Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia **17 February 2011**

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Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration

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<u>Submission by an individual</u>

It is proper that government should review policy on multiculturalism after forty years. Not that policy has been misguided or misdirected; more that policy has been subject to political correctness and scare-mongering. I submit background on policy as I view it, and thoughts on how review could be directed to reaffirming policy, and to "selling" that policy in light of changed circumstances.

Response to criticism of policy has been as shrill as the disapproval: emotive, passionate, myopic. I suggest a dispassionate conversation more from the head than the heart; over a time horizon looking back into history, circumstances of the present, into the generational future — underpinned by theory.

1. **Culture in theory**
Culture by definition is dynamic.[1] There is no end point to the malleability of culture. Culture thus defies notions of late(r)-arrival cultures integrating into and/or being assimilated by earlier-derived cultures. Culture absorbs and culture imparts. Culture in Australia is at once Australian and universal — in spatial time, geographic influence, and social environment.

2. **Political challenge to cultural theory**
The challenge to cultural theory is political, from as far back as the Age of Enlightenment.[2] Rorty (ibid:5-8) criticises the "essentialist Heideggerian account of the West as a finished-off object". Rorty, on the contrary, posits the alternative notion of the West as a "continuing adventure" (in conversations with the East). Rorty in his time was fighting a losing battle in Francis Fukuyama's triumphalist age of liberal democracy[3], and Samuel P. Huntington's pessimistic view of the inevitable clash of diverse cultures.[4] The September 11, 2001, strike on the Twin Towers of the New York World Trade Centre gave unwitting credence to Huntington's remaking of world order.

3. **Suspicion of Australian multiculturalism**
Suspicion of Australian multiculturalism gathered pace with the global backlash against Islamist terrorism, conflated with all things Islam, and with adherents to the Muslim faith. Reductionist impulses gave rise to growing intolerance.

4. **Policy response**
4.1 Take the politics out of culture.

4.2 Restore the focus on theory. The dynamics of culture have set Australia apart from global — essentially European — experience. Through waves of migration, Australia is practical example of cultural theory. Australia offers a model for global society.

4.3 Living culture, in Australia as elsewhere, needs to be looked at in holistic whole with identity; in internal conversation, as well as mirrored in relations with the global world. Australia's history and its geography, and the shift in global weight to the region of which Australia is a part, dispose Australia(ns) to the benefits of a people of diverse cultures. The positives of cultural exchange, as Rorty (ibid) posits, is eminently in prospect. Terry Nardin and David R. Mapel[5] are persuasive in making their case for universal values. A policy response in Australia could take account of assessments of the past;[6] policy settings on culture and identity can mutually benefit from internal and international relations.

4.4 Professor D'Cruz and William Steele (ibid) counsel one caution against taking an instrumentalist approach to relationships — within Australia as much as Australia with its neighbours. The caution is apposite to cross-cultural relations within Australia, and the strengthening of multicultural relations.

With understanding, accommodation and respect of people and nations with diverse cultures, will come mutual economic, social and cultural benefits.

Endnotes

1   GEERTZ, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretations of Culture*. New York: Basic Books
2   ROR TY, Richard. 1991. 'Philosophers, Novelists, and Intercultural Comparisons: Heidegger, Kundera, and Dickens', in *Culture and Modernity: East-West Philosophic Perspectives*. ed. Eliot Deutsch. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press. pp. 3-20
3   FUKUYAMA, Francis. 1992. *The End of History and the Last Man*. London: Penguin
4   SAMUEL P. Huntington. 1996. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster
5   NARDIN, Terry, and David R. Mapel. eds. 1992. 'Convergence and divergence in international ethics', in *Traditions of International Ethics*. eds. Terry Nardin and David R. Mapel. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 297-322
6   D'CRUZ, J.V., and William Steele, 2003. *Australia's Ambivalence Towards Asia: Politics, Neo/post-colonialism, and Fact/fiction*. Clayton: Monash Asia Institute

Submitted by an individual, as per details below: