THE FUTURE OF AUSTRALIAN MULTICULTURALISM

Peter Kurti, Damien Freeman, Jonathan Cole, Bryan Turner

CULTURE, PROSPERITY
& CIVIL SOCIETY
Defending Liberty in Australia

THE CENTRE FOR
INDEPENDENT
STUDIES

The Future
of Australian
Multiculturalism

Peter Kurti, Damien Freeman,
Jonathan Cole, Bryan Turner

THE CENTRE FOR
INDEPENDENT
STUDIES

Analysis Paper 76

Contents

Foreword

The success of Australia's cohesive and multicultural society over the past sixty or more years has depended on a simple compact: in return for the citizen being free to maintain private cultural and religious traditions, the state expects observance of our norms and laws. However, since Hamas's invasion of Israel on 7 October 2023, this compact has been under unprecedented strain as the politics of the Middle East erupted on to the streets of our cities.

Nearly one year later (at the time of writing), these tensions are getting worse. The tolerance and diversity of which we have been rightly proud has given way to cultural separatism and open, often violent, conflict between different groups. Politicians' warnings that levels of intolerance are on the rise are coded warnings that social *dis*integration is upon us. Many people are now wondering whether we are witnessing the end of Australia's multicultural project.

But if not the end, then what kind of future lies ahead for Australian multiculturalism? More than 10 years ago, the Centre for Independent Studies published a report that examined the health of our multicultural society. In *Multiculturalism and the Fetish of Diversity*, the present author argued the narrow promotion of diversity as moral objective — rather than as a political outcome — posed a long-term threat to individual liberty. It did so by promoting the interests of particular groups over those of the individual by means of what the report described as "programmatic" or "hard" multiculturalism.[1]

Striking a balance between 'diversity' and a cohesive national culture that binds all citizens of a society is not easy; especially in a country such as Australia, which has enjoyed sustained periods of high immigration. The balance requires a commitment on the part of governments, political and community leaders, teachers, families and the individual citizen to a greater whole — the nation state. For the most part, this balance has been struck in Australia successfully. But what happens when it is distorted? What kind of future can lie ahead for multiculturalism in this country?

The three essays in this collection attempt to answer that question. Damien Freeman and Jonathan Cole, who were invited to respond to the first essay, written by the present author, take different approaches to the issue of multiculturalism. Freeman argues that social cohesion depends on cultivating trust, which he considers to be greatly diminished; Cole argues that a strong and free market economy is the best way to foster social cohesion. Both take issue with the present author's argument for the need for multiculturalism to be grounded in a stronger national identity. What all three essays have in common is the recognition that there is a problem with Australian multiculturalism and it is a problem that can no longer be ignored.

In his Afterword, Bryan Turner responds to the three essays and adds what he considers the crucial ingredient of 'populism' to the multicultural mix. Turner argues that populism, which characterises as "opposition to the diversity caused mainly by immigration", is both a product of democracy and also its greatest threat. "Does this contradiction characterise modern Australia?" Turner asks. He holds that it does, and that if we care to preserve both diversity and liberty, we have to address populism and the challenge it presents.

The Future of Australian Multiculturalism presents a series of complimentary, if distinct, assessments of the health of our national multicultural project. As such, it is intended as a contribution to the conversation we are bound to have if we are serious, as a nation, about sustaining and strengthening the social cohesion for which Australia has long been so noted.

Peter Kurti

Director – Culture, Prosperity & Civil Society program

The Centre for Independent Studies

Diversity As Division Or Unity? The post-multicultural threat to Australia's liberal democracy - *Peter Kurti*

When 'diversity' crossed the floor

Australian multiculturalism has been dependent on a simple compact: integration of cultural diversity is a shared responsibility between Australian citizens (or citizens-to-be) and the Australian state. At the heart of this compact lies an expectation — even an assumption — that the individual will observe Australian norms and laws, and that the state will, in turn, afford the individual freedom privately to maintain certain cultural and customary norms and traditions.

However, the eruption of pro-Palestinian and antisemitic protests following the attacks of 7 October 2023, together with consequent bitter political division and polarisation, have raised serious questions about the success of Australia's multiculturalism model. Far from fostering social cohesion and the civic virtue of tolerance, multiculturalism appears to have encouraged cultural separatism and helped fan hostility between different sections of the community.

The politics of the Middle East have also cleaved open the politics of our own country. The issue of Palestinian 'statehood' ruptured the party room unity of the federal Labor government when WA Senator Fatima Payman defied caucus and crossed the floor of the chamber to vote against ALP policy on the Palestinian issue. Palestinian statehood is also now the principal issue fuelling the emergence of a new political entity in Australia: The Muslim Vote. This organisation claims on its website to represent the interests of Australian Muslims who "are a powerful, united force of nearly one million acting in unison."[2] The Muslim Vote rates politicians according to a series of criteria; none of which are about Islam or issues affecting Australian Muslims. All the criteria are about Palestine.[3]

When Payman crossed the floor, she complained that the pressure brought to bear upon her by her parliamentary colleagues put the lie to any commitment to 'diversity' of representation in Australian society when there was no accompanying diversity of opinion. "It is important to consider that modern Australia looks very different to what it did 20-30 years ago and will continue to change," Payman said.[4] These remarks about diversity raise an important question for advocates of Australian multiculturalism: Is 'diversity' simply a descriptor of the multi-ethnic character of society or does it point to the emergence of parallel societies in Australia? Payman's use of the term suggests 'diversity' is being prioritised as a social norm and used as a weapon against prevailing social, political and cultural structures in our society.

These structures came under further attack when Australian democracy, and The Muslim Vote, itself, were subsequently denounced by Islamist Muslim clerics as an insult to Allah. The clerics also denounced Muslim members of Australian parliaments as "apostates" and declared that what the clerics sought was a different form of power that would enshrine sharia as the dominant form of law in Australia.[5]

Declarations such as this openly and directly challenge the political, legal and social norms of this country. They also call into question the viability of the compact upon which Australian multiculturalism has always depended. Tolerance of diversity in Australia is only possible if bounded by a commitment to the spirit of Australian law and order. This entails, in part, that Australian streets, parks and campuses do not become the arenas in which overseas conflicts are played out. And yet this is precisely what appears to have happened.[6]

Multiculturalism and the promotion of diversity was originally intended to counter the 'whiteness' of Australian society that was a legacy of its founding. Diversity is now being deployed not only to assault any Australian norms with which it is deemed to conflict, but also to foment conflict between Australia's ethnic communities. And herein lies the threat posed by multiculturalism to Australia's secular liberal society. Today, the stakes have never been higher for the future of Australian multiculturalism. Indeed, the strains generated by Australian multiculturalism, as we have known it for 50 or more years, appear to be driving the emergence of a form of post-multiculturalism that could supersede it.

Multiculturalism in Australia

In one sense, 'multiculturalism' simply refers to cultural diversity in a society in which different cultural, social and religious communities coexist. One of the most culturally diverse countries in the world (ranked third after Singapore and Hong Kong), Australia has seen the proportion of its population born overseas rise steadily during the first quarter of the 21st century. In 2001, the figure stood at 23 per cent; by 2011 it had risen to 26 per cent; and by 2023, it had risen again to 31 per cent; which means about 8.2 million people, in a total population of 27 million, were born overseas.[7]

Graph 1 Net overseas migration(a) - top 5 countries of birth(b) - year ending
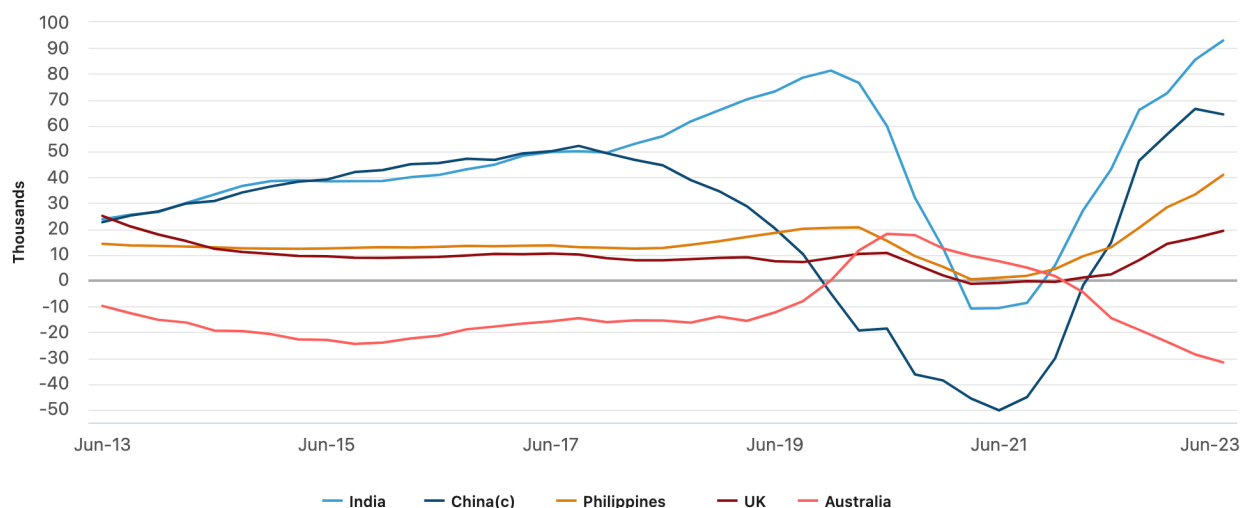
a. Estimates from September quarter 2022 onwards are preliminary. See revision status on the methodology page.
b. Top 5 countries of birth by the sum of migrant arrivals and migrant departures in year ending June 2023.
c. Excludes SARS and Taiwan.
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Overseas Migration 2022-23 financial year

Australia's immigration has always been higher than emigration in comparison with other countries (see Graph 1). Thus, net overseas migration (NOM), which represents the net gain of immigrants arriving minus migrants departing, has always been a significant source of population growth in Australia. In 2023, NOM amounted to 518,000 people who were added to Australia's population, accounting for 84 per cent of the country's population growth, the largest NOM since records began.[8]

As will be discussed below, research by the Scanlon Foundation's *Mapping Social Cohesion* survey shows Australians remain broadly content both with this kind of multiculturalism, which is the result of these levels of immigration, and with the benefits that flow from cultural diversity. Thus, the crisis now confronting multiculturalism in Australia does not arise from immigration, as such, but rather from the behaviours and attitudes some groups of migrants and their descendants are explicitly directing at other groups in the Australian community.

This leads to consideration of a second sense of 'multiculturalism' that is pertinent to an evaluation of Australia's form of multiculturalism. This second sense refers to a program of government policy that employs certain mechanisms for promoting cultural diversity, ranging from subsidy to preferential treatment.

This form of programmatic multiculturalism developed in Australia as a policy response to issues relating to the settlement and integration of immigrants in ways that cohered with prevailing norms while affording new arrivals greater acceptance of their own social and cultural practices. The Whitlam government (1972-75) initiated some of these policy responses.

In his famous 1973 speech as Labor's then immigration minister, 'A Multi-cultural Society for the Future', Al Grassby, said "the social and cultural rights of migrant Australians are just as compelling as the rights of other Australians." Grassby developed the policy goal of multiculturalism as 'unity in diversity' which expressed a strong commitment to the moral principles of equity and reciprocity: dissimilar people in a voluntary bond agreeing to share a common social structure.

Multiculturalism in Australia began to take its present form under the Fraser government (1975-83). The landmark Galbally Report, released in 1978, established four guiding principles of multiculturalism: equality of opportunity; the right to express one's own culture; ethno-specific services; and self-help for migrants. These principles were further developed in 1982 in a series of forums around the country initiated by the Fraser government and led by George Zubrzycki.

Four themes of multiculturalism emerged from Zubrzycki's work: social cohesion; cultural identity; equal opportunity and access; and equal responsibility for participation in society.[9] As Australian academic Laksiri Jayasuriya has observed, the Australian model of liberal multiculturalism conjoined the notion of 'inclusionary citizenship' (which conferred the rights and privileges of citizenship) with 'cultural pluralism'. However, Jayasuriya also warned that:

> Running through this was a tension that indicated that multiculturalism was conditional, in that mutual coexistence of different cultures was permissible only provided there was an acceptance by new settlers of the commonalities embodied in the Australian political system and its social legal institutions.[10]

In the decades after the Fraser government, Australian multiculturalism went beyond the liberal position that the law must protect the liberties of citizens to enjoy freedom of association; rather, it emphasized "the need for action to modify or change social attitudes, and to alter the distribution of economic resources, and indeed the distribution of political influence."[11] It was characterised by a commitment to cultural pluralism with its emphasis on equal treatment and the insistence that no cultural norms should enjoy priority over any others.

Today, this commitment is expressed through the work of a series of organisations and bodies that focus on promoting multiculturalism and social cohesion. These include:

1. The Australian Multicultural Council, which comprises ministerially appointed members who give independent advice to government on multicultural affairs, social cohesion and policies for promoting integration.

2. The Australian Multicultural Foundation established nearly 40 years ago to forge a strong commitment to Australia while respecting cultural diversity.

3. Multicultural Australia, which promotes multiculturalism and social cohesion in Queensland. The comparable body in NSW is Multicultural NSW.

4. Ethnic Communities' Councils, which operate across the country in various states and territories to promote social cohesion at local levels.

5. The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, which advocates for multicultural policies at a national level.

Some of these bodies are publicly funded, others operate as private companies; all seek to promote the principle of multicultural diversity, but do so without seeking so much *preferential* treatment as what they consider *equal* treatment for Australia's ethnic communities.

Multicultural organisations invariably express a commitment to the importance of common membership of a political community that shares a history, and legal and political institutions. However, intensity of that commitment is weakened whenever this form of programmatic multiculturalism places greater emphasis on cultural diversity than national identity. As Jayasuriya has remarked, the emergence of these organisations over time helped generate "an identity politics that became the orthodoxy of Australian multiculturalism."[12]

The Howard government (1996-2007) made efforts to reframe multiculturalism in terms of commitment to the idea of the 'nation'. With an emphasis on duties rather than rights, the government sought to assert the idea of core Australian values to which all Australians, including new settlers, needed to commit. Concerns grew that promoting the idea of all cultures as equal posed a long-term threat to social cohesion. By 2024, the impact of identity politics on Australian society had played out in ways that many would have found difficult to anticipate 10 or 15 years before.

One impact, witnessed with particular intensity since 7 October 2023, is violation of the axiom that ethnic communities do not bring to these shores conflicts from their countries of origin. One alarming manifestation of this is the eruption of antisemitism, which some leaders in politics and commentators in the media have been slow to denounce. In a recent speech delivered at the University of NSW, Steven Lowy, a former co-chief executive of Westfield Corporation, expressed concern "that Australia is now sleepwalking into a period of extremist politics and a social spiral."[13]

While tensions between communities are bound to arise, they must not spill out into open hostilities; yet this is precisely what has now happened. Worse still for the prospects of Australian multiculturalism has been the assertion of group rights as opposed to those rights to be enjoyed by individuals. As Lowy also remarked, "We can disagree with each other without collectively demonising a people based on race or religion. [But] it is a sad fact that there has generally been lukewarm denunciation of anti-Semitism [sic], at best by the leadership of many of our institutions. Half-hearted rejection of anti-Semitism is never enough, as history has shown all too well."[14]

Clearly, the issue of pluralism arises because of the large migrant component of the Australian population. But the resurgence of antisemitism is not the direct result of immigration; it is the result of a systemic failure to manage integration and defend the paramount importance of what might be described as 'national values' in an increasingly diverse society. Thus, the paradox of pluralism — "the dilemma of having to reconcile commonalities with

'difference'"[15] — has become more acute. As leading commentator Paul Kelly puts it:

> Australian multiculturalism has fallen victim to a self-congratulating complacency and a dramatic shift in progressive ideology. The more the left promoted a tribal and identity politics based on race, ethnicity, religion, sex and gender, the more it attacked the principles of multiculturalism by encouraging the growth of separate group rights. This inevitably led to social and political fragmentation. Group rights become the new mantra, weakening the power of national harmony.[16]

Do Australians still want multiculturalism?

Despite concerns such as those raised by Kelly and others, the Australian model of multiculturalism has been, for the most part, successful. Most of us think it's been good for the country; and most of us want it to continue. The most authoritative account of Australian attitudes to multiculturalism is provided by the Scanlon Foundation's annual *Mapping Social Cohesion* (MSC) report.

According to the 2023 MSC Report, compiled before the war in Gaza began, 89 per cent of Australians agreed with the statement: "multiculturalism has been good for Australia."[17] Not only is this figure consistently high across MSC surveys in recent years, it has been rising: in 2018, 77 per cent of respondents agreed with the same statement; in 2022, 88 per cent agreed.

These views are coupled with a very favourable view of the value immigrants are thought to bring to Australia, both in social and economic terms. Over 90 per cent of respondents agreed that "someone who was born outside Australia is just as likely to be a good citizen as someone born in Australia."[18] As the MSC remarks:

> The very strong support for the view that multiculturalism has been good for Australia suggests that multiculturalism is an important symbol and holds great value to people across a broad cross-section of society.[19]

However, when it comes to the question of whether or not immigrants are ready to adopt Australian values, respondents were divided. In 2023, 53 per cent of respondents believed too many immigrants were not adopting our national values, albeit a significant decrease from 67 per cent in 2019. Although a large proportion thinks migrants are adopting values, "a large share of people still do not think that is the case."

Further, the 2023 MSC Report also found prejudice remains a common problem in Australia, and Christians and Muslims are the people about whom most others hold negative attitudes. Even so, the MSC detected a widespread decline in negative attitudes towards Muslims from 41 per cent in 2019 to 32 per cent in 2023.[20]

Whereas respondents held positive attitudes to migrants from the United Kingdom (91 per cent), the United States (92 per cent), Italy (94 per cent) and Germany (79 per cent), attitudes towards other migrant groups were found to be negative. Thus, 63 per cent held negative attitudes to migrants from Asia, the Middle East and Africa, prompting the MSC to remark that:

> This striking discrepancy in the attitudes expressed towards European (and US) and non-European migrants is a worrying indicator of the potential racial prejudice held within Australia.[21]

The 2023 MSC therefore makes two seemingly contradictory claims: on the one hand, that multiculturalism remains popular in Australia and that Australians value the contribution migrants make to the country; but on the other, that there are worrying indicators about racial prejudice. Noting that multiculturalism can be understood in different ways, the MSC found only 37 per cent of Australian-born respondents believed minorities should be given government assistance to maintain customs and traditions. By marked contrast, 69 per cent of overseas-born respondents supported government assistance.

Attitudes to multiculturalism are related strongly to levels of social cohesion: "people who are happier, more financially satisfied, more trusting in political leaders and more involved in community and civic activities" tend to have much more positive attitudes to multiculturalism.[22] Even so, given the varied understanding of what multiculturalism is, and varied levels of acceptance according to socio-economic status, Australian multiculturalism appears to be a work in progress.

A pressing question is whether that progress has faltered because of a clash between the pursuit of diversity and the principles of liberalism and a liberal society. The decisive defeat of the Voice proposal in the October 2023 referendum certainly suggests popular enthusiasm for diversity might be on the wane. However, one important and more recent opportunity to address this question, appears to have been missed by the Australian government.

Towards fairness?

In 2023, 50 years after Grassby's speech outlining a vision for Australia's multicultural future, the Albanese government commissioned a review of multiculturalism that outlined 29 recommendations and proposed a policy framework. The report, delivered in March 2024 but not made public until July, acknowledged social circumstances had changed since 1973 and "the beliefs and concepts we previously counted on for stability are being put into question" by those changing circumstances.[23]

Recommendation 11 of the report called for the government to establish a Multicultural Affairs Commission and Commissioner together with a new Department of Multicultural Affairs, Immigration and Citizenship, with a dedicated minister.[24]

Many of the other recommendations concerned matters of resourcing, ensuring and widening provisions to encourage the embracing of 'diversity', including providing for citizenship tests to be conducted in languages other than English. The report made no mention of the resurgence of antisemitism in Australia since October 2023, nor did it address the overt hostility of sections of the Muslim community to the institutions and norms of Australian society.

Opposition citizenship spokesman, Dan Tehan, criticised the report for failing to address social cohesion when it had been commissioned at a time when, in his view, "social cohesion in this nation

has never been challenged like it is at the moment". Tehan added: "The fact that anti-Semitism [sic] isn't addressed in this report leaves the question: what of the recommendations, if any, can be taken seriously?"[25] At the time of writing (October 2024), the Albanese government has made no commitment to implementing any of the report's recommendations.

Even were it to do so, a prior and urgent requirement is to ensure any framework for Australian multiculturalism sits beneath a wider national commitment to social cohesion, the institutions of our parliamentary democracy and the norms and principles of a liberal and secular society. Questions about the fundamental compatibility of multiculturalism and liberalism must be addressed if a genuinely diverse and cohesive society is to be forged.

The individual and the group

"Has multiculturalism been a success or are we a nation of parallel communities?" sociologist Bryan Turner asks of contemporary Australian society.

> While the idea of multiculturalism as a social policy tends to focus on culture, a more acid test arises with legal pluralism. Competing legal traditions necessarily raise more acute difficulties than cultural pluralism, as the former brings the nature of sovereignty into play.[26]

A central issue when evaluating the prospects for multiculturalism in Australia is whether multiculturalism in its 'hard' or policy-driven form is compatible with liberalism and the liberal state. The idea of the 'liberal state' can be understood in the clear and concise terms offered by William Galston, an American political scientist who has remarked it:

> Is characterised as a community organised in pursuit of a distinctive ensemble of public purposes. It is these purposes that undergird its unity, structure its institutions, guide its policies and define its public virtues.[27]

According to Galston, the liberal state is *not* neutral: its 'ensemble of public purposes' will be informed by a certain conception of justice, for example, which will, in turn, limit and shape possibilities available to its citizens. It will also shape the state's understanding of its own interests and preferences. One dimension of these interests and preferences is liberalism's commitment to what legal scholar Daniel Weinstock has identified as 'political individualism'; by which he means the state can only be justified to the extent it serves the good of the individual:

> Whether that good is cashed out in terms of individual interest, individual consent, or in terms of some more morally ambitious notion such as individual flourishing, is one of the questions that liberals argue about. However, this core commitment is sufficient to generate the view, common to all liberals, that groups cannot be viewed by liberalism as possessed of any kind of irreducible value. Groups matter only to the extent that they matter to individuals.[28]

But the primacy of the commitment contemporary liberalism affords to the individual is not without its problems.

In the view of American political scientist John Owen, this commitment poses a threat to the *integrity* of the individual. This is because what Owen describes as "open liberalism" — using the term 'liberalism' to refer to "a commitment to individual freedom as the highest political good"[29] —grants to the individual the freedom to engage in perpetual creation by means of exercising that very freedom to choose. The result of this continual exercise of choosing, Owen argues, is that liberalism today has come to represent:

> A dogmatic rejection of all boundaries, material or social, particularly inherited ones. It presses upon us a novel notion of the good life as a life of perpetual choice and fluidity across all conceivable areas, private and public, from cradle to grave.[30]

Owen argues that the "enforced fluidity" brought about by open liberalism has led both to the dissolution of institutions (he cites the example of marriage) and the ability of those institutions to command loyalty because the norms and boundaries that sustain them have weakened. Owen calls for a revision of liberalism towards

what he calls "pluralistic liberalism" which will restore to the individual the capacity "to bind [oneself] to norms, communities and ways of life that require long-term commitment."[31]

By urging liberalism to become more pluralistic, in the sense of affording the individual the opportunity freely to adopt whatever social and cultural *constraints* are deemed of value, Owen's criticism serves to sharpen liberalism's focus on the freely-choosing individual as the possessor of irreducible value. Whereas one individual is free to throw off all constraint, another is free to choose to be bound by established and inherited norms and conventions. Pluralistic liberalism, in this sense, thereby preserves the primacy of liberalism's commitment to the individual. This, in turn, entails that the *group* can only matter to the extent it comprises *individuals*.

Whether one embraces the *open* or the *pluralistic* conception of liberalism, it still holds that groups cannot give rise to independent moral claims. If liberalism can confer anything in the group, it is only "the full complement of individual rights which are essential building blocks in the associational lives of individuals."[32]

Thus the fullest involvement of the liberal state in the lives of its citizens ought to entail protecting the rights of individuals freely to associate or dissociate, and to uphold the liberal principle that the individual will have a certain conception of a good life and will want to live in accordance with that conception.

The individual is not, of course, an isolated unit. Individuals belong to groups; whether social, cultural, religious or some other. The culture of the group, in turn, shapes the identity of the individual by providing a perspective from which to interpret the world in which the individual lives. Any conception of a good life will, itself, be shaped by the various influences of the groups to which the individual belongs. What the liberal state must afford is equal respect to the individual by not coercing that person to act "in accordance with the choices and values of another individual".[33]

Furthermore, a liberal society must protect the freedom of the individual to choose *not* to belong to a group or to be bound by its cultural, moral or religious norms and expectations, as C.L. Ten has observed:

A liberal community is a political community and a series of smaller social communities, with overlapping memberships, interacting with one another in a free environment. In a liberal society, [individuals] are free to leave [a group] and to try to join other groups. Those whom the dominant groups will not embrace can still find a home in a liberal community, and justice will be their shield.[34]

As long as the individual is capable of exercising autonomous agency and can enjoy protection of fundamental rights — whether *within* the group to which he or she belongs, or *outside* the group if the individual chooses to leave — tension between liberalism and multiculturalism ought to be minimal. However, at this point liberalism might come into possible conflict with the principles of policy-driven forms of multiculturalism.

Once the *group* makes claims for the exercise of its *own* autonomy with regards to those areas of social, cultural and political life that it claims to be of importance to its own way of life — notwithstanding conflict with the claims of individual members of the group — the principles of liberalism and multiculturalism are bound to collide.

Is multiculturalism compatible with liberalism?

One response to the issue of conflict that can arise between the individual and the group is that a society should demand some degree of *homogeneity* in order to bind citizens to one another as members of a single political community. In examining this response, Chandran Kukathas cites the position of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose view was that the state must express the *general will of the people* understood as individual and equal citizens.

According to Rousseau, there has to be "a profession of faith which is purely civil and of which it is the sovereign's function to determine the articles, not strictly as religious dogmas, but as sentiments of sociability, without which it is impossible to be either a good citizen or a loyal subject."[35] In other words, to the extent to which the values of the individual conflict with the values of the community, there

can be *no value pluralism* when it comes to preservation of the political community of the state.

For Kukathas, this is a minimal conception of homogeneity. He holds that the question of whether a society should be multicultural is not a significant issue: "modern societies, for the most part, simply are multicultural. The important question that does raise significant issues is this: what kinds of political institutions should govern a multicultural society?"[36]

Kukathas rejects what he calls "interest-group pluralism" — the institution of political recognition of the pluralist elements in a multicultural society — because he does not think they merit participation in the political process: "political institutions should, as far as possible, serve to allow these different elements to flourish but should not be in the business of enabling these elements or interests to shape society."[37] He argues political institutions should be neutral as to how a society is shaped by its component elements.

Whereas these elements — which include culture and ethnicity — will inevitably shape the lives of individuals living in particular communities, Kukathas believes these influences belong in the *private* realm. Political institutions should not permit the elevation of these influences to become matters of *public* concern where they become contestable. Rather, political institutions should be concerned simply with upholding the rights and freedoms of individuals "regardless of the particular interests or affiliations of the individuals."[38] The focus, in other words, is not to be on *group* pluralism but on the pluralism of *individual* interests.

Even so, emphasising a liberal commitment to protecting individual freedoms and rights has not allayed concerns about the future of multiculturalism. Critics claim it is failing because it continues to give too much weight to protecting and promoting group identities and legitimating a retreat into separated minority communities, thereby generating communal and ethnic tensions. These concerns have given rise in the minds of some scholars, such as Steven Vertovec, to the need to rethink multiculturalism and even to posit the notion of an emerging 'post-multiculturalist' world.

'Post-multiculturalism' is something of an open-ended term. It is characterised, in part, by programs of corrective measures (such as some of those contained in the *Towards Fairness* report) intended to support language services, improve access to community services and review courses and tests for citizenship.

At the same time, the term 'post-multiculturalism' acknowledges that the terms of the compact between state and citizen have changed. These changes have arisen as the concept of multiculturalism has come under political pressure because of community concerns about perceived failures of integration, a sense of weakening social cohesion and the need for commitment to some concept of national identity. As Vertovec has remarked:

> Despite a strong emphasis on conformity, cohesion, national identity and dominant cultural values, in practically all the contexts in which such policies are being implemented an acceptance of the significance and values of diversity is voiced and institutionally embedded. In this way, post-multiculturalist policies and discourse seek to have it both ways: a strong common identity and values coupled with the recognition of cultural differences.[39]

Reassertion of a strong sense of national identity has featured prominently in much recent criticism of multiculturalism. However, critics such as Kukathas have given little weight to the idea of a distinctly *Australian* national identity other than in a weak form based on a history and a shared inheritance of a set of legal and political institutions; it makes no reference to any "common ethnicity or 'character'".[40]

Once these institutions affirm the freedoms and rights of the individual, a society should be able to accommodate different cultural communities without asserting a strong sense of *national* identity that would, in any case, threaten to distort the diversity of identities in a society and possibly exclude certain individuals and communities. As Kukathas notes: "it is only by not creating too strong a sense of national identity that it will be possible to tolerate a variety of ways of life within the political community."[41]

What next for Australian multiculturalism?

The success of Australian multiculturalism hitherto has been secured by observance of the simple compact outlined at the beginning of this essay: "integrating cultural diversity into Australian life is a shared responsibility of both the Australian government and Australian citizens or citizens-to-be."[42] However, this compact — dependent on an acceptance of mutual responsibilities — has recently come under strain.

As recently as 2017, a policy statement issued by the Turnbull government emphasised the obligations of citizens and new arrivals to contribute to the life of the nation.[43] In doing so, the statement "jettison[ed] the language of government responsiveness to diversity, the cornerstone of Australian multiculturalism for over four decades. With the 2017 multicultural policy, the longstanding 'nation-building' idea of pro-actively accommodating cultural diversity is officially ended."[44]

According to Australian political scientist Geoffrey Brahm Levey, the position of the Turnbull government's policy can appropriately be described as 'post-multicultural'. Levey chooses to use this term because he argues that the 2017 policy outline rests on the assumption that multiculturalism has "already redressed the historical exclusion of cultural minorities [and that] a sufficiently level playing field, institutionally and attitudinally, exists."[45]

For Levey, this post-multicultural posture assumes the various policies for multiculturalism have now successfully done their job of transforming Australian society. However, it is Levey's view, that Australia is nonetheless not yet ready to cut loose entirely from a multiculturalism committed to implementing group-differentiated measures, and that the post-multiculturalism attempted by the Turnbull government was "premature".[46]

Whereas the Turnbull government's policy proposal shifted the responsibility from the state to the citizen, by 2024, with the Albanese government's *Towards Fairness* report, the emphasis swung back to government and the services it can — or should — provide to citizens and citizens-to-be. There is little mention now of shared responsibilities; the onus of obligation as set out in the report has returned to the shoulders of government.

Resurgent antisemitism in the wake of the 7 October attacks on Israel has raised grave concerns about the prospects for Australian multiculturalism. Indeed, in the opinion of Kelly, "the Australian values of multiculturalism, mutual respect, truth and social order are being traduced" as the changes in our society following the attacks continue to unfold. "The nation suffers from polarisation yet also denial."[47]

Australians have been appalled by regular denunciations of their Jewish compatriots who, for the first time in living memory, are now fearful of walking the streets of their own cities. This has reignited debates about whether efforts directed at maintaining culture have taken priority over emphasis on the importance of strengthening social cohesion. One year on from the attacks, and after anti-Israel protest marches in key cities over more than 50 consecutive Sundays, Australia is witnessing an unparalleled poisoning of community relations by the hatred engendered by the politics of the Middle East. At the time of writing (October 2024), these protests have evolved into overt and explicit support for Hezbollah, a listed terrorist organisation.[48]

Although these attacks by one group of Australian citizens against another group are certainly alarming, the questions to which they have given rise are not new. Since its inception, debates about multiculturalism have oscillated between the poles of recognition of cultural diversity and commitment to common national norms such as the rule of law. As legal affairs commentator Chris Merritt has remarked of the importance of institutional commitment to enforcing the rule of law in Australia:

> Respect for the rule of law comes naturally to most people in this country. But the principles that form the basis of that idea might not come naturally to those who have grown up in countries with a different tradition. The first step toward preventing lawless conduct is to ensure those who are subject to the law are made aware of their obligations – particularly those from different traditions.[49]

Australian multicultural policy has always been dynamic as it has sought over the years to respond to changing social and cultural circumstances. Once again, the parameters of multiculturalism are being debated: publication of *Towards Fairness* represents the most recent response to the ongoing challenge of managing an accommodation between cultural diversity and the principles of a secular liberal society. In a development that signals the possibility of an emergent post-multiculturalism, the focus has shifted sharply to concerns about social cohesion. Threats to the safety of one section of Australian society posed by other sections have also revived discussions about imposing limits on freedoms associated with a liberal society, such as freedoms of speech, association and religion.[50]

There can hardly be any prospect of urging Australian governments to scrap multicultural policies, given the diversity of the national population. Multiculturalism has developed from the fact that Australia is now a heterogeneous country that continues to attract large numbers of immigrants. And in addition, as Israeli professor of law Amnon Rubinstein has remarked: "New concepts of equality among different communities and of collective rights [have given] rise to a new philosophic-social-legal concept which has shaped public opinion."[51] The fact is that multiculturalism now has deep roots in Australian society.

However, *Towards Fairness* clearly leans heavily away from affirming the value of a polity unified by a set of binding liberal principles and associated rights and duties, in favour of promoting a variegated society which places diminished emphasis on the value of overarching norms and institutions.[52]

Notwithstanding the concerns that commentators such as Kukathas have expressed about 'national identity', the current crisis of Australian multiculturalism almost certainly warrants renewed emphasis on the importance of commitment to the nation's norms, laws and institutions. This problem will not be addressed by the creation and funding of more multicultural bodies and policies, for this is to assume fundamental social and cultural attitudes can be shaped by institutional bureaucracies alone.

Rather, the current crisis of Australian multiculturalism needs to be addressed by what Stephen Lowy has described as "a return to strong conviction leadership:

> Leadership is about conviction. Leadership is not about popularity. It is about doing what is fundamentally right for the country. And we are seeing this slipping in Australia now. We live in an age of conviction deficit. And once you create a little crack, you give licence. We are now paying a high price for that.[53]

Citizens of this country must commit to Australia and its way of life, and fears that calling them to do so may stir division must be quelled. Yet, as Lowy has remarked, without effective political leadership that sets the terms of the discourse about culture, this is likely to amount to little. This is a view shared by commentators such as Kelly who is more outspoken in his criticism of the Albanese government for having failed "to show the moral, social and strategic leadership that Australians deserve."[54]

At the same time, a lingering concern is that today's generation of political leaders have been formed by immersion in a 50-year program of cultural pluralism and diversity, so are ill-equipped to provide the leadership so urgently required if multiculturalism in Australia is to have a future. This program of cultural pluralism, which has been promoted with vigour by our schools and universities over the course of a generation or more, has downplayed the importance of common norms and values. The bitter fruit of that policy failure is now being served up.

The danger is that the leaders on whom we must depend will fail to grasp the critical role government must play in enforcing duties of shared responsibility and mutual tolerance. And if that is the case, Australian multiculturalism will inadvertently, and perhaps inevitably, sink from damage of its own creating.[55]

Unity or Belonging? The post-White Australia approach to Australia's social cohesion - *Damien Freeman*

Writing in *The Spectator*, John Casey recalled a time when Margaret Thatcher and Enoch Powell both attended a meeting of the Conservative Philosophy Group:[56]

> Edward Norman (then Dean of Peterhouse) had attempted to mount a Christian argument for nuclear weapons. The discussion moved on to 'Western values'. Mrs Thatcher said (in effect) that Norman had shown that the Bomb was necessary for the defence of our values. Powell: 'No, we do not fight for values. I would fight for this country even if it had a communist government.' Thatcher (it was just before the Argentinian invasion of the Falklands): 'Nonsense, Enoch. If I send British troops abroad, it will be to defend our values.' 'No, Prime Minister, values exist in a transcendental realm, beyond space and time. They can neither be fought for, nor destroyed.' Mrs Thatcher looked utterly baffled. She had just been presented with the difference between Toryism and American Republicanism. (Mr Blair would have been equally baffled.)

What is it that we would fight to defend? Shared values? Diversity? The country to which we belong? The answer goes to the heart of the question of what makes us willing to cooperate as a society to ensure we survive and prosper.

Programmatic multiculturalism and liberal democracy

Peter Kurti distinguishes between multiculturalism as a descriptive claim about a society's cultural diversity and *programmatic multiculturalism*, which treats multiculturalism as "a program of government policy which employs certain mechanisms for promoting cultural diversity ranging from subsidy to preferential treatment". This programmatic multiculturalism came, he argues, to be dominated by identity politics. While Kurti accepts that the Australian population is still positively disposed towards Australia's cultural diversity, he observes that it trends away from programmatic multiculturalism and identity politics.

In 2023, the Albanese government commissioned a review of multiculturalism which resulted in the *Towards Fairness* report published in mid-2024. Kurti observes that the *Towards Fairness* recommendations would enshrine group rights in Australia's public institutions. His concern is that this would be a radical departure from the *status quo*, in which the fundamental basis of liberal democracy is the relationship between the individual citizen and the state. Liberal democracy would be disturbed, he argues, if the institutional relationship between the state and the individual was mediated by some notion of groups through which the state engages with individuals who identify with those groups. This leads Kurti to conclude that multiculturalism is incompatible with liberalism.

If the ultimate expression of multiculturalism is found in *Towards Fairness*'s institutions through which identity groups mediate the relationship between the individual citizen and the state, then multiculturalism is indeed incompatible with liberal democracy. Thus, Kurti concludes that multiculturalism in Australia is in trouble. He notes that the Turnbull government tried to reset the approach to multiculturalism by reframing it in terms of citizens' responsibilities in concert with the rights they might assert, but this did not get traction. The most recent approach of enshrining programmatic multiculturalism and identity politics in the *Towards Fairness* report is roundly criticised by Kurti as being incompatible with liberal democracy and, at any rate, does not even seem to have been appealing to the current progressive government.

So what is the solution? Kurti does not claim to have it, although he does gesture towards it: "the current crisis of Australian multiculturalism almost certainly warrants renewed emphasis on the importance of commitment to the nation's norms, laws and institutions. Citizens of this country need to commit to Australia and its way of life, and fears that calling them to do so may stir division need to be quelled".

What is missing from this analysis is a deeper understanding of the purpose of multiculturalism as a public policy in Australia today. In order to understand multiculturalism's purpose, one needs to see it as a response to an earlier public policy: the White Australia policy. Only when it is located in this context can it be properly understood and a conservative alternative to *Towards Fairness's* progressive approach be developed.

White Australia policy and social cohesion

The White Australia policy underpinned one of the first statutes passed by the Australian Parliament: the Immigration Restriction Act 1901. It was repealed by the Immigration Act 1958, however, the policy's broader legacy remained until the passage of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975.

In *The End of Certainty*, Paul Kelly identifies the White Australia policy as one of five policies that together formed Alfred Deakin's Australian Settlement.[57] The Immigration Restriction Act may have determined immigration policy, but Kelly explains that the White Australia policy was more than that: "it was a creed which became the essence of Australian nationalism and, more importantly, the basis of national unity".[58] This immigration policy was complemented by economic policies (protectionism and industrial arbitration), social policy (state paternalism), and defence and foreign policies (imperial benevolence) that enjoyed bipartisan political support for the first 80 years of the Commonwealth. Kelly's history of the 1980s is the story of the undoing of this Australian Settlement.

Two years before Kelly published *The End of Certainty*, Gerard Henderson advanced an alternative analysis in his *Australian Answers*.[59] He argues that the White Australia policy was one of three policies that together form the Federation Trifecta. According to Henderson, the White Australia policy needs to be seen primarily as part of a broader economic policy that included protectionism and industrial arbitration. The economic climate of Australia could be artificially sustained by regulating wages through industrial arbitration, protecting local industry from foreign competition, and restricting cheap foreign workers from the labour market.

Writing in 1930, Sir Keith Hancock understood the White Australia policy to have a broader role: "The policy of White Australia is the indispensable condition of every other Australian policy".[60] Yes, there were economic justifications, as "an influx of the labouring classes of Asia would inevitably disorganise Australia's economic and political life", but he recognised something more fundamental was at stake. Racial homogeneity was the basis for the fledging country's social cohesion.[61]

To say that Australia was White in 1930 was not simply to state a fact about its ethnic composition. It was to express a positive attitude towards this: it was to affirm that White Australia was both ethnically homogeneous and socially cohesive. The latter was not only desirable, but a remarkable achievement for a country that was only 30 years old.

What this reveals is that, at its most fundamental, the White Australia policy should be understood as a policy about social cohesion. As such, the end of the White Australia policy marks the beginning of a new policy approach to social cohesion. It is the beginning of an era in which it was understood that social cohesion no longer depends on *sameness*. For the next 50 years, public policy for social cohesion sought to achieve unity through a commitment to *diversity* rather than sameness. Kurti's essay seeks to demonstrate that the commitment to diversity in *Towards Fairness* cannot be sustained in a liberal democratic state.

Social cohesion

The 2023 Edelman Trust indicated that trust in institutions was at an all-time low in Australia, with only 48% of people expressing trust.[62] It also revealed that polarisation, the process through which social opinion becomes not only divided, but entrenched with an us-and-them mentality, is increasing to the point that the country is currently straddling the boundary between being 'moderately polarised' and 'in danger of severe polarisation'.

Australian politicians warn that this increasing polarisation is having a pernicious effect on social cohesion.[63] Keith

Wolahan, federal Member for Menzies, has spoken of the way "information silos" are resulting in "fragmentation" and a tendency "to exaggerate our own virtue and see the other as a cartoon villain."[64] James Paterson, a Senator for Victoria, has warned that foreign powers, including companies controlled by the Chinese Communist Party, may take advantage of this tendency "to sow division, undermine social cohesion, erode national unity and suppress inconvenient narratives".[65] Andrew Hastie, the federal Member for Canning, has also warned that the collapse of the social and moral consensus in Australia over the last 30 years can be used to advantage by authoritarian regimes such as Russia, China, and Iran: "the challenge for us is if we're divided as countries, it's very hard to meet those authoritarian threats" because, he argues, when there is so little social cohesion, "it's very hard to come up with grand strategy" for combatting foreign threats.[66]

This much is to say that there is an acknowledged problem with social cohesion in contemporary Australia, but what exactly is meant by *social cohesion*? The Scanlon Foundation Research Institute was formed to conduct and lead research on social cohesion, and has earned a reputation as a leader in the field. The institute admits, however, that "there is no standalone definition when using the term social cohesion".[67] It traces the term back to Émile Durkheim's 1897 study, *Suicide*, in which he identifies two aspects: the absence of latent social conflict and the presence of strong social bonds. After reviewing a range of approaches, the institute adopts as a standard the definition proposed by Dick Stanley, namely that social cohesion is "the willingness of members of society to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper".

What we now see is that to understand the White Australia policy as a means of achieving social cohesion is to understand it as a means of avoiding latent social conflict and of maintaining strong social bonds so that members of the society are willing to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper.

Whereas sameness was the basis for cooperating for survival and prosperity in the White Australia era, something else would have to serve this function as the society became more heterogeneous. It has been proposed that multiculturalism might play this role, however, Kurti has demonstrated why programmatic multiculturalism is not fit for purpose. However, this is where the challenge remains: how do we increase social cohesion in an increasingly diverse society?

Kurti on multiculturalism

There are three broad observations that I would make about Kurti's approach to multiculturalism. The first concerns his approach to social cohesion; the second, his approach to the state; and, the third, his understanding of non-programmatic multiculturalism.

Social cohesion, unity, and sameness

Kurti takes *multiculturalism* to be a commitment to *diversity* and that diversity is the opposite of unity. As such, it appears to be incompatible with *social cohesion*. The White Australia policy was an approach to social cohesion that depended upon sameness. If the pursuit of social cohesion depends upon sameness, then multiculturalism is incompatible with a commitment to diversity. The post-White Australia approach to social cohesion has been about the idea that social cohesion does not necessarily depend upon sameness but that there might be a way of achieving social cohesion even within a diverse society. Multicultural advocates have gone so far as to claim that social cohesion can be achieved not only *in spite* of diversity but indeed *in virtue* of diversity.

Diversity alone is not going to achieve social cohesion, and Kurti is right to draw attention to the mistaken commitments to programmatic multiculturalism, which have resulted in the *Towards Fairness* recommendations that would enshrine identity politics within public institutions. What is apparent, however, is that, in a society that is increasingly diverse, social cohesion is not going to be derived from sameness.

Kurti's conflation of *social cohesion* with *unity* is unhelpful here. In part, one senses, he equates *unity* with *shared values*. The Scanlon Institute connects social cohesion with lack of social conflict,

presence of strong social bonds, and the willingness of members of a society to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper. Of course, *shared values* are a very effective way of reducing social conflict, creating social bonds, and inspiring people to cooperate for their survival and prosperity. There will be fewer shared values in a more diverse society, however, and so it might prove necessary to open our minds to new possibilities for social cohesion. A preoccupation with unity, sameness, and shared values might distract us from other possibilities.

The liberal democratic state and multicultural society

Kurti is broadly correct in his approach to the liberal democratic state. He is also correct in warning that programmatic multiculturalism is incompatible with the liberal democratic state. The mistake of programmatic multiculturalism is that it seeks to change the relationship between the state and the individual citizen.

This mistake would not have happened if advocates for multiculturalism had recognised that multiculturalism is a claim about the nature of Australian society, not a claim about the state. If they had appreciated that distinction, they would have realised that a multicultural society advances through cultural or civil society institutions that promote cultural diversity in society, not through public institutions that change the legal relationship between the state and the individual citizen.[68]

Kurti has a tendency to err in the opposite direction. If liberal democracy is a claim about the relationship between the individual citizen and *the state*, then he should be careful not to let it restrict our understanding of the relationship between people and *the society* to which they belong. He appears to move from discussing "the fullest involvement of the *liberal state* in the lives of its citizens" to warning that "a *liberal society* must protect the freedom of the individual to choose *not* to belong to a group or to be bound by its cultural, moral or religious norms and expectations".

It is the role of the state to protect the freedom of the individual through public institutions, primarily the law courts. It is primarily a matter for society – not the

state – to provide conditions that avoid latent social conflict and maintain strong social bonds, so that members of the society are willing to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper.

To say that the state should not encroach on the domain of society is to understand why programmatic multiculturalism is misguided: the state is the domain of liberal democracy, not the domain of multiculturalism. The flipside, however, is that society is not necessarily the domain – or at least not the primary domain – of liberal democracy. If multiculturalism is a claim about the society rather than a claim about the state, then there is no reason why a multicultural society is incompatible with a liberal democratic state.

Social cohesion is fundamentally a claim about the society, not a claim about the state. The White Australia era sought to maintain social cohesion in society through *sameness*. The multicultural era sought to maintain social cohesion through *diversity*. A society that is increasingly less homogeneous will need to find a way of achieving social cohesion despite the increasingly divergent values of people within that society. The challenge of promoting social cohesion in contemporary Australia is a challenge for its multicultural society, not for its liberal-democratic state. As such, it is a challenge that must be met using the resources of the society, not the resources of the state.

Multiculturalism as a fact and multiculturalism as a value

To be sure, Kurti is not opposed to the idea of multiculturalism *per se* – his target is programmatic multiculturalism. The problems, he maintains, started when descriptive multiculturalism gave way to programmatic multiculturalism. Descriptive multiculturalism "simply refers to cultural diversity in a society in which different cultural, social and religious communities coexist". To say that a society is multicultural in this sense is to make a purely descriptive statement about it.

Kurti does not find such descriptive claims problematic. He contrasts them with claims about programmatic multiculturalism which are problematic. The problems involve the way the descriptive claims are used ultimately to advance identity politics.

There is another distinction that might be made, but which Kurti does not make. In *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Bernard Williams introduces a distinction between concepts that are *thin* and concepts that are *thick*.[69] A thin concept is one that is either descriptive or evaluative.[70] A thick concept is one that fuses evaluative and descriptive components.[71] These are important for Williams because he thinks that most of the concepts that we use in our ordinary ethical lives are thick ethical concepts.

When we talk about multiculturalism in the post-White Australia era, we are talking about it as a thick concept. It is not merely descriptive. White Australia was a thick concept that not only described Australia's ethnic composition, but expressed something desirable about Australian society, namely the social cohesiveness that attended ethnic homogeneity. To understand multiculturalism as a policy response to White Australia is to see it as a thick concept that provides an alternative to another thick concept. The descriptive component has changed, in that it captures the ethnic diversity of Australia, but it continues to retain a positive evaluation, namely that the culturally diverse country is socially cohesive, and that this too is an achievement – albeit for different reasons.

When Kurti treats multiculturalism in its earliest incarnation as a purely descriptive concept, he fails to articulate the sense in which it could serve as a replacement for the White Australia policy. The problem is more serious than that, however. If we run with multiculturalism as a purely descriptive concept, then it seems that programmatic multiculturalism is necessary as a response to White Australia – or at least it is the only option currently on the table.

Kurti has shown us why we should not embrace programmatic multiculturalism, but he needs to revise his concept of descriptive multiculturalism. He needs to demonstrate that it is possible for non-programmatic multiculturalism to be something more than a descriptive concept. Non-programmatic multiculturalism can carry a positive evaluation about Australia's ethnic diversity. In this way, it can serve as a basis for a socially cohesive society without slipping into identity politics.

Toryism and belonging

Conservatives are right to reject the *Towards Fairness* recommendations. If the identity politics that informs them is not the path to social cohesion, then what is the conservative approach to achieving social cohesion? Kurti's achievement is to focus attention on the need for a conservative policy response to this challenge. Perhaps, that response depends upon whether conservatives subscribe to Toryism or American Republicanism. Kurti's approach suggests a commitment to the latter, but maybe there is a distinctly Tory response.

The Tory solution might lie in the repudiation of *identity groups* and the conservative alternatives. Tories might distinguish between the progressive idea of *identifying* and the more conservative idea of *belonging*. They might also distinguish between *groups* with which people can *identify*, and the *small platoons* to which they *belong*. In one of the most famous passages in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Edmund Burke writes:[72]

> To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country and to mankind.

The idea of little platoons took on great significance in 20th-century conservative thought, notably through its use in Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind*, and has continued to be a source of inspiration for contemporary thinkers such as Yuval Levin in *The Great Debate*, although James McElroy has warned that we need to keep in mind the difference between Burke's use of the term and contemporary usage.[73]

The idea that we belong to small institutions, such as families, through which we are connected to larger institutions, such as countries, is an insight that could be used as a basis for creating social cohesion. These are institutions that we naturally belong to, as opposed to groups that we choose to identify with because of shared identity characteristics.

A liberal-democratic state in which people value the cultural diversity of their society might well see merit in trying to strengthen

the small platoons to which its members belong, and the series of links through which these can instil a sense of belonging to one's country as a means of achieving social cohesion. It might offer greater success than trying to focus on cultivating shared values. Strengthening such ties of belonging would anchor social cohesion in a shared sense of feeling at home in one's society. Such an approach might find inspiration in Sir Roger Scruton *oikophilia*, the sense of love for one's home.[74]

The small platoons to which people belong in contemporary Australia may well be different from those to which they belonged in an earlier era. That said, a public policy approach that acknowledges these contemporary small platoons as the building blocks of Australian society might then go a step further. It might affirm them as valuable features of Australian society through which we can maintain the strong social bonds that encourage those who belong to Australian society to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper. In doing so, a Tory policy of social cohesion that is both post-multicultural and post-White Australia might emerge.

A Cultural Free Market. Australia needs natural assimilation and negative social cohesion based on division of labour and market exchange -
Jonathan Cole

Peter Kurti is concerned that the 'compact' that has underpinned the successful' Australian model of multiculturalism — a "tolerance of diversity in Australia … bounded by a commitment to the spirit of Australian law and order" — is under threat from what he calls programmatic multiculturalism. Programmatic multiculturalism describes the program of government policy that promotes cultural diversity via 'subsidy' and 'preferential treatment'. Programmatic multiculturalism shifts the onus of the compact from cultural diversity united around observance of shared 'Australian norms' to observance, indeed obeisance, to the new social norm of 'diversity' *per se*. This is to say that the diversity that is the by-product of a multicultural society in a descriptive sense has been transformed and elevated into something like a state ideology, i.e., something the state should promote, celebrate, expand and defend from any perceived threats, including dissent. Diversity is no longer a social fact to be navigated and negotiated within a paradigm that balances rights and duties, but the greater good to which all other social considerations, perspectives and interests must be subordinate.

Kurti is correct in identifying this significant shift in the understanding and function of the concept of multiculturalism in Australia, from social compact to state ideology (my language, not his), and is to be commended for drawing attention to its consequences. In this response, I argue that a solution to the concerns Kurti articulates regarding programmatic multiculturalism, which I share, is for the government to vacate the business of regulating culture altogether and rely instead on a free and self-governing market of cultural competition. I further contend that this solution will avoid a problem that I detect in Kurti's defence of Australia's historical multicultural compact. Finally, I will address the matter of social cohesion given this is the primary concern animating both Kurti's criticism of programmatic multiculturalism and his defence of the older Australian multicultural compact.

The virtues of a free cultural market

My case for a free cultural market in Australia proceeds from one important presupposition that must be stated at the outset. Multiculturalism, in the descriptive

rather than programmatic sense of the term, which is to say ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious diversity, is, at this juncture in Australian history, a *permanent* and *irreversible* feature of Australian society. Were all migration to cease this day forward and into perpetuity, Australia would remain a highly diverse society. There is no turning back the clock on the social reality of multiculturalism. It is important to clarify this fundamental datum of Australian society as it highlights that all debate about social cohesion must assume and contend with the fact that the society doing the cohering (or failing to) is marked by a high degree of diversity, and therefore, by nature, pluralism.

If programmatic multiculturalism is a problem, indeed a threat to social cohesion, as Kurti contends, for its potential to encourage 'cultural separatism' and 'fan hostility between different sections of the community', then the obvious remedy is to abolish it altogether. By 'abolish', I mean de-institutionalise and de-fund the multicultural architecture, infrastructure and (government-funded) industry. The purpose, and if not the purpose, then the effect, of the government's intervention (via programmatic multiculturalism) in matters of culture and diversity, is to subsidise languages, customs and religious beliefs and practices that otherwise might struggle to survive and thrive in a genuinely free market of culture. This type of government intervention makes sense only if we accept the assumption underpinning programmatic multiculturalism that diversity is the social greater good to be realised, maintained, expanded and defended as a matter of government policy. While I think Kurti's concerns about cultural separation and communal conflict resulting from programmatic multiculturalism are overstated, although not entirely unfounded, I share his antipathy towards this government program, albeit for different reasons.

My primary criticism of programmatic multiculturalism is that it constitutes an entirely unnecessary government intervention into cultural matters that should remain the preserve of individual choice and voluntary association. In that regard, programmatic multiculturalism entails yet another instance of the growing reach and scope of the state (intrusion) into the natural operations of social life. The real offence of programmatic multiculturalism is the unhealthy statist view of social order that it presupposes and expresses, namely, that the state's role extends to governing, shaping, reforming, directing and *programming* the social relations of its citizens, including 'managing' their diversity. Such a logic is born of an infantilising fear or anxiety about the inherent untrustworthiness of adult human beings to treat each other in civilised ways absent a benign government incentivising and coercing them towards decency.

Abolishing programmatic multiculturalism will not affect multiculturalism as a descriptive fact of Australian social reality, in which case politicians, academics, journalists and common citizens will be able to talk honestly about an Australian multicultural reality, and celebrate its perceived virtues and successes. Moreover, citizens and residents will be free to retain and maintain their languages, customs and religious beliefs and practices (subject to the limiting factor of Australian criminal and anti-discrimination law) and to pass them on to their children. It just means that they will not receive government financial support, and hence taxpayer subsidies, to do so. Individuals and communities will shoulder the responsibility of finding the time, energy and resources to maintain and pass down their cultural traditions on the back of their own efforts and initiative. Migrating to a foreign land and culture does not come with a right to recreate the migrant's original cultural world for the sake of convenience at the expense of taxpayers who do not belong to that culture.

In a genuinely (classical) liberal society, individuals will even enjoy the freedom to adhere to some version of a multiculturalist ideology. However, in the absence of any government funding, positions and institutions to work in, capture, lobby or fleece, it will be much harder for those who embrace multiculturalism as an ideology to impose it on others. They will have to rely on persuasion and the strength of their arguments. Meanwhile, people like Kurti who value traditional Australian customs, norms, laws and institutions, will be free to defend and proselytise their virtues,

while competing with their ideological foes without the government tipping the scales in either's favour.

In a genuinely free cultural market, cultural competition will ensue, because this is the natural state of affairs in cultural life, especially in the context of cultural contact and diversity. The notion of free cultural competition might make conservatives nervous. But the proper antidote to programmatic multiculturalism is not programmatic state-funded, state-supported or state-imposed conservatism. Conservatives tend to be cultural protectionists. They want metaphorical government tariffs, excises, duties and other subsidies and regulations to protect the domestic market of traditional Australia culture from encroachment by other cultures and traditions. Like all protected industries, they do not want to compete in an open market, for fear that consumers will choose other products and services, leading ultimately to bankruptcy.

Cultural assimilation has pejorative connotations in 21st-century Australia, thanks to the worldview of programmatic multiculturalism and a history of contentious attempts to programmatically assimilate Australia's first inhabitants. However, the truth is that cultural assimilation is a natural process that accompanies migration. It has been so for millennia and remains the case everywhere on the globe, including in Australia, despite the best efforts of programmatic multiculturalism to prevent or forestall this natural human tendency. It is not uncommon for the children of migrants to abandon the customs, beliefs and practices of their parents as they assimilate to Australian society, or at the very least to adapt them to the new cultural environment in which they grow up. A genuinely free market in culture, given the market share of English, the monopoly of Australian law, and the inclusive power of national cultural products like sport, would likely facilitate the *natural* process of assimilation, particularly in the absence of any hindrance by a state-funded and state-supported programmatic multiculturalism. It would also raise the costs of cultural separation, thus promoting greater social cohesion.

In sum, there is simply no need for the government to regulate 'diversity', whether through its promotion, defence,

subsidy or any other form of support. Language, culture, custom and religion should remain matters of personal choice and voluntary association, subject to the limiting factor of Australian criminal and anti-discrimination law. A genuinely free market of culture in Australia would likely lead to more and faster assimilation, because assimilation is a natural process that accompanies migration, and because English and Australian institutions and laws enjoy enormous market share (monopoly in the case of Australian law). Individuals will remain completely free to hold onto their patrimonial or ancestral languages, customs, traditions and faiths if they wish to. However, they will need to bear the costs (financial and social) of doing so themselves.

The disappearance of a hegemonic Australian culture and its consequences

Kurti's antidote to the rise and dominance of programmatic multiculturalism appears to be the restoration, or revitalisation, of the original compact drawn up in the wake of post-World War II mass migration (or a version thereof). Kurti refers several times to Australian norms, laws and institutions as the ballast for social cohesion amid cultural diversity. This compact, however, relied on a hegemonic Australian culture that no longer exists, and is no longer feasible.

Great cultural diversity existed on the Australian continent prior to the arrival of European settlers, who in turn added their own diversity. The ships that carried Australia's first European settlers included the speakers of different languages (English and Gaelic), different ethnicities (English, Irish, Welsh, Scottish and African[75]) and different faiths (Church of England, Catholic, Presbyterian and Judaism). Not long after, German settlers arrived in South Australia and Chinese migrants arrived in Victoria and NSW during the gold rush. The Australian continent, in its pre-settler, colonial and Commonwealth manifestations, has always been multicultural. It is the scope and depth of diversity that has changed more recently with mass migration.

The original multicultural settlement (compact) that Kurti defends depended

to a large extent on the existence of a hegemonic cultural order vested in a dominant Anglo-British Protestant cultural identity. It was hegemonic in the sense that it overlaid deep sectarian and ethnic divisions and grievances, particularly with regard to Australia's significant Irish Catholic settler population, as well as friction with Chinese migrants. It also overlaid the abject failure of European settlement to find a just and viable compact with Australia's first inhabitants, peoples and cultures that were subjected to the hegemonic British cultural order said to be at the heart of Australia's successful multicultural compact.

Mass migration, the decline of Christianity and Aboriginal self-determination, among other socio-cultural developments in Australia over the last 60 years, have undermined the hegemonic British cultural order that formed the basis for Australia's original, and successful, on Kurti's analysis, social compact. This hegemonic Australian cultural order no longer exists, or insofar as it does still exist, it is contested and embraced as one cultural identity within a context of plural Australian identities. In any event, multiculturalism is no longer merely a descriptive social fact about Australia, but now a core part of the Australian identity. The extent to which programmatic multiculturalism is responsible for this widespread Australian identity is moot. The identity is ingrained, and unlikely to disappear.

Not only does Kurti's defence of the historical compact at the heart of Australia's 'successful' multicultural settlement appear to rely on a hegemonic cultural order that no longer exists, but it also appears to overlook the process of natural cultural evolution. No culture is static, at least not in the present world. In the same way that cultural assimilation is a natural process that accompanies migration, cultural change is a natural and ineluctable process in the host culture receiving migrants. To state the obvious, the Australia of 2024 is not the Australia of 1954, which in turn was not the Australia of 1904. The Australia of 2074 will differ in significant ways from the Australia of 2024. Human societies are evolutionary. The languages, ideas, relations, customs, laws, institutions and norms that constitute societies change over time. Change is

a feature of human existence, not a bug. Languages undergo a process of natural change even in circumstances of isolation. Children invariably see and experience the world differently from their parents. We even give different names to each successive generation these days as a way of cataloguing their different characteristics. Moreover, diverse societies are always contested societies. The more diverse a society is, the more contested its norms, institutions and laws inevitably will be. A hegemonic culture is simply no longer feasible in the context of a society as diverse as Australia.

The question for Kurti, in the context of Australian cultural diversity and pluralism, is: which Australia is it that new migrants are supposed to commit to as part of a compact that would allow them to maintain their indigenous cultural practices and traditions? Without wishing to be (unduly) facetious, when Kurti makes reference to the Australian norms, laws and institutions that form the bedrock of an Australian multicultural compact, is he talking about the new gender norms that prevail amongst younger Australians? Is he talking about climate change and the political, social and cultural norms that have arisen in response to it, including new laws and institutions? Or is he talking about the new norm of welcome to country, along with agitation for treaty and truth telling? Does he mean abortion and euthanasia, which are currently legal in all states and territories in Australia, and thus part of Australian law?

These cultural norms, institutions and laws may have emerged recently, and they may also be contested to varying degrees, but they are embraced by significant numbers of Australians and thus form part of the plural cultural landscape that is contemporary Australia. It is not clear what a compact could mean in such circumstances, beyond a generic commitment on the part of migrants to observe Australia's evolving cultural norms, institutions and laws, or perhaps to tolerate every and any Australian identity, expression, narrative and ideology that exist. If the desideratum is to revive the older hegemonic Australian cultural identity and order as a way or reviving or restoring Australia's historical multicultural compact, then it is very far from clear how

this could be achieved absent some form of authoritarian programmatic effort by government policy, if such a thing were even possible.

The deep irony, of course, is that many migrants, coming from more traditional and conservative cultures, as they do, are likely to be uncomfortable or outright unsupportive of some of the existing cultural norms, institutions and legal arrangements that now characterise contemporary Australia. The 'no' vote in the same-sex marriage plebiscite would likely have been much lower in the absence of migrant communities in Western Sydney, which returned the highest proportion of 'no' votes in Australia. Wokeism was not brought to this country by Pakistani, Chinese, South Sudanese or Iraqi migrants. It is an intellectual import from America, and arrived in the absence of any significant American migration. Ideas do not fill in migration forms and apply for visas. In a hyper-connected global environment of digital cultural exchange, all domestic hegemonic cultural orders are vulnerable to external cultural influence, now more than at any point in human history. It is arguably American culture, with its common English language, that has transformed contemporary Australian culture more so than mass migration from non-English speaking backgrounds, and via the transference of ideas rather than people.[76]

The compact that was once capable of succeeding in an older Australia, in which a more hegemonic cultural order prevailed, is no longer possible, and therefore not the antidote to programmatic multiculturalism. Given multiculturalism in the descriptive sense is the fundamental and ineluctable social datum of Australia, the ease with which cultural influence can now occur in the absence of migration and the fact that cultures naturally evolve, and do so now more rapidly than ever, the only viable solution to programmatic multiculturalism, and its ugly twin sister programmatic assimilation, is to get the government out of the business of 'managing' culture altogether and to allow individuals to make their own cultural choices and cultural associations, subject only to the limitations of Australian criminal and anti-discrimination law.

Social cohesion

One can anticipate that the conservative critique of my proposed cultural 'anarchism' will be that it is certain to pose a mortal threat to social cohesion. However, conservatives err, in my view, in placing too much emphasis on shared values, traditions, religion and norms as the only viable and effective means of realising social cohesion. The fundamental truth about Australian society is that it currently has historically and comparatively low rates of politically motivated violence, inter-communal conflict, racism, discrimination, separation, ghettoisation and serious social friction. This is all the more remarkable for the fact of Australia's historically and comparatively extreme diversity. This kind of social cohesion I would define as *negative* social cohesion, which is to say, an absence of the kind of phenomena that everyone agrees threaten social cohesion.

Conservatives and progressives both aspire to something best described as *positive* social cohesion: a sense of solidarity, inclusion and shared belonging, identity and values.[77] It is my contention that *negative* social cohesion is now the only viable means of attaining a functional social cohesion sufficient to enable social peace, cooperation and prosperity *in the context of extreme diversity*. Positive forms of social cohesion may have been possible in other historical ages and in different demographic circumstances (homogeneity, for example). However, an extremely diverse society, by definition, is never going to attain a common and shared sense of identity, belonging, values and beliefs.

How, then, has Australia managed to maintain such a high level of *negative* social cohesion amidst such extreme diversity? Kurti attributes this remarkable outcome to Australia's successful historical multicultural compact, and similarly warns that its abandonment, in favour of programmatic multiculturalism, is currently eroding Australia's social cohesion, with an impending risk of separatism and conflict. But I contend that Australia's strong *negative* social cohesion now primarily rests in features of our current economic order and legal regime that are rarely taken into account in any discussion about social cohesion.

The basis for Australia's high degree of *negative* social cohesion rests in its highly developed division of labour, which makes all citizens and residents mutually dependent for their essential needs, whether food, shelter and clothing, or health, education and transport, and even non-essential (to survival) cultural pursuits and leisure activities. As the scale and complexity of the Australian economy has grown and deepened, Australians have become not only utterly dependent on their neighbours for survival, but on absolute strangers who form part of an integrated network of division of labour and market exchange. This is now how all people living in Australia satisfy their common needs, needs that transcend their cultural, religious and ideological differences.

Division of labour and market exchange further generate patterns of shared behaviour that are often so ingrained and routine that people barely notice their function in regard to social cohesion (e.g., the ritual of weekly grocery shopping at the supermarket, going to the movies or meeting friends for coffee). These patterns promote and foster virtues such as honesty and civility by virtue of the vested interest in which all are integrated into the network of division of labour and market exchange being observed as norms.[78] To put it starkly, naked self-interest in a culturally diverse society characterised by a highly developed division of labour gives everyone a stake and incentive in social order and social harmony.

Conservatives and progressives underestimate the power of the division of labour and markets of exchange to generate and sustain *negative* social cohesion. They both think that society can only survive so long as it coheres around some tradition, i.e., a shared language, faith, norms, ideology and/or permanent institutions. They differ in respect of the content around which society is to cohere, but agree that there should be some hegemonic cultural ethos, spirit or ideology underpinning the enterprise so that people may be bound together. This is the grist of the mill of the so-called culture wars, with the left and the right both vying for control of the state levers of cultural influence in order to implement (impose) their respective visions of social cohesion.

The (self-)interest that vests everyone in *negative* social cohesion, in spite of their linguistic, cultural, religious and ideological differences, is not limited to sheer necessity through mutual dependence, but also to the shared prosperity that is the product of a highly developed division of labour and accompanying system of *free* exchange via markets. Australia's economic order therefore binds its diverse inhabitants together in a shared stake in social order by virtue of both mutual need/dependence and mutual prosperity. This is a truth that neither conservatives nor progressives want to countenance, because both, for their own reasons, believe that free market capitalism erodes social cohesion. On the contrary, I maintain that it is now the primary, perhaps sole, thing keeping a diverse society like Australia together.

A highly developed division of labour further depends on a robust system of property rights and fundamental law and order. Australia boasts strong property rights and an effective, and effectively enforced (comparatively, the only meaningful measure in socio-political analysis), criminal code. A functional legal regime, particularly in the domain of criminal law, is a vital element in any society that is able to attain and maintain strong *negative* social cohesion. It is the criminal code and the measures employed to enforce it that protect Australia's social cohesion from politically- and religiously-motived violence, not programmatic multiculturalism, nor shared traditional cultural values and norms. Similarly, it is anti-discrimination law that protects Australia's social cohesion from actualised prejudice, such as discriminatory hiring and firing decisions, not programmatic multiculturalism, nor shared traditional cultural values and norms.

Australia's high level of *negative* social cohesion in the context of high levels of diversity illuminates the true threat to its social order: economic cataclysm, such as a deep and prolonged depression, the erosion of property rights and the loss of will or capacity to properly enforce the criminal law.

Conclusion

I concur with Kurti that programmatic multiculturalism is problematic and undesirable. I maintain that it should be abolished and that the government

should exit entirely the realm of diversity management and efforts to program culture, values and identities. These are matters that should be left to the free individual choice of citizens and residents in the context of free voluntary association. Such a move ought to promote *natural* assimilation which should be viewed as a positive, natural human tendency, albeit one that the state should not interfere in either.

Moreover, I contend that the compact that once served as the basis of (*positive*) social cohesion and a multicultural

settlement in Australia is no longer possible in the context of Australia's new demographic realities, the natural evolution of its culture, its exposure to foreign cultural ideas in the digital world and the ineluctable pluralism and cultural contestation that comes with diversity. For better or for worse, Australia's social cohesion is now primarily vested in its highly developed division of labour, free market exchange, strong property rights and effective (and effectively enforced) criminal code and anti-discrimination law.

Afterword: Populism Versus Democracy And Diversity - *Bryan S. Turner*

These three contributions to the issue of cultural diversity and social coherence are written from an Australian perspective, and as a result offer an informative and careful commentary on the national experience primarily from the end of the White Australia policy.

Peter Kurti explains the basic agreement between citizen and state. The individual will respect and observe Australian norms and values, and in exchange the state affords and protects the freedom of the individual. This compact has been shaken by international challenges; especially the ongoing conflict in the Middle East.

Damien Freeman notes trust is at an all-time low. He argues social cohesion will be better served, not so much by grand government plans, but by supporting the cohesive role made possible through 'small platoons' such as families, by which we become connected to larger institutions such as countries.

Jonathan Cole offers a critical response to any government attempt to regulate a society as complex as modern Australia. He supports the 'virtues of a free cultural market' and concludes with the observation that Australian social cohesion is best served by a high division of labour, free market exchange, strong property rights and an effective legal framework.

In constructing a response to these valuable essays, I initially thought of describing the basis of my past research on citizenship, arguing that successful societies embrace three 'C's: civility, citizenship and community. Unfortunately, all three components are under stress; and so many modern citizens often experience social membership as denizens rather than citizens. Many often live in society as though they are only passing through.

All three contributions to this discussion recognize the problems we face in Australia and beyond concerning diversity and membership. However, I want to add a discussion of the problems presented by populism; especially what may be considered as reactionary inclinations of 'the people'. In doing so, I draw attention to a well-recognized paradox that populism is a product of democracy and often its greatest threat. Does this contradiction characterise modern Australia?

A comparative perspective may be helpful. Much of my life has been, in many peculiar ways, shaped by former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher and the Thatcher Years (1979-1900). Thatcher dismantled the welfare state that had given my generation free health care, a university education and job security. Her free-market principles presented a challenge to universities. In response, I

left Aberdeen University in 1982 — being concerned I would become unemployed — for a professorship at Flinders University.

Following from Damien Freeman's paper, perhaps I can begin with Enoch Powell (1912-1998). Powell also had an Australian connection, becoming Professor of Greek at the University of Sydney at age 25. It is perhaps understandable that Mrs Thatcher was baffled by Powell's remark that we do not fight to protect values that exist in a 'transcendental realm'. Unlike the Eton Boys of David Cameron's cabinet, Powell had an unforgettable Birmingham accent and was the MP for Wolverhampton South for many years.

I had been born in Birmingham in 1945 and when Powell gave his 'rivers of blood speech' I only heard his voice, which was strangely electric, but with a very pronounced Birmingham accent. His working-class supporters immediately felt he was 'one of us'. Furthermore, and of relevance to the problem at hand, he offered a populist challenge to democratic government by noting the British electorate had never been asked whether they wanted 'strangers in their midst'. They had never been invited to vote for diversity. In retrospect, was his political address to his constituents the opening shot of populism in British post-war politics?

I refer to Powell because it is his challenge to the establishment that continues to rumble through British politics under various governments and many manifestations of populism. Its most recent manifestation includes Nigel Farage and the Brexit vote. Farage was a reactionary populist who also appealed to 'the working man' when he appeared in public with his fag and pint of beer. He promised to increase support for the NHS and to protect Britain's borders from illegal migration. I raise this issue not out of nostalgia for Birmingham, but to suggest one cannot discuss multiculturalism without considering populism.

There is much confusion about the causes and character of populism, but it essentially pits the (good) population against the (corrupt) elite. It addresses the felt grievances of the population. The principal feature of contemporary populism is opposition to the diversity caused mainly by immigration.

Populist parties are now extensive in Europe; especially in those regions most exposed to unregulated migration. One need only think of *Podemus* in Spain, the Northern League in Italy, Golden Dawn in Greece, *Fidesz* in Hungary, or *Alternativ fuer Deutschland* in Germany. What they have in common is opposition to unplanned and unwanted immigration from societies that do not share the culture and values that are believed to characterise the host societies. Populism may be in many respects an unwanted development in democracies. Indeed, populism is frequently described as the "unwanted drunken guest" at the party.[79]

In the United States, Steve Bannon played a crucial role in developing a populist agenda for Donald Trump. Bannon received much of the credit for Trump's electoral victory over Hillary Clinton and the Democrats. He was the key architect of Trump's version of right-wing populism. He was suitably labelled as a 'dishevelled drunk' by a GOP congressman. As the unwanted guest he led the charge against the 'Washington Swamp' and appealed to the 'deplorables' of Clinton's political imagination.

One common feature of populism is that it is occurring in countries that have low and declining birth rates, where the labour market has depended on migration. When the labour market was attracting guest workers, the fear of diversity did not trouble populists. When the society appears to depend on migrants with allegedly higher birth rates, populism flourishes.

To take one example: in France, Jean Renaud Camus orchestrated a populist response to what he called '*Le Grand Remplacement'* in which, especially in rural France, migrants with high birth rates would replace French citizens. He saw the population crisis as a conspiracy that was orchestrated by 'replacement elites' and involved 'genocide by substitution'. Such fears about population replacement are generally not supported by the demographic facts regarding the size of the migrant population and their fertility rates; but the factual evidence may be irrelevant in relation to the feelings and experiences of under-privileged classes.

Another objection to my commentary would be that Australia is unlike European countries. As a colonial society being the

product of British naval power, Australia is unlike any European country. As Jonathan Cole points out: "Mass migration, the decline of Christianity and Aboriginal self-determination, among other socio-cultural developments in Australia over the last sixty years, have undermined the hegemonic British cultural order that formed the basis for Australia's original, and successful, on Kurti's analysis, social compact". Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that hegemony has gone, but much of the legacy remains. When will Australia become a republic?

If all the above is correct, one should be looking at populism in the United States rather than Europe. America can celebrate the Boston Tea Party and the war against monarchy, the Bill of Rights and the Constitution. However, populism has obviously taken hold of the US during what may come to be known as the 'Trump Years'. Populism, especially agrarian populism, existed well before the Trump variety. However, its presence in American politics is obvious. In the US, we have the fear of unregulated illegal immigration, a border that is believed to be out of control, and a political culture that may be said to have invented 'post-truth'. At least Richard Nixon's time in office was subsequently labelled the 'first post-truth presidency'. Unlike the US, Australia has an effective level of gun control, and we have nothing equivalent to the southern border. However, in many respects more is to be gained from comparing Australia to the US than to Europe.

In conclusion, a critic might ask for evidence of Australian populism. Cas Mudde has identified Pauline Hanson and One Nation as an Australian example of populism[80]. Popular opposition was very much on display during the Covid-19 crisis when there were substantial protests against the lockdowns, travel restrictions, facemasks and working at home. Another dimension was opposition from the 'anti-vaccine' movement, the spread of misinformation about the actual quality of the millions of needles that were required and the ongoing debate about the role of the Wuhan laboratory.

My other evidence comes from a 2024 ARC-funded survey into the beliefs and attitudes of Australian men between 18 and 35. They were recruited via a Facebook advert to consider 'What does it mean to be a man in Australia today'? The research, based on a national questionnaire and interviews of 335 men in mainly blue-collar occupations, found widespread frustration about how their voice was never heard on television, radio or newspapers including their perception of the special privileges offered to women, their frustrations with what they saw as biased divorce legislation and, in my terms, being underprivileged denizens rather than citizens.

Although such grievances may not be an immediate threat to the wider society, angry men are a potential recruiting ground for more radical forms of populism. Their negative views that were based on both frustration and resentment may be misconceptions of their actual circumstances, but they are nevertheless real.

In my response to these essays, I offer no easy solutions; but stage one of any national debate must begin by identifying the main problems and issues we face. I propose that populism is a challenge to liberal values regarding diversity and inclusion.

Further reading

Pam Nilan, Josh Roose, Mario Peucker and Bryan S. Turner "Young masculinities and right-wing populism in Australia" *Youth* (2023), 3(1):285-299.

Bryan S. Turner, "Masculinity, citizenship and demography: the rise of populism", *Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, (2024), 37:203-217.

References

1   See, Peter Kurti, *Multiculturalism and the Fetish of Diversity*, (Centre for Independent Studies: St Leonards, NSW, 2013).

2   *The Muslim Vote*, https://themuslimvote.com.au/

3   The organisation rates politicians according to: "i) Strong solidarity with Israel, ii) Strong support for Palestine, iii) Weak on Palestine (did not condemn Israel or occupation), iv) Mostly silent on Palestine, v) For/Against South Africa Case of 'Genocide' at the [International Court of Justice]." https://themuslimvote.com.au/

4   "Diversity catches up with the ALP", *The Australian* (2 July 2024) https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/editorials/diversity-catches-up-with-the-alp/news-story/6520fdfe56bbd292bfa15adf9eb3f404#:~:text=Senator%20Payman%20has%20said%20you,to%20change%2C%E2%80%9D%20she%20said.

5   Alex Demetriadi, "'False gods': preaching against our democracy", *The Australian* (23 July 2024) https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/false-gods-preaching-against-our-democracy/news-story/470e55a15fec3e3d8fbf82900ad1cf5a

6   Peter Kurti, "What future for Australian multiculturalism?" *Spectator Australia* (25 May 2024).

7   "Australia's Population by Country of Birth", *Australian Bureau of Statistics* (June 2023) Australia's Population by Country of Birth, Jun 2023 | Australian Bureau of Statistics (abs.gov.au)

8   "Overseas migration", *Australian Bureau of Statistics*, (June 2023) Overseas Migration, 2022-23 financial year | Australian Bureau of Statistics (abs.gov.au)

9   Laksiri Jayasuriya, "Multiculturalism", in Brian Galligan and Winsome Roberts, (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Politics*, (OUP: Melbourne, Vic., 2007), 349.

10   Laksiri Jayasuriya, as above, 349.

11   Chandran Kukathas, "The Idea of an Australian Identity", in Chandran Kukathas (ed.), *Multicultural Citizens: The Philosophy and Politics of Identity*, (Centre for Independent Studies: Sydney, 1993), 152. See also, Peter Kurti, *The Tyranny of Tolerance: Threats to Religious Liberty in Australia*, (Connor Court: Redland Bay, QLD, 2017), 48 et seq.

12   Laksiri Jayasuriya, as above, 349.

13   Paul Kelly, "It's time for good people to speak up", *The Weekend Australian*, (28-29 September 2024).

14   Paul Kelly, as above.

15   Laksiri Jayasuriya, as above, 350.

16   Paul Kelly, "Fractures on the left rewrite PM's political script", *The Australian* (10 July 2024).

17   James O'Donnell, *Mapping Social Cohesion 2023*, (Scanlon Foundation Research Institute: Melbourne, Vic., 2023), 66.

18   James O'Donnell, as above, 67.

19   James O'Donnell, as above, 74.

20   James O'Donnell, as above, 70.

21   James O'Donnell, as above, 72.

22   James O'Donnell, as above, 76.

23   *Towards Fairness: A multicultural Australia for all*, (Commonwealth of Australia, 2024), 11.

24   *Towards Fairness*, as above, 136.

25   Joe Kelly, "Diversity report falls flat as Labor turns a deaf ear", *The Australian* (25 July 2024) https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/diversity-report-falls-flat-as-labor-turns-a-deaf-ear/news-story/542e5ee0beac3f7705c2355d7e858e61

26   Bryan S. Turner, "Liberal societies in a religious world", in Bryan S. Turner and Damien T. Freeman (eds.), *Faith's Place: Democracy in a Religious World*, (Kapunda Press: Redland Bay, QLD, 2020), 20.

27   William A. Galston, "Two Concepts of Liberalism", *Ethics* 105 (April 1995): 516-534, 524.

28   Daniel Weinstock, "Liberalism and Multiculturalism", in Steven Wall (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Liberalism*, (CUP: Cambridge, UK, 2015), 306.

29   John M. Owen IV, "Liberalism's Fourth Turning", *First Things* (August 2024) https://www.firstthings.com/article/2024/08/liberalisms-fourth-turning

30   John M. Owen IV, as above.

31   John M. Owen IV, as above.

32   Daniel Weinstock, as above, 306.

33   C.L. Ten, "Multiculturalism and the Value of Diversity" in Chandran Kukathas (ed.), as above, 8.

34   C.L. Ten, as above, 16.

35   Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, quoted in Chandran Kukathas, "The Idea of a Multicultural Society", in Chandran Kukathas (ed.), as above, 22.

36   Chandran Kukathas, "The Idea of a Multicultural Society", in Chandran Kukathas (ed.), as above, 26.

37   Chandran Kukathas, "The Idea of a Multicultural Society", as above, 27.

38   Chandran Kukathas, "The Idea of a Multicultural Society", as above, 27.

39   Steven Vertovec, "Towards post-multiculturalism? Changing communities, conditions and contexts of diversity", *International Social Science Journal*, 2010, Vol. 61 (199), 83-95, 91

40   Chandran Kukathas, "The Idea of an Australian Identity", as above, 151.

41   Chandran Kukathas, "The Idea of an Australian Identity", as above, 154.

42   Geoffrey Brahm Levey, "The Turnbull government's 'Post-multiculturalism' multicultural policy', *Australian Journal of Political Science* (2019) Vol. 54, No. 4, 456-473, 460.

43   *Multicultural Australia: United, Strong, Successful*, (Australian Government: Canberra, 2017).

44   Geoffrey Brahm Levey, as above, 464.

45   Geoffrey Brahm Levey, as above, 466.

46   Geoffrey Brahm Levey, as above, 469.

47   Paul Kelly, "A Different Country", *The Weekend Australian, (5-6 October 2024)* https://www.theaustralian.com.au/inquirer/after-october-7-australia-is-not-the-same-country/news-story/c891ec09ef0237919fe826838e36d071

48   See, Australian National Security, https://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/what-australia-is-doing/terrorist-organisations/listed-terrorist-organisations/hizballah

49   Chris Merritt, "Our authorities inept at quelling hatred and bigotry", *The Australian* (4 October 2024) https://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/legal-affairs/our-authorities-inept-at-quelling-hatred-and-bigotry/news-story/731f90e64eb5709d4d28c4969b301e1d

50   See further, Dorata A. Gozdecka, et al., "From multiculturalism to post-multiculturalism: trends and paradoxes", *Journal of Sociology* (2014) Vol. 50 (1), 51-64.

51   Amnon Rubinstein, "The Decline, but Not Demise, of Multiculturalism", *Israel Law Review* (2007) Vol. 40 (3), 763-810, 810.

52   For a more politically emphatic response to the report, see Peta Credlin, "Tribe trumps nation in this new multicultural missive", *The Australian* (1 August 2024) https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/tribe-trumps-nation-in-this-new-multicultural-missive/news-story/4e74a0dc38121404c3f92a02ec316c28

53   Paul Kelly, "It's time for good people to speak up", as above.

54   Paul Kelly, "A Different Country", as above.

55   Peter Kurti, "What future for Australian multiculturalism?" as above.

56   The revival of Tory philosophy | The Spectator

57   Paul Kelly, *The End of Certainty* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1992).

58   Paul Kelly, as above, p. 3.

59   Gerard Henderson, *Australian Answers* (Milsons Point: Random House Australia, 1990), pp. 6-7.

60   W. K. Hancock, *Australia* (London: Ernest Benn, 1930), p. 77.

61   For further discussion of Kelly and Hancock, see my *Abbott's Right* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2017).

62   Edelman | 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer

63   For further discussion of the challenge posed by polarisation in Australia in the context of the 2023 referendum, see my *The End of Settlement* (Redland Bay: Connor Court Publishing, 2024).

64   First Speech — Keith Wolahan MP, Federal Member for Menzies

65   Speech | Our Race Against Time to Win the Battle of the Mind (senatorpaterson.com.au)

66   Andrew Hastie warns of 'social collapse' as world 'breaks down into tribes' (gbnews.com)

67   What is social cohesion? | Scanlon institute

68   Note my discussion about the way human rights legislation converts *interests* into *rights*, and the problem that is caused by making legal judgements about rights rather than political judgements about interests in my "In the long grass" in Damien Freeman and Catherine Renshaw, *Nonsense on Stilts* (Redland Bay: Kapunda Press, 2019). It is a reminder of the way contemporary progressives cause havoc when they inadvertently transfer the social or (in the case of human rights) the political into the domain of the legal.

69   Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985).

70   For example, to say, "Elizabeth I was *sexually abstinent*" is to use a descriptive concept and to say "Elizabeth I was *pious*" is to use an evaluative concept.

71   For example, to say, "Elizabeth I was *chaste*" is to use a thick ethical concept that fuses a descriptive concept (sexually abstinent) with an evaluation (that her abstinence was pious).

72   Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in *Reflections on the Revolution in France and other writings*, Jesse Norman (ed.) (Everyman: New York, 2015), p. 464.

73   Knock It Off With the 'Little Platoons' Already

74   Roger Scruton, *Green Philosophy* (Atlantic Books: Bloomsbury, 2013).

75   Cheryl Timbury, "They came from many lands," 22 January 2022, *First Fleet Fellowship Victoria Inc.*, https://firstfleetfellowship.org.au/convicts/they-came-from-many-lands/.

76   All parts of the Australian political spectrum, from the Greens to One Nation, evince signs of strong American ideological influence, problematising the notion that it is migration, and its multicultural product, alone that has transformed Australian culture.

77   This is one of the aims of "programmatic multiculturalism."

78   They don't guarantee such behaviour, but they do promote their status as observed norms. Many violations of these norms are criminalised.

79   R.A. Huber and C.H.Schimpf, "A drunken guest in Europe", *Zeitgschrift fur Vergleichende Politik Wissenschaften*, (2016), July: 103-129.

80   Cas Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist", *Government & Opposition,* (2004), Vol. 39 (4), 541-563, 549

The success of Australia's cohesive and multicultural society over the past sixty or more years has depended on a simple compact: in return for the citizen being free to maintain private cultural and religious traditions, the state expects observance of our norms and laws. However, since Hamas's invasion of Israel on 7 October 2023, this compact has been under unprecedented strain as the politics of the Middle East erupted on to the streets of our cities. After one year, these tensions had steadily got worse. The tolerance and diversity of which we have been rightly proud has given way to cultural separatism and open, often violent, conflict between different groups. Many are now wondering whether we are witnessing the end of Australia's multicultural project. But if not the end, then what kind of future lies ahead for Australian multiculturalism? The Future of Australian Multiculturalism presents a series of complimentary, if distinct, assessments of the health of our national multicultural project. It is a contribution to the conversation we are bound to have if we are serious, as a nation, about sustaining and strengthening the social cohesion for which Australia has long been so noted.

About the Authors

Peter Kurti is Director of the Culture, Prosperity & Civil Society program at the CIS, and also Adjunct Associate Professor of Law at the University of Notre Dame Australia.

Damien Freeman is a Fellow of the Robert Menzies Institute at the University of Melbourne and an Honorary Fellow of Australian Catholic University, He has written Occasional Papers for the Centre for Independent Studies and is the author of The End of Settlement: Why the 2023 referendum failed.

Jonathan Cole is Director of the Centre for Religion, Ethics and Society. He researches conservatism, libertarianism and political theology and is co-host of The Political Animals podcast.

Bryan Turner is professor of sociology at the Australian Catholic University, emeritus professor at the City University New York, and Research Fellow at the Edward Cadbury Centre at the University of Birmingham (UK).

Related Works

Peter Kurti, *Multiculturalism and the Fetish of Diversity*, (Centre for Independent Studies: St Leonards NSW, 2013).

Peter Kurti, *No Ordinary Garment: The Burqa and the Pursuit of Tolerance*, (Centre for Independent Studies: St Leonards NSW, 2015).

Peter Kurti, *Toxic Mutation of an Ancient Hatred: Left-Wing Antisemitism,* (Centre for Independent Studies: Sydney, 2019)