

## **A BREACH OF TRUST: THE VITIATED DISCOURSE OF MULTICULTURALISM AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

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### **Abstract**

This paper sees the discourse on Australian multiculturalism at the turn of the twenty-first century as conflicted, and tries to analyse how this might be resolved.

A division is noted between the 'static' definition of culture implicit in the structure of ethnicity as a form of micro-management of socio-cultural issues, and the 'dynamic' meaning of culture in a postmodern, globalized world. I explore the argument between those that adhere to a core/periphery functionally assimilationist definition of multiculturalism (emphasising otherness) and those that urge a re-definition of the term to emphasise notions of alterity (de-emphasising otherness) and hybridity through some recent historical metaphors of cultural racism.

Events such as the *Tampa* affair, the 'War on Terror' and the Cornelia Rau matter have tested belief in the civility of our society and mutual respect. I use these sites as metaphors of cultural racism to show how normative multiculturalism has been demeaned in the neo-conservative political climate of Howard's Australia. I argue that a breach of trust has occurred within Australian society between the stakeholders of multiculturalism, whereby the rhetoric and cultural politics of the government of the day have promoted emphasis on a nationalism that is antithetical to the pluralistic dynamics of a multicultural society, and foster intolerance. This has particularly impacted on the Muslim commu-

nity, the latest arrivals in a country with a history of difficult arrivals.

The latent ambivalence of the Australian multiculturalist model, containing a repressed sense of racialisation, needs to be resolved. It is argued that it is an imperialist project that privileges the core white Anglophone culture over 'subaltern' migrant groups, when what is needed is public policy with a code of ethics or politics of civility to facilitate a hybridising society.

### **Introduction**

The looming approach of the Norwegian cargo vessel *MV Tampa* into Australian waters on the 26<sup>th</sup> August 2001, carrying 438 potential asylum seekers stowed on deck, caused the Australian government to arguably breach its obligations under the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) and the 1967 Protocol and other instruments of international human rights law by interdicting the vessel and 'warehousing' its passengers (the Pacific Solution). The excision of certain territories from the 'migration zone' further created a legal fiction not recognised at international law (Germov and Motta 2003:37). According to public opinion polls (A.C. Nielsen 2001; Roy Morgan 2001) at the time, this did not bother the Australian public unduly, but it threw the media into a frenzy and ignited a furore amongst the *intelligentsia* which has not subsided.

The issue was not simply one of the rights of asylum seekers—that was quickly sub-

sumed into a larger paradigm, fear of global terrorism, and subsequently sharpened to an even more blatant exercise in racial and cultural vilification by the 'children overboard' affair. Hardly had this been resolved by the Senate Report (2002), *Select Committee on a Certain Maritime Incident*, than the Cornelia Rau matter surfaced, culminating in the Palmer Inquiry (2002) into the culture of the Immigration Department. By now the 'jig' was up! Julian Burnside QC penned a prescient analysis that 'the abuse of one of us exposes what we're doing to them' (Burnside 2005:17). 'Them' or the 'Other' are the asylum seekers who received the same 'careless, cruel indifference' that Rau received at the hands of the Immigration Department. Burnside asked,

why is it acceptable to treat asylum seekers this way, but shocking when it is done to one of us ... why did it take Cornelia Rau's case to provoke widespread public concern about immigration detention?

His answer was that it happened because she looked like a typical Aussie girl — 'she is uncomfortably like us'. Her treatment at the hands of the Immigration Department, Burnside contended, was a reflection of a society that is indifferent to the fate of those perceived as not like us.

### **A Breach of Trust**

Both the *Tampa* incident and the Rau affair are metaphors of prejudice that reflect on the site of the multicultural debate in Australia at the turn of the twenty-first century. The *Tampa* incident represents a publicly sanctioned scapegoating of the unfortunate 'Other' by a government in election mode, whilst the Rau matter encapsulates the phenomenon of a groundswell of public indignation at the subjection of one of 'us' to the dehumanising treatment we reserve for the 'other'. Taken together, these

complementary top-down, bottom-up models of implicit racialised prejudice meet at a juncture of signification for the multicultural edifice—that normative multiculturalism has been demeaned in the turn of the twenty-first century political climate. A *breach of trust* has occurred within Australian society between its constituent groups and the proponents of a return to a mythical monoculture. American sociologist Louis Adamic (1944) observed that it was old-stock Americans who tended to view virtually everyone else as a menace to the 'historic pattern of the country' when in fact diversity itself was the pattern. He believed that only when Americans recognised that Americanness resided precisely in the country's status as a 'nation of nations' that its loftiest ideals could be realised.

My paper outlines the discourse on Australian multiculturalism between its proponent and critical ideologies and argues that either way, the current definition needs changing. A division is noted between 'static' and 'dynamic' definitions of multiculturalism that highlights the problematic—the issue of social micro-management. I contend that the temper of the times, marked by such events as the *Tampa* affair, the 'War on Terror' and the Rau matter, has tested belief in an open civil society and mutual respect and promoted a defensive, fortress mentality. Negative political leadership on multiculturalism has not helped, and there has been a blurring of the distinction between Australian values and Australian history. The latter belongs to the place, in the 'Annalesian' sense (Clark 1999), the former is an indicia of the beliefs of a society which changes in composition over time. It follows therefore that propositions such as an emphasis on mutual responsibility and reciprocity in multicultural interactions are more likely to harmonise society than the propagation of monocultural

iconography as national belief. The latter reinforces cultural ranking and is divisive, notwithstanding that everyone should obey the same law. It is also implicitly racialising. If the aim of multiculturalism is to harmonise diversity rather than ostracise difference, I contend, then alterity is preferable to 'otherness'. Through the epistemology of others, I argue that an ethics of multiculturalism or code of civility should be developed to ameliorate the unwritten code of incivility that has framed the disjuncture within multiculturalism at the turn of the twenty-first century.

For definitional purposes, I refer to the three successive reports on the implementation of prescriptive multiculturalism commissioned by the Fraser, Hawke and Howard governments (the Galbally, Gobbo and Roach reports, so-called after their respective chairmen) as the templates of public policy settings on multiculturalism, relevant to their era, and then proceed to discuss how the various governments finessed them.

Stephen Castles (2001) pointed out that whilst the dominant understanding of Australian multiculturalism could be seen as a model for public policy, designed to ensure the full socio-economic and political participation of all members of an increasingly diverse population, it was also perceived in other ways. It could be viewed as a multi-ethnic society, with a potential for conflictual intergroup relations (like apartheid South Africa), or a negative identity statement, seen as legitimating separatism and cultural relativism and antithetical to nationalism. It is my contention that the perspectives of the Galbally, Gobbo and Roach reports corresponded to the first, second and third of Castles' definitions, respectively—responding to economic and political considerations of the time.

The Galbally report (*Migrant Services and Programs* 1978) addressed the issues of access, equity and cultural maintenance in Australia, to ameliorate problem areas of the migrant settlement experience, such as poverty and high rate of return. It noted the growing recognition that a homogeneous society was neither possible nor desirable. The Gobbo report (*National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* 1989) defined multiculturalism as based on a set of rights to cultural identity, social justice and economic efficiency, as well as obligations to national interest, civic structures and reciprocal responsibility regarding freedom of expression and belief. The Roach report (NMAC 1999) stressed the concept of Australian multiculturalism and inclusiveness as a panacea to the objections of the Hansonite constituency to being 'swamped by Asians' and overcatering for the welfare of minority groups. It noted the removal of access to welfare benefits for migrants in the first two years, and, significantly, the Howard government abolished the Office of Multicultural Affairs and the Bureau of Immigration, Multiculturalism and Population Research on coming to office in 1996.

Whilst there has always been bi-partisan support for normative multiculturalism, it is obvious that successive reports have narrowed and qualified its definition and reach, so that its meaning has run the gamut of Castles' definitions in its resonance throughout Australian society. It is my contention that the multicultural discourse has been most vitiated during the neo-conservative Howard Liberal ascendancy, with its emphasis on a white teleology of nationhood and its discursive framing of asylum seekers as the demonised 'Other', so that a question mark hangs over its future direction, if not viability. There has been a journey from a point where society reached out to its marginalised migrant groups to a point where they grew and prospered,

and appeared threatening to a disaffected sector of the host society, disenfranchised by globalization. A discourse of territoriality and managerial capacity over the national space has ensued, in the words of Ghassan Hage (1998), which has challenged the prescriptive framework of multiculturalism, and calls for a re-definition.

Mark Lopez's revelatory work, *The Origins of Multiculturalism*, demonstrated that the advent of multiculturalism as public policy sprang neither from a grass roots movement nor any political epiphany, but was rather a long and painstaking lobby for the recognition of the migrant's plight and aspirations by a select few activists (Lopez 2000). The uptake of this cause by a number of academic researchers and finally some individual politicians culminated in a social justice policy of access and equity to disadvantaged groups, including a multilingual delivery of services to people of varying migrant group backgrounds. This marked the end of the assimilationist ideal. The ascent of normative and prescriptive multiculturalism occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and Foster and Stockley in *Multiculturalism: The Changing Australian Paradigm* noted the Fraser Liberal government's co-opting of ethnic leaders and tying their interests in with that of the government, when mutually suitable, in a celebration of 'ethnicity' as a form of micro-management of socio-cultural issues (Foster and Stockley 1984:68). Jon Stratton in *Race Daze* observed with a touch of irony some twenty years later that John Howard criticised the Labor Party for doing the same (Stratton 1998:41).

Within a decade of its inception, however, popular perceptions of multiculturalism were beginning to sour. Professor Jerzy Zubrzycki, who along with Jean Martin was one of the academic pro-

genitors of Australian multiculturalism (Zubrzycki 1964; Martin 1978), in the late 1980s posited the proposition that normative multiculturalism had been mismanaged or misunderstood, and issues and policies regarding ethnic identity and social cohesion needed to be resolved (Zubrzycki 1987:49). He was referring to perceptions of divisiveness within the Australian social fabric when ethnic lobby groups were seen to pressure politicians and public organizations for self-serving policy outcomes that did not necessarily coincide with mainstream concerns. The implication was that support for migrant group welfare should be interlinked with Australian identity, and not function as a foundation stone for a nation of self-perpetuating migrant tribes, with a potential for conflicts of interest. Similar arguments were made by academics such as psychologist Frank Knopfmacher (1982), philosopher Lauchlan Chipman (1980), historian Geoffrey Blainey (1982) and one-time member of parliament and leader of the One Nation party, Pauline Hanson (1997).

Jamorzik, Urquhart and Boland's book, *Social Change and Cultural Transformation in Australia* used a core/periphery metaphor to describe Australian multiculturalism as a monocultural core of social institutions surrounded by forms of ethnic and cultural diversity (Jamorzik:1995). Jon Stratton, in *Race Daze*, surmised,

It is the claim to a core culture which enables conservatives to argue for a return to assimilation. Assimilation, in the Australian case, implies that the core culture remains the same whilst it is the migrant who is transformed (Stratton 1998: 16).

Expanding this argument, Stratton noted that one could find in Hegel's master-slave argument a 'Foucaultian' site of power, where one's position was vali-

dated through the objectifying experience of the other (Stratton 1998:209). Appropriation of the 'other' as a form of knowledge could be likened to the project of nineteenth century imperialism. Thereby, deduced Stratton, the metaphor of the imperialist project could be seen to resonate through the structure of official multiculturalism—it was the core culture which was privileged while the marginal, ethnic cultures were formulated as 'objectified spectacles' for the members of the core culture. Ethical obligation on the part of the objectifier was therefore negated, as objectification was a dehumanising process. In this way, Edward Tyler's nineteenth century anthropological definition of culture as an object of study delimited in space and an unchanging, timeless whole (Tyler 1871)—by means of which official multiculturalism in Australia has been conceptualised (*Migrant Services and Programs* 1987:104)—had 'Othered' the members of those cultures.

This distillation of an objectified multiculturalism as a functionally assimilationist model has been critiqued by protagonists of a more subjectified multicultural philosophy, who highlight the 'subaltern' position of ethnic minorities in Australia. Their agenda proposes replacing the delineated and unchanging definition of 'culture' with an open and evolving acknowledgment that cultures hybridise and transform. For instance, Stratton illustrates, a person's Australian culture is inflected by their background and the migrant history of that background is transformed within Australia. This requires an ethics of reciprocity in human relations which acknowledges difference but denies objectification. It evolves out of the experience of marginalisation, but culminates in an understanding of culture (Stratton 1998:210). It is an ethics of mutual responsibility in the tradition of Levinas (1997) of alterity as opposed to

otherness. Professor Zubrzycki emphasised,

the culture of a group cannot be seen as a static fossilised entity which remains unchanged from the time a particular group sets foot on Australian soil, but as a living, dynamic, changing and interacting set of life patterns (Zubrzycki 1987:52).

Leader of the Labor Opposition, Mark Latham, speaking at the Global Foundation forum in Sydney on 20th April, 2004, concurred, declaring,

If we treat multiculturalism as a static concept, as something frozen in time — each of us pigeon-holed into past habits and past identities — then inevitably, it will be a policy based more on difference than diversity (Latham 2004:5).

The question arises, then, as to how, within a democratic, pluralist society, is transitional support for newcomers (providing a sense of community, security, maintained traditions and language environment) reconciled with a core Anglophone culture that objectifies these people? David McKnight, in *Beyond Right and Left: New politics and the culture wars*, rejects mosaic multiculturalism as 'group thinking'—dangerous because it is a form of stereotyping in which generalised judgments are made about particular groups (Aborigines are lazy, Jews are greedy, the English are snobs, Asians are hard-working ...etc.). He makes an important distinction, that, although issues involving competing and antagonistic cultural values are usually settled by reference to Australian law, which favours individual over group rights, the *public* debate over the limits of cultural diversity is not 'settled' so easily (McKnight 2005:216).

The National Multicultural Advisory Council (NMAC) was commissioned in 1997 to undertake a report 'aimed at ensuring that cultural diversity was a unifying force for Australia', in light of the

upsurge in popularity of the simplistic, anti-cosmopolitan nationalism represented by Pauline Hanson. Its recommendations, contained in *Australian Multiculturalism for a New Century* (the Roach report), outlined a critique of multiculturalism held by a sector of the Australian community. They believed that multiculturalism applied only to migrants from a non-English-speaking background and seemed to deny Australian culture. The report also acknowledged that past practices had focussed on rights rather than obligations and submitted that a new emphasis on inclusiveness and obligation would remedy this. It recommended that terms such as 'Australian multiculturalism' and 'inclusiveness' be focal points to convey: common membership of the Australian community; a shared desire for social harmony; the benefits of diversity; an evolving national character and identity. These sentiments are conducive to the promotion of a hybridised cultural identity which can accommodate both cultural blending and the persistence of diverse cultures, but, argues McKnight, they should occur within the framework of the values of an evolving common culture (McKnight 2005:218). He cites Laksiri Jayasuriya (1990) and Sunder Katwala (2004) as protagonists of hybridity theory, and Ien Ang offered a practical description of it in *On Not Speaking Chinese*. She wrote,

it is a form of micro-politics of everyday life informed by the pragmatic faith in the capacity for cultural identities to change, not through the imposition of some grandiose vision for the future, but slowly and unsensationally ... In this way, a cosmopolitan ethos can be fostered from below ... (Ang 2001:159).

Presumably, this is what Latham meant when he pronounced that 'multiculturalism lies not so much between individuals as within them—the habit of living one's

life through many cultural habits' (Latham 2004:5).

Notwithstanding that the Howard government continued the tradition of implementation of multiculturalism as public policy (albeit in a truncated form of service delivery and academic analysis), it was the *rhetoric* and *cultural politics* of the neo-conservative political ascendancy that, I argue, breached trust amongst the stakeholders of multiculturalism. The paradox of the Howard government and the Roach Report has been that *public* debate has centred on adherence to core Australian values, that is implied assimilation, rather than embracing diversity. The effect has been to divide rather than unite.

Suvendrini Perera has noted that instead of a focus on equal access for all to the institutions of citizenship, Australian 'multiculturalism' in recent years has been confined to exhorting the Anglo majority to display 'tolerance' toward racial and ethnic minorities (Perera 2002:18). Tolerance is a word which carries negative connotations—it means forbearance, putting up with something that you do not necessarily like or agree with. Ghasan Hage, in his deconstruction of tolerance in multicultural Australia contained in *White Nation: fantasies of white supremacy in a multicultural society*, contended that the 'ethnic caging' of boatpeople was an expression of the actuality of the treatment of ethnicity within Australia. Howard, according to Jon Stratton, argued that multiculturalism threatened national identity because he saw that as an expression of the historical experiences of the people rather than a statement of shared values (Stratton 1998:109). In January 1989 he imparted to Gerard Henderson, 'The objection I have to multiculturalism is that multiculturalism is in effect saying that it is impossible to have a common Australian culture' (Henderson 1995:27). He fol-

lowed this, in office, with an implementation of a white teleology of nationhood.

Judith Brett noted that by appropriating the rhetoric and symbolism of radical nationalism, such as 'practical mateship', once left to Labor, Howard thereby promulgated an assertive nationalism (Brett 2003). She identified how his 'conservative populist' style focussed on Labor as captive to minority interests and out of touch with 'mainstream Australia' (Brett 1997). This included multicultural and indigenous groups, which by inference were influencing Paul Keating's espousal of a vision of ties with Asia, Aboriginal reconciliation and a republic (Day 2002)—concerns distant from the lives of ordinary Australians. Howard thus defined his sympathies within the discourse of identity politics as being 'nationalist', alongside those of Geoffrey Blainey and Pauline Hanson. Michelle Grattan opined, 'He lacks that special quality of imaginative empathy that would allow him to enter the minds and souls of those whose experience is totally outside his own' (Grattan 2002:458).

Howard's critics, among them Robert Manne, accused him of creating a divisive agenda on issues such as Australian history, Aboriginal affairs and asylum seekers, through branding opponents as minority 'elites' and claiming his opinion represented that of average and therefore the majority of Australians, thus putatively shutting down debate (Manne 2004). His own view was that he was healing divisions by equating cultural homogeneity with social harmony. In an Age interview of 29 February, 2002, titled 'Thoughts of a Bypassed Lazarus', he emphasised,

We've brought to a respectable conclusion this perpetual seminar on our national identity that went on. We agonised were we too Asian or Asian

enough, or too British, too American? We've suddenly realised what we've been all along, we're just 100 per cent Australian.

Brett has further identified Howard's speeches since 1997 as filled with characterisations of what he variously calls the Australian way, Australian values, the Australian identity or the Australian character (Brett 2004:84). The problem was that the founding culture of the 'Australianness' Howard relied on was a white Anglo monoculture, so that every time he addressed an audience that was not wholly part of that foundational culture, it nuanced a feeling of 'otherness' and exclusion from the essentialism of Howard's Australianness. Howard's harking back to the Anzac tradition, mateship, military valour, remembrance, the martial defence of Western values demonstrated a nationalism rooted in the past (Manne 2004). No new nationalist image was produced that included the different strands of political community, binding them in a new exhortation. A report by the Civics Expert Group (1994) on attitudes towards the Constitution, citizenship and civic participation showed many disparate groups excluded from the post-federation settlement (non-whites, indigenous people, women, people of non-Anglo-Celtic background) wanted to be included in a new definition of the Australian nation.

In his discourse on hospitality within the nation in *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, Hage argued that when a defensive society lived in paranoid fear of an alien 'other', it suffered from a scarcity of hope, becoming non-nurturing and intolerant (Hage 2003). This was a cultural expression of the political reality that developed under the neo-conservative ascendancy. With a political 'wedge' (Marr and Wilkinson 2003:310) having been driven between ordinary Australians and the intellectual elite over the totemic issues of multiculturalism, Abo-

original reconciliation and the republic, this 'cultural rollback', maintained Robert Manne, served the government well. When it came to political divisions to be reopened by 'an extremely tough border protection policy aimed against the ultimate 'Other', the unwanted Muslim asylum seeker', Manne claimed Howard had 'found the issue where he could simultaneously gazump One Nation and destabilise a Labor caught between its conflicting constituencies' (Manne 2004). A discursive framing of asylum seekers and by association their Australian Muslim brethren as the demonised 'Other' was juxtaposed against the white teleology of nationhood to produce the most explicit attack on multiculturalism since its inception.

The politicisation and militarisation of the *Tampa* incident in the pre-election months of 2001 marked the zenith of the multicultural assault. A signification spiral occurred (Hall *et al.*, 1978) in which discrete events, such as the Sydney rape trials, were ideologically associated and linked to wider discourses of national experience by which a whole community (Australian Muslims) was made to share the burden of blame and carry responsibility (Jones 2001; Devine 2001). Notwithstanding pejorative and legally false terms such as 'queue jumpers' and 'illegal immigrants' (Menadue 2001) being used to vilify mostly Muslim inmates of immigration detention centres who were fleeing totalitarian regimes, the 'dog whistle' in this exercise was that these people were contravening a moral order (Poynting *et al* 2004)—queuing and obeying rules are seen as a proper and fair way of acting. Dog whistle politics involves pitching an implied message to a particular group of voters that other voters do not hear (Oakes 2001:8), so by criminalizing boat-people and asylum seekers and inferring that they were committing an immoral act, these people were seen by those

who believed government rhetoric as threatening the social and political order. A *moral panic* driven by government rhetoric conflated the *Tampa* incident, the attack on New York of September 11, 2001, and the 'children overboard' affair of 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2001, into one issue: terror. Muslim Australians underwent the impugning of their moral and cultural standards by slogans such as, 'we decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come', and John Howard's infamous, 'I don't want people like that in Australia. Genuine refugees don't do that ... They hang on to their children' (*Herald Sun* 2001).

Statistics tell us that over two-thirds of the population believed the government's rhetoric and acquiesced in its cultural politicking. The mendacity of the dehumanising of desperate people for short-term political gain rebounded on its perpetrators with ironical embarrassment. The racialising displayed towards asylum seekers and the Islamic community (the latest arrivals in a country whose history is built on difficult arrivals (Wills 2002)), with inferences of their harbouring a fundamentalist, culturally unaccommodating mentality, was exposed as a projection of the attitude of, firstly, the Australian government itself, and secondly, that of its Immigration Department.

Revelations that the London Underground bombings of July 2005 were carried out by three British-born citizens out of the four perpetrators prompted a re-evaluation in Britain of the culture of the 'ethnic' enclave. *Guardian* columnist Jonathan Freedland commented,

We could shut out every last asylum seeker, expel every illegal immigrant, and it would make us no safer. This attack came from within (Freedland 2005:9).

Baroness Kishwer Falkner, a Pakistani-born member of the House of Lords asked, 'Do we tolerate segregation in the guise of multiculturalism?' She exhorted a rethink of the multicultural compromise—that Britain spell out more clearly what it was prepared to ask from, as well as give to, its migrants (Freedland 2005:9). The point was not lost on Australia. Suddenly the Prime Minister became receptive to meeting with Muslim civic and clerical leaders, to recognise and embrace their position as stakeholders in Australian society, and to enlist their participation in combating radical agitators (Zwartz 2005:6). There was an about-face recognition that demanding commitment from newcomers required mutual respect, not a position defined by policies that told them their cultures were irrelevant and inferior (Jakubowicz 2005:13). It remains to be stated, therefore, that legitimate avenues to social participation in nationhood do not emanate from a static definition of culture and the importance of privileging the comfort, cohesiveness and exclusiveness of the white Anglo founding culture of Australian statehood. The prospect of a re-badging of the evolving and hybridising nature of Australian society remains one of hope for the future. The neo-conservative legacy of 'tolerant' multiculturalism has been a metaphor for subaltern relegation of migrant groups.

The second point of exposition of the prejudice underlying 'tolerant' multiculturalism concerns the culture of a dysfunctional Immigration Department. For as long as 'Othered' asylum seekers were showing signs of disturbance over the wilful neglect and emotional abuse to which they were subject in mandatory detention, neither the government nor the public were moved or cared much (A.C. Nielsen 2001; Roy Morgan 2001). Health care workers, church groups, journalists, lawyers and a con-

cerned *intelligentsia* debated their poor treatment, particularly in reference to traumatised children (HREOC 2004), but it was the graphic revelation of the treatment of a white Australian girl, Cornelia Rau, with all the callousness and indifference meted out to the 'Other' that caught the public's attention and embarrassed the government (Palmer 2005). Political journalist Michelle Grattan, commenting in *The Age* on the Palmer Inquiry into the detention of Rau and Vivian Alvarez Solon, and by inference the racialised assumptions by which the immigration department dehumanised its victims, wrote:

the department's culture—intolerant and always assuming the worst of detainees or those who have not complied—has been the Government's culture ... in taking its uncompromising line, the department was doing what was wanted by a Government that was so ready to insist that asylum seekers had thrown their children overboard. If it had not mistaken a couple of Australians for foreigners, it's quite likely its general bad behaviour would be continuing unquestioned (Grattan 2005:6).

It was only through the prism of racialised whiteness and Australian residency that the public began to comprehend not only that no one with those attributes should be treated the way Rau and Solon were, but also that no one should be treated that way at all. The static prescription that 'Australian' meant a core privileged culture and marginalised stakeholders like migrants and refugees were alien and objectified because of their differences, was exposed for the intolerant, prejudiced mindset that it is—a callous rejection of the Kantian view of human self-worth.

Once it has been recognised that migration tides contribute different attributes to the common good, then the evolving common culture hybridises. Logically, a statement of shared values

should change over time, as does the composition of society. Simpson and his donkey might mean less to Italian, Chinese, Lebanese or Vietnamese immigrants than the descendants of the Anzacs, but does that mean that these migrant groups have made no contribution to society? If they have put their trust in the laws, civic institutions and democratically elected politicians of Australia, then it is a breach of trust to diminish their cultural signifiers.

Perhaps a transformative metaphor can be seen in the Cronulla riots of December 2005. The image of drunken white youths draped in the Australian flag and carrying bottles with which to harass 'Lebs' and/or people of Middle Eastern appearance resonated around the nation and throughout the world media. Historian Marilyn Lake seemingly summed up the Howard era when she wrote, 'Militant nationalism also breeds racism' (Lake 2005:19). More specifically, Milad Bardan, executive officer of the Australian Arabic Council, cautioned:

There is a thin line between verbal and physical abuse, and the riots in Sydney are but proof of systematic natural progression of years of ethnic hounding, taunting and stereotyping. If Australia is to avoid a repetition of the weekend riots, it is vital that the media and the authorities refrain from using this practice in their quest to provide a safer and more integrated Australian community (Bardan 2005).

It appears that his words were heeded at least by the community, if not the Prime Minister.

Amidst a plethora of spontaneous community initiatives undertaken to condemn violence and mitigate community tensions, the Prime Minister again damned a site of multicultural disjuncture with faint praise. His 'I would never condemn people for being proud of the

Australian flag. What I condemn is loutish behaviour, criminal behaviour' (Editorial 2005), was reminiscent of his similar reticence to acknowledge the racial overtones of Pauline Hanson's 1996 parliamentary debut. In response to her xenophobic notions as politics of grievance, Howard had applauded the arrival of a new era of free speech instead of deploring the arrival of a new politics of race (Abbott 1998). Journalist Shaun Carney analysed the Prime Minister's words as 'a positive message about the good nature of the Australian people — not most of us, or the vast majority, but all of us' (Carney 2005:29). By this he meant the white, insular, parochial, anti-multicultural constituency of his power base, the neighbours and mums and dads of the Cronulla rioters, were not being judged, threatened or rebuked. He was inclusively telling his xenophobic voters that they should continue to feel relaxed and comfortable. A former policeman turned academic, Michael Kennedy, after a compelling analysis of ethnic culture and violence, concluded the matter was about politics and implied it required leadership (Sheahan 2005:25). Marilyn Lake and Shaun Carney both demonstrated how negative leadership inflected multiculturalism.

Despite an Age readers' poll showing 68 per cent did not agree that multiculturalism was dead in Australia (*The Age* 2005:18) and positive community action implying the same, the politics of multicultural victimisation has vitiated the philosophical and public policy discourse until such time as its propagators are replaced by a different political culture — one that displays positive leadership.

Poynting *et al.* in *Bin Laden in the Suburbs* maintain that the hysteria associated with the attacks on multiculturalism represents the ideological agendas of

conservative politicians and the commercial imperatives of tabloid journalism more than it does popular opinion (Poynting 2004:259). However, they urge a rethink on the nature and direction of multiculturalism and national belonging in Australia in the twenty-first century. In this, they echo the sentiments of Professor Jerzy Zubrzycki (1987). Ien Ang asks for an ethics of multiculturalism. She argues that Australian multiculturalism has always been ambivalent—it claimed to be anti-racist but propagated a repressed sense of race (Ang 2001:104). Unless we interrogate this ambivalence, she urges, we will maintain a multiculturalism that preserves a conservative element of racialisation (Ang 2001:111). This concurs with Jon Stratton's observations in *Race Daze*. Whilst fashioning hybrid lives and intercultural relations that cut across assumptions about ethnic enclaves takes generations, Hogg and Brown (1998:177) argue in *Rethinking Law and Order* that we need a 'politics of civility' which challenges the unwritten social codes of incivility and moves towards greater recognition of shared responsibility.

### Author Note

Jeanette Krongold has a legal background, specialising in immigration law. She is working on a doctoral thesis about asylum seekers and 'breaking the rules' over the last decade. Her areas of interest include immigration, multiculturalism, human rights, and critical whiteness theory.

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