AEAC:4-5).

The range of options through which culture may be institutionalised in Australia and which are discussed in *Australia as a Multicultural Society* corresponds to the historical experience of the past 40 years in Australia. During the stage of assimilation the only form of pluralism tolerated by the wider community was the presentation of the 'pretty' ethnic traditions in folk art - dancing, music, graft - with the addition of ethnic cuisine. This kind of pluralism - together with the cultural differentiation that occasion the private, invisible world of the family and personal relations - was labelled by Martin as emasculated pluralism.

Robust multiculturalism, however, implies a degree of cultural differentiation which is institutionalised in the existence of ethnic groups with continuity and some measure of autonomy in religious structures, welfare bodies, sports groups and ethnic schools. In time such ethnic institutions begin to act as pressure groups in support of a wide range of ethnic interests. With the establishment in 1975 of the Ethnic Communities Council (ECC) i the state of New South Wales (as a combined inter-ethnic pressure group) a successful beginning has been made for the creation of a prototype structure with a voice in all matters to do with immigration policy.

The New South Wales example was followed suit by all States and Territories of Australia. The existence of ethnic mobilization and organisation exemplified in the role played by the Ethnic Communities Councils is increasingly viewed not as aberrant but as necessary for achievement of ethnic rights and as the only means of achieving more social equality especially in the occupational domain. The latter point was borne out by the adoption in 1978 by the Australian government of the *Report of the Review of Post-Arrival Programs and Services for Migrants*, generally known as the Galbally Report.

The strategy which the Galbally Report devised was based on four principles:
(a) all members of our society must have equal opportunity to realise their full potential and must have equal access to programs and services:
(b) every person should be able to maintain his or her culture without prejudice or disadvantage and should be encouraged to understand and embrace other cultures;
(c) needs of migrants should, in general, be met by programs and services available to the whole community but special services and programs are necessary at present to ensure equality of access and provision;
(d) services and programs should be designed and operated in full consultation with clients, and self-help should be encouraged as much as possible with a view to helping migrants to become selfreliant quickly (para. 1.7).

The Report comprised an integrated package of 57 new programs and a number of related proposals to be introduced over the three-year period 1978/79 -1980/81 at a cost of $50 million above the 1977/78 base of $45 million. The actual amount spent on post-arrival programs and services in English instruction, settlement and welfare and the Telephone Interpreter Service operating throughout Australia greatly exceeded what the Galbally Report recommended. Over the three-year period total expenditure, measured in constant prices, increased to $220 million; an average of more than $70 million per year.

An evaluation of the Galbally Report and its implementation was undertaken in 1981/82 aimed at extending and improv-

ing special programs for migrants. In accepting the report *Evaluation of Post-Arrival Programs and Services* (Australia AlMA, 1982) the Prime Minister stated that the measures proposing *inter alia* a restructuring of the On-Arrival Education Program, a significant increase in the range of welfare services and the removal of discriminatory legislation "will considerably enhance equality of access and opportunity".

Conclusion

This survey of Australia's response to the challenge of dramatically increased ethnic diversity has focussed on the parallel development of a theory of multiculturalism and a set of policies and programs designed to promote the goals of multiculturalism in practice. Of the two modes of action appropriate in the treatment of ethnic minorities and discussed by Gabriel Mugny (1982) - a strategy of negotiation and a policy of rigidity and inflexibility in the choice of options - Australia has chosen the former mode. The actions of Federal and State governments together with the activities of several statutory agencies clearly reflect the desire to maintain a balanced approach to multiculturalism, namely that it cannot be reduced to cultural and language problems alone (as it is in Canada) but must also tackle those aspects of the social structure that deny equality of opportunity to minority groups.

This is the key problem at the foundation of multiculturalism in Australia - the recognition that it is not monolithic but contains the seeds of many different kinds of future development. Thus the relation between equality, cultural identity and social cohesion is not a simple matter. All three principles are necessary and interdependent and apply as much to non-English speaking minorities as they do to Anglo-Australians. This was reflected in the title of the policy discussion paper

presented to Government in 1982 by the Ethnic Affairs Task Force of the Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs (ACPEA) -*Multiculturalism for all Australians: our Developing Nationhood*. Consequently the paper argued that "the days when multiculturalism was discussed exclusively in the context of 'ethnic affairs', defined until recently as something concerned with non-English-Speaking minorities in Australia, are over".

The debate on immigration and on multiculturalism in Australia has not abated since the stormy scenes at the public forums which followed the publication of the 1982 discussion papers. The critical issue has been the level of migration from Asia which in the minds of some politicians and their even more radical supporters is seen as representing a threat to social cohesion in the Australian society. The publication in May 1988 of the report of the Committee to Advise on Australian Immigration Policies (known by the name of the Committee"s Chairman as the "FitzGerald Report") added more fuel to the fire through its major recommendation that Australia give preference to those who contribute to its economy and, by implication, reduce the share of those applicants for migration who on arrival are likely to join the queues of the unemployed. The suggestion of the FitzGerald Report that Australia should partly "disengage" from IndoChinese refugee settlement has certainly strengthened many sections of the Australian community opposed to Asian migration on racist grounds. This point received a further reinforcement in the Report through the suggestion that parents of the immigrants applying for family reunion should, if they are under 55, no longer be given priority but would have to qualify under a new Open Category in competition with others who may score highly on skills youth and education. If this recommendation were to be accepted then it would have an adverse impact on many whose entry is be-

ing sought from the Philippines and Vietnam.

At the time of writing the debate is still gaining in its intensity and is not likely to abate. In the view of this author the present debate is not about what multiculturalism means. It is about the possibility of reconciling the need for the role of law for legitimate authority which in a political democracy is ultimately based on support and consent of the people - with the preservation of ethnic groupings. It is about social organization of cultural difference. As such the debate assumes the level of significance which applies to all plural societies around the world.

The FitzGerald Report also reported the wide-spread confusion in the community at large about the meaning and intent of multiculturalism as a means of social engineering. This too, became an issue of the on-going debate linked as it is with the perception that as a concept and public policy, multiculturalism is "sectional and divisive".

The Prime Minister of Australia in a much publicized speech in Canberra in August 1988 criticized the Conservative Opposition for its "Opportunism" in using the hitherto bipartisan support for nondiscriminatory immigration and multiculturalism for the sake of electoral gain.

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