

Growing Up

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The inauguration of the 'Multicultural Policy' here in Australia in 1973 marked the official shift in the nation's parochial views under the official 'White Australia Policy' since Federation. In light of the ongoing and recent refugee policy 'crisis' in Australia it is useful to reflect on experiences here, and also it is useful to draw similarities and differences between the experiences here and experiences with the United States' experiences with immigration. Though the U.S immigration trajectory has followed quite a different path from Australia, they have also had the experience of shifting their intake of immigrants from largely only western European nations to non-Western, or 'non-white' nations. As a result, both nations have somewhat successfully re-conceptualised their national imaginations. Nonetheless, their respective policies and public attitudes have not largely been, and continue not to be smooth sailing. They continue being met with hostility from many quarters. The rise of xenophobic political campaigns and media commentary arise not so much from the true sources of migration, but against the migrants themselves, consequently leading to the passage of anti-immigrant legislation. Instead, what are needed are broader analyses of multicultural societies and immigration in order to move beyond the simplistic dichotomies which inform contemporary debates, as either 'for' or 'against' this phenomenon. Structural shifts in the global economies and global crises, along with the intensified pressures of globalisation need to be considered in the discussion of immigration. Questions of national identity, multiculturalism or cultural pluralism and racism also need consideration of the changing national and global context, and their re-theorisation is long overdue.

While Australia's shift in policy has been relatively shorter than the U.S post 1965 policy, both nations exhibited periods, whether for permanent settlement or not, of non 'white', non-western European immigration. The American experience had been evolving for some time prior to 1965 and demands for citizenship from certain groups pressured inclusion as a bottom-up experiment, known as America's 'melting pot'. A model not without problems, immigrants strongly asserted their claims to also be Americans, while not all uniformly, and still many maintaining elements of diversity and their right to do so. While the Australian experience could be seen, to a lesser degree, as a policy that was also reacting to the situation of the reality on the ground; the inauguration of the Multicultural Policy was a government initiative, a top-down policy, and could be seen as conducted in haste and therefore ill-conceived. This meant immigrants would always be positioned as such, whether established or recent.

Nonetheless debates on whether multiculturalism has not worked or not fulfilled its stated aim are bogus debates. Multicultural societies in both Australia and the United States are as much a self-generating phenomena as they are formal government policy. Both societies' experiences with cultural diversity have been part of their formation both past and present and have left an indelible mark. A mark that is nevertheless dynamic and constantly changing to suit both internal and external forces. Debates continue either 'for' or 'against' it. While Stephen Castles points out that '[A]ustralia's cultural diversity is 'irreversible' and any escape into a nostalgic illusion of Anglo-centered assimilation is not

only unrealistic but also dangerous, because it blocks away a real grasp of what is going on in our fast changing world.¹ Multiculturalism refers both to the demographic-cultural fact of the enormous diversity of cultures that constitute our Australian society, and to the ensemble of institutions and policies introduced by the state to govern this diversity.² The discussion must move away from whether multiculturalism has a future to how to maximize the social and political well-being of all. In this debate using the term 'integration', however, can be misleading, as it is a term associated with a policy preceding that of multiculturalism. A policy which aimed at proclaiming the mono-cultural nature of our land and the necessity of migrants to assimilate into that mono-culture, pretending to be the same while repressing difference.³

Nevertheless, parallels will be drawn from both experiences, in the hope and need for a deeper understanding of the trends and patterns to debunk the common myths which continue to prevail in both countries. Many of the recent reactionary responses have mirrored past voices of fear and hostility toward the new arrivals. In both the U.S. and Australia, many of the patterns, strategies, and problems of today's migrants' parallel previous waves of immigration. Both push and pull factors are still responsible for the new waves of immigration. Like earlier flows of European immigration, many of today's immigrants are in pursuit of the conservative goal of security, or similar to the possibilities in which modernisation had brought to improvements in individual and family circumstances. The forces that were once pushing Europeans out of their homelands, conditions of urban, industrial development, had now reached the developing countries of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and South and Central

America and this was spurred on by America's need for low-wage, non-industrial workers in a more mixed economy. In addition, evidence shows a higher portion of immigrant cohorts after the 1990s are more likely to have a college education or who are skilled workers; foreign graduates almost equal the number of native-born graduates and the portion of foreign-born occupying professional occupations in the United States also reflect this trend.⁴

To further understand these phenomena the analysis of immigration needs to move beyond the narrow individual focus and more toward the contextual forces influencing immigration. Analysis of different modes of incorporation is a way to overcome limitations of the individualistic models of immigrant achievements and to specify contextual factors. The modes of incorporation and context of reception is defined by a number of factors including: policies of receiving government, labor market, and the characteristics of their own ethnic communities. The burden of deindustrialization has resulted in a shift from industry blue-collar jobs to service sector jobs affecting first, as well as, second and third generations of immigrants. The disappearance of jobs in industry has meant that the second and third generation offspring of past labor migrants has diminished the industrial opportunities once available to those generations. A consequence of this shift is the creation of an hourglass shaped labour market instead of the traditional pyramid shape labour market. The old industrial ladder, while available to previous waves of immigrant families is no longer available today. The old pattern of moving up from unskilled, semiskilled, and skilled and supervisory occupations is gone. Instead, we see bifurcation of service employment, between menial and casual low-wage jobs. Today for children of immigrants to succeed they must cross in one generation that which took their predecessors, descendants of European immigrants, several generations to bridge.

1 Ghassan Hage, *The Future of Australian Multiculturalism: Reflections on the twentieth anniversary of Jean Martin's The Migrant Presence*, eds. Gassan Hage and Raewyn Couch (Sydney Research Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences, The University of Sydney, 1999), pp. 1-7.

2 Hage, *The Future of Australian Multiculturalism*, pp. 1-7.

3 Hage, *The Future of Australian Multiculturalism*, pp. 1-7.

4 A. Portes and R.G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A portrait*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), p. 15.

In combination with a lack of upward mobility are debates on 'race', which has never been divorced from immigration. This is mainly due to the concept of race as having such a pervasive influence in the United States. Like past waves of immigration, the idea of race and its influence cannot be ignored as it shapes the context of incorporation in the new country. One feature of contemporary capitalism has been its increased exploitation. Certain immigrants in past and present waves have experienced both negative and positive reception in the labor market. In the past however, regardless of reception, the hard-working individuals had more chance of upward mobility. And unfortunately today, for certain immigrants, their ethnic identities do not carry a badge of honour. Contemporary migration, argues Pyong Gap Min, depends on the highly educated who experience positive modes of reception, immigration will leave some of the children of immigrants trapped in urban cities and susceptible to minority native cultures.⁵

Immigration in the United States, both past and present, still contains a theme that continues to resonate today. The fears of those outside the borders of the nation attempting to import with them ideas and behaviors are seen as threatening to this nation. Attempts both in Australia and the United States to exclude and repatriate immigrants began with the Irish Catholic, then later the Southern Europeans, the Jews, the Chinese and the Japanese. All groups including those now considered white were referred to once as 'those who could not be assimilated'. These fears in the United States inspired the push for the creation of a national origins quota system in the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924⁶. In the present context, the United States has seen its fair share of anti-immigrant bills, tied along with anti-

welfare legislation, and reaching their height in the mid-nineties. Likewise in Australia after implementation of the Racial Discrimination Act, racism did not disappear, it was present at both the personal level and indeed the organizational level; and also found a new voice (blame the Jews, blame the Asians, blame the blacks) and a new strength from the policies of economic rationalism that placed neglect and hardship on many communities.⁷

The similarities and differences against immigration are wide between both past and present waves. In the United States, writers such as Peter Brimelow, Richard John Neuhaus, and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. base their arguments on normative ideals, such as, 'the kind of nation we are', largely basing their claims and assertions on unverified or fact-based information. One difference of the 'nativism' of today from the past argues George J. Sanchez is that 'nativism' is highly aimed at Latinos and Asians, and which manifests against such people through campaigns of anti-multilingualism and a strong advocacy of English-only schools and public signage⁸. In Australia the same fears led to the deportation of the Chinese in the nineteenth century, and the internment of Japanese in camps. And resurfacing in the present era with the Blainey debate, and later with Hansonism, which the Howard government picked up on with policies hostile and regressive to multiculturalism and immigration.⁹ The negative reception that waves of new Palestinians and Lebanese received before arriving in the mid-1970s as potential terrorists, and today the 'war on terror' has made Muslims and asylum seekers again the scapegoat.

Overt racism may be less frequent than in the past, but racism is still part of taken-for-granted-

5 Pyong Gap Min, 'Essay on migration', *The Future of Australian Multiculturalism: Reflections on the twentieth anniversary of Jean Martin's the Migrant Presence*, eds. Ghassan Hage and Raewyn Couch (Sydney: Research institute for Humanities and Social Sciences, The University of Sydney, 1999), p. 19.

6 D.A. Gerber and A.M. Kraut, *American Immigration and Ethnicity: A reader* (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 127.

7 Angela Chan, 'Playing with Words', *The Future of Australian Multiculturalism: Reflections on the twentieth anniversary of Jean Martin's the Migrant Presence*, eds. Ghassan Hage and Raewyn Couch (Sydney: Research institute for Humanities and Social Sciences, The University of Sydney, 1999), pp. 9-20.

8 Gerber and Kraut, *American Immigration and Ethnicity: A reader*, p. 128.

9 James Jupp, *Immigration*, 2nd ed. (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 147.

assumptions, the influence of past ideologies and practices makes itself felt indirectly through discourses in the media, politics and popular culture.¹⁰ While explicit racist language is condemned and not typically used, slogans such as 'Aussie pride' are used as a cover for 'White pride', nationalism and the flag provide a cover for racial bias.¹¹ Hostility to diversity and ambivalence to immigration by politicians and/or commentators typically denies any charges of racism, but instead develops 'traditional' arguments, and stresses 'core values'.¹²

To understand the relationship between multiculturalism and racism one aspect that needs to be understood is that of ethnic and national identity and its power to position subjects. The dominant national identity has been based on myths and contains contradictions, while the identities of minority groups have been positioned as Other.¹³ In this sense, 'multiculturalism' can work against the aspirations of minority groups to drop the label of 'other' as it helps to maintain and position itself beside the dominant group.¹⁴ A problem that has arisen from the discourse of multiculturalism is the paradox of minority cultures forming counter-narratives, and their resistance to dominant nation myths.¹⁵ To address this conundrum recent post-colonial

theories use new terms that better describe the idea where something new develops in a context and interaction with other groups can generate a new hybridised cross-cultural art.¹⁶ Constructing communities as ethnic absolutes, results in separate and homogenous entities, and limits the possibilities of self-definition. Cultural anthropologist Homi Bhabha states the need to think in terms of 'hybridity' or a 'third space', as a re-theorisation of multiculturalism to inform dominant understandings of national identity.¹⁷

Immigration and multiculturalism in both Australia and the United States is an integral part of the development of these societies, while trends and patterns can be drawn between the past and present waves, analyses must move beyond the individualistic model. Instead a realization of the national and global context, both push and pull factors are necessary, and the constantly changing global economy. Ultimately, the maximisation of opportunities for both the nation and immigrants and their participation is the way forward, rather than regressing back and inhibiting this process. Xenophobic ideas from established sections, particularly dominant interests of the society are not helpful and are typically reminiscent of past unfounded ideas that create only panic and hostility. Immigration can be seen as part of a larger debate on multiculturalism and also the struggle of how the nations are shaped and imagined. New ways of imagining the nation and citizenship are required to get past the old self/Other dichotomy, which privilege the position of some over others. What Bhabha calls such a proliferation of consciousness, the 'Third Space' beyond the self/other dualism.¹⁸ And on the whole this is possible based on the experiences in both nations with past waves which overcame very similar problems and disproved a range of unfounded fears that only duplicate past prejudices.

10 Stephen Castles, 'The Racisms of Globalization', *The Teeth Are Smiling: The Persistence of Racism in Multicultural Australia*, eds. Ellie Vasta and Stephen Castles (St Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd, 1996), p. 30.

11 Ben Miller, 'Lecture' 12.2 Flags, Riots, and Nationalism (The University of Sydney, May 27, 2009).

12 Jupp, *Immigration*, p. 149.

13 Ellie Vasta, 'Multicultural Politics and Resistance: Migrants Unite? The Future of Australian Multiculturalism: Reflections on the twentieth anniversary of Jean Martin's the Migrant Presence', eds. Ghassan Hage and Raewyn Couch (Sydney: Research institute for Humanities and Social Sciences, The University of Sydney, 1999), p. 48.

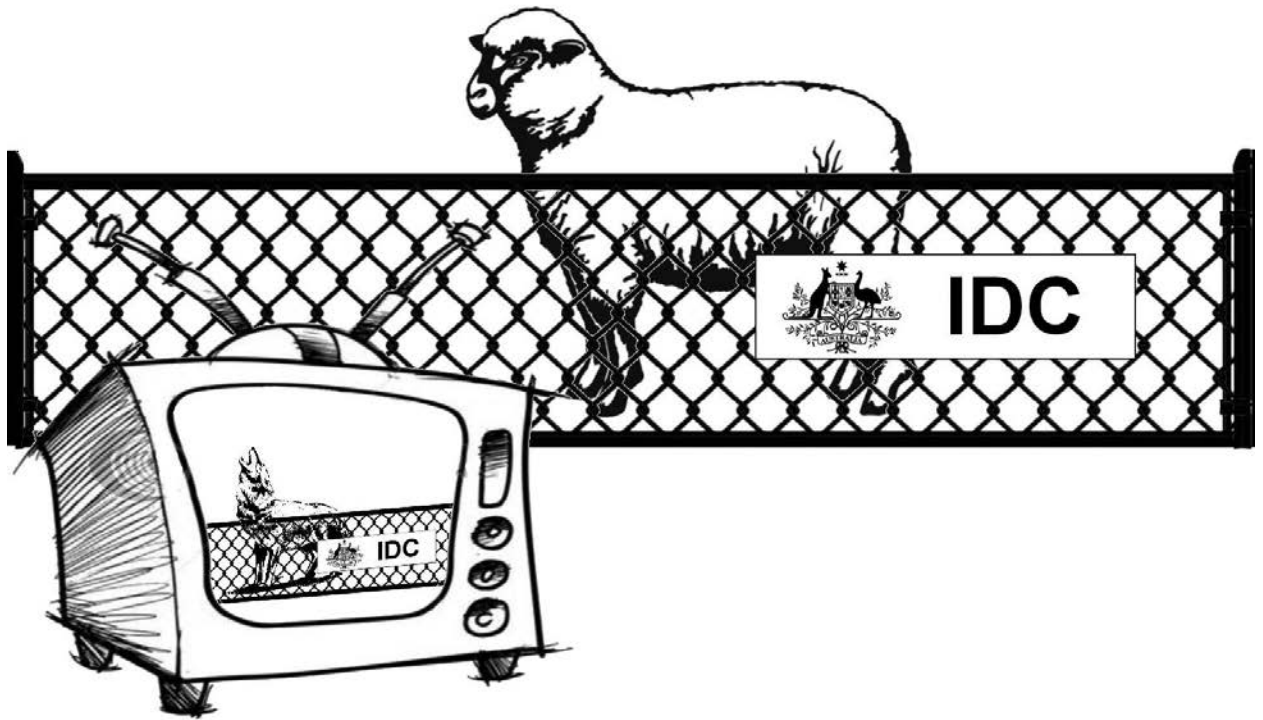
14 Vasta, 'Multicultural Politics and Resistance', p. 48.

15 B. Saul, 'Enter: A Vagrant Land', *The Future of Australian Multiculturalism: Reflections on the twentieth anniversary of Jean Martin's the Migrant Presence*, eds. Ghassan Hage and Raewyn Couch (Sydney: Research institute for Humanities and Social Sciences, The University of Sydney, 1999), p. 235.

16 Saul, 'Enter: A Vagrant Land', p. 235.

17 Saul, 'Enter: A Vagrant Land', p. 236.

18 Saul, 'Enter: A Vagrant Land', p. 236.



Behnam, Perception and Reality, digital image