JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION.
INQUIRY INTO MULTICULTURALISM AUSTRALIA

Submission by Multicultural Council of Tasmania
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Australia has been a recipient of migrants since the first European settlement in 1788. Nevertheless cultural diversity existed even before then: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people lived in different tribal groups speaking around six hundred languages with different cultures, customs and traditions. However, the dominant nature of European settlement was to dilute the rich culture that existed prior to the arrival of the Europeans. The diluting of Aboriginality was part of the White Australia policy of the early 1900s and the Assimilation policy which followed from the late 1940s. Both policies led to indigenous people and migrants becoming marginalised and being treated as inferior. The early 1970s saw a significant shift in attitude and treatment of Australia's migrants. To maximise the positive effects of migration it is necessary to evaluate and analyse the events and decisions which have shaped Australia as a multicultural society today; looking into the policies which played a crucial role in changing attitudes and the direction in which these policies took Australia.

Furthermore, it is important to explore Australian public reaction to cultural diversity, and responses to migrations crossing its territories and cultural boundaries and the effectiveness of multiculturalism and how it has impacted on the cohesiveness of a nation that is made up of a vast number of different cultures. To look closely at the Australian ideals of equality and a "fair go for all", and where Australian migrants are situated within this values framework, both historically and especially at present. The minority groups are often less marginalised because of multiculturalism and thirty-something years of this phenomenon has brought more equality, less racism and more tolerance to a nation that once prided itself on being a country of and for white men and women.

It is necessary to acknowledge and indeed celebrate the important characteristics multiculturalism has instilled in Australia as a culturally diverse nation. If multiculturalism's two core attributes are to recognise cultural diversity and celebrate cultural diversity then it could be argued that it has achieved its aims. Since assimilation was abandoned, immigrants have found a unique voice within the overarching national body. Certainly, it was influential

immigrant groups and individuals that helped shaped multiculturalism as a public policy. Multiculturalism has given a platform for immigrants to express their needs and desires. As is seen during the 1970s through to the early 1990s, they had a receptive audience amongst politicians.

The direction changed dramatically when the conservative Howard government gained power in 1996. In contrast to previous Labor and Liberal governments, this government put less emphasis on multiculturalism as a public policy. Immigrants began to feel less empowered and the Australian public began to look upon certain immigrants with fear in their eyes. It was a distinctly different kind of fear to previous decades. This fear smelt of a deep distrust. This government had taken back the reigns of the old colonialist battle horse in an attempt to win back any power that previous governments had given to minority groups. The dominant culture needed to be empowered in this era of the 'war against terror'. Multiculturalism, as a federal government policy, began to be threatened. However, had the foundation upon which multiculturalism was built during the early 1970s been built not from the dominant culture's structures, but from an equal share of majority culture and minority cultures, it would have been able to withstand the attack of the conservatives and assimilationist-minded individuals.

Coming out of an assimilation-driven era, it may have been too much to ask of the Australian political system to make way for cultural minority groups to directly influence and have a strong involvement in building a uniquely different political structure, one based on true equality. It is upon building this structure that fixed into the foundation should have been a strong social justice element. Multiculturalism is synonymous with social justice but since Australia's multiculturalism policies were driven from the top-down, a social justice focus was ignored and trouble emerged.

As some theorists have shown in their work, multiculturalism can be seen to exist in Australia only on the surface. Within the structural walls, it is dominated and driven by an Anglo-Saxon monoculture. The very structures that run the country are dominated by people of European descent. Multiculturalism has failed to diversify the Australian political system: Australian Parliament remains white-European majority and so too the legal system. It is in this sense that Ghassan Hage labels those who appreciate cultural diversity in Australia as the "white-cosmo multiculturalists" who are little different to the "Australo-British" in that they "continue the white Eurocentric quest for a distinctive form of Europeanness begun by the

Australo-British" (Hage 1998: 201). It is only by moving beyond these two sets of ideologies that immigrants can be fully represented, not just in the make-up of Australian society, but crucially, the very structures that power the country along. There is little use in multiculturalism remaining a theory, or an idea, that is only identifiable on the surface. One needs to be able to scratch the surface and discover cultural diversity all the way through the different layers of society, reaching to the very core.

This is where innovative ideas for settlement programs for new migrants, including refugees, and incentives to promote long term settlement are so desperately needed.

Since Australia's post-war programme of mass immigration, Australia has become one of the most ethnically diverse liberal democracies in the world. Furthermore it has been able to maintain harmony in the face of growing diversification, although this statement may be contestable. Certainly Australia has been able to avoid major cross-cultural conflicts and sustain a relatively harmonious environment. In becoming a multicultural nation, however, Australia has not resolved issues of inequality and inequity. In fact, it would be fair to say, these remain the biggest challenges for Australia, not only for people of different cultures, but its own Indigenous people and not excluding people of lower socio-economic background. Multiculturalism emerged in the early 1970s to tackle issues of equality and equity. Moreover it emerged as a new government policy following decades of assimilation which essentially had failed as a policy (Jayasuriya 1990: 51). It has been argued by some writers that multiculturalism has also failed, yet other writers believe it has allowed and encouraged freedom of expression and freedom of difference to occur in Australia (Windschuttle, Blainey, Calma). Moreover there are theorists who recognise multiculturalism's intention as positive but question its authenticity as an ideology that seeks to recognise equality and equity for all (Jamrozik et al, Anderson, and Jakubowicz).

It is the relevancy of the comment by the late Donald Horne, an journalist, writer, social critic, and academic who became one of Australia's best known public intellectuals, made fifteen years ago that is intriguing, particularly to the topic of multiculturalism in Australia. Despite multiculturalism's best efforts to achieve equality for immigrants, despite its altruistic motives, multiculturalism has essentially failed non-European immigrants to be considered as equal citizens of Australia. It has failed because it was never in the mandate of multiculturalism to challenge the dominant culture and the polarity that exists between

majority culture and its others. Horne's 'Anglos', the settlers, consider themselves as the host and therefore, no matter what programs or services are established for the benefits of migrants, the Anglos will wield power over the migrant and the indigenous (Anderson 2007: 382). Until this polarity is disrupted there will remain absolute division and inequality between immigrants and the majority culture.

As a person who has been living in the Hobart community for ten years and working extensively with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, I have come to learn a great deal about settlement programs in Hobart, Tasmania. Such programs often appear to work as empowering for migrants but in fact disempower migrants. Any outspoken individuals are targeted and ostracized, demonized, and have little chance to find long term employment. Often they end up leaving the State of Tasmania out of sheer frustration.

Over recent years, positions in organizations that work for the migrant sector are filled by non-migrants who have little or no background in migrant issues and no experience of being a migrant themselves, but are chosen for the positions because they have the ability to write strong job applications (because English is their first language, unlike most migrants). Sometimes these organizations tap into the knowledge of new arrivals and the refugee community, appropriating ideas and first-hand experience from them, in order to fund projects that in the end give no employment opportunities to the migrants, instead, provide more employment for the existing Anglo community who are also in the competitive job market. Bringing refugees to such a community that cannot deliver meaningful jobs to individuals is an abuse of their rights as human beings and their right to contribute meaningfully to the community into which they have entered into. To migrants it feels like daily humiliation.

This particular issue relates to settlement and participation that this committee is examining. In order to "promote long term settlement patterns and achieve greater social and economic benefits for Australian society as a whole" the positions in the organizations that seek to look after new arrivals should be filled by migrants who were once 'new arrivals' but have since experienced settlement. They are the ones who are able to understand from experience the issues that new arrivals face and are better equipped at offering the right assistance and advice and to recommend relevant programs that may help settlement.

Finally, to end this submission, Evelin Linder, a world expert on the psychology of humiliation, writes that there are three elements necessary for society to progress towards social equality, which we believe are relevant to the joint standing committee's aim of maximizing the positive effects of migration:

"Firstly, new decent institutions' have to be built, both locally and global, that heal and prevent dynamics of humiliation. Secondly, new attention has to be given to maintaining relationships of equal dignity. We need not least, a new type of leaders, who are no longer autocratic dominators and humiliation-entrepreneurs, but knowledgeable, wise facilitators and motivators, who lead toward respectful and dignitified, inclusion of all humankind as opposed to hateful polarisation."

Linder calls for a moratorium on Humiliation to be included into new public policy planning. The need for new decent institutions and leadership to heal and prevent the dynamics of humiliation, othering, de-humanisation and an examination of governances both nationally globally. This is an incentive that is necessary for migration to be a positive and equitable experience for this country.