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Submission to Australian Senate Select Committee on Ways of Protecting and Strengthening Australia's Multiculturalism and Social Inclusion

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Introduction

This Inquiry takes place at a critical time for Australian multiculturalism. In global, national and local terms the values of multiculturalism are under attack, and the policies and practices supporting multiculturalism are being eroded. It is therefore most opportune that this Inquiry has been established by the Senate. It is now over four years since the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Migration reported on Migration and Multiculturalism in Australia. Few if any of its recommendation, even though unanimously supported by the Inquiry, have been addressed by the Government.

In the meantime, significant social and political changes have occurred, support for multiculturalism as exposed by Scanlon Foundation research has been declining, and inter-group hostility is growing. Social inclusion is melting and social cohesion also shows signs of fragmenting. While claims have been made that Australia is the world's most successful multicultural society, the conditions that allowed for that claim to have credence are no longer evident. This is particularly the case since the cessation of the Social Inclusion policy of the previous Government (2007-2013), which was moving to examine the issues affecting multicultural Australia.

This submission argues these negative changes have occurred because Government has failed in three critical areas to address the most important elements of infrastructure required to underpin a vibrant and effective multicultural society. These three areas can be summarised as the legislative vacuum, the under-developed knowledge base, and the insufficient dynamics of representation.

Authors

a. My name is Andrew Jakubowicz, I hold a first class Honours Degree in Government and a Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology. I first undertook research into cultural diversity in Australia in 1969; this was the topic of my Honours thesis and formed a core element in my PhD. Since that time, I have worked in universities in the UK, the USA and Australia, while contributing to research and teaching in Europe and Asia. I

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have served as director of the Centre for Multicultural Studies at the University of Wollongong, and co-director of the Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Research Centre at the University of Technology Sydney. I have served on government bodies, such as the Board of the Special Broadcasting Service and the Advisory Board of MulticulturalNSW. I have undertaken policy-related research for the Federal and state governments. Over the past decade I have been involved in the writing of seven television documentaries, and three online factual projects, all addressing aspects of multiculturalism. Since 1990 I have been leading the development of the “Making Multicultural Australia” web-site, an educational resource for schools and the wider community (<http://multiculturalaustralia.edu.au>).

At the time of this submission I am Professor of Sociology at UTS, a member of the MulticulturalNSW Advisory Board, and Project leader for the Linkage research on “Cyber Racism and Community Resilience”. These roles are for identification purposes.

b. My name is Ly Ly Lim, I am a PhD candidate at the University of Technology Sydney, undertaking research into Australian multiculturalism. In 2016 I completed my Master’s research thesis (at ANU) on the foundation and architecture of a federal Multicultural Act. Prior to this, I worked for the Australian federal public service in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (1999-2007) and the Attorney General’s Department (2007-2014). I came to Australia as a refugee from war-torn Cambodia in 1982, and have experienced, witnessed and worked under the full impact of Australia’s changing multicultural policies over the past three and a half decades.

This submission represents purely our perspectives.

Response to Terms of Reference.

- a. Knowledge and acceptance of multiculturalism as a social inclusion policy within Australia remains fragmentary within and outside of the Australian government, due in part to lack of a leadership culture to champion its values and benefits;
- b. Access to adequate settlement and social inclusion services has been declining, especially for segments of the Australian community who are not foregrounded (such as the Syrian refugees) in Government policy;
- c. The research underpinning the knowledge base about Australian multicultural society and problematic issues such as racist violence remains inadequate, a consequence in part of the closure of the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research (BIMPR) in 1996;
- d. Vilification and discrimination continue to undermine social cohesion and dissolve many of the pathways needed for the achievement of social justice, and thereby social inclusion;

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- e. The spread of the Internet and social media has intensified the impact of vilification, significantly increasing the level of incivility and antagonisms between different ethnic and religious groups. Moves to “free-up” the expression of hate has contributed to the rising “tide line” of racism in the community, notwithstanding widespread dislike of such behaviour;
- f. Older media have failed in general to adequately represent the cultural differences within Australian society, thereby disheartening excluded minorities while leaving more privileged majorities without access to realistic understandings of contemporary Australian diversity;
- g. Following the uncontroversial lead of some States and the ACT, federal legislation enshrining the principles of multiculturalism and its key agencies would help define the acceptable boundaries of Australia’s multicultural nationality, thereby protecting it from the extremist groups of all cultural, political and religious persuasions, who wish to control the civil behaviour of other Australians. In addition, it would provide a whole of government perspective, and help develop the social and policy skills that underpin multicultural civility. One way forward would be an Australian Multicultural Commission under a national Multicultural Australia Act;
- h. Legislation would reflect the diversity of Australian society, sociologically, ideologically and politically; providing the legal framework and permanent benchmark against which policies could be measured. Moreover, it provides the legitimacy for changes to be enduring and effective.

Proposals for consideration by the Select Committee

We note that the Government has recently announced a revised policy on Multiculturalism. It emphasises the integrative aspect of the policy, a position already well-recognised in the policy since the 1980s. I note the policy was announced a week before Harmony Day, which was also the commencement date for the work of this Committee. The Government chose to table its changes to the Racial Discrimination Act Section 18C on Harmony Day, thereby masking the Committee’s launch. Notably and regrettably the Government’s new policy drops any reference to the anti-racism program launched in 2011, while remaining silent on the importance of legislation to underpin the values and operations of Australian multiculturalism. Furthermore, we note that the Government has also announced more demanding criteria for the achievement of Australian citizenship, a number of which potentially further marginalise the more vulnerable segments of Australia’s multicultural society. Citizenship that ensures equity and access to Australian society has always been a goal of Australian multiculturalism.

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Australian multiculturalism should have a strong base in human rights. Unfortunately, multiculturalism has experienced many years of marginalisation, resource-depletion, and evidence-free policy. The key agency for advancing human rights, the Australian Human Rights Commission, has come under serious attack and unjustifiable denigration by some politicians, conservative civil society organisations, and political movements. Multicultural legislation would protect and help inform all Australians, while marginalising extremists who claim their use of the concept of multiculturalism justifies their own hard-line, racist and anti-democratic views. We are referring here both to religious extremists and those with racially charged agendas.

The Federal Government's statement on multiculturalism represents a lost opportunity to embed key values of multiculturalism in Australia's institutions, and establish the legislative foundation for future social cohesion. Any advisory body membership should be sought through public advertisement and reflect at the very least a bipartisan endorsement. The current Australian Multicultural Council has been compromised by the widely-held perception that at least half the members are closely linked to the governing party, were appointed for political rather than societal reasons, and were drawn from a very narrow sector of Australia's multicultural communities.

The Committee now has the critical opportunity to move to a New Multiculturalism by:

- creating national legislation that provides a human rights structure for Multiculturalism in Australia and establishes the boundaries for civil engagement between individuals and communities;
- proposing advisory and executive bodies that reflect the wide diversity of Australia;
- establishing a strong research capacity linking researchers, policy makers, civil society and business, separate from but supported by government, that is both policy and inquiry driven;
- creating an Australian Multicultural Commission under national legislation and based within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, charged with developing Australia's capacity to fully realise the ambition of being the world's most successful multicultural society;
- developing a media and public culture strategy that recognises and respects the cultural diversity of Australia, and ensuring it appears strongly in the media and the arts;

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- endorsing the values and benefits of multiculturalism for Australia through an annual statement by Parliament, a concrete symbolism of Australia's commitment to multiculturalism;
- supports 'rejection of racism' as a core Australian value;
- delineates core Australian values of civic democracy following on from the Australian Citizenship Council proposals of 2000.

A New Multiculturalism would retain key parts of policies developed (and in some cases abandoned) over the past generation:

- drawing on Australia's international UN convention responsibilities (not only those in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) but also in the broader human rights conventions and in the conventions on religion, migrant workers, culture and people resident outside their countries of origin), delineate and ensure the effective implementation of "rights" to which Australia is a signatory;
- clarify the outcomes sought for immigrants in the first phases of settlement, ensuring through access and equity the quality and relevance of services;
- recognising that both specialist and generalist services and programs are necessary to ensure equity.

The New Multiculturalism would introduce (or recover) key concepts, including that:

- Indigenous Australians are the traditional owners of the land on which modern Australia has been formed and are integral partners in the multicultural project;
- Ethnic and Australian are complementary not antagonistic identities;
- globalisation has enabled the mobility of diasporic communities that are often trans-national, carrying a number of national passports, offering much more subtle and fluid identities, especially for second-generation and later citizens;
- Australian society is created through all its citizens, so that multiculturalism has to recognise, respect and incorporate the "charter" cultures of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales;
- diaspora communities in Australia include large numbers of temporary migrants, including 457 (and its successors), refugees, and international student categories, whose presence multiculturalism has to recognise, respect and incorporate;
- multiculturalism is essentially a human rights policy, which can be expressed through all forms of public activity;

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- racism and therefore anti-racism is a multi-directional phenomenon, that can both affect culturally diverse communities as targets, and have perpetrators in those communities;
- Australia's reservation to Article 4 of the UN ICERD should be rescinded, permitting the criminalisation of serious racial vilification;
- a national legislative framework should be created that enshrines Multiculturalism within the range of UN conventions to which Australia is a signatory, including ICERD, Cultural Heritage, Indigenous Rights, Trauma and Torture, and the Rights of the Child. Possible models include Canadian legislation and State legislations of New South Wales, Victoria or Queensland.

Rationale

We are a nation in transformation. "Multiculturalism" has re-emerged as a key parameter for whole of government interventions in our increasingly complex and evolving society. After years of hostility from that part of Australian society most comfortable with a monocultural tradition, reflected in a (false) distinction between integration and multiculturalism, the Government in March 2017 re-asserted the centrality of the concept as an organising principle in the delivery of public services and underlying social cohesion.

"Multiculturalism" has two lives: as a social philosophy that promotes a particular orientation to societies composed of citizens from many different cultural origins, AND as a framework for the delivery of services in culturally diverse societies. Its philosophical origins in the 1970s and its practical establishment in the 1978 Galbally Report suggests that the concept itself requires renewal. In the past forty years globalisation has intensified, the Internet has been created, and population movements have accelerated. New communities have entered Australian society and struggled to find a place here. Australia's philosophical and policy settings have not kept pace. Indeed the failure to regularly refresh the ideas and practices from a solid empirical research base, with a consequential tendency to abandon the debate purely to the realm of emotion and populist pressure groups, has contributed to both social and policy crises.

A "New Multiculturalism" is required to re-set the policy parameters and accept the contemporary challenge of a "Multiculturalism for All Australians", first laid out in 1976. A "New Multiculturalism" firstly identifies the values and approaches that have resilience and should remain, and then identifies the issues that are poorly or not at all addressed, and posits additional initiatives.

The Multiculturalism of the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and the 'Noughties' began from two important ideas: that for migrants to Australia their "ethnic identities" and cultures

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were crucial for their well-being, and that immigrants entered a society that discriminated against them and failed to provide them with real opportunities. The two pillars were those of culture and rights. The aim of policy originally was to ensure rights, enable access, and ensure equitable outcomes and cultural preservation. The issue of migrant rights drove the pressure for multiculturalism, even though it was always leavened by an awareness of the “two-way” conversation: immigration to Australia would change migrants but also change their Australian neighbours. By 1989 Multiculturalism gained an important new dimension - social justice; and the public debate had begun on what form of Multiculturalism Act Australia should have. A decade later the situation had shifted: the shadow of “tribalisation” (promoted by Prof Geoffrey Blainey) began to haunt the debate, social justice was removed from the policy settings (to be replaced by a less meaningful and rubbery reference to ‘equity’), and the mood shifted away from multiculturalism towards a more assimilationist approach.

In particular, the independent research resource and national forum provided by the Bureau of Immigration Multicultural and Population Research was closed in 1996, ensuring that inquiry-driven research was effectively removed from the policy process. Instead a much smaller program-oriented research function was retained in the Immigration Department, offering a very constrained evidence base, driven by the political priorities of the government of the day, and the program responsibilities of the bureaucracy. The national research conversations that had been so important as an interface for research, policy and community discussions essentially disappeared. Moreover, leading political voices rejected the idea that Australian values might be enriched by engagement with immigrant communities, re-asserting the dominant position of a supposed ‘core culture’, demanding that immigrants accept what they found and modify their lives to fit.

By the middle of the first 21st century decade, multiculturalism had lost much of its leverage as a force for social change and improved well-being, driven down by spreading apprehension that the acknowledgement and endorsement of cultural diversity would lead to division, violence and disharmony. Attention had become focused on the threats posed by “home-brewed” terrorism, with public resources flowing towards “de-radicalisation” of Muslim youth. Public discourses were replete with intimations of violence, social dissolution and alien invasions, invoking public anxiety. Over the next five years, further damage was done to the acceptance of human rights, with many rather different groups seeing the sea-change as one that licensed inter-group hostility, vilification and violence.

The consequences of this shift in sentiment and leadership became clearer during 2009 and 2010, with the upsurge of racist violence directed at the unexpected target of Indian international students. Public policy had no effective base from which to

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respond, with denial of racism by political leaders simply adding accelerant to the flames, embittering the victims and emboldening the perpetrators.

Since the rise of international terrorism and the growth of extremist groups across the board, social tensions have grown, often exacerbated by key political figures. Yet major diasporic communities whose countries of origin are also major players in Australia's economic security are now a feature of our society, not typically the case in the earlier post-war period (other than for the UK). Before the past two decades our largest source countries of immigrants did not play a major role in our economy, while countries which have been of major economic importance have tended not to be major sources of immigrants. With the rapid growth of India and China as economic and population partners, Australia faces a new era of multicultural policy challenges.

Strong, independent and inter-disciplinary evidence-based research is vital to assist policy development in these areas, including housing and urban planning, education, health and social services, racism and local community relations. Yet research funding and research infrastructure to support such evidence-based research is severely lacking since the demise of the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research. There is an urgent need to build the research infrastructure and funding to enable strategic and coordinated research on migration, cultural diversity and community relations.

We propose the establishment of a national Migration, Cultural Diversity and Community Relations Research Institute. This would bring together government, business and community stakeholders to fund and steer research, with a program of competitively-funded research grant and research networking activities. The Institute would convene national research conferences, policy workshops, and end-user symposia. The Migration, Cultural Diversity and Community Relations Research Institute will also play the critical role of linking the Australian immigration research and policy community into important international migration research networks, such as the International Metropolis (its conference will be in Sydney in 2018) and the International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion (IMISCOE) network.

Relevant publications

Andrew Jakubowicz

Personal Blog on multiculturalism <https://andrewjakubowicz.com/?s=cult>

The Conversation – 40+ pieces on multiculturalism and policy in Australia
<https://theconversation.com/au/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=jakubowicz+multicultural>

Making Multicultural Australia website <http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/>

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2016 'Vietnam The War that Made Australia' SBS TV March

2014 'Once Upon a Time in Carlton' Northern Pictures not yet screened.

2014/15 'Once Upon a Time in Punchbowl' SBS TV July/ Al Jazeera February 2015

2012 'Once Upon a Time in Cabramatta' SBS TV January

2011 'Immigration Nation', 3 part documentary, research advice, script editing, historical adviser (broadcast January 2011), Renegade Factual, Melbourne; AND

'Immigration Nation' website, script and script editing, concept development, production adviser, Chocolate Liberation Front, Melbourne (launch January 2011).