

Select Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism

Submission

This submission will heavily center on term of reference h: the potential benefits and disadvantages of enshrining principles of multiculturalism in legislation.

About the author of this submission

My name is Nicholas Butler. I represent no group or organization. I am simply submitting my opinion as no one more than an Australian citizen.

Introduction

Multiculturalism is broadly understood as the philosophy that it is beneficial for a society to be made up of a variety of cultural influences. Whether or not a society chooses to be multicultural can have enormous implications for the rights of minority (and in some cases majority) groups in the society, social harmony and cohesion, and the values a society will hold. This submission will make recommendations as to how to maximise the benefits of multiculturalism, while also minimising its drawbacks.

Potential benefits of multiculturalism

I believe multiculturalism has two potential benefits:

Potential benefit 1: Multiculturalism increases the number of cultural elements that all members of a society may partake in and enjoy.

The Australian people broadly enjoy the presence of cultural elements in Australia that add to cultural diversity. This is because such diversity offers the Australian people a greater variety of cultures to enjoy. When society is multicultural, there are more opportunities to enjoy cultural elements than when a society is monocultural, for the simple reason that there are more cultural elements available to be enjoyed.

The specific types of cultural elements Australians enjoy specifically include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- cuisine;
- clothing and costume;
- festivals and rituals;
- sports;
- mythologies and stories;
- artefacts;
- architecture;
- language (but not so as to diminish the importance of understanding and speaking English).

Recommendation 1: The Australian government should promote a model of multiculturalism that welcomes and embraces diversity of the types of cultural elements listed under the first potential benefit of multiculturalism.

However, one must remember that in this world, cultural elements are not limited to the aforementioned list. Also elemental to cultures are their beliefs and values. In some cultures, the beliefs and values dominant in them are patently incompatible with Australia's non-negotiable values.

Recommendation 2: The Australian government should define Australia's non-negotiable values as: freedom of speech/religion/association/the press, separation of church and state,

equality before the law, equal rights and respect for all people regardless of minority status, democracy, rule of law, free and fair elections, and human rights.

The second potential benefit of multiculturalism is:

2. Multiculturalism fosters a reassurance among ethnic and religious minorities that they can be completely Australian despite their ethnic or religious minority status.

Ethnic and religious minorities often have cultural backgrounds different to Australia's predominant cultural background. To reject multiculturalism would be to require them to surrender this background in order to be considered properly Australian. If a person of this background was unwilling or unable to do so, they would probably be excluded from mainstream society, and face discrimination. This would have a multitude of negative outcomes. First of all, such discrimination would be morally unacceptable. Secondly, it may lead to the person viewing themselves as not Australian. To feel distant and separate from society in such a way would likely result in the person developing a hatred of society. This hatred can give rise to attempts to attack and hurt or kill Australians.

Recommendation 3: The Australian government should define belonging to Australian society in such a way that allows an individual to keep their cultural background and still be considered to belong to Australian society.

Recommendation 4: The Australian government should continue with its public campaigns that educate against racism. Strong opposition to racism is both morally right and necessary to integrate different ethnic groups together.

However, Recommendation 3's definition of belonging to Australian society cannot be absolute. There are situations when it is necessary for an individual to require the rejection of certain cultural backgrounds in order to properly belong to Australian society. These situations are when an individual holds beliefs antithetical to Australian values as described in Recommendation 2. When this is the case, the reasoning behind allowing religious and ethnic minorities to keep their cultural backgrounds - to ensure that they can be considered properly Australian - does not apply. To apply it would be to allow the maintenance of beliefs and practices inconsistent with Australia's non-negotiable values, which would be profoundly harmful.

Someone who opposes Australia's non-negotiable values will be dissatisfied with Australian society unless it changes. There is no way to make them satisfied short of changing society to fit their image. We should be steadfastly unwilling to do this. This does mean that unless we can convince such a person to adopt non-negotiable Australian values, there will be tension between them and mainstream society. Unpleasant as this tension will be, it is far preferable to weakening or undermining non-negotiable Australian values, the consequences of which are explained under drawback #3.

Recommendation 4: The Australian government's model of multiculturalism should not include the welcoming, embrace, promotion, encouragement or accommodation of any religious or cultural practice that is inconsistent with the values stipulated in Recommendation 2.

Recommendation 5: Recommendation 1 shall not be interpreted as requiring a model of multiculturalism that includes the welcoming, embrace, promotion, encouragement or

accommodation of any religious or cultural practice that is inconsistent with the values stipulated in Recommendation 2.

Recommendation 6: Recommendation 3 shall not be interpreted as defining belonging to Australian society as allowing an individual to preserve or maintain any cultural or religious belief, value or practice and still be considered to belong to Australian society.

Potential drawbacks of multiculturalism

I believe multiculturalism has three potential drawbacks:

Potential drawback 1: Multiculturalism increases the amount of difference in society, which may dissuade people from engaging and interaction with people who are different to them.

It is human nature for people to prefer the company of people who are like them. The familiarity gives them an assurance that they are secure and in no danger around them. In monocultural societies, in which most or all people live the same culture, there is less difference between people, and therefore less opportunity for difference to divide people.

People who are unfamiliar to a person - such as people of different cultural backgrounds - cannot provide the same familiarity, and therefore the same sense of security. This can lead people of different cultural backgrounds to reject interaction with one another. This lack of interaction results in a lack of learning and understanding about the other person, which in turn allows for the formation of negative stereotypes and perceptions about the other person. These negative perceptions may form the basis of attacks by members of one group on another.

Freedom of association requires that people of the same cultural group be allowed to associate primarily with each other. However, we should not be naive as to the effect this can have on their relations with members of society generally. It can limit the interactions they will have with other members of society. Measures should be established to provide opportunities for such interactions.

Recommendation 7: The Australian government should require all state and publicly-funded institutions and organisations, and any services they may provide, to be equally accessible and open to all people, regardless of race, religion, skin colour, ethnicity, national origin, cultural background or identity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, political opinion, physical attributes, or membership in any social group.

All this said, I consider it unlikely that most Australians would be uncomfortable with interacting with people of different cultural backgrounds if they believe that the difference between them and the other person is only superficial - limited to the list of types of cultural elements under benefit #1. A person would be unlikely, for example, to be reluctant to interact with another person if they believed that the cultural differences between them did not go further than matters such as diet, dress, or cultural rituals or festivals.

I believe that, where it exists, the reluctance to interact with people of different cultural backgrounds is due to a perception, correct or incorrect, that the other person holds values incompatible with Australian values. However, I consider it likely that some people who hold this perception do so by using superficial cultural differences as predictors of more profound cultural differences.

To better facilitate interaction among different cultural groups, two things are necessary. Firstly, all different cultural groups must share Australian values.

Recommendation 8: The Australian government should encourage, among all cultural groups (majority or minority), adherence to non-negotiable Australian values.

Secondly, all different cultural groups must believe that all other groups share Australian values. Interaction will not be fostered between two groups if one believes the other does not share Australian values, even if they do.

Recommendation 9: The Australian government should publicise, promote and make visible examples of individuals from various cultural groups adhering to Australian values.

Potential drawback 2: Multiculturalism may introduce different and contrasting interests between different cultural groups into Australian society that may form the basis for tension and conflict.

All conflict is rooted in difference. All conflict occurs because two or more opposing parties are seeking a certain outcome, and the other party or parties are seeking a contrasting outcome. One party may come to view the other party as getting in the way of fulfilling their interests, and as such, they may attack the other party. Such attacks can instigate broader conflict between different groups.

In a monocultural society, there are less points of difference between people. Accordingly, there are less reasons for them to be fighting against each other. A multicultural society allows for more points of difference, and therefore, more potential for conflict. If the cultures of two different cultural groups are inconsistent, and one group living by their culture is to the detriment of the culture of another group, conflict between some members of the groups is likely.

Recommendation 10: The Australian government should encourage all people to think of themselves as Australian first, before any other identity, be it a cultural, religious, ethnic or other identity. The willingness and ability of a prospective immigrant to identify in this way should be considered in whether or not to admit them into the country.

I consider it extremely unlikely that two different cultural groups could come into conflict over superficial cultural differences such as those listed under benefit #1. Such elements can coexist. They are not incompatible. Such differences could only be grounds for conflict if one group's member attempted to impose superficial cultural elements over another, which happens extremely rarely.

Conflicts over different cultures are more likely to result from cultural differences at levels deeper than this superficial level. For example, they are more likely to result from different visions, rooted in culture or religion, as to how Australia should be governed. This is because some members of different groups are likely to be uneasy or resentful with the visions of governance promoted by some members of other groups. To prevent such conflicts, it is necessary that different cultural groups share the same vision as to how Australia should be governed. The vision they should share should be according to the definition of Australian values as defined in Recommendation 2. It is unnecessary to repeat the recommendation here.

However, it is necessary to state one hot-button issue relating to conflicting cultural views about how Australia should be governed: freedom of speech. Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination

Act has given rise to numerous legal cases in which members of one cultural group have attempted to shut down the freedom of speech of members of another. This has caused tensions between different ethnic groups, the most notable being between some Korean and Japanese Australians over a memorial to the victims of the Rape of Nanjing in a Sydney church yard. (See Visetin, Lisa, *WWII peace statue in Canterbury-Bankstown divides community groups*, online, August 1, 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/wwii-peace-statue-in-canterburybankstown-divides-community-groups-20160801-gqi99s.html>) A complaint under 18C has been filed to have the statue removed. (See Cooper, Hayden, *Japanese group launches 18C racial discrimination case over 'comfort women' memorial*, online, December 13, 2016, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-12-14/japanese-group-launches-18c-case-against-uniting-church/8117234>)

Recommendation 11: Sections 18B, 18C, 18D, 18E and 18F of the Racial Discrimination Act should be repealed in their entirety, and replaced with prohibitions on advocating violence, making threats, and abuse targeted at specific people on the grounds of race, colour or national or ethnic origin.

Potential drawback 3. Different cultural and religious beliefs, values and practices accommodated by multiculturalism may be inconsistent with non-negotiable Australian values.

Too often, multiculturalism has led some people to believe that such values and practices should be accommodated. This is a gravely misguided idea.

Australia's values have not been chosen at random, but for a reason. They have been chosen because they are the values that maximise human happiness and wellbeing. They do this because they are values of freedom, not coercion, allowing every person to live their life in the way that makes them happy. Therefore, to violate Australian values is to violate the rights and freedoms of another person. This causes unhappiness and suffering to other people, and it should not be tolerated or accepted.

Furthermore, violations of Australia's non-negotiable values are likely to exacerbate social tension and disharmony. As people are irrational beings, it is likely that some people will collectively blame all people who share an attribute of a person who violates those values for doing so. The group as a whole may be consequentially targeted, including those innocent members who do accept Australian values. This would likely lead some members in the group to cease to see themselves as Australian, and retaliate against attacks on their group with attacks on their own.

To accept values and practices in the name of multiculturalism would be to deny people their rights and freedoms, thereby causing suffering, and cause social tensions and divisions. This must not be allowed.

Recommendation 10: The Australian government should take every possible civic measure to encourage adherence to Australian values as defined in Recommendation 2, and discourage rejection of them. The means to do this should include, but not be limited to, teaching of Australian values in all public schools, public information campaigns promoting Australian values, denying public funding to any organisation or institution that opposes or advocates against Australian values, and restricting immigration to people who will adhere to Australian values. However, legal penalties should only be applied in situations where a person has been tangibly and directly harmed by an act.

Australian multiculturalism in practice

In Australia, multiculturalism is often thought of as an end in and of itself. One such manifestation of this thinking is the title of the office of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. In this title, multiculturalism is the only consideration, rather than any of the goals multiculturalism aims to achieve. It should not be thought of this way. It should be thought of as a means to various ends - specifically, the potential benefits listed in this submission.

To think of multiculturalism as something that should be achieved for its own sake discourages consideration of its potential consequences. If one believed in it for reasons other than its consequences, its consequences would not play a role in evaluating its overall merit. This thinking risks ignoring potential harms that multiculturalism can cause.

The overall social goal related to multiculturalism should be integration, social cohesion, and assimilation to the extent necessary to achieve those goals. Multiculturalism should be viewed as part of achieving this goal, rather than a goal in and of itself.

Recommendation 11: The office of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs should be renamed the office of the “Minister for Integration and Social Cohesion”.