“AUSTRALIAN INDENTITY”, RACISM AND RECENT RESPONSES TO ASIAN IMMIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA

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ABSTRACT

Recent responses to Asian immigration in Australia can be assessed in relation to Australia's search for a national identity. Australian nationalism has always had its racist elements, reflected in the maintenance of the White Australia Policy until it was abolished by the Whitlam government in 1973. Asian immigration has built up considerably since then, though no one source country has been dominant. Since the late 1970s, generally one third or more of settler arrivals have been from Asian countries. Migrants to Australia from Asian countries have been, on average, more highly educated and have achieved higher income levels than the rest of the population. However, some groups have had below average education levels, notably refugees from the Indo-Chinese region. The polls indicate majority opposition to Asian immigration, as to immigration in general, though multiple issue opinion polling does not show immigration to be an issue of major concern. Since the maiden speech in parliament by the independent member for Oxley, Pauline Hanson, in September 1996, a “race controversy” has eruped which has reflected not only the persistence of racist attitudes among a section of the Australian population, but also that there is a class and education element: anti-Asian sentiment is more prevalent among the Anglo-Australian working class than among the better educated and those of immigrant background. Avoidance of further widening of these fault lines in Australian society will require statesmanship of a high order from Australia's political leaders.

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The evolution of national identity

The history of Australia since European settlement in 1788 can be written from many perspectives, but one that would find considerable resonance among the Australian population at present would be a focus on the changing sense of national identity. The settlement of Australia, beginning at Botany Bay in present-day Sydney, involved the subjugation, displacement and to some extent organized extermination of an aboriginal population (Reynolds, 1987). In accord with the spirit of the times, the Australian aborigines were regarded by the early settlers as possessing a highly inferior culture (indeed many regarded them as sub-human). Unlike in New Zealand, no treaty was ever made with them recognizing their prior possession of the land; the attitude of white settlers until well into the 20th century was that they were destined to die out. White Australians suffered a collective amnesia with regard to Aboriginal Australians until a few decades ago. In my own school days they were almost invisible in our syllabus, and I gained no hint of the wrongs perpetrated on them by my ancestors until well after I had left school.

In the search for a national identity, the history of Aboriginal Australians has now come to play an important if controversial role. Recently Prime Minister John Howard took to task those promoting a “black armband” view of Australian history (i.e. giving excessive emphasis to the wrongs done the Aborigines, as well as to other shortcomings such as the environmental degradation caused by the farming systems adopted by the European settlers) and called for an emphasis on the positive accomplishments of nation building. Although Aboriginal Australians constitute only 2 per cent of the Australian population, their role in defining Australian identity is likely to loom much larger than this proportion might suggest. Long-standing feelings of superiority, guilt, anger and confusion colour the search for an appropriate accommodation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. This background of relations between a white “master race” and a displaced non-white native people is not irrelevant to attitudes over the past century to neighbouring Asian populations and the more recent issue of reactions to the growing proportion of Asians in the Australian population.

Throughout much of Australian history, the need to establish a large settler population has been an unquestioned goal. In the early days, there was fear of possible French invasion, as well as the need for a much larger population to occupy the land and open farming and pastoral leases. But over time, the “Britishness” of the settler population began to change, even when the population remained ethnically heavily Anglo-Celtic (a long-standing Australian term which reflects the important role of the Irish in the Australian population). The Australian-born began to develop an identity separate from...
that of their old-world parents, and a sense of Australian nationalism began to develop quite early, notwithstanding what appears today as an extraordinary sense of loyalty to the “mother country” reflected in Australia's unquestioning rallying to the flag at the time of the Boer War and the First World War. The First World War - when Australian troops displayed heroism and suffered heavy casualties in Gallipoli, Europe and North Africa strengthened the sense of Australian identity and left in its wake the Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia (later the RSL) “to carry the banner of an aggressive and somewhat exclusive Australian nationalism” (Price, 1991:4). This was the time of the “independent Australian Britons” - people of predominantly Anglo-Celtic origin who, though still proud of British connections, were determined to be independent of old world bonds and inequalities (Hancock, 1930, Chapter 3).

Australian nationalism has always had its racist elements. The Bulletin, an important barometer of Australian aspirations, and one of Australia's most prestigious magazines, kept at its masthead the slogan “Australia for the White Man” over the entire period 1908 to 1961, and frequently argued that Australia should not receive non-European migrants at all. Prominent poets and novelists such as Joseph Furphy, Henry Handel Richardson and Henry Lawson presented racist themes and viewpoints that strike the modern reader as offensive but which were merely in tune with the tenor of their times. Until after the Second World War, all the countries to Australia's immediate north except Thailand were under colonial control, and a smug sense of superiority of Europeans to all non-white populations prevailed - a sense little affected by events such as Japan's victory over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. The paradox is that, while writers such as C.J. Dennis and historian Charles Bean, a key figure in the creation of the Anzac legend, equated race consciousness and white supremacy with Australian fighting spirit, these sentiments co-existed with the emerging stress on egalitarianism, the fair go and taking individuals as they come. Of course, egalitarianism was being promoted in a very homogeneous society.

Postwar immigration and the demise of the White Australia Policy

During World War II Australia experienced near-invasion by the Japanese. Knowledge of atrocities perpetrated by the Japanese forces both before (in China and Manchuria) and during the conflict, many of the latter directly experienced by Australian prisoners of war, entrenched a long-standing attitude of fear of invasion from the north and was a potent element in the postwar immigration drive. Australia's population at the end of World War II was only seven and a half million, living on a land area almost as large as that of the United States (excluding Alaska). The need for a rapid increase in population appeared self-evident. Australia's postwar immigration policy was therefore simple: to bring in migrants from Britain, but from other European countries as well if numbers from Britain did not meet requirements. The displaced persons, largely from Eastern Europe, came in large numbers in the years immediately following the end of the

\[1\] Historian Humphrey McQueen argues provocatively that "racism is the most important single component of Australian nationalism" (McQueen, 1970:42) and that "the Labor Party was racist before it was socialist” (McQueen, 1970:53).
war. The search for immigrants was progressively widened to Southern Europe and even to Egypt, Lebanon and Turkey, which were accorded a kind of “honorary European” status, apparently by virtue of their proximity to Europe. In the 1950s and 1960s, settlers from Italian or Greek peasant stock, with low levels of education and lacking English language, or later from Lebanon or Turkey, were clearly preferred to well educated, English speaking, Christian potential settlers from “real” Asian countries such as Hong Kong, Sri Lanka or the Philippines.

The reason for this curious set of preferences was the abiding influence of the White Australia Policy, which was the centre point of Australian immigration policy from the 1880s until the first real dent appeared in 1966. This policy was based on fashionable theories of racial superiority, and its objectives were to attain an ethnically homogeneous society. The Aboriginal population was expected to die out, with those of “mixed race” (the majority of the Aboriginal population) “assimilating into the majority population to the point of eventual invisibility” (Jupp, 1995: 208). The overall impact of exclusion of non-European migrants and a fairly modest immigration inflow during the 1930s was that by the time of the Second World War Australia was indeed a very homogeneous population, predominantly of Anglo-Celtic origin and with over 90 per cent local born.

In the postwar years, however, the White Australia Policy became dysfunctional in a number of respects: it thwarted the attainment of the national policy to achieve high migrant intake, by restricting that intake to European societies which eventually lost the incentive to migrate to Australia because of their growing prosperity; it was based on increasingly discredited theories and attitudes; “it restricted the thinking of Australians to a world view unduly focused on distant regions such as Britain” (Jupp, 1996:209); it alienated newly independent Asian states (though this was hotly denied by successive Ministers for Immigration); and as neighbouring Asian countries achieved rapid economic development and a more important place on the world stage, the policy became increasingly contrary to Australia’s economic, social and political interests. Paradoxically, an important factor eroding support for White Australia was the success of postwar mass immigration programs composed of non-English speaking Europeans, designed to sustain White Australia by supplementing British migration. Many of these migrants were culturally very different from the British, yet they appeared to fit into Australian society with little friction - and certainly improved its cuisine - thus strengthening the case for widening the source areas to include Asian countries. Some state governments moved towards multicultural approaches in their settlement policies, no longer requiring immigrants to become indistinct from Anglo-Australians. The widening of source areas of migrants to the Middle East and Turkey, already mentioned, made untenable the cultural arguments for White Australia and left exposed its officially denied crude racist basis.

2 Although successive Australian governments strenuously denied that a “White Australia Policy” existed, in this case Australians’ tendency to call a spade a spade prevailed in the persistence of the term in popular usage.

3 Obviously, before the time of Federation in 1901, when the Immigration Restriction Bill was adopted, the exclusionist policies (mainly directed at Chinese and Pacific Islander labourers) were separately instituted by the different Australian colonies (London, 1970: 3-23; Yarwood, 1964).
Under increasing pressure for modification, some minor changes were introduced in the White Australia Policy beginning in 1958, with a more important breakthrough in 1966. The policy was finally fully dismantled in 1973, during the early days of the Whitlam labour government.

Immigration patterns since the dismantling of the White Australia Policy

Before discussing the changing sources of migrants since the dismantling of the White Australia Policy, the overall volume of migration needs to be stressed. This has remained high throughout the postwar period, with net migration often exceeding 100,000 per year, adding close to one per cent to the rate of population growth (Figure 1). The result is that migrants constitute a larger proportion of the Australian population than they do in Canada or the USA - indeed, larger than in any other industrialized nation except Israel. However, over the most recent four-year period (1992-1995) Australia's per capita migrant intake has been only about half that of Canada.

Australia has had only a quarter century to adjust to a situation of substantial immigration from Asia. Since the late 1970's, at least one quarter and generally one third or more of annual settler arrivals have been from Asia. In 1971, only 167,000 Australians had an Asian birthplace - and a not insubstantial number of these were of European ethnicity. By 1981, the Asian birthplace population had increased to 370,000 and ten years later had reached 665,000. The Chinese and Vietnamese have become the sixth and seventh largest immigrant ethnic groups respectively, after the British, Germans, Italians, Greeks and members of the farmer Yugoslav republics.

Figure 2 shows the 10 main countries of origin of immigrants in 1964, before the policy had changed, then in 1984, once the impact of the changed policy had had time to settle down, and finally in 1994. The most striking trends are the substantial fall in the absolute numbers, as well as the share, of British migrants, the rise of Asian source countries, and also the diverse sources of migrants in recent times. This, in fact, has been a

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4 The most important change in 1966 was that non-Europeans already in Australia under temporary permits, but likely to be there indefinitely, could apply for resident status after five years instead of the previous fifteen year waiting period. Additionally, applications by "well qualified people"from non-European countries were to be "considered on the basis of their suitability as settlers, their ability to integrate readily and their possession of qualifications which are in fact positively useful to Australia" (London, 1970: 28). The Minister for Immigration expected only limited increases in non-European migration to result from the policy changes, and stated that "the basic aim of preserving a homogeneous population will be maintained".

5 The proportion of immigrants in the population of certain immigrant-receiving countries is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>6.39%</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
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marked characteristic of Australian immigration. Apart from the dominant British group, no one source of migrants has become very large, though total non-British are very numerous. The importance of different sources has risen and then fallen over the past half century - first the displaced persons, mainly of central and eastern European origin, then the Yugoslavs and Italians, then the Greeks, more recently the Vietnamese. Most recently of all, the Chinese and Filipinos have played an increasing role. The Chinese have come from a large number of countries other than China - Hong Kong, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, even Papua New Guinea and East Timor, and joined a small population of ethnic Chinese of longer standing. Although in terms of “ethnic strength”, the Chinese in 1987 still lagged well behind the Germans, Italians, and Greeks, it seems certain that within another decade or so they will have passed all these groups and will be second only to the dominant Anglo-Celtic group in “ethnic strength” in Australia (for the projected situation in 2025, see Price, 1996, Table 4.1). Nevertheless, the point just made - the diversity of migrant sources - continues to hold. This has led to an extraordinarily diverse population at present, drawn from all the world's continents and most of the world's countries.

In some ways, the scale of Asian migration following the change in policy has been surprising. In 1960, a group of liberal academics and public figures, the Immigration Reform Group, published a pamphlet entitled Immigration: Control or Colour Bar? (Rivett (ed), 1962), in which it was proposed that, to “test the waters” of public tolerance, as it were, 1,500 non-European migrants should be let in annually for five years and the number be gradually increased thereafter. In the event, however, once the White Australia Policy was modified, this tentative number was very rapidly exceeded. In the late 1960s, about 9,000 non-Europeans and part-Europeans were being admitted annually. The overturning of the policy in 1972 led to even greater changes: by 1979, over 20,000 Asian migrants were entering each year, and the number has exceeded 30,000 in a number of years in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Australia managed to adapt to these large inflows of Asian migrants with scarcely any overt signs of unrest.

An important aspect of the flow of Asian migrants to Australia is that these migrants have been, on average, more highly educated and have achieved higher income levels in Australia than the rest of the population. This is because a substantial proportion of them have been admitted under the business and skills categories of the Australian migration programme, and because even in the case of family reunion, Asian migrants have been generally quite well educated. The only groups of Asian migrants who are less educated than the Australian population have been the refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia

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6 Australia experienced substantial inflows of Chinese immigrants onto the goldfields of Victoria and New South Wales during the 1850s and early 1860s. Most left when the gold rushes ended, and the Chinese population, which had reached 42,000 in Victoria alone in 1858-9 (one-sixth of the adult male population -Price, 1974:71), had fallen to 17,000 in 1921. See Choi, 1975.

7 This is a term used by Price (1996) to define the ethnic origins of the Australian people. In the case of mixed ancestry, proportions are assigned according to the proportion of each ethnicity in the person's ancestry. See also Khoo and Price, 1996.

8 The diversity of the Australian population is well captured in a major book prepared for the Australian Bicentennial - Jupp, 1988.
and Laos, and some of the family reunion flow from the Philippines and China, because in the case of refugees in particular, the points-based criteria for assessing people seeking entry to Australia, which give considerable importance to education, are relaxed.

The relatively high socio-economic status of Asian groups in the Australian population has resulted from deliberate policy, based on fear of the consequences of the development of enclaves of economically disadvantaged Asian migrants for public perceptions about these migrant groups. Although there is certainly a (correct) perception that refugee groups are economically disadvantaged, this is not the case for Asian Australians as a whole. Indeed, there is perhaps a risk of jealousy stemmin from the obvious signs of wealth and success in the case of much of the Asian population. An indicator of the remarkable educational success of Australia's Asian populations is that over the last five years, students with Asian ethnic backgrounds have captured approximately 40 per cent of the top 100 places in the NSW Higher School Certificate examination held at the end of secondary school (Jones, 1996a). Since the 1981 Census, the Vietnamese have consistently been over represented in University education, despite their economically disadvantaged situation.

**Assimilation, Integration, Multiculturalism: what next?**

Official attitudes towards what is expected of migrants to Australia have undergone some striking modifications. In the early postwar years, refugees from Europe, be they professionals or of more modest background, were expected to serve on construction projects for two years after their arrival. The policy of the time was assimilation - i.e., adaptation to the culture of the host community. Involvement of migrant men in the workforce would require them to acquire English language and adapt to the work habits and other Australian customs. Compulsory enrolment in the education system would largely take care of the assimilation of the second generation. It was only a proportion of migrant women, left at home to raise families, who would be largely cut off from Australian society and have more trouble adapting than did their husbands or children.

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9. Employed immigrants from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos are also far less likely than other immigrant groups to be employed in professional occupations (Jupp, 1995, Table 3). See also Viviani, 1996.

10. Although some students are sent to Australia from Asian countries for their high school education, it seems certain that ethnic Asian students would constitute fewer than 10 per cent of students sitting for the NSW Higher Certificate examination.

11. Data for 1994 in the state of New South Wales show that Vietnam-born participation rates at University are double the general Australian rate (Pare and Mok, 1995), and this is likely to be even more pronounced as the Australian-born children of Vietnamese are now entering University. More than three times as high a proportion of the Vietnamese students in higher education were from a low socioeconomic background than was the case with students of English speaking background (Dobson, Birrell and Rapson, 1996). In 1991, Vietnam-born students in medical faculties were 5.2 per cent of all medical students although the Vietnam-born were still less than 1 per cent of the Australian population in 1995 (Birrell, 1995:30).
From 1964 to 1973 integration was the accepted policy; it required less complete melding into the Australian population than did the earlier assimilation policy. Then in 1973, under the Whitlam Labour government, multiculturalism (drawing heavily on the Canadian model) became the official policy (Zubrzycki, 1991; Jupp, 1991, 1996). This policy was continued with enthusiasm during the Fraser liberal government, and was strongly supported during the Hawke and Keating labour governments. In its early years, multiculturalism and the celebration of ethnic diversity began to be promoted as distinctively Australian symbols, indeed for some government members it was seen as the focus of a new kind of nationalism (Betts, 1988:105). The contrast with the rather stultifying pro-British sentiments of the later Menzies era of the 1950s and early 1960s was marked; but it is likely that neither the Menzies emphasis nor the “showy” multiculturalism of Al Grassby, Whitlam’s Minister for Immigration, reflected middle Australian attitudes.

Under the Keating government from late 1991 to 1996, there was a strong push for Australia to be accepted as a “part of Asia”. Keating strongly believed that Australia’s future lay in this rapidly developing region, and that the increasing share of Asians in the Australian population had very positive implications for enmeshing Australia economically in the region. For those Australians who were closely involved with the dynamic countries of South-East and East Asia, Keating’s vision seemed more like a commonsense statement (Jones, 1996). To be a part of Asia does not require Australians to deny their European heritage, but it does require the recognition that Australia’s geography places us irrevocably as part of this region, and the growing economic and political clout of East Asia renders this an opportunity to be grasped rather than cause for regret and nostalgic backward glances.

Another important plank of Keating’s policies was the push towards a republic. The monarchists - concentrated among the older Anglo-Celtic population - were offended by the joint republican push and the notion of Australia’s Asian destiny. There were others with republican sentiments, who were in tune with the Keating goal of a republic by the centenary of Federation in 2001, who were nevertheless left offside by the Keating vision of Australia’s Asian destiny. For them, the Republic was part and parcel of an aggressive nationalism that was not particularly tolerant of ethnic and cultural diversity.

Attitudes to Asian Immigration: the Polls

It would be useful to know whether Australian public attitudes towards immigration in general and towards Asian immigration have been changing over time. It seems clear that the overall level of support for immigration fell between the 1960s and

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12 Keating was by no means the first Labour Party figure to stress the need to enmesh Australia in the Asian region. In 1983, Bill Hayden, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, told Asiaweek that “we’re an anomaly as a European country in this part of the world. There’s already a large and growing Asian population in Australia and it is inevitable in my view that Australia will become a Eurasian country over the next century or two. I happen to think that’s desirable. That means we are becoming part of the mainstream of this region” (Betts, 1988:159).
1970s (Betts, 1988, Fig. 5.1), and opposition to immigration appears to have reached a new peak in the 1990s (Betts, 1996; Milllrank, 1996:12-14). Nobody was quite sure about the level of public acceptance or rejection of Asian immigration at the time when the White Australia Policy was overturned in 1972, and despite the publication of the results of many public opinion polls since that time, it is not clear whether public support for Asian immigration increased or decreased during the period of increasing Asian immigration over the 1970s and 1980s. Support has probably decreased since the mid1980s, parallel with decreased support for immigration as a whole.

Most of the polls on Asian immigration have been in the context of a broader question about whether the level of overall migration is too high, about right or too low. A similar question on Asian immigration is usually a follow-on question to this more general question. What is found is that the level of support for Asian immigration does not differ greatly from the level of support for immigration as a whole. This suggests that the answers regarding Asian immigration may frequently not be expressing any particular attitude about Asian immigration from a racial viewpoint, but rather from a broader set of views about whether substantial levels of immigration are a good or bad thing.

For what they are worth, the poll findings on Asian immigration are reproduced as Table 1. They show that, although there is considerable variability between polls, the proportion who answer “too many” is generally in the 40 to 60 per cent range, whereas the proportion replying “about right” or “too few” is generally in the 30 to 40 per cent range, though with some outliers above 50 per cent. After a thorough review of these poll results, Goot (1991) concludes that some of the differences might reflect changes over time, but others may reflect differences in the way the questions were worded.

However the most remarkable if least obvious cause of the difference seems to be the contexts in which the questions were asked; more precisely, differences in the length and focus of the various questionnaires in which questions on immigration were embedded. Public opinion on the rate of immigration is not only “soft”, it is created in the very attempt to measure it (Goot, 1991:277).

Perhaps the more important finding is that people from non-English speaking backgrounds and the tertiary educated were more likely to support immigration, including Asian immigration, than were less educated “middle Australians”. Australians as a whole felt warmer towards British immigrants, who rated 63, or warmest, on a scale of feelings, followed by Italians (61) and Greeks (58). Feelings were cooler towards Chinese (50), Indians (48), Vietnamese (46) and Lebanese (45) (Evans, 1996).

A final point to be noted in this section is that although the majority of Australians will say that immigration in general, and Asian immigration in particular, is too high when pressed to give an opinion in surveys, multiple issue opinion polling does not show migration to be an issue of major concern. For example, The Bulletin Morgan Poll of 28 November 1995, which surveyed the issues voters believed the Government should be
addressing, immigration rated 15th, behind ‘interest rates’ and above ‘child and youth issues’ (Millbank, 1996:14).

The Hanson Affair of 1996 and its Interpretation

A major controversy erupted in Australia in September 1996 following the maiden speech in Parliament by the independent member for Oxley in Queensland, Pauline Hanson. Ms Hanson had been deselected by the Liberal Party before the election because of her racist views, and her maiden speech was a cocktail of grievances, concerning policy on Aborigines, Asian migration, foreign ownership and the need to do away with Australian foreign aid programs. Her speech (including the statement ‘I believe we are in danger of being swamped by Asians’) flew in the face of accepted bipartisan support for an immigration program in which ethnic background was not a criterion. But it clearly resonated with a substantial body of opinion in Australia, and for months anti-Aboriginal and anti-Asian views, some of them of a crudely racist kind, filled talkback radio programs and letters to the editor. It was almost as if a dammed-up flow of opinion was breaking out. Some unpleasant verbal and physical abuse was experienced by some Asian students, tourists and Asian-Australians. Prime Minister Howard was slow to react, claiming that it would be inappropriate to dignify the Hanson speech by replying to it specifically. However, conscious of the harm that reporting of the speech and subsequent controversy was doing to Australia's reputation in Asia, a bipartisan motion on racism was finally passed by Parliament on 30 October 1996. It might be cited in full:

That this house

- Reaffirms its commitment to the right of all Australians to enjoy equal rights and be treated with equal respect regardless of race, colour, creed or origin;

- Reaffirms its commitment to maintaining an immigration policy wholly non-discriminatory on grounds of race, colour, creed or origin;

- Reaffirms its commitment to the process of reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in the context of redressing their profound social and economic disadvantage;

- Reaffirms its commitment to maintaining Australia as a culturally diverse, tolerant and open society, united by an over-riding commitment to our nation, and its democratic institutions and values; and

- Denounces racial intolerance in any form as incompatible with the kind of society we are and want to be.
The statement makes no mention of multiculturalism. This formerly bipartisan policy had been dropped with alacrity by the incoming Howard conservative government.

A central element of the Hanson complaints was that the Asian proportion of the Australian population is likely to rise to unacceptable levels. How high will it rise? It is not easy even to establish the current proportion of the Australian population with an Asian ethnicity, let alone to project it forward in time. Birthplace figures certainly do not describe the ethnic mix, both because especially in earlier times, many migrants with Asian birthplaces were children of British or Australian colonial officials or business people and, more importantly, birthplace figures tell us nothing of the second and subsequent generations. Therefore the fact that, based on recent immigration patterns, by 2031, the Asian-born might be about 7.5 per cent of Australia's population (Khoo and Price, 1996: Table 7) is less relevant for most purposes than the proportion of the population that is ethnically Asian. According to careful estimates by Price (1996) this proportion was 3.2 per cent in 1987 (4.6 per cent if West Asians were included) and would be higher by at least 2 more percentage points today. Price projects the Asian ethnic proportion to 2025 on the assumption that both total immigration and its distribution by birthplace remain roughly at recent levels. These assumptions yield projections that by 2025, the proportion of the population with an Asian ethnicity will rise to 15 per cent, or 19 per cent including West Asians (Price, 1996, Table 4.1).

While Price's figure might appear alarmingly high to those who define Australian identity mainly in terms of a homogeneous ethnicity, it would not appear alarming at all to those who define it in terms of a common experience of Australian life, because well over half of the 19 per cent would have been Australian born and raised. Price also emphasizes that if the different ethnic groups in Australia continue to mix with each other, we will have a large and increasing number of persons of mixed ethnic origin who, in ethnic terms, can only describe themselves as “Australian”.

What are we to make of the 1996-97 immigration controversy? (It can hardly be dignified by the term “debate”). It clearly revealed that racist sentiments are alive and well among a substantial section of the Australian population. But this was hardly a secret; indeed, as this paper has made clear, Australia's history has been built on racist foundations. It would appear that racism had long been a staple fare of certain popular talkback programs on commercial radio, but most of Australia's intelligentsia, who almost by definition would be listening to the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Commission) were oblivious to this (Jakubowicz, 1996). Australia's popular culture, like that of any country we care to examine, contains subterranean racist elements. Although there have been no major public disorders based on racial tensions, many cases of small-scale violence, intimidation, abuse and discrimination have been documented, mainly directed against Aboriginal people but some against Asian migrants and students (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1991). The Hanson phenomenon has brought Australia's racism to the surface: even on the football field, racial vilification of Aboriginal players seems to have increased in the past year.
The more important issue is to decide whether the 1996-97 outpouring of racist sentiments has been to some extent cathartic, enabling the country to move forward on what is probably a more realistic basis of acknowledgment that ethnocentrism underlies our national ethos; or whether this airing of the dirty linen of the national psyche represents a dangerous lurch towards intolerance, opening the way for increased influence of right wing groups such as the League of Rights and Australians Against Further Immigration, or of more radical neo-fascist groups such as National Action, which are always looking to increase their national appeal.

In coming to terms with such issues, another question is whether attitudes to Asian immigration differ on the basis of age, ethnicity, education, class, rural-urban origin or any other characteristic. Some worrying fault lines have been opening in Australian society over the past two decades, with increasing income inequality (next worst to that in the United States among economically advanced countries, according to some accounts) and high youth unemployment (Karmel, 1997). If those who feel worse off economically also felt divorced from the rest of society in terms of their attitudes and basic beliefs, this would be a matter of great concern. There is some evidence that such a gulf in attitudes is indeed developing - for example, that anti-Asian sentiment was more prevalent in “middle Australia”, among the Anglo-Australian working class, who feel “disenfranchised”, as it were, by the emphases of multiculturalism, whereas among liberal intellectuals there is stronger support for multiculturalism and a more diverse society. Pauline Hanson certainly claimed to be representing the “forgotten people”,

principally the Anglos - not the polished, cosmopolitan Anglos from politics and the Arts, transcendent cultural beings such as Paul Keating or Hilary McPhee, but the Anglos from the school of hard knocks working class battlers or shopkeepers like herself, the unpolished white folk, what poet Les Murray has called “Vernacular Australia” with its vernacular heritage - billy tea, swags, Blue Hills and blue gums, the ute and the kelpie. Australia All Over territory (Cochrane, 1997).

Pauline Hanson tended to be ridiculed by academics and by the establishment because of her ignorance. Ignorance she certainly displayed - the statement in her maiden speech that Malaysia's population is 100 million had to be edited out of the Hansard record, and in reply to a television interviewer's question, she clearly had no idea what the word “xenophobic” meant. But supercilious reactions to her ignorance are counterproductive; her ignorance is not a problem to her supporters, because she shares their basic reactions to what is happening in Australian society. “If she were educated she would belong to the enemy” (Cochrane, 1997).

\[\text{13 In this quote, Blue Hills refers to a long-running radio drama extremely popular with middle Australia; Australia All Over refers to a radio program equally popular with middle Australia, especially country people, in which ordinary Australians from all over the country talk about their lives and experiences. Swags were what the itinerant swagman (hobo) carried. "Ute" = utility, a small pick-up truck used by farmers and tradesmen. The kelpie is an Australian sheepdog.}\]
Betts (1988, Chapters 5 and 7) argues persuasively that in the 1970s and 1980s, “liberal cosmopolitanism”, drawing on a 1960s background of opposition to the White Australia Policy and to involvement in the Vietnam war, and support for women’s liberation and other social movements, became an almost uncontestable value in intellectual circles. A dangerous gulf developed between middle Australians and the “liberal cosmopolitans” who took pains to denigrate aspects of Australian popular culture and to criticize it for its ethnocentrism, racism, and indifference to the needs of immigrant communities and (once the refugee intake built up after 1976) to the desperate needs of Indo-Chinese refugees. After the policy of multiculturalism was introduced in 1973 under the Whitlam government, “racial and cultural tolerance and the celebration of ethnic diversity were now to be promoted as distinctively Australian symbols, and for at least some members of the Government a new kind of nationalism could be built around the idea of the ‘family of Australia’” (Betts, 1988:105). This new nationalism, however, involved a tendency to denigrate parochial Australian values and living patterns, which were characterized as dull, conformist, materialist and essentially worthless. The fact is, of course, that these “worthless” values and patterns of living continue to be those of the majority of Australians, and will not be given up simply because some intellectuals rail against them By the same token, the overturning of the White Australia Policy, involving the removal of discrimination on grounds of race in migrant selection, did not represent a victory in a closely argued debate. “White Australia supporters were not persuaded by reason and evidence. It was a political victory that left the racist parochial unconverted but outmanoeuvred” (Betts, 1988: 105).

At least ostensibly, it was a valid concern about whether Australian society was ready to deal with the strains resulting from a high level of Asian immigration in such a context that constituted the essence of the controversial speech by prominent historian Professor Geoffrey Blainey at Warmambool in 1984. Blainey was “letting the side down” by raising such issues and he was attacked unmercifully by the intellectual establishment as a result (Betts, 1988:160-168). The issues deserved to be dealt with on their merits rather than on the assumption that Blainey was expressing racist views. The fact that subsequent events (or rather, lack of events) seem to have shown that Australia's limits of tolerance are higher than Blainey anticipated in no sense negates the validity of his raising the issue.

During the Hawke-Keating years (1983-1996), and especially under Keating, many people felt pressured into accepting, or at least not overtly opposing, “liberal” views on matters such as the Republic, the need for a new flag, and attitudes towards multiculturalism - all of which acquired an aura of “political correctness”. Of all recent Australian Prime Ministers, Keating was the most brilliant Parliamentary performer, putting down his opposition with cruel but effective riposte; there is little doubt that some of those who opposed the notion that Australia could really be accepted as part of the Asian region felt cowed into silence. Keating felt passionately that Australia's future lay in Asia, and he made the point strongly in speeches. He probably misjudged the proportion.

For a subsequent elaboration of Blainey's arguments, see Blainey, 1984. For the academic counterattack on him and his views, see Markus and Ricklefs (eds.), 1985.
of people who felt threatened by the vision of the future which he promoted - or who at least needed more time to adjust to it. Political correctness was also the order of the day in the immigration debate. Many people with genuine concerns about the need to reduce the immigration intake because of concerns with environmental sustainability or threats to social cohesion were unjustly accused of racism and felt constrained from speaking out. Those whose opposition to Asian immigration was crudely racist were similarly constrained. The Hanson controversy may represent, in one sense, a “breakout” as such people suddenly felt released to say all the things, nasty or otherwise, that they had been bottling up for so long.

The future

The prognosis for the future of racism in Australia is a mixed one. Australia’s record over the past 50 years in absorbing migration flows from eastern and southern Europe, and more recently from Asia, has been remarkably good. These were, relative to the population, very large inflows indeed (larger than either the United States or Canada have experienced over the same period), and the cultural adaptations required in integrating Southern Italian and Greek migrants into Australian society were actually greater than those required in the case of most categories of recent Asian migrants. It has been argued that the relatively weak national identity of Australian society (lacking, as it does, national myths linked to major geo-political crises, or a dominant national religion) may make it easier for immigrants to become integrated into Australian society, and for the host society to accept immigrants (Holton, 1994: 213).

However, immigration policy cannot be settled on the assumption that Australia does not include racists or that they cannot poison race relations. Does the 1996-97 race controversy represent a political aberration, or a harbinger of change for the worse that can only be avoided by a fundamental change in social and political direction? The answer is not clear. Early success in migrant absorption occurred in a rapidly expanding economy offering jobs to all, most children of migrants were rapidly integrated into the community through the public education system or parochial Catholic schools, and there was little resentment of the small minority forced to rely on welfare. These fortunate conditions no longer prevail: for example, unemployment rates among refugee groups in Australia are very high indeed and they remain stubbornly high among young people in general. Added to this is the rise in political temperature resulting from the resentment of some in the white community with the High Court ruling on native land title. As mentioned earlier in this paper, racism towards Aborigines and racism towards Asians cannot be totally separated.

Pauline Hanson has kept the heat on, founding her One Nation party, conducting speaking tours, mainly in country areas, and publishing an extraordinary ghost-written diatribe, Pauline Hanson: The Truth, which apart from revealing an extreme political paranoia on the part of its anonymous author, contains some vicious anti-Asian racism. A

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15 For example, many Greek families continue to use the Greek language at home even into the second and third generation; and Greek rates of outmarriage are very low (Clyne and Kipp, 1995; Price, 1994).
poll published on April 30, 1997 showed that 10 per cent of Australians said they would vote for Hanson's party (20 per cent in Queensland). This undoubtedly exaggerates the real support her party would get in an election. But the realities of the Australian parliamentary system are such that, although there is little danger of her party winning any seats in the lower house, they could well pick up a senate seat or two which could conceivably leave them holding the balance of power in this house of review. In any event, her party's existence means that extreme racist views will for the first time in decades be fed "legitimately" into the political debate. They may, however, be illegal. A ChineseAustralian group has threatened to take Hanson to court under the Racial Discrimination Act.16

1997 is therefore a year full of dangers with regard to race relations. Avoidance of divisiveness will demand more than status quo politics. It will require that the leaders of the major parties show statesmanship of a high order. The task should not be beyond them. Australia remains relatively free of terrorism, ethnic and religious hatreds and transplanted prejudices. It is arguably no more racist than any of its neighbouring Asian countries, or than other English-speaking countries with which it is most closely aligned. The sectarianism of Anglo-Irish relations and the ethnic hatreds of the former Yugoslavia have tended to wither among these populations when transplanted to Australia. Australia remains basically a decent society, if a little self-righteous. Although Hanson has managed to raise the temperature on racism, for most Australians it is not a pressing issue. As respected commentator and ABC radio talk show host Philip Adams said in a recent speech, if we exclude the dyed-in-the-wool racists on one extreme and the committed multiculturalists on the other, public opinion is like a large blob of jelly, ready to wobble in whatever direction it is pushed. It is up to those who are committed to a harmonious society to push it in the direction of tolerance - or better still, of acceptance, even celebration, of difference.

Culturally, Australia is alive and evolving - already a multicultural society which must now forge a new Australian identity out of these diverse communities. Despite the Howard government's shrinking from the term "multiculturalism", and a great deal of uncertainty in the community about what the term really means (Goot, 1993), a poll published in the Weekend Australian on 3-4 May 1997 showed very strong public acceptance of whatever its respondents believed the concept to mean: 78 per cent agreed that multiculturalism had been good for Australia, and only 16 per cent felt that it had been bad. Certainly, there is an identity crisis of sorts: "a contradiction exists between the British historical tradition, the current Anglo-American cultural dominance and the Asia-Pacific geographic and economic location" (Jupp, 1995: 211). But not too many Australians worry about it when they go to bed at night. In time, more will appreciate Woolcott's (1997) point: "the tyranny of distance has been replaced by the opportunities of proximity".

16 This act was passed in 1975 and strengthened in 1995 by the addition of a section about the public expression of racial hatred (Zelinka, 1996: 19).
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Figure 1: The natural increase and net migration components of population growth rates, Australia, 1948-1996
Figure 2 – Top Ten Source Countries of Settler Arrivals
1964-65, 1984-85 and 1994-95

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Country</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greece</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Iraq</td>
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Table 1: Whether the number of Asian migrants entering Australia is too many, too few or about right, 1984-1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Poll</th>
<th>Population*</th>
<th>Too many</th>
<th>About right</th>
<th>Too few</th>
<th>Total support</th>
<th>DK</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
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<td>McNair</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2178</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Morgan</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2273</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
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<td>McNair</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2053</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>1984d</td>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
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<td>McNair</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2182</td>
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<tr>
<td>1984f</td>
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<td></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>1986b</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>1988a</td>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>34</td>
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<td>McNair</td>
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<td>55</td>
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<td>1552</td>
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<td>1989</td>
<td>Morgan</td>
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<td>1071</td>
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<td>1990</td>
<td>Morgan</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1196</td>
<td>14</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Australia-wide unless otherwise stated

Questions:
1984a (March): "During the last 3 months for which there are published figures, about 42 per cent of the people who immigrated into Australia came from Britain and European countries and 40 per cent from Asian countries. In 1984 about 90,000 migrants in total will be allowed to come to Australia. Which line on this card best describes the balance of migrants you would like from each area: Britain and Europe 90,000, Asia 0; Britain and Europe 70,000, Asia 20,000; Britain and Europe 45,000; Asia 45,000; Britain and Europe 20,000, Asia 70,000; Britain and Europe 0, Asia 90,000."

1984b (May): "Of the 93,000 people who came here last year about 24,500 were Asians. They were given permanent residential status in Australia. (PAUSE) In your opinion, were 24,500 Asians too few, too many or about right?"

1984c (May): "An increasing proportion of migrants are coming from Asia compared with the United Kingdom and Europe. Do you approve or disapprove of this?"

1984d (June): "Of the 72,000 people who will come here in the next 12 months about 24,000 will be Asians. They will be given permanent residence status in Australia. (PAUSE) In your opinion is 24,000 Asians too few, too many or about right?"

1984e (August): "A decreasing proportion of migrants are coming from the United Kingdom and Europe compared with Asia. Do you approve or disapprove of this?"

1984f (June): "Do you think the current rate of Asian immigration is too high, too low or about right?"

1985 (May-June): "Here are some more statements some people have made about migrants and Australians. For each I'd like you to tell me how much you agree or disagree with the statement, that is, who much each describes how you feel: 'I think we should stop Asian migrants from coming here from now on.' Strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, strongly disagree.

1986a (July): Respondents were asked whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that 'there are too many Asians migrating to Australia at the present time.'

1986b (November): "Since the Second World War, Australia has taken in many thousands of refugees and displaced persons, mainly from Europe and South-East Asia. In recent years, between 10 per cent and 15 per cent of all out migrants have been refugees and displaced persons and many more would come if the could. Do you think Australia's refugees and displaced persons intake should be increased, kept at its present level, reduced?"

1988a (August): "Of the 143,000 people who came here last year, about 49,000 were Asians. They were given permanent residential status in Australia. (PAUSE) In your opinion, were 49,000 Asians too few, too many or about right?"

1989b (October-February 1989): "Still looking at card 19 (PAUSE) do you think that the government should accept more or less of the following groups of migrants ... Migrants who are Asian? Accept a lot more, accept some more, stay about the same, accept some less, accept a lot less."

1989 (August): "Of the 145,000 people who came here last year, about 55,000 were Asians. They were given permanent residential status in Australia. (PAUSE) In your opinion, were 55,000 Asians too few, too many or about right?"

1990 (February): "Of the 134,000 people who came here last year about 48,000 were Asians. They were given permanent residential status in Australia. In your opinion were 48,000 Asians too many, too few or about right?"