

## **Mushy multiculturalism in a terrorist age**

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Thank you very much for inviting me to speak to you tonight. The list of previous speakers and topics is an impressive one - topics such as science, music, the human genome, the military have all been canvassed. These are matters that affect us all. Tonight I want to talk to you about an issue that goes to the heart of what it means to be a liberal, democratic country.

Open any newspaper these days and multiculturalism is up for debate in Australia, as it is in many other Western countries. A few years ago, it was merely part of orthodox thinking as a hallmark of any tolerant, liberal democracy such as Australia. It was one of those words happily bandied about without too much thought.

These days multiculturalism is being questioned more and more. And not just from those on the conservative side of politics. Tonight I intend to look closely at what we mean by multiculturalism and why questions are being asked.

Let's start by trying to define multiculturalism. It means different things to different people. And that is part of the problem. For some it means no more than promoting a culturally diverse society unified by a core set of non-negotiable values like freedom of speech, the separation of church and state, the equality of women, representative government and the rule of law. This is multiculturalism "lite".

Indeed, fifty years ago, before the term 'multiculturalism' had entered the lexicon we would have called this assimilation.

In the 50's and 60's when migrants arrived in Australia, there was a sense of obligation to the new country. Immigrants knew what was expected of them. They were required to

fit into that new country.

Writing in *Quadrant* magazine a few years ago, a migrant from Czechoslovakia, Agnes Selby wrote of her own experience:

“The postwar migrants did not change the then existing Australian culture but added to it. Although they spoke a variety of languages, their culture was essentially European-derived, as Australian culture then was. If Australia changed in the postwar period, so did the migrants through assimilation and integration. In the absence of multiculturalism and political correctness, terms not yet born in those days, the new arrivals soon melded with the Australian community. Now, more than fifty years later, it is no longer possible to tell where one’s ancestors came from. Such was the success of postwar migration,” she said.<sup>1</sup>

The transformation of thousands of poor, displaced postwar migrants into comfortable middle class Australians in a matter of a few generations is one of the great success stories of integration.

The traditional three way contract was simple: majority tolerance, minority loyalty and government vigilance in both directions.<sup>2</sup>

Becoming an Australian citizen meant accepting responsibilities in return for clearly understood rights and privileges. A migrant renounced “all other allegiances” in order to swear loyalty to Australia.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “South of the Invisible Line” by Agnes Selby, *Quadrant*, March 2002, page 24.

<sup>2</sup> See John O’Sullivan, “The Folly of Intolerance” *National Review Online* 24 October 2001.

<sup>3</sup> That was dropped in 1986 because, after a decade of multiculturalism, it was seen by the then Labor Minister, Chris Hurford as “ambiguous and unnecessary”. See “Democracy and dual citizenship” by Katherine Betts, *People and Place* Volume 10, No 1 2002 at page 60.

When my parents came to Australia from Denmark, they came on Australia's terms. They went to English classes so that when they went to the corner deli they could learn to ask for vinegar, not "vine gar," as they called it. As an Australian born child of Danish parents, I was Australian. What else could I possibly be?

Thirty years later, a much stronger form of multiculturalism has taken root. Now asking for minority loyalty is regarded as a sign of intolerance. You only have to look at the reaction to the recent comments by Treasurer, Peter Costello, who suggested that those who favour sharia law may want to look elsewhere for a home. He was immediately criticised for his alleged intolerance.

Pursuing a more virulent form of multiculturalism, advocates now emphasize the right of different cultures to be "separate but equal." This version of multiculturalism encourages a lazy moral relativism. Nothing is right or wrong. All cultures are equal.

### *Hyphenated loyalty*

Immigrants are no longer Australians, or even "new" Australians as my parents saw themselves. Even Australian born children of migrants these days call themselves second generation immigrants: Lebanese-Australians, for example.

Multiculturalism endorses the idea that migrants can have what Theodore Roosevelt<sup>4</sup> called a hyphenated loyalty to their new country. And the new country comes after the hyphen, not before it.

The problem is a simple one: when you tolerate this idea of a hyphenated loyalty, you soon undermine our common set of values. Tolerance is a worthy goal but it's only

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<sup>4</sup>Theodore Roosevelt said in 1915, "The man who calls himself an American citizen and who yet shows by his actions that he is primarily the citizen of a foreign land, plays a thoroughly mischievous part in the life of our body politic." See Phillip Davies (eds) *Immigration and Americanization* (Boston: Ginn & Co, 1920).

meaningful when tempered with moral judgements about what is right and what is wrong.

Late last year you may have seen film footage of the Chief Justice from the Northern Territory descending on the Yarralin community. He took his court-room to the indigenous community to sentence a 55-year-old Yarralin man for bashing and raping a 14-year-old girl. The anal rape of a crying, screaming child saw the man go to prison for just one month because the girl was promised to the man under customary indigenous law. The Chief Justice accepted evidence that this was simply aboriginal culture and the girl knew what to expect.<sup>5</sup>

That decision was morally reprehensible but was made in this climate where aspects of non-western cultures are revered as quaintly romantic and different. I believe that cultural relativism like this points a gun at social cohesion and western values.

And let me add that it is particularly disappointing when this strident form of multiculturalism trumps feminism. When women's rights take a back seat to cultural rights. This persisting cultural cringe about imposing our values on those who do not share them meant that the leading critics of that rape case were the federal Justice Minister Chris Ellison (a white man), the new ALP president Warren Mundine (a black man) and a few indigenous women. But where was the white feminist outcry?

### *The illegitimate birth of multiculturalism*

Let me move back to the birth of multiculturalism.

Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that multiculturalism has unleashed what I have called a self-loathing of western culture. The birth of multiculturalism was hardly western liberal democracy's finest moment.

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<sup>5</sup>"Victim trapped between two worlds" *The Australian* October 9 2002

It was as, Mark Lopez traces in his book, *The Origins of Multiculturalism*,<sup>6</sup> the first big win for interest group politics. It didn't make it into mainstream society on the basis of merit. Instead, in the face of stiff opposition, multiculturalism succeeded thanks to the power of the lobby. In fact, as Lopez says, it became the greatest lobbying success story.

Multiculturalism was pushed by a group of activists on the fringe of politics. It grew out of the 1960's anti-Vietnam milieu.

It was, as if after Vietnam, the protestors put down their anti-war placards and picked up new ones with the word "multiculturalism" on them.

The story of multiculturalism, says sociologist Katherine Betts, is not one of ethnic agitators. It was largely pushed by a group of anglo-Australian activists. And "most of them could and did meet in one room."<sup>7</sup>

Opinion polls at the time showed that 90 per cent of Australians were opposed to the ideas of multiculturalism.<sup>8</sup> But it managed to get its toe in the policy door with some help from Al Grassby and Gough Whitlam.

Activists also managed to recruit Opposition spokesman at the time, Malcolm Fraser, to the cause. When Fraser included multiculturalism in the Coalition platform in 1974, this was the first time it became official immigration policy for a major political party.

When elected to government in Dec 1975, it was all too easy. Multiculturalism had won

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<sup>6</sup>Mark Lopez, *The Origins of Multiculturalism in Australian Politics 1945-1975*, 2000, Melbourne University Press.

<sup>7</sup>Review of Mark Lopez, *The Origins of Multiculturalism in Australian Politics* by Katherine Betts, *People and Place*, 2000, volume 8, number 3.

<sup>8</sup>The Melbourne Family Survey, 1971; see Mark Lopez, *The Origins of Multiculturalism in Australian Politics*, at page 88.

the day.<sup>9</sup>

It sold itself as the tolerant, moral alternative to the previous evil immigration policy of assimilation and integration.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. See generally, Chapter 10, The Culmination of the early formative phase of multiculturalism, 1975, page 372ff.

But assimilation and integration were not intolerant of migrants. On the contrary these policies invited migrants to Australia with the promise that they too could become Australians and enjoy the values that makes Australia what it is.

Multiculturalism remains a testament to the power of the lobby. In her book *The Great Divide*, Katherine Betts cites a 1994 poll by done for the Council of Multicultural Affairs which confirms that the rank and file supporter of multiculturalism is not the migrant but more likely the well-educated anglo-Australian living far way from migrant enclaves.<sup>10</sup>

And of course, multiculturalism is now an industry. Elites have a vested interest in ensuring that groups maintain their very separate identities. Their influence and power to extract government money and favours depends on them retaining power as an identifiable, non-integrated bloc.

If that bloc reduces, becomes less identifiable or homogenous with the Australian community, as happens with assimilation and integration, they lose their power. Thus, elites actively and enthusiastically fight against integration. The end of multiculturalism would be the end of an industry.

### *Multiculturalism in a terrorist age*

Having looked at the illegitimate birth of multiculturalism, let's fast forward and look at

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<sup>10</sup> Those surveyed were asked which of the following two statements comes closest to your view: (Number 1) We should welcome and respect migrants who have different ways of living and behaving; or (2) Migrants should learn to behave like the majority of Australians do. The answers from those born in Australia differed little from those born overseas. Sixty two per cent of Australian born and 57% per cent of overseas born agreed that migrants should behave as Australian do.<sup>10</sup> Thirty four per cent of Australian born and 39% of overseas born respondents agreed with the first statement. When the respondents were broken down by education it was an entirely different story. Of university graduates, 58% said we should welcome and respect migrants who have different ways of living and behaving.<sup>10</sup> Of those without a university education, 70% agreed that migrants should behave as Australians do. Twenty six per cent agreed with the first statement.

multiculturalism against the backdrop of the last few years - against the backdrop of terrorism.

Now, there's nothing worse than an "I told you so" homily. But some of us were raising questions about multiculturalism after the terrorist attacks in the US in 2001. We suggested that many in the West were so busy being inclusive, so busy denigrating our own culture, that we were not noticing what was happening.

But those - like me - who criticised multiculturalism were subjected to a torrent of criticism. Many outraged letter writers and commentators denounced us as fear-mongers. Others said it was a form of "new racism" to speak of the inevitable, and in some cases, downright dangerous cultural clash encouraged by multiculturalism.

Back then, many were living a dream about the virtues of tolerance without limits. When Sheik Omar Bakri Mohammed, a religious extremist, was exiled from Saudi Arabia, he was welcomed by the British. When he started preaching violence against the West, calling for a Muslim caliphate that included Britain, it was a sign of free speech in a multicultural society. When he set up the extremist group al-Muhajiroun, it went unremarked as a right of freedom of association.

Even in October 2001, after young British Muslim men turned up in Afghanistan fighting for the Taliban, few took notice. One Muslim leader from Luton Central Mosque warned of a "very bad situation in Luton". "There are some organisations here ... [that] deliberately set out to excite the young men with talk of jihad," he said. And bad things were happening. An al-Muhajiroun spokesman told one British newspaper that "there are more fighters joining jihad from Britain than anywhere else in the West ... It should serve as a strong warning to the British Government. We do not recognise British or any man-made laws ... only Allah's law." Again, few took any notice. Multicultural times rolled on.

As Mark Steyn has written - the very concept of "the enemy" is alien to the non-judgmental multicultural mind: "There are no enemies, just friends whose grievances

we haven't yet accommodated," he said.

Multiculturalism may have been urged on us with the best of intentions but after the London bombings, it was clear that the multicultural experiment had not gone as planned. Remember that those attacks in London were perpetrated by local boys, boys born in British hospitals. Boys whose allegiances demanded death to their British countrymen.

After those four young British Muslims set off from Luton, and detonated four bomb blasts in London, many more people began to ask the inevitable question: perhaps tolerating the intolerant is not such a good idea. That too much tolerance can be a problem if it suggests to those who detest our values and our societies that we will not make judgments about what is right and what is wrong.

Once upon a time, those who once spoke of the ampersand citizen or the hyphenated citizen, or those who put quotation marks around "Western culture" as if it did not really exist in a multicultural society, were feted for their sophistication.

After London, questions are being asked. Even long-time supporters of multiculturalism, such as The Age's Pamela Bone, wondered aloud whether it was time for us to lay down some ground rules for those from different cultures who wish to live side by side with our culture. "Couscous yes, child marriage no?" she asked.

But why the question mark? Let me suggest that we should get rid of the question marks and the ampersands and hyphenations that have blurred our thinking on what is right and good about Western culture. Let us state with some confidence that the core parts of our own culture are not up for negotiation.

Advocating multiculturalism for people from cultures with similar values was never going to be problematic. But when cultures differ sharply, multicultural policies that promote all cultures as equal lead us in all sorts of wrong directions. A young Aboriginal woman points to tribal law to excuse her killing of her philandering husband. An educated man, the father of a group of Pakistani gang rapists, claims they did not understand our culture. A recent poll in Britain found that 40 per cent of British Muslims want sharia law introduced into the UK and 20 per cent said they sympathised with the "feelings and

motives" of the bombers who struck London's underground last July.

Finally, more of us are saying "Hang on, some values are non-negotiable."

At Sydney's Cronulla beach last December, we saw people saying just that. Many commentators and some politicians chose to describe the thousands of Australians who turned up that day as racist - as evidence that Australia was indeed a country swamped by racists.

Racism was on the streets that December weekend. No doubt about it. White supremacists alleged to have links to neo-Nazis admitted they brought in more than 100 people to join the rampage at Cronulla. Young men used their bodies as billboards to read: "We grew here, you flew here". This is racist and it's wrong. Vigilantes bashing young men and women is criminal.

But tarring the whole crowd with the same racist brush is wrong. There was so much more to Cronulla than racism. And we're fooling ourselves if we pretend otherwise.

I have written previously about the "progressive dilemma" - the conflict between solidarity and diversity. Last year, David Goodhart, editor of the progressive Prospect, wrote a controversial piece called "Discomfort of strangers". It explored the tenuous fabric that binds us as a society. He pointed to that "progressive dilemma" and compared the homogenous nature of British society in the 1950s with the present one, where individualism and diversity have produced a very different society.

He talked about us not just living among strangers but having to share with them. "We share public services and parts of our income in the welfare state, we share public spaces in towns and cities where we are squashed together on buses, trains and tubes, and we share in a democratic conversation about the collective choices we make. All such acts of sharing are more smoothly and generously negotiated if we can take for granted a limited set of common values and assumptions."

Goodhart was hounded for suggesting that throwing people of different cultures together can cause friction. Not because of any latent racism, but because "we feel more comfortable with, and are readier to share with and sacrifice for, those with whom we

have shared histories and similar values." That friction is most evident in The Netherlands and Scandinavian countries, societies that were once homogenous but recently have been confronted with immigrants from very different cultures. As Goodhart said: "To put it bluntly -- most of us prefer our own kind." Even to raise such a notion will have the usual suspects crying racism. But the sooner we recognise human nature, the sooner we can work out where to go from that starting point. Recognising human nature means that multiculturalism, though a fine sentiment, can only work if we unite behind a core set of values. I was heartened to read the results of a recent groundbreaking study commissioned by SBS. The study of young immigrants aged 16-40 found that while these young people support multiculturalism, they also have concerns that we need to talk more about the need for groups to assimilate. The report said that "many referred to the dangers of 'tribalism.'" One young Thai-Australian said: "If you are going to come to a certain country it's valuable to retain some aspects of your culture, but you've also got to be able to integrate into the [existing] culture."

It is a healthy sign that we are starting to ask questions about multiculturalism. One of the challenges ahead is to assert with confidence what our culture is. I'll finish by quoting Peter Coleman, who at an SBS forum, did just that. He said: Our heritage is the free society. It includes parliament, the Bible, Shakespeare, Milton. It is Magna Carta, the rule of law, equal rights for women, freedom of thought and expression, freedom of worship and the right to apostasy. It is Federation, the Constitution and Anzac Day.

This complex heritage - if asserted and proclaimed, as it was in the era of assimilation - does more to overcome the totalitarian jihadists than all the advisory councils and all the crimes acts. Yet we neglect and ignore it, sometimes completely. You cannot blame immigrants for not knowing more about it. The fault lies with us."