

Social Cohesion in Multicultural Australia

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Summary

This paper deals with Australian multiculturalism and its contribution to social cohesion in Australia. It begins with the discussion of the definition of community cohesion. Then, focuses on the nature of cultural, linguistic and religious diversity in Australia and describes the concept of Australian Multiculturalism, its foundations and changes that were made over time to multicultural policies and programs. Finally, the paper attempts to answer the questions: Does Australian Multiculturalism contribute to community cohesion in Australia? and if so, what challenges to social cohesion may we be facing today?

1.0 COMMUNITY COHESION

The common meaning of the notion of community cohesion focusses on the ability of communities to cooperate with each other and form a united whole. The extensive examination of relevant literature points out that although there are many definitions of social cohesion, there is no agreed definition. Most definitions involve notions of solidarity, willingness to participate and togetherness.^[2] The United Nations defines socially cohesive societies as those where all groups have a sense of belonging, participation, inclusion, recognition and legitimacy.^[3]

There are however two definitions that are of relevance to this paper.

First, it is a definition developed by Professor Ted Cattle of the Interculturalism and Community Cohesion Foundation in London. His definition has been widely applied to guide work on the community level by government agencies and NGOs in the United Kingdom.

Professor Cattle writes: *'By community cohesion, we mean working towards a society in which there is a common vision and sense of belonging by all communities; a society in which the diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and valued; a society in which similar life opportunities are available to all; and a society in which strong and positive relationships exist and continue to be developed in the workplace, in schools and in the wider community'*. (Cattle, 2006)

Second, there is a definition developed by Professor Andrew Markus and the Scanlon Foundation that utilises five indices to inform the Index of Social Cohesion, namely: Belonging; Social justice

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and equity; Participation; Acceptance and rejection, legitimacy; Worth. (Scanlon Foundation 2016)

Using the above two definitions, I propose that we focus on the following six factors when attempting to assess the level of community cohesion in multicultural Australia.

- Common vision, defined by shared sense of belonging by all communities; identification with Australia and trust in civic institutions.
- Australian 'Fair Go' or social justice aiming to deliver a society with similar life opportunities available to all.
- Participation by people in decision making both at national and local levels and in voluntary work.
- Valuing diversity where the diversity of people's backgrounds is appreciated and valued. This may be expressed by positive attitudes towards minorities and newcomers; government leadership in support of diversity, non-discrimination and welcoming; and above all, about the respect for others.
- Integration where people of different backgrounds mix together in a wider community through intermarriage, diversified workplaces, education system and are included in media and culture.

In addition, I propose to add the sixth factor not mentioned by either Ted Castle or Andrew Markus, that is:

- Peaceful Conflict Resolution –an agreement upon the measures and processes to be used to resolve social conflicts. This may include elections, justice system, negotiations and other measures.

As the recent outcome of the Australian same sex marriage survey has shown, community cohesion is not only about all of us thinking the same or behaving in a similar manner. Social cohesion is also about the ways we negotiate our differences.

CULTURAL, LINGUISTIC AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

This will deal primarily with the diversity that resulted from the post-WWII migration to Australia.

I wish, however, to recognise that the diversity of Australian society is far more complex. For example, it includes 649,200 people, that is 2.8 per cent of our population, who reported being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin in the 2016 Census and who speak a total of 150 Indigenous languages were spoken in their homes.

Migration

The modern history of Australia is in large part the story of migration. Allow me to quote just few statistics to illustrate my point.

The population of Australia at 31 March 2017 was 24,511,800 people. This is an increase of 389,100 people since 31 March 2016; including net overseas migration of 231,900 people in the same period. (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017)

Since 1945, about 8 million people have settled in Australia; with annual intake rates often exceeding 1 per cent of Australia's population. Between 2006 and 2016 Australia's population increased by almost 3.5 million. 54.3% of Australia's population growth in 2015 came because of migration programs.

At 30 June 2015, 6.7 million of Australia's resident population was born overseas (28.2 per cent); it is the highest proportion when comparing with Canada (20 percent), United States (13 per cent), UK (12 per cent) and other larger OECD countries. In addition, the 2016 Census shows that 21 per cent of the Australian born population had either one or both parents born overseas. Thus over 49 per cent of Australians have either a first or second generation overseas connection.

The large migration intake is likely to continue in the foreseeable future because it is linked to Australia's labour market needs. Most of the prospective migrants are chosen because their skills are needed here. In addition, Australia takes a significant number of refugee and humanitarian settlers. In a recent report on the economic impact of migration, the Migration Council Australia estimated that by 2050 migration will contribute \$1.6 trillion to the Australian economy. (Migration Council Australia, 2014)

Diversity

The post WWII mass migration has delivered Australia's cultural, linguistic and cultural diversity.

Contemporary Australia maintains a diverse immigration intake with 1,000 or more persons from 29 countries in the 2015-16 arrivals. Looking at the top five countries of birth, according to the 2016 Census, United Kingdom and New Zealand were still the next most common countries of birth after Australia. However, China and India occupied fourth and fifth place, with the proportion of people born in China and India increasing since 2011 from 6.0 per cent to 8.3 per cent, and 5.6 per cent to 7.4 per cent, respectively.

Australia's linguistic diversity is enormous. The 2016 Census identified more than 300 languages spoken in Australian homes.

Currently, after English, the most common languages spoken at home were Chinese language speakers 877,678 (Mandarin 596,713 and Cantonese 280,947), Arabic (321,723 speakers), Indian language 292,147 speakers (Hindi 159,652 and Punjabi 132,496), Vietnamese (277,405 speakers), Italian (271,597), Greek (237,588), Tagalog - national language of the Philippines - (182,493) and Spanish 140,871.

The 2016 Census also indicated strong growth of Asian and Indian languages; for example, Mandarin has grown by over 170% in the decade to 2016.

Currently more than one-fifth (20.8 per cent or 4.9 million) of Australians spoke a language other than English at home although there are significant regional differences. In New South Wales, for

example, nearly 23 per cent of the population speak a language other than English at home, while Tasmania had the highest rate of people speaking only English at home with 88 per cent. The Northern Territory had the lowest rate of people speaking English at home (only 58 per cent) because of its Aboriginal population.

The latest Census data also highlights that Australia is a religiously diverse nation, with Christianity remaining the most commonly reported religion (52.1 per cent of the population) with 22.6% identifying themselves as Catholic and 13.3% as Anglican. Other faiths include Islam (2.6%), Buddhism (2.4%), Hinduism and Sikhism (2.4%) and Jewish (0.4%). It is worth noting that members of religions other than Christians have increased from 1.1 million in 2006 to 2 million in 2016; including increases in the Muslim faith from 340,400 to 604,200, Hindu from 148,100 to 440,300 and Buddhist from 418,800 to 563,700.

While most Australians reported a religion, the 'No Religion' count increased to almost a third of the Australian population between 2011 and 2016 (from 22 per cent to 30 per cent). In fact, 'no religion' was the most common individual response in the 2016 Census.

Such characteristics justify using the word 'multicultural' to describe Australia's demographic diversity.

Looking back, the government response to the diversity created by post WWII migration of large numbers of non-British settlers from Eastern Europe, Italy, Greece and elsewhere, was first to ignore them in policy terms. Initially, assimilation of non-British migrants and the continuation of a mono-cultural 'Australian way of life' was the ideal. Non-British European migrants were expected to melt seamlessly into Australian society and adopt the Australian lifestyle as quickly as possible: learning English, becoming local patriots, and abandoning their previous national identities.

However, upon their arrival, non-British migrants did not dissolve easily into the Anglo-Celtic melting pot, but rather established their own lively communities with churches, sporting, youth and cultural clubs, associations, language schools, welfare and financial institutions. Effective community leaders and ethnic media, both of which have influenced Australian politics, also flourished.

Such institutions were established not only to maintain their cultures but also to help with settling into Australia and joining the broader society, rather than staying within their cultural enclaves.

By the early seventies, it had become obvious that cultures brought to Australia by migrants were not going to fade away and that the nation would be better served by accepting diversity rather than trying to eradicate it. Political parties also realised the importance of the so called 'ethnic vote' and the need for government involvement in management of such diversity.

As a result, since the mid-1970s an architecture of government policies and programs emerged which is known as Australian Multiculturalism (noting that Australia has not legislated relevant measures along the lines of the Canadian *Multiculturalism Act 1985*).

Below I briefly examine how the multicultural architecture developed over time.

2.0 DEVELOPMENT OF AUSTRALIAN MULTICULTURAL POLICIES

2.1 The Whitlam years (1972-75)

The genesis of contemporary multiculturalism dates back to the Whitlam years (1972-75). Multicultural policy responses arose in the context of both a political contest to secure electoral advantage and because of social justice concerns.

The initial concept of multiculturalism, based on the Canadian model, was introduced by Al Grassby, the then Minister for Immigration, during the Whitlam Labor government. Grassby's initial attempt to define multiculturalism was around a rather confusing concept of '*the family of the nation*' with no formal policy established. However, key achievements during this time included proscribing racial discrimination and removing discriminatory provisions from the migration legislation.

2.2 The Fraser years (1975-83)

Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser (1975-83) also linked his political success with the advancement of multicultural policies and programs. In fact, it was under the Fraser government that multiculturalism emerged for the first time as a well-articulated, government-endorsed policy that was implemented through a range of pioneering government programs. Fraser also pioneered establishing a range of advisory and consultative bodies to improve ethnic communities' access to government.

The Australian Ethnic Affairs Council under the leadership of Prof Jerzy Zubrzycki played a particularly visionary role. As early as in 1977, the Council drew up a Principles of Australian Multiculturalism charter highlighting principles of social cohesion, cultural identity and equal opportunity. (Australian Ethnic Affairs Council, 1977) and for the first time, asserted that successful multicultural policy is directly linked to Australia's ability to sustain social cohesion.

The 1977-78 Review of Migrant Programs and Services, and the resulting 1978 Galbally Report (Galbally, Frank 1978), adopted the following guiding principles for delivery of programs and service delivery in a multicultural society:

- *All members of our society must have equal opportunity to realise their full potential and must have equal access to programs and services;*
- *Every person should be able to maintain his or her culture without prejudice or disadvantage and should be encouraged to understand and embrace other cultures;*
- *needs of migrants should, in general, be met by programs and services available to the whole community, but special services and programs are necessary at present to ensure equality of access and provision;*
- *services and programs should be designed and operated in full consultation with clients, and self-help should be encouraged as much as possible with a view to migrants to become self-reliant quickly. (Galbally, F., 1978)*

In response, the Fraser government established a range of ethno-specific programs and services and the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs, a national think tank with Petro Georgiou at its helm.²

Several of those ethno-specific services continue to function today, including: Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), Migrant Resource Centres (MRC), the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), and other English as a Second Language programs. The establishment of such services was the distinguishing feature of Fraser's approach to multiculturalism.

Further policy shift was proposed to the Fraser government in 1982 when The Australian Ethnic Affairs Council recommended the adoption of '*multiculturalism as the most suitable model for relations between all ethnic groups in Australia and as a preferred basis for government ethnic affairs policies*'. The Council also added '*equal responsibility for, commitment to and participation in society*' to its 1977 announced Principles of Multiculturalism. (Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs, 1982) The report also dealt with issues such as Australian national identity around '*a tolerant ideal of "a fair go" for all*' and with the issues of social cohesion and cultural identity. These themes were further advanced in the Future Directions for Multiculturalism Report. (Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs, 1986)

2.3 The Hawke/Keating years (1983-1996)

Prime Minister Hawke (1983-1991) initially perceived multiculturalism as politically advantaging the Liberal Party, and distrusted key players in the field. As a result, he started to dismantle the institutions and programs established by the former Prime Minister. The Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs was abolished and the existence of SBS was threatened.

Following public protests, the Prime Minister changed his approach and tasked Dr James Jupp to undertake a Review of Migrant and Multicultural Programs and Services and deliver a new policy approach. The key principles to guide the Federal Government's role and policies were not that different from the Galbally principles and defined as:

- equitable opportunity to participate in the economic, social, cultural and political life of the nation for all;
- equitable access to and an equitable share of government resources;
- opportunity to participate in and influence government policies, programs and services; and
- right to enjoy own culture, religion and language together with respect for the rights of others. (Jupp, James 1986)

The key practical differences resulting from the report were the recommendations to move away from ethno-specific delivery of services to their replacement, wherever possible, by mainstream service providers. This has evolved into the current Multicultural Access and Equity Policy.

² The implementation of the 1978 "Report of the Review of Post-Arrival Programs and Services to Migrants" was evaluated by the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs and its outcomes with recommendations published see: Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs (1982).

The years 1987-92 must be seen as the golden era of multiculturalism in Australia. Establishment of the Office of Multicultural Affairs within the Australian Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet placed multicultural policies at the centre of whole of government structures and decision making. The Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research became an important research centre, repository of information and backbone of policy development. Access to government by culturally and linguistically diverse community leaders was also further enhanced during this time, giving ethnic communities and their leadership some say on a national policy level and the ability to shape the delivery of services that were of direct relevance to them.

Another milestone was the 1989 adoption of the national multicultural policy, *'National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia...Sharing our future'*. The *Agenda* defined three dimensions of multicultural policy as: cultural identity, social justice and economic efficiency. The key achievements of this document were an added stress on so called 'Productive Diversity', emphasis on the balance of rights and responsibilities and the need for migrants to accept the basic principles of Australian society. (Office of Multicultural Affairs, 1989)

Furthermore, the Labor government adopted a National Language Policy which enhanced both the teaching of non-English languages at schools and fine-tuned translating and interpreting services.

The mid 1990s brought the emergence of a populist backlash against multiculturalism and immigration, especially strong in regional Queensland. Some commentators argued that the high profile of multiculturalism during the Hawke era contributed to the emergence of this backlash and subsequent need to clarify the underlying philosophy of multiculturalism.

Prime Minister Keating's (1991-96) approach to multiculturalism was much more cautious with a focus on Access and Equity (Office of Multicultural Affairs, 1992) and Productive Diversity Policies (Cope, B. & Kalantzis, M. 1997). Further refinement to the 1989 National Agenda were proposed by the National Multicultural Advisory Council in 1995 with emphasis on *'the obligation that all Australians should have an overriding and unifying commitment to Australia'* and *'accept the basic structures and principles of Australian society'*. (National Multicultural Advisory Council, 1995)

2.4 The Howard years (1996-2007)³

Prime Minister John Howard (1996-2007) won power when strong anti-multiculturalism, anti-immigration and anti-Asian sentiments were rampant and politically successful, including the election of Ms Pauline Hanson to Parliament.

The Prime Minister was initially reluctant to criticise Ms Hanson's public statements. However, following the emergence of her One Nation Party as a registered party and its growing political popularity with more conservative segments of Australian society, the Prime Minister declared: *'there is no place in the Australia we love for any semblance of racial or ethnic intolerance'*.

In 1997 Howard established the National Multicultural Advisory Council and launched a new multicultural policy, *A New Agenda for Multicultural Australia*, which advocated a *'shared national identity'* grounded in concepts of *'mateship'* and a *'fair go'*. He subsequently focussed

on Australian Citizenship, introducing the Australian Citizenship test and expanding dual-citizenship rights.

This refocused approach to multiculturalism dealt more with practical solutions rather than symbolism, including increased funding for both the Adult Migrant English Program and settlement programs aimed at refugees arriving from the Horn of Africa.

The terrorist attack on 11 September 2001 (which as it happened, caught the Prime Minister in New York City) surprisingly delivered a new lease of life for multiculturalism. It was realised how important the multicultural framework is to the maintenance of social peace in Australia. The *Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity* policy statement was produced in 2003 and shifted the focus further towards unity and social cohesion. Stronger contacts with ethnic organisations were re-established.

Similarly, the 7 July 2005 terrorist attack in London led to The *National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security* and the Muslim Communities' Leaders Reference Group, both of which were developed as a result of the Prime Minister's Summit with Muslim communities' leaders on 23 August 2005.

2.5 The Rudd/Gillard years (2007 – 2013)

During the 2007 federal election campaign, the Labor Party promised to return to the Hawke government's approach to multicultural policies and to re-establish the Office of Multicultural Australia. However, the establishment of the Rudd/Gillard governments saw only some of the promises realised.

During the first Rudd period in government (2007 – 2010), although multicultural issues were not given much prominence, the ground work on *'The People of Australia'* policy statement was undertaken. During that period the focus of attention (and resources) also further shifted toward the needs of refugees who started again to arrive on boats and away from the broader needs of other new arrivals, culturally diverse groups and the wider Australian community.

The Gillard government reintroduced stronger broad protection measures and gave higher profile to multiculturalism. The then Minister for Immigration and Citizenship Chris Bowen announced a new multicultural policy during his well-publicised address to the Sydney Institute, on the topic *'The Genius of Multiculturalism'*.

When the new policy, *The People of Australia*, was launched, it reflected advice from the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council and focused on equality and anti-discrimination issues. It reaffirmed the well-established tenets of multiculturalism including: rights and responsibilities; non-negotiable respect for Australian foundational values of democracy and the rule of law; reaffirmation of equality between men and women; and the concept of a shared identity.

The Australian Multicultural Council was also subsequently launched to advise government on implementing the policy and advocate on multicultural issues.

In summary, the Rudd/Gillard years can be characterised as a period of unfulfilled hopes of a return to the Hawke years in multicultural affairs and renewed focus on the mainstreaming of services and the anti-racism strategy.

The Abbott/Turnbull years (2013 -)

A relative stability characterised the early Abbott years. Prime Minister Abbott reappointed the Australian Multicultural Council (AMC), but without an advocacy role. The initial AMC responsibilities reflected his government's strengthened focus on social cohesion, unity, citizenship and productivity.

The re-emergence of the One Nation Party under Pauline Hanson in Australian politics provided an additional challenge to Australian multiculturalism. In mid-2015 Hanson started campaigning on an anti-multiculturalism and anti-migration platform and in the 2016 Australian federal election she was elected to the Senate, representing Queensland, together with three other senators of her party.

The launch of the new multicultural statement '*Multicultural Australia – United, Strong, Successful*' on 20 March 2017 by the Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and the Assistant Minister for Social Services and Multicultural Affairs, Senator Zed Seselja marked another important milestone in our nation's multicultural journey. (Australian Government, 2017)

With this statement, the Government renewed its support for multicultural Australia with added focus on shared values, commitment to Australia and community cohesion. The key messages of the statement are:

- Multicultural policies are for all Australians.
- Economic and social integration by new migrants results in their identification with Australia and contributes to Australia's prosperity.
- Australians are bound together by our shared values: respect, equality and freedom.
- Mutual respect and mutual responsibility are cornerstones of our harmonious society.
- Intolerance and discrimination are incompatible with Australian society.
- Even with strong borders and strong national security, our best protection is focusing on what unites us.

Most recently, Senator Richard di Natale, Leader of the Australian Greens Party introduced an '*Australian Multicultural Bill*' in the Senate. The Bill defines Australia's multicultural policy with emphasis on Australian multicultural heritage since before British arrival, equality of treatment under the law, inclusiveness and respect for our diverse cultures, and access to government services. The bill proposes robust implementation of multicultural policies by Commonwealth entities and establishment of powerful and a well-resourced Australian Multicultural Commission.

To sum up, multicultural policies and programs develop incrementally over the years. Although they are developed in a political context, Australian multiculturalism is usually seen as a bi-partisan undertaking, with Labor perhaps focussing more on social justice and racial discrimination; and the Coalition on social cohesion, fundamental values, citizenship and integration.

The examination of past policies suggests that the key principles underpinning Australian Multiculturalism could be summarised as including:

- Identification and commitment to Australia and a shared future in which everyone belongs.
- Commitment to social justice aiming to deliver a society with similar life opportunities available to all. Fairness and compassion.
- Commitment to parliamentary democracy and the rule of law and civic participation.
- Valuing and sharing our diversity, mutual respect for cultural differences and non-discrimination.
- Inclusion of all, regardless of cultural, linguistic or religious backgrounds, into broader society, including the labour market, education and media.
- Peaceful settlement of community conflicts.

When we compare the definition of community cohesion quoted earlier in the paper and the core principles of Australian multiculturalism we have almost a perfect match. The only conclusion one can draw from it is that Australian multicultural policies and programs are the key contributor to cohesiveness of Australia.

MULTICULTURALISM AND SOCIAL COHESION

Social research suggests a high level of social cohesion in Australia. This is illustrated by the Scanlon survey questions on a range of social cohesion indicators having consistently obtained a high level of positive response. For example, questions concerned with the sense of belonging, identification with Australia and life satisfaction, obtain positive responses from more than 85% of respondents. (Markus A 2017). In 2016, the survey has 91% of Australians reporting a sense of belonging and 85 percent reported to have '*a sense of pride in the Australian way of life and culture*'. (Markus, 2016).

Also, the Mind & Mood report on New Australians, based on extensive interviews with Chinese, Indian, Vietnamese and Somali migrants indicated that they see Australia as a peaceful and fair nation and were more optimistic about their future in the '*lucky country*' than the local-born middle class. (Megalogenis, 2012) In fact, most migrants are happy with their decision to settle in Australia and content with the nature of Australian society and its culture. For example, the majority reported feeling welcomed in Australia '*always*' (52%) or '*most of the time*' (28%). (Markus, 2016)

Furthermore, multiculturalism is recognised as key feature of the Australian national character by the community. For example, the national annual Scanlon Survey report, *Mapping Social Cohesion*, consistently shows strong support for multiculturalism (83 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement '*multiculturalism has been good for Australia*') and for the notion that current levels of immigration should be maintained. Similar results were shown also by other research. (Dunn, 2016; Mansouri, F. Elias, A. and Sweid, R., 2017)

3.0 CURRENT CHALLENGES TO SOCIAL COHESION

Although many commentators would agree that today's Australia is a relatively cohesive society, there are some that point to some weaknesses. For example, according to the Australian

Multicultural Council, although social cohesion at the national level is strong; there is not always a trickle-down effect to the community level.

Some authors are more critical. For example, it has been argued that the current large and diverse immigration intake is creating social divisions and risks long-term national unity. (Birrell, B.2010) or that immigration is creating '*ethnic stratification*'. (Salter, F., 2010) Other researchers argue that attempts to mainstream multiculturalism make it '*a concept on periphery, almost an afterthought for policymakers*' and thus its contribution to community cohesion could be limited. (Mansouri, F. Elias, A. and Sweid, R., 2017) It is argued that more space needs to be created to celebrate non-majority cultures; this view may be contrary to public opinion which does not support provision of government support for cultural maintenance programs. (Markus, A., 2017)

In my view, social cohesion is always a work in progress. As societies develop and move forward their social cohesion could be challenged. In fact, there are many examples of societies that were seen in the past as exemplary in terms of their community cohesion but disintegrated almost overnight. Lebanon in 1975 comes to mind.

So, what appears to be the emerging challenges to community cohesion of Australia? I have dealt with this issue in more detail elsewhere (Ozdowski, S., 2016) Here I will only mention a few concerns that were drawn to my attention most recently.

3.1 Discrimination and racist behaviour

Scanlon research suggests an increasing experience of discrimination and racist behaviour, especially among visibly different migrant groups. The proportion of respondents indicating experiencing discrimination based on skin colour, ethnicity or religion increased from 9% in 2007 to 15% in 2015 and to 20% in 2016 – the highest level recorded in the Scanlon Foundation surveys. (Markus, A., 2017)

The 2017 Scanlon survey mentions that '*the relatively high level of negative feeling towards Muslims is a factor that enters into evaluation of future risk.*' The survey indicated that 41 percent of respondents are negative towards Muslims compared with 6 percent negative towards Buddhists.

This could be the key by-product of countering violent extremism measures that appear to be contributing to the stigmatisation of Muslim communities in Australia. This negativity could also be '*in part fed by the reality – and the heightened perception of radical rejectionism of Australia's secular democratic values and institutions within segments of Muslim population, which in 2016 was the largest of the non-Christian faith groups.*'

Similarly, the Diversity Council of Australia social inclusion survey indicated that more than one in five Australian workers experienced discrimination or harassment last year alone (22%). This figure spiked to 38 percent for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians, followed closely by Australians with a disability (34%) and Australians under 30 (30%). (Diversity Council of Australia 2017)

The recent increase in discrimination and racist behaviour must be one of the biggest threats to any multi-ethnic society and to its cohesion as it slows integration and may create a permanent under-class.

3.2 Unequal treatment in the labour market

There is enough evidence pointing to discrimination in labour markets. For example, research indicates that people need to anglicise their names to get a job interview. There is also evidence showing that often highly skilled migrants are having difficulties in securing their first jobs in Australia.

According to the former Assistant Minister for Multicultural Affairs, ‘...of the 136,000 ongoing Australian Public service employees, less than 20,000 or about 14 percent, come from a non-English speaking background. In the Senior Executive Service, only 138 out of 1,918 are from non-English speaking background.’ (Fierravanti-Wells, 2015).

The employment discrimination against Muslim Australians seems to be of particular concern as the Scanlon Foundation surveys indicate an increase in negative attitudes towards those of the Muslim faith.

We clearly need a mechanism that would strengthen the practical accountability of our large employers such as the Australian Public Service, banks and universities to advance equality of opportunity for Australians of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

The existing discrimination in employment undermines the Australian dream that Australian society stays open to all newcomers and that the ability to join in the first generation is a key feature distinguishing Australia from older societies like Germany, France or UK.

3.3 English Language proficiency.

The 2016 Census shows that the number of people with low English proficiency has increased in 2016. The number of those who speak English ‘not at all’ is 193,036 and those who speak English ‘not well’ is 626,889; making a total of Australians with low proficiency in English of 819,925 or 3.74 per cent of the census population. This number has increased from 654,964 in 2011. An increase of 164,961 persons; from 3 per cent to 3.5 per cent of the Australian population.

The significant decline in English language proficiency is likely to impact on integration and community cohesion. However, additional research is necessary before a conclusion can be made as the decline could reflect the return to native languages by post-WWII migrants because of aging or due to an increase in the humanitarian intake.

3.4 Commitment to Australia

Some social commentators and researchers also suggest a growing disengagement of some migrants from Australian life which could be interpreted as weakening in commitment to Australia. For example, the Scanlon surveys show that a sense of belonging to a “great extent” has fallen over the recent years; it also points to a growing lack of trust in Australian democracy over recent years.

Some of the reasons for a decline in a sense of belonging could be, for example:

- The existence of attractive economic opportunities elsewhere. Australia is seen as attractive life-style choice, place to educate children; but not necessarily as a place with economic potential.

- Globalisation and unlimited access to overseas media providing direct connection with countries and culture of origin via the internet and satellite television. Social media enables the ability to live in parallel worlds with no connection to the local community.
- Toughening of citizenships laws.
- Geopolitical changes in our region, especially the rise of China.
- Attempts to de-legitimise or marginalise the policy of multiculturalism especially by the Pauline Hanson movement.

Geographical concentration of migrant populations

Finally, according to the 2017 Scanlon survey and census analysis there is an increasing geographical concentration of overseas-born populations, especially in Sydney and Melbourne. This appears to be a relatively new phenomenon that extends well beyond initial settlement periods.

As this development directly links to the integration of new communities, further research is required.

But all the above issues require much more research before we conclude that they negatively and significantly impact on our community cohesion.³ The key issue to remember is that for multiculturalism to be relevant, it must be inclusive of all Australians. Nobody should be left out or left behind.

³ For much more detailed discussion of a range of difficulties challenging multiculturalism and social cohesion in Australia, see: Ozdowski, S. (2016).

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