

The background of the cover is a light blue, textured surface. Overlaid on this is a large, semi-transparent, light blue circular shape that resembles a cell or a large nucleus. Inside this large shape, there are several smaller, darker blue circular shapes, also resembling cells or nuclei. The overall aesthetic is scientific and modern.

**RESPONSES
TO A FAST-CHANGING WORLD**

Stepan Kerkyasharian AM



NEW SOUTH WALES GOVERNMENT

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For a multicultural NSW

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RESPONSES TO A FAST-CHANGING WORLD

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Chair of the Community Relations Commission
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Foreword

This series of speeches covers the recent years during which there has been a fundamental reappraisal of our society and the world community, examining the threats to both, from the interplay of Western life and Islam, but especially the interplay with radical Islam.

It traverses a period in which we have seen great enthusiasm by people of goodwill from the major faith groups to meet, talk and discover similarities. But the conclusion reached at the Commission fairly quickly was that this was not necessarily the best approach because we believe that those similarities will become apparent in the fullness of time. We realised that it would be far better to deal with our inability to understand and accept the irreconcilable differences between religions which probably threaten to divide us more in the long term. This gradual realisation is revealed in this series of speeches.

The series begins with the Commission's first attempts to define citizenship in a globalised world. This research exercise prepared us well for the debates about commitment to homeland that were to follow inevitably from the September 11 attacks in New York and other acts of terrorism in western settings around the world, committed by locals. The speeches move through the period of great change that followed those momentous events, up to the end of 2006.

Stepan Kerkyasharian is now a well-known figure who appears frequently on television news and current affairs programmes, radio news bulletins and in the press, expressing opinions about many issues affecting the harmony of our society, but in particular the acceptance of Islam as one of the religions of Australia. He also speaks frequently at academic, government and community gatherings, which people find to be meaningful and ground-breaking. In any case, we see the role of the Commission very much as leading the debate on issues affecting cultural diversity and the interaction of Australians of all races, creeds and cultures.

This set of speeches catalogues some of the approaches taken by the Community Relations Commission For a multicultural NSW in these recent years of critical re-examination and reappraisal.

For that reason they are both important and historic.

Warren Duncan
Media Officer
Community Relations Commission
For a multicultural NSW

TRANSFORMING CITIZENSHIP

2004, Turkey

In 2004 Stepan Kerkyasharian was invited to lecture in Turkey. He spoke at both the Bilgi University and at Ankara University in Ankara delivering a paper on the evolution of the concept of citizenship under the title Transforming Citizenship.

Transforming Citizenship

2004, Turkey

Citizenship? Why have one? Do people really need it? Is it a right? Is it a privilege? Is it merely a practical legal tool for sorting out who belongs where? Or is it perhaps an ideological construction that works to convince us that we should remain in cohesive, integrated societies?

In questioning citizenship, people often turn to the Ancient Greeks who in conceiving of the rights and responsibilities of the citizen, so thoroughly analysed its practice and potential. The Greek philosopher Aristotle in fact declared that ‘the nature of citizenship...is a question which is often disputed: there is no general agreement on a single definition’.¹

Yet there exists a widespread general understanding of citizenship that virtually all nations subscribe to in theory. Although its form and meaning varies markedly, it is generally held to be a legal determination of a nation’s rights. It also usually encompasses a tight link between notions of citizen and nation.²

Whatever it is these days, citizenship is still about human beings, about people who have a commitment to a place and to the people who live there. It is a surprisingly fundamental and powerful term. Citizenship is, as Australian historian Alastair Davidson suggests, ‘a central concern for human beings bent on being happy and seeking justice.’³

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¹ Quoted in Derek Heater *Citizenship: The Civic ideal in world history, politics and education* Longman London New York 1990 pi

² For a brief historical overview of the various general understandings of citizenship see Kathleen Weekley ‘Introduction’ in Alastair Davidson and Kathleen Weekley eds., *Globalisation and Citizenship in the Asia-Pacific* St Martin’s Press New York 1999 pp1-23. Weekley notes the overriding normative sense of citizenship that emanates from modern, nation-state developments of the rights and responsibilities of a citizen. This particularly Western conception of citizenship has different inflections for indigenous and non-Western peoples, however it has established widespread currency, many scholars argue even a hegemony.

³ Alastair Davidson *From Subject to Citizen: Australian Citizenship in the 20th Century* Cambridge University Press Melbourne 1997 p1

It is about how people identify themselves, how they can exist economically, the ways they can act politically, where and how they can live and travel, what they may hope for. It is often linked to an emotional feeling of belonging. In an increasingly globalising world, a sense of belonging is often where people turn for security and stability. Yet many migrants do hold on to a feeling of belonging to other places.

As we move into the twenty-first century, issues and possibilities of what constitutes citizenship and how citizenship works in, or is limited by, a multicultural society are becoming increasingly prominent. Academics who have been concerned with multiculturalism have increasingly turned toward exploring the concept of citizenship.⁴ After relative silence on the matter until the 1970s, many governments have also become increasingly interested in reviewing, promoting and educating people about their citizenship. Recent controversies about multiculturalism and immigration – particularly in the post-September 11 environment – have meant a new defence, and questioning of, the concept and practice of multiculturalism as well.⁵

⁴ Laksiri Jayasuriya 'Australian Multiculturalism and Citizenship: Towards a New Paradigm' in *Position Papers for seminar on Reconciliation* Ethnic Affairs Commission NSW Ashfield NSW 2000 argues for 'a revitalised concept of citizenship responsive to the new pluralism of Australia in the 21st century (that is) able to confront the politics of difference.' This should involve 'participation, recognition and representation.' p47-48. Historian of Multiculturalism Mark Lopez notes 'interest in multiculturalism increased rapidly from the mid 1990s' and that in Australia multiculturalism has been the 'subject of heated public debate, often stirring emotions and going to the heart of fundamental issues of identity and social organisation at the national, subgroup and personal level.' *The Origins of Multiculturalism in Australian Politics 1945-1975* Melbourne University Press Melbourne 2000 p1. As Inta Allegritta argues, an 'an integral feature' of resolving a 'moral crisis between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians' is 'citizenship'. Inta Allegritta 'Imagining Ourselves as Intercultural Citizens' in Scott K Phillips editor *Everyday Diversity: Australian Multiculturalism and reconciliation in practice*

⁵ See Alastair Davidson *From Subject to Citizen* p2. In the Australian context, as Laksiri Jayasuriya suggests, in the 1990s 'following the Hanson phenomenon and the formation of One Nation as a political party, recent controversies about multiculturalism and immigration have brought to the fore the vulnerability of Australian multiculturalism as a response to the diversity and pluralism of Australian society'. Laksiri Jayasuriya 'Australian Multiculturalism and Citizenship: Towards a New Paradigm' p47. To this must now be

So too public policy that deals with rights and responsibilities of minority groups has begun to focus on interrogating the relationships and possibilities for reconceptualising citizenship.⁶ In Australia, recent popular focus on immigration policy has renewed debate on the need for cultural and particularly religious conformity in the profile of migrants.

Such debates have a long standing history. Recent studies of the historical construction of citizenship around the globe have noted how citizenship emerged through the modern period as fundamentally linked to decisions of exclusion, of defining who did not belong to a state.⁷ Such questioning of the origins of our conceptions of citizenship has appeared for two reasons: we now realise that earlier conceptions of citizenship have been inadequate, and there have been major political, social and economic changes recently.⁸

added the recent events of new federal government restrictions on refugee intake and detention, and the effects of the terrorist attacks on the US. Some responses to recent events have canvassed abandoning official multiculturalism altogether. See Wolfgang Kasper *Sustainable Immigration and Cultural Integration* The Centre for Independent Studies Monograph 55 St Leonards Sydney 2002. Kasper writes in response to a recent surge in popular anti-immigration sentiment and falls prey to this sentiment by suggesting that because multiculturalism may have lost some popular support, it should be abandoned. Not only are his suggestions based on the assumption migrants must integrate into Australian society, but that this integration will inevitably occur naturally, without the protection of cultural rights guaranteed by multiculturalism. Questions of the effectiveness of multiculturalism are consistently predicated on the assumption that migrants who 'fail' to integrate cause social problems. However the evidence of this is largely anecdotal. For example see Helen Hughes *Immigrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers: A Global View* The Centre for Independent Studies Monograph 54, St Leonards Sydney 2002.

⁶ I have written about this in 'The Concept of Citizenship in a Globalised World', and 'Australian Multiculturalism and Citizenship: Towards a New Paradigm' in *Position Papers for seminar on Reconciliation*.

⁷ See Kunal M Parker 'Disaggregating Citizenship' *Law and History Review* Volume 19 Number 3 <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/lhr/19.3/parker2.html>

⁸ Stephen Castles and Alastair Davidson *Citizenship and Migration* pp2-3

Australian Citizenship

As a result of a relatively non-discriminatory immigration policy since the 1970s and successive government commitments to policies and principles of multiculturalism Australia has become a society which is diverse in terms of race, religion, language and ethnicity.⁹

Australia is a relatively wealthy country: its modern origins lie in the colonisation of the original inhabitants by the British from 1788. Initially established as a penal colony by the British, it transformed the Aboriginal peoples' lands into a British outpost in Asia.

Even before 1945, the Australian population had historically been diverse. For example, the gold rushes of the 1850s attracted immigrants from around the globe. However with the assistance of government policies and control, Australian society remained essentially a cultural derivative of Britain.

After an extended period of mostly tragic official and unofficial efforts to completely assimilate the Aboriginal population into non-Indigenous Australian

⁹ Between 1901 and 1996 the source of migration to Australia has been dominated by the United Kingdom, but since 1945 included at first other European countries and then Middle Eastern and Asian countries. See Table 2, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs 'Immigration: Federation to Century's End' Commonwealth Government 2001, p21, available at <http://www.immi.gov.au>. In the 1970s the Whitlam government dismantled many of the distinctions and restrictions on the equality of migrants. The fact that Australian citizenship has long been associated with economic rights such as the right to welfare, added to social cohesion in the early stages of post 1945 migration to Australia. More recent changes to this association under the Howard government in particular have been argued as detrimental to social cohesion. See for example Jayasuria 'Australian Multiculturalism and Citizenship: Towards a New Paradigm' p63. Australia's increasing cultural diversity can be seen in the fact that in 1996 the percentage of the population speaking a language other than English was 13.9 percent (16.8 percent in New South Wales, the main centre of Australian immigration) The percentage of overseas born Australians at 1996 was 23 percent. The top five languages spoken other than English in NSW in 1996 were Arabic, Cantonese, Italian, Greek and Vietnamese. The religious profile of Australia now includes significant numbers of non-Christian religions: the fastest growing religious communities are Buddhist and Islamic. See Community Relations Commission For a multicultural NSW Census Statistics, 'The People of New South Wales' <http://www.eacnsw.com.au/statistics/nsw/language.pdf> and <http://www.eacnsw.com.au/statistics/nsw/religions.pdf>

society, Australia has recently increasingly come to terms with the cultural reality of its population.¹⁰

Australia has of course very specific contexts in the development of its official policies of citizenship and its relations with minority communities and the movement of peoples into the country. So too multiculturalism emerged in the context of various international as well as domestic trends and forces such as the impact of decolonisation, shifts in Australia's trade links and alliances, and changes in international migration patterns.¹¹ A relatively isolated geographical position also afforded the possibility of debate and policy implementation on a pluralist society, where other countries have been concerned with more immediate issues of national unity as a means of national security and border integrity.

Since the introduction of a more open immigration policy in the 1970s and a willingness of state and federal governments to engage with the needs of, and issues for migrants, Australia is at present a successful example of a multicultural society.

Today, Australia has one of the most open citizenship models of any country in the world and there is no formal requirement for cultural adaptation. The Australian position as a 'settler society' with an increasingly diverse cultural makeup has certain unique characteristics that warrant attention. In contrast to the European experience, Australia did not go down the path of the 'Guestworker' model. Migration to Australia was a commitment for life and for successive generations. Some countries such as Germany are still

¹⁰ Along with the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation in 1973 and a commitment to greater equity and social justice for migrant communities, public policy employed the term 'ethnic' to capture the cultural diversity of Australian society. It was also part of an assertion of rights by groups of people excluded from the entitlements of citizenship they felt they were being denied. Laksiri Jayasuriya 'Australian Multiculturalism and Citizenship: Towards a New Paradigm' p50. However the term has been in less favour in a changed political climate recently.

¹¹ Mark Lopez *The Origins of Multiculturalism in Australian Politics 1945-1975* p37. See p37-39 for an overview of the preconditions for the introduction of debate and policy on multiculturalism in Australia.

struggling with the aftermath of an immigration policy that neither required a commitment to Germany from its migrants, nor did it offer one in return. This created a mass psychology of exclusion and marginalisation.

In fact, because of Australia's history of a distinct lack of articulation of the political community and citizenship, this has allowed the policies of multiculturalism to fill the void.¹² This means that contemporary Australian society has in my opinion some interesting and important lessons for other nations that have multiple ethnic groups or cultures.¹³

From exclusion to inclusion

Over the last 25 years, public policy has guided Australia to a position where it is now a harmonious multicultural society at a time when many other societies are still coming to terms with religious and linguistic diversity. Australia's cultural diversity is now recognised as an important social and economic resource.

For example, recent legislation by the government in the state of New South Wales has developed existing principles and guidelines for promoting a multicultural society. It states:

¹² Chesterman and Galligan argue this in *Defining Australian Citizenship* esp. pp2-3.

¹³ Much scholarly investigation of citizenship such as Alastair Davidson *From Subject to Citizen* agrees that the Australian contemporary context offers some interesting possibilities for other nations. Davidson notes that Australia is 'able to contribute to the refinement and elaboration of the new notion of what it is to be a citizen' p3. He suggests a singular important lesson of Australian efforts to deal with citizenship is the significance of 'strong democracy' p7. I have argued elsewhere that the paradox of Australian multiculturalism is due in part to the fact that such historical circumstances and political context in Australia have assisted in a broad public acceptance of the policies and ideas of multiculturalism. See Stepan Kerkyasharian *Viewpoints: A collection of speeches on multicultural issues* Ethnic Affairs Commission Ashfield NSW 1996 esp p37.

All public institutions of New South Wales should recognise the linguistic and cultural assets in the population of New South Wales as a valuable resource and promote this resource to maximise the development of the State.¹⁴

Previously it has been argued by scholars of multiculturalism (and reflected in affirmative action legislation by Australian governments) that ‘ethnicity’ has mainly been a ‘resource’ that can mobilise people for collective political, social or economic interests. Ethnicity has rarely been treated by governments as a form of cultural capital for the wider society.¹⁵ This legislation will be interesting for other states outside Australia because it also links the principles of multiculturalism to a broad notion of citizenship – a notion that goes beyond formal Australian citizenship. I am particularly interested and involved in this process because, as I have argued elsewhere, governments can lead the social agenda through their bureaucracies.¹⁶

There is however a gap between the implementation of such policies and whether such policies follow cultural demographic changes, rather than drive the agenda. Perhaps surprisingly, considering the relatively widespread public acceptance and government willingness to engage with the fact of a multicultural society, Australia’s historical attitude to the immigration of people

¹⁴ Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee No 1 *Inquiry into Multiculturalism Interim Report, Report 9* Commonwealth Government, May 2000 p26

¹⁵ Laksiri Jayasuriya notes this in ‘Australian Multiculturalism and Citizenship: Towards a New Paradigm’ p58. This legislative move here in Australia reflects what Stephen Castles (1992) has noted as a shift away from essentialist notions of ethnicity: that ethnicity is not fixed and immutable. Castles *The Challenge of Multiculturalism: Global Changes and Australian Experiences* Working Papers on Multiculturalism number 19 Centre for Multicultural Studies, University of Wollongong 1992, suggests ethnic mobilisation as interest groups is still useful, but perhaps less viable in the current Australian political climate. Others have argued this, the theme of some debate at the New South Wales government inquiry into Multiculturalism in 2000. In an inflection of this debate during evidence to the inquiry I noted the term ‘resource’ was not restricted to economic ‘resources’ but includes social and cultural resources. See Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee No 1 *Inquiry into Multiculturalism Interim Report, Report 9* May 2000 p27.

¹⁶ See Stepan Kerkyasharian *Viewpoints: A collection of speeches on multicultural issues* Ethnic Affairs Commission Ashfield NSW 1996

of a non-British origin has been comparatively poor. Ironically, Australia is an immigrant nation, and yet for much of its history it has been absorbed in controlling its borders to prevent the entry of others.¹⁷

In Australia the notion of multiculturalism evolved in the 1970s and 1980s to replace previous mono-cultural assimilationism of the 1950s and 1960s where migrants were expected to assimilate into the dominant British-Australian culture that had developed since British colonisation.¹⁸ These changes in immigration policy during the early 1970s actually followed the gradual dismantling, and then abolition of what was known as the ‘White Australia’ policy’: the often underhand restrictions on ‘non-white’ immigration.¹⁹

Modern Australia’s origins lie in a widespread acceptance of institutionalised racism. In fact the indigenous people were deliberately excluded from the 1901 Constitution and discriminated against supposedly for their benefit. The imposition of British authority upon the Aboriginal people, the inhabitants of Australia for tens of thousands of years, resulted in dispossession, the decimation of cultures and communities and forced assimilation into European-Australian society including the removal of Aboriginal children from their families.²⁰ Interestingly, the policies of forced integration and assimilation were met with such vigorous and sustained resistance that now Australian governments are forced to tackle issues of reconciliation between the indigenous and non-indigenous populations, including symbolic gestures of apology for past injustices.

¹⁷ See Peter Mares *Borderline: Australia’s Treatment of Refugees and Asylum Seekers* UNSW Press 2001.

¹⁸ The term multiculturalism was ‘borrowed’ from Canada and has been described as a shorthand for ‘cultural pluralism’. Laksiri Jayasuriya ‘Australian Multiculturalism and Citizenship: Towards a New Paradigm’ p49.

¹⁹ For an overview of the changes in migration and public policy on migrants in Australia from 1945 to 1975 see Ann-Mari Jordens *Alien to Citizen: Settling Migrants in Australia 1945-1975* Allen and Unwin Sydney 1997. Other significant work includes, Jock Collins *Migrant Hands in a Distant Land* (1988), James Jupp *The Australian People* (1988), Stephen Castles et al *Mistaken Identity: Multiculturalism and the Demise of Nationalism in Australia* (1988), Adam Jamrozik et al *Social Change and Cultural Transformation in Australia*.(1995).

Why had this institutionalised dichotomy come about? Australia had an exemplary record from the 1890s in extending the voting franchise and introducing the election rather than appointment of members of the upper house in parliament. Other western nations – even the United States – were slower to follow what are now generally accepted principles of democratic governance. Considering this, it appears a rather curious irony that the Australian government during the twentieth century held, and still maintains, the power to discriminate against its citizens on the basis of their race. Section Twenty-five of the Constitution states in part:

‘...if by the law of any State all persons of any race are disqualified from voting at elections for the more numerous House of the Parliament of the State, then, in reckoning the number of the people of the State or of the Commonwealth, persons of that race resident in the State shall not be counted’.²¹

Essentially, this has occurred due to the founders of the State instituting the ability to selectively impose sanctions and bestow privileges on its citizens based on their race.

So how could a nation that until 1945 had isolated itself from accepting all but British culture, so rapidly turn into a successful multicultural society? Historically, Australia has always linked the conceptualisation of citizenship with migrants and its resultant cultural diversity. In fact, the inclusionary approach to citizenship has been recognised as one of its most distinctive and laudable features.²²

²⁰ See Henry Reynolds *Why Weren't we Told?* Viking Ringwood Victoria 1999, Carmel Bird *Bringing Them Home: Stolen Generations Report*, http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/stolen_children/

²¹ See ‘Australian Constitution – Section 25 – Provisions as to Races Disqualified from Voting’ at <http://www.australiapolitics.com/constitution/text/25.shtml> This section reminds us that when the individual British colonies federated into one nation of Australia in 1901, the various political acts that dealt with citizenship and migration held discriminatory, racist powers and still reinforces the notion that the State should always retain the power to discriminate against its citizens on the basis of their race: to the point of denying them the right to vote.

However this rapid transformation to a multicultural society has at the same time brought to prominence several important issues. One of the most significant is the question of how to relate the traditional, homogenising concept of citizenship to the perceived problematic nature of diversity and difference.

Interestingly, Australia has a limited formal operation of the *rights* of Australian citizenship.²³ Because Australian citizenship evolved from British subjecthood, the formal conferring of other rights and entitlements such as the right to vote to other statutes and administrative practices were left aside.²⁴ Until the introduction of the *Nationality and Citizenship Act* of 1948, Australians were officially British subjects.²⁵

Race and the Citizen

From the late 19th Century to 1948, Australian citizenship was defined and developed as much in order to exclude people on racial grounds as it was to provide benefits for 'Australians'.²⁶ Before Federation in 1901, formal expressions of citizenship followed the processes of self-government in each

²² Laksiri Jayasuriya 'Australian Multiculturalism and Citizenship: Towards a New Paradigm' p60. Citizenship has long been noted as both a status and a set of rights (with a commitment to achieving a measure of equality). How Australia's traditions of social democracy built on the ideals of equality or a 'fair go' for all is discussed in Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis *A Place in the Sun* Harper Collins, Sydney 2000.

²³ Recently there have been a number of prominent calls for a more coherent constitutional definition of citizenship. For example see Cheryl Saunders 'The Australian Constitution' <http://austli.edu.au/other/IndigLRes/car/1997/3book4/Pages/04aac01.htm>

²⁴ Laksiri Jayasuriya 'Australian Multiculturalism and Citizenship: Towards a New Paradigm' in *Position Papers for seminar on Reconciliation* p62

²⁵ See John Chesterman and Brian Galligan eds *Defining Australian Citizenship: Selected Documents* Melbourne University Press Carlton Victoria 1999 p29

²⁶ John Chesterman and Brian Galligan eds *Defining Australian Citizenship* p13 See also Chesterman and Galligan *Citizens without Rights: Aborigines and Australian Citizenship* Cambridge University Press Melbourne 1997. The Act retained the concept of 'Aliens' – those who were not British subjects. See *Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948* <http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/places/cth/cth13.htm>

of the Australian colonies, so that in general, the constitution of each colonial government in relation to Britain directed the form of citizenship practised.²⁷ Ironically, the first Commonwealth Franchise Act is famous for enfranchising women, however it also disenfranchised Aboriginal people.²⁸

Citizenship underpinned the ‘White Australia Policy’ of modern Australia. In fact the Aboriginal people were completely *disenfranchised* in 1901 and not counted in the national census – they were not classed as citizens until a referendum granted them citizenship in their own country in 1967.²⁹ In formulating the Australian constitution in 1901, the majority of the so-called ‘Founding Fathers’ of the Australian Constitution wanted a guarantee that the security of the new nation would be bolstered by the homogeneity of its population.

For example, in the 1860s the first major influx into Australia of people from Asia was met with legislation to control the movement of specific peoples into the country. Interestingly, even in this early stage, the debates over restriction of immigration from China were actually actively constructing Australian citizenship. During the gold rushes in New South Wales and Victoria from the 1850s, Chinese miners travelled to the colony in relatively large numbers.³⁰ When non-Chinese miners frustrations targeted the Chinese – particularly at the notorious Lambing Flat riots – the government quickly

²⁷ *Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948* <http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/places/cth/cth13.htm>

²⁸ The Naturalisation Act of 1903 excluded both Aboriginal people and people from Asian countries. Both ‘natural-born’ people and ‘naturalised’ people were afforded the rights of the Australian constitution, though the question of citizenship was avoided until the 1948 Act. *Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948* <http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/places/cth/cth13.htm>

²⁹ See Chesterman and Galligan *Citizens without Rights: Aborigines and Australian Citizenship* Cambridge University Press Melbourne 1997

³⁰ Initially welcomed to the colony as a cheap labour source from the 1840s, the Chinese workers were met with increased racist hostility as their presence increased. See State Records New South Wales Colonial Secretary: Special Bundles, 1826-1982 CGS 906, esp. 4/829.1, 4/884.1, 2/8095.3. The Chinese immigration records for 1856 show 1,806 persons in New South Wales and in 1861 12,988. See Australian Bureau of Statistics Special Article *The Chinese in Australia* <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/>

enacted the *Chinese Immigration Regulation and Restriction Act*.³¹ The restriction of Chinese immigration meant enacting a legislative framework that regulated how long Chinese could stay, whether they could or could not bring their families, whether they could work and for whom, and in particular, whether they could become ‘naturalised’ and gain the rights of British-Australian subjecthood.³²

Interestingly, opposition to the stringent restriction of Chinese centred on their economic value to the colony of New South Wales, but also on their ‘rights’. A petition against the Act from ‘Merchants, Tradesmen and Citizens of Sydney’ noted that:

The population being in all countries the source of wealth, any prohibition to its free ingress in a young and thinly populated country... would be a fatal blow to its advancement and prosperity.³³

Although primarily concerned with the economic value of Chinese immigration, other petitioners demanding justice and protection for the Chinese attacked by miners at Lambing Flat, in fact suggested the government show responsibility for the Chinese. Some Chinese were indeed British subjects from the British Colony of Hong Kong. These immigrants, according to the petitioners:

...are on equality with Her Majesty’s European subjects in this colony and their persons and property entitled to the like privilege and protection.

³¹ See *Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales* January to November 1861. ML.

³² See Choi C Y, *Chinese Migration and Settlement in Australia* Sydney University Press Sydney 1975, Shirley Fitzgerald *Red Tape, Gold Scissors: The Story of Sydney’s Chinese* State Library of NSW Press Sydney 1997, Jane Lydon *Many Inventions: The Chinese in the Rocks 1890-1930* Monash Publications in History Melbourne 1999, Jupp, E., ed. *The Australian People: An Encyclopedia of the Nation, its people and their origins* Angus and Robertson North Ryde 1988 pp 298-307, 317-323.

³³ Petition by Certain Merchants, Tradesmen and Citizens of Sydney 26th March 1861 *Votes and Proceedings* 1861 Volume 1 p669.

They continued that:

Those Chinese in this colony who are not British subjects, are... entitled by the laws of nature, of nations, and of religion, to that protection of British Law and British rule, which is the just pride and boast of the Englishman...³⁴

So too, in 1891, South Australian Chinese people petitioned their colonial government and noted that the immigration restrictions meant Chinese men could not bring their families with them.³⁵

These historical examples suggest a close connection between ethnic conflict or harmony and the frameworks of citizenship.³⁶

Statements by politicians involved in debating the introduction of legislation on immigration in 1901 are clear on these issues. Australia's first Prime Minister Edmund Barton said:

I do not think that the doctrine of the equality of men was really ever intended to include racial equality between the Englishmen and the Chinaman.³⁷

³⁴ *Petition from Certain Inhabitants of Sydney respecting alleged Maltreatment of the Chinese* 21st March 1861 Thomas Richards Governemnet Printer Sydney 1861 ML.

³⁵ Peition re Chinese Immigration September 9th 1891 State Library of South Australia http://www.slsa.sa.gov.au/lib_guide/sasource/pet.htm

³⁶ Again in 1881, New South Wales was confronted with the dilemma of introducing a different cultural group into its British society when a shipload of Italian colonists fleeing a failed endeavour in New Guinea were accepted in Sydney. The response was to 'disperse' the Italians rather than allow them to congregate. However the Italians were reluctant to do so and eventually formed the 'New Italy' settlement in the north of New South Wales New Italy Settlement State Heritage Inventory NSW Heritage Office http://www.heritage.nsw.gov.au/07_subnav_01_2.cfm?itemid=5053135, Castles, S., et al eds., *Australia's Italians: Culture and Community in a Changing Society* Allen and Unwin Sydney 1992.

³⁷ Edmund Barton *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* 26 September 1901 p5233.

Another early twentieth century Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin referred to this notion of unity and by implication, national security, when he suggested:

A united race means not only that its members can intermix, intermarry and associate without degradation on either side, but implies one inspired by ideas, and in aspiration towards the same ideal, of a people possessing the same general cast or character, turn of thought – the same constitutional training and tradition – a people qualified to live under this constitution.³⁸

Deakin was also aware of the potential economic impact on the country by people not of the correct racial background when he stated:

The Japanese require to be excluded because of their high abilities...it is the business aptitude, and the general capacity of these people that makes them dangerous and the fact that while they remain an element of our population, they are incapable of being assimilated.³⁹

These comments suggest that the prevailing views of the turn of the twentieth century were indeed racist – though not supremacist. The Chinese and Japanese workers and businesspeople were often seen by Australians as *too* successful. Barton, Deakin and others reflected a non-indigenous Australian desire to create and nurture certain values and ways of life over others.

Nevertheless within a century, Australia *has* come to terms with the reality of its diversity. At a time when the issue of cultural diversity has become a matter of significant importance for many countries in the world from Afghanistan to South Africa, from the former Yugoslavia to the Philippines, Australia remains culturally diverse and relatively free of conflict.

³⁸ Alfred Deakin *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* 12 September 1901 p4807.

³⁹ Alfred Deakin *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* 12 September 1901 p4807

Globalisation

The increasing intensity of globalisation has created new challenges for citizenship – both in established western democracies as well as other regions of the globe.⁴⁰ For example, the world has moved to a position where environmental imperatives such as shared access to water resources has forced traditional enemies to negotiate common solutions. Economic imperatives and the march of technology have created a global economy that overrides national and political boundaries.

Global trading has significantly changed the priorities of multinational operators who, in the past, had to rely on political and sometimes violent conflict to generate economic wealth, but now rely on the peaceful coexistence of nation states for successful international trade and profit. The world has found an equilibrium for these competing economic, technological and environmental imperatives – generally known as globalisation.

Globalisation is generally agreed to reflect the emergence of a global economy based on the activities of trans-national corporations and international markets. It is also the increasingly rapid introduction of new information technologies that facilitate both economic and cultural trade, the formation of regional economies such as the European Union and the development of ‘supra-national’ economic and political institutions such as the WTO.⁴¹

Since the 1950s the collapse of colonialism quickened the pace of mass movements of people around the globe. As a direct result, significant ethnic, racial and religious minorities have been created in large number of States.

⁴⁰ The impact of globalisation on multiculturalism and citizenship has become increasingly part of public debate in Australia. For example, see the ‘Globalisation and Citizenship: An international Conference’ Melbourne May 1997, particularly Theophanous A ‘Multiculturalism, Social Justice and Active Citizenship’ published by the author Melbourne 1997. Some recent work suggests the possibility that models of ‘diversity management’ promoted in global businesses could apply to other sectors whilst others argue ‘diversity management’ is actually about controlling and integrating diversity. See Loong Wong ‘Globalisation and Diversity Mangement: Looking for Diversity’ in Scott K Phillips editor *Everyday Diversity: Australian Multiculturalism and Reconciliation in Practice* Common Ground Altona Victoria 2001 p179.

⁴¹ Castles and Davidson *Citizenship and Migration* p4

At the same time, there are indigenous peoples who remain suppressed in their own homeland and have no apparent prospect of ever achieving self-determination. On a daily basis they see their culture, traditions and heritage further eroded by the dominant culture imposed upon them by new settlers.

Often they have been forced to assert or claim rights of citizenship in their own lands.

This has also brought more scrutiny on the practical working, and indeed the conception of, citizenship. The relationship between governments and the people of their states, including newcomers, is ultimately determined by the notion of citizenship: it is citizenship which establishes the rights of an individual and the obligations of the state.

There is common ground between the migrant and indigenous experiences of citizenship – particularly in settler societies such as Australia. Here, the state has had to legislate the parameters of citizenship in order to foster assimilation and integration, and in order to offer various forms of rights – and broaden understandings of obligation. The history of citizenship in Australia has been one of refining in various forms of legislation, including multicultural, a popular conception of the rights and responsibilities for people of diverse race, ethnicity, religion and language backgrounds.

The English for example, in a masterly way, refined and manipulated citizenship through legislation. They created a British citizenship where one could be British but not English. This ambiguity was very clearly exploited in the 1970s and 1980s, as post-colonial migration reached its peak, when different classifications of ‘Britishness’ were established. A British citizen could have the right of abode in England, whereas a British subject could not.

The idea of a citizen who spent most of his or her life in one country and shared a common national identity is fast losing ground to the realities of a more global world. Inside the countries there are increasing numbers of citizens who feel they do not belong to one particular country. In fact increasing globalisation makes the ideas and myths of ethnically and religiously homogenous nations increasingly unsustainable.

Australia’s response to increased migration after the Second World War

was to legislate principles and procedures of fostering and continuing multiculturalism. Considering Australia's racist immigration history, multiculturalism has been remarkably successful and resilient.

However recently it has been under attack from various quarters. Particularly after recent world events, many Australians have become suspicious of the benefits of multiculturalism. Indeed many academics, government bodies and public figures in Australia are finding themselves having to defend multiculturalism in a changed domestic political landscape.⁴² Importantly, many multiculturalists concur that it is the area of modernising the notion of citizenship that will invariably invigorate multiculturalism.

Historical Citizenships

In order to comprehend the current anxieties globalisation has generated for citizenship and multiculturalism, some historical context is important. Historically, no nation has ever consisted of an absolute, single, homogenous culture. However the nation has generally required the assimilation of any newcomers or internal 'outsiders'. Often this has occurred through the

⁴² Laksiri Jayasuriya 'Australian Multiculturalism and Citizenship: Towards a New Paradigm' in *Position Papers for seminar on Reconciliation* p65. The original conceptions of multiculturalism have become what scholars such as Jayasuriya argues are 'liberal multiculturalism'. Jayasuria argues that this means that politics of difference do not necessarily exclude universalism. Critics of this form of multiculturalism such as Jayasuriya suggest it is 'unable to confront and respond to the challenge of inclusion in a genuinely pluralistic society.' (p65) Hence the need for a shift in thinking on multiculturalism and citizenship, 'that affirms, not denies, the reality of cultural difference and leads to a reconceptualising of citizenship, not as legal status, but as membership in a political community – a community governed by rights and duties and not blind to 'difference'. Jayasuriya argues that 'clearly, if citizenship theorising is to provide a defensible intellectual and moral basis for a revitalised multiculturalism, it has to go beyond the conventional understanding of citizenship as legal status, a set of individual rights and entitlements, and become more an expression of one's full and equal membership in a political community; and importantly, this is a community which does not necessarily presuppose a shared 'common heritage'. Jayasuriya p68, 70. Also see Jurgen Habermas 'Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State' in A Gutman (ed) *Multiculturalism* Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994 p27. A wider conception of citizenship promotes shared political values that are not necessarily dependant on shared cultural values.

mechanisms of citizenship.

Our current Western concepts of citizenship trace a strong historical influence from Greece and Rome, that emerged very much as a moral obligation.⁴³ The Greeks noted how an education in how to be a citizen was necessary and that it was considered to be an education in virtue.⁴⁴ In Greece, loyalty to a State, rather than a more concrete form of loyalty to a family or clan, introduced a more abstract level of obligations and rights. Aristotle noted how it should be an active political involvement, rather than a passive right.⁴⁵

Citizenship has always been ambiguous about rights and obligations. It always implies both inclusion and exclusion.

The concepts of citizenship, as developed by the ancient Greeks and Romans was not something which applied to everyone who lived in a city, a nation or a geographic locality. It represented the most privileged form of nationality and was governed very much by status or wealth.⁴⁶ Invariably those who were chosen to benefit from this privilege were the wealthy and the powerful, those who relied on the concept of citizenship to suppress minorities or the disadvantaged within their society and within their state.

⁴³ Ghassan Hage 'Citizenship and belonging: The relevance of honourability' p3. Hage notes a close relation between 'honour' and citizenship since then, and that the responsibility that is often attached to citizenship, is often dependent on the citizen being treated with 'honour'. Promoting obligation in minorities (as part of mutual obligation of citizenship), is according to Hage 'above all a moral sense' that 'emerges in the form of a moral obligation'. (p4) If the society you belong to honours you, you are more likely to honour it.

⁴⁴ Derek Heater *Citizenship: The Civic Ideal in World History, Politics and Education* p1 For an historical overview of some major European developments in conceptions of and practices in Citizenship see See Heater pp1-26.

⁴⁵ Derek Heater *Citizenship: The Civic Ideal in World History, Politics and Education* p2. Indeed Alexander the Great (tutored by Aristotle) conceived of a sort of world citizenship – a 'concord' of hearts. Forms of the idea of a 'universal' citizenship continued for the Stoics with Roman philosophers and informed early Christianity. 'Universals' have often been conceived precisely because they offer the potential management of diversity.

⁴⁶ Ancient Athens for example, had a population of around 250,000 of which only 40,000 were citizens. Derek Heater *Citizenship* p 2.

Although the concept of citizenship was theorised and debated, citizenship in the Greek city-state was practical and exclusive. The Romans extended the application of citizenship more widely, but again, largely in order to control the threats from increasing diversity.⁴⁷

Guarantees of security for the nation have historically been significant factors in determining citizenship rights and responsibilities.⁴⁸ Even the French revolutionaries created two kinds of citizens in their republic – ‘active’ and ‘passive’ – categories which were based on wealth and the payment of taxes. This constituted what was called the Republic of Rich Citizens. The aims of the revolution had encompassed the rights of all people, but only the owners of wealth were to be citizens. Although the French Revolution did heighten focus on the rights as well as responsibilities of a citizen, the association of citizenship with a notion of equality has not historically been a reality.

By the twentieth century, the idea that some form and common understanding of citizenship was crucial to the survival of the nation state was generally accepted.⁴⁹ Equating nationalism with citizenship was an emotional adhesive for a modern state – and led to the strong, widespread acceptance of the equation of nationality with citizenship. However, This has come under scrutiny of late, particularly with the heavy weight of legacies of recent tragic and inhuman efforts to homogenise peoples. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we seem to have learnt that it is in fact against the long-term interests of a State to suppress or expunge its minorities.

⁴⁷ See Derek Heater *Citizenship* pp16-18.

⁴⁸ The beginning of the colonial period and European contact with various new peoples saw interest develop in the nature of humanity – though the colonising interests of the sovereign state cut across this. Just as the ideas of world citizenship were being talked about by such philosophers as Francis Bacon and Comenius, the sovereignty of the nation state in Europe was being formalised. See Derek Heater *Citizenship* pp10-14. Heater suggests the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 at the end of the Thirty Years War cemented this. Interestingly, in determining citizenship in European countries from the 18th to the early twentieth centuries, the most common test was language.

⁴⁹ Alastair Davidson notes three main historical understandings of citizenship: the Greek City States, modern European nation-states and ‘supra-national’ institutions such as the European Union. (See Davidson pp4-5)

A Community of Communities: Cultural Diversity as Resource

Interestingly, while suppressing and subjugating minorities, States have always realised the latent economic value of minority communities. Consequently citizenship has often been designed by some states to keep minorities out of the power structures of the state whilst allowing their economic exploitation.

Historically, States have recognised and bestowed rights and privileges on minorities for centuries. For example in Hungary in 1036, King Stephen suggested in a letter to his son Emeric:

*Make the strangers welcome in this land, let them keep their languages and customs, for weak and fragile is the realm which is based on a single language or on a single set of customs.*⁵⁰

Although it is difficult to compare attitudes and legislation for and against minorities over different historic eras, St Stephen's pragmatic acceptance of minorities in establishing a centralised Christian state recognised cultural diversity as a resource for the strengthening, even for the survival of the State.

Such fundamental notions often transfer across time and culture. For example, in 2001 the New South Wales government proclaimed ground-breaking legislation. Entitled the Community Relations Commission and the Principles of Multiculturalism Act, it says in its Preamble:

This Act;

- a) Recognises and values the different linguistic, religious, racial and ethnic backgrounds of the people of New South Wales, and
- b) Promotes the equal rights and responsibilities of all the people of New South Wales within a cohesive and harmonious multicultural society in which diversity is regarded as a strength and an asset, individuals share a commitment to Australia and English is the common language.

⁵⁰ 'unius linguae uniusque moris regnum imbecile et fragile est' For a brief outline of St Stephen's rule see Saint Stephen Confessor, King of Hungary 975-1038 <http://www.ewtn.com/library/MARY/STEPHEN.htm>

The parallels in the language are uncanny but the motivations behind the words of King Stephen of Hungary and those of the New South Wales legislation need closer examination.⁵¹

The words of that Preamble are expressed formally in the new legislation in the form of four 'Principles of Multiculturalism'. It continues:

Parliament also recognises that those principles are based on citizenship. The expression citizenship is not limited to formal Australian citizenship, but refers to the rights and responsibilities of all people in a multicultural society in which there is:

- a) a recognition of the importance of shared values within a democratic framework governed by the rule of law, and,
- b) a unifying commitment to Australia, its interest and future. The principles of multiculturalism are to be construed accordingly.

The legislation is the first in Australia to make explicit the link between the notion of citizenship and the issues of social justice, community harmony and cultural and economic opportunities in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-racial society.

It sets the scene for a new understanding of citizenship in the 21st century. That new understanding must be about inclusiveness rather than separation and marginalisation.

What drives the New South Wales legislation is to reduce the marginalisation of its citizens by enhancing their level of participation in all aspects of the life of the state.

Under this framework ethnicity, race, language and religion should not play any part in determining or defining the status of a citizen. So too the loyalty and commitment of a citizen to a State should not relate to the individual's race, religion, language and ethnicity. They should have the right of self-identification by way of any of those identifiers.

⁵¹ NSW Government White Paper *Building Our Cultural Diversity – Ethnic Affairs Action Plan 2000*, 1996.

Citizens should also have the right to form communities based on any or all of these identifiers. The notion of a community of communities should form part of the accepted foundation of a Nation or a State and this should hold true for any State, regardless of the size or the diversity of the minorities who reside within it. Importantly however, there is also a realisation that the recognition of *absolute* rights of ethnic, religious, racial and linguistic minorities to achieve autonomy (based on self-identification) can lead to the fragmentation of States and threaten their very viability as socio-economic entities.

In New South Wales the Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Act represents an opportunity for the various communities, including the indigenous people, to relate to citizenship in a new way. Allowing all peoples the right to self-identification as citizens will give them freedom of choice and the right to form communities, instead of community groupings being mandated by governments. This means the concept of a community of communities and a culture of cultures will become the building blocks for the society.

Marginalisation or Inclusion?

What is different between the philosophical position of New South Wales and the rights bestowed on minorities by others in history? The issue is: how can a state act to include its cultural diversity without marginalizing it?

For example, the extension of rights to minorities often, in contradiction to intention, works against equal participation in the wider community. Affiliating with an officially recognised minority often limits participation in society to the roles and functions accorded or sanctioned for the minority. Thus what appears to be positive assistance, even privileges or political power for minorities, is actually a form of marginalisation.

The dilemma faced by many citizens in states which are guided by marginalisation is whether to declare an affiliation to a minority – thus being marginalised away from the real power structures (albeit with certain prescribed privileges) – or to effectively mask and eventually lose their inherited identity.

In New South Wales, such a dilemma has been considered and the guiding principles of recent legislation offer a different path. It instils in its citizens a basic sense of security, allowing them to give their best to the State without being distracted by self-consciousness about their difference from the mainstream or dominant culture. The initiatives in New South Wales are in fact at the forefront of redefinitions of the concept of citizenship.

Citizenship and Identity

One of the questions often posed when a revision of citizenship is raised is: 'What about our national identity?' The introduction of citizenship of the European Union has been an interesting example where citizenship and nation have been in some way 'extricated'. However much it has polarised opinion on its value to Europeans - whether it should or should not override national citizenship rights - such conceptions of citizenship that are not based in the nation state are forcing us to reconceptualise citizenship.⁵² Indeed, European member states bring very different national conceptions of citizenship together, forcing debate on new models of citizenship. One of the most important factors here is that an essential linkage of citizenship to a predefined national identity is under question. In fact in my experience this linkage has been a major contributor to recent interracial and interethnic conflict and violence around the globe.

The acclaimed Peruvian Nobel Prize author Mario Vargas Llosa has argued the notion of collective identity is an ideological fiction.⁵³ In a recent ABC broadcast entitled 'The Culture of Liberty' he said:

Now, citizens are not always obligated, as in the past, and in many places in the present, to respect an identity that traps them in a concentration camp from which there is no escape – the identity that is imposed on them through the language, nation, church and customs of the place where they were born. In this sense, globalisation must be welcomed because it notably expands the horizons of individual liberty.⁵⁴

⁵² *The European Union: Integration Process and European Citizenship* 'Citizenship and Identity' <http://www.historiasiglo20.org/europe/ciudadident.htm>

History is littered with examples of governments and leaders who prescribed and then moved to impose an identity on their citizens. Some were based on ethnicity, some on religion and some on race. Invariably these forced proscriptions of identity ended up in bloody conflict – indeed some resulted in the attempted annihilation of whole cultural groups. Vargas Llosa obviously believes, as I do, that whilst national identity can be described, it cannot - and should not - be prescribed. Vargas Llosa argues that cultures are not static over time and therefore we should not impose legislation that enshrines static conceptions of culture. As we have seen in my country Australia, the rapid changes in our cultural make-up in the last fifty years have meant framing and enacting more open and fluid conceptions of the relations and obligations between individuals from different cultures and the state.

Multiple Loyalties and Mutual Obligation

If we are to argue for a more complete separation of citizenship from race, religion, language and ethnicity, some further issues need clarification. For example, the notion of dual citizenship and the relevance of birthplace to citizenship must be explored.

Recently in Australia we have seen the situation where individual families seeking asylum have been granted vastly different legal status as citizen and non-citizen. For example a mother was not granted refuge, but her child born on Australian soil while her case was pending, was in fact entitled to citizenship.⁵⁵

So too governments have recently increasingly moved to act over the complications posed by people holding multiple citizenship entitlements. Indeed

⁵³ See also Benedict Anderson *Imagined Communities* London Verso 1983 for an insightful account of the way national identities were formed as fictions for the cohesion of modern nation states.

⁵⁴ The Culture of liberty: Mario Vargas Background Briefing Radio National <http://www.abc.net.au/talks/bbing/stories/s274321.htm>

⁵⁵ Sydney Morning Herald 30/06/2002

there are states which automatically grant citizenship rights to descendants of their resident citizens, even though those descendants may never have set foot on their soil or have any commitment whatsoever to that state.

These issues arise as problems because at present citizenship is based on either the individual's country of birth, ancestry or country of adoption and that permanent legal presence in a new state, with a commitment to its laws and its security, is not sufficient for the state to accept a person as a citizen.

Yet if we examine closely what citizenship means, if we momentarily part with the ideological frameworks that become attached to it, we find that citizenship is basically a contract between an individual and the state. In this conception of citizenship, we must ask whether one's country of birth is actually relevant in such a contract?

Does it matter any longer if a person speaks the language of the majority to be entitled to citizenship? To the extent that the person is able to participate in the processes of government and decision-making, the answer is yes. However there should be no barriers to individuals having another language, as their first language, and identifying with the culture of that language. Neither should the state prevent them from passing on that language to their descendants, because knowledge of and affinity with another language is irrelevant to the mutual obligations between state and citizen. In the same manner, there is no reason why race, religion and ethnicity should have any bearing on the fundamentals of citizenship, in the relations between a citizen and the state.

The Australian and Asian Experience

The idea of mutual obligation as part of citizenship has been with us for a long time. In 1919 the director for Education in New South Wales, Peter Board wrote:

The (First World) War is altering many formerly accepted views as to nationality and the State...this different notion of the structure of the State involves a different conception of citizenship; for citizenship

is that which deals with the relation of the individual to the State or community...Citizenship implies the recognition not only of the obligations of individuals to the community as a whole, but the responsibility of groups within the community to the community as a whole.⁵⁶

The increasing ethnic and cultural diversity of populations such as Australia challenges the model of the citizen as a 'national' with a concurrent, prescribed 'national identity'. Many Australians have multiple allegiances. Indeed many people in Australia are competent and comfortable with more than one culture.

In a speech I delivered to the National Press Club of Australia in September 2001, events in Asia were prominent. I was then concerned to note that in the Australian region and across many areas of Asia, threats to nation states and wars based on race, religion and ethnicity were on the rise. From Thailand to Kashmir, from Sri Lanka to the Philippines and from East Timor to the Solomons and Fiji, we continue to witness an increasing fragmentation of post-colonial nation states along racial, religious or ethnic lines. We must begin to seriously consider what are the limits of this fragmentation? Will multiple, small nation-states be truly viable?

We have seen issues of race, language, ethnicity and religion surfacing right across Asia. We have seen people who have lived by a uniform culture now starting to reassert their own culture to a point that they are ready to fight and die for the independence of their culture. The huge challenge facing almost every country in the Asia region, including Australia, is the loss of mono-culturalism, or perhaps we should call it the rejection of mono-culturalism.

The events of September 11 in the United States have heightened the need to continue interrogating and expanding ideas on citizenship, particularly in that these events appear to have heightened tension between Islamic peoples and the US and its supporters. In Australia this tension increased further with the recent tragedy in Bali.

⁵⁶ Peter Board on Australian Citizenship in Walter J, Macleod M (editors) (2002) *The Citizen's Bargain: A Documentary History of Australian Views since 1890* Kensington: UNSW Press p101

Such events have meant an increased distrust of and even hostility towards Australians of Arabic backgrounds.⁵⁷ Indeed, some violence toward Islamic people followed September 11 in Australia. However, the depth of multiculturalism in Australia has shown to have restricted potential conflict, and to have offered a common platform for Islamic and non-Islamic communities here.

Just before the finalisation of this paper, the October bombings in Bali - a popular holiday island in Indonesia for Australians - have brought closer to my home the tragedy of terrorism and bears heavily on my topic. This will have ramifications for multiculturalism and the immigration policies of Australia. Such events usually mean a heightened focus on the policing of physical borders, and unfortunately also on policing the boundaries of the rights and obligations of citizenship.

However I am confident that our strong recent history of government willingness to promote diversity over exclusion will keep us a conflict free nation. In the few weeks after the Bali bombings Australian society has remained relatively free of conflict.

I base my confidence in Australia's future as a culturally diverse yet tolerant society on our history. I also suggest that our leading government policy makers are responding to the challenges of a diverse society through initiatives that will prove interesting to other societies.

During the late 1990s the NSW Ethnic Affairs Commission, noting the value of government leadership in cultural affairs, developed an Ethnic Affairs Priorities Statements Standards Framework to assist government departments and agencies to benchmark their progress in integrating ethnic affairs throughout their organisations.

In 2000, the then Ethnic Affairs Commission undertook a major evaluation of its activities and proposed a series of future directions. The new plan, the Community Relations Plan of Action 2012 is concerned with cultural harmony

⁵⁷ For a brief overview see Ghassan Hage 'Postscripts' Arabic-Australians Today p243

for the next decade. It is underpinned by four new key objectives:

1. Leadership to encourage and value a culturally diverse society through the establishment of supportive policy, legal and planning frameworks
2. Community harmony
3. Access and equity within a framework of social justice obligations
4. Economic and cultural opportunities⁵⁸

After the bombings in Bali, the New South Wales Community Relations Commission rapidly acted in concert with other areas of State government to promote community harmony during a period where people may feel divisive. The strength of Australians' commitment to multicultural harmony has been inspiring.

Conclusions

In a globalising world citizenship can no longer be based on a homogeneous culture and its shared history. The key to the future lies in reconceptualising – and implementing government policy on – citizenship. The areas where this reconceptualisation is now taking place are at the points where multiculturalism and citizenship meet.⁵⁹

We are now in a position to move beyond struggling toward and conceiving of citizenship as rights, and interrogating the forms of citizenship that allow diversity to flourish.⁶⁰ Central governments, many of which are made up of representatives of the dominant culture, must employ policies to manage the

⁵⁸ Community Relations Commission For a multicultural NSW Cultural Harmony: The Next Decade 2002-2012 Green Paper for Public Comment New South Wales Government 2002. This document relates to the Community Relations Commission For a multicultural NSW Community Relations Report 2001

⁵⁹ For an interesting historical overview and discussion of the need to reconceptualise citizenship see Stephen Castles and Alastair Davidson *Citizenship and Migration: Globalization and the Politics of Belonging*, Routledge New York 2000

⁶⁰ So too we need to, and can, move beyond the pessimistic view of the inevitability of a 'clash of civilizations' – and new concepts of citizenship are crucial here. Samuel Huntington's infamous thesis proposed no escape from conflict between cultures in heightened globalisation. Samuel Huntington 'The Clash of Civilizations?' *Foreign Affairs* volume 72 Number 3 1993.

diversity of the state towards inclusion and away from marginalisation.

If policies and notions of citizenship that embrace linguistic, religious and racial diversity are deployed, particularly in nations that possess a dominant culture and many minority cultures, then bloodshed and division will be much less likely. It would certainly have a dramatic effect by reducing the number of refugees seeking asylum in countries which accept and respect cultural diversity.

Citizenship should be seen as the unifying force, the drawing together of the common bonds of history and shared aspects of culture based on the acceptance of and respect for diversity.

There are fundamental differences in conceptions of citizenship across the globe.⁶¹ A new conception of citizenship that releases citizenship from being bound to tradition will prove valuable for all nations and states. It will free the citizen from social strictures of assimilation and from traditions of suspicion of the 'unassimilated'.

If governments genuinely strive to achieve equality of opportunity for all groups within their state – but more importantly, if they openly demonstrate their respect for and acceptance of diversity of language, race, religion and ethnicity with their citizens as an inseparable fabric of their society and state – then division and bloodshed and the ultimate creation of unworkable mini-nations will not be necessary.

Research assistance: Stephen Gapps

⁶¹ Some scholars have noted how there may be much more that is in common than different between, for example, Asian and European ideas on citizenship. See Alistair Davidson 'Never the Twain Shall Meet? Europe, Asia and the Citizen' in Alastair Davidson and Kathleen Weekley *Globalization and Citizenship in the Asia-Pacific* pp221-241

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THE FUTURE OF ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

Closing address at the 2005 CRC Symposium 21 June 2005, Sydney

*On Tuesday 21st June 2005
the Community Relations
Commission held its annual
symposium where community
leaders and relevant service-
providers come together to
review the previous year's
achievements and to plan for
the coming year.*

*The 2005 symposium had a
strong emphasis on youth and
the need for community
organisations to make way for
young people to take over.
Stepan Kerkyasharian delivered
the closing address to the
symposium to sum up the
theme.*

The Future of Ethnic Communities

***Closing address at the 2005 CRC Symposium
21 June 2005, Sydney***

We are here today talking about promoting cultural harmony. Under that umbrella I want to talk about defending cultural harmony. Why do I want to do that?

It's because I believe that currently the biggest threats to our community harmony do not come from racists and bigots and white supremacists within our society, although they are still at work, but from the clashes of religious ideologies well outside our shores.

Wherever you look around the planet today there is war or conflict which is almost without exception fuelled by religious difference. I do not necessarily subscribe to the catch cry *Clash of Civilisations*, but I do believe that power seekers and ambitious politicians around the world have seized on religious difference as a way of fomenting strife.

From that turmoil they apparently feel they can emerge with even more power. We see it on almost every continent. But we don't see it on our island continent, at least, not yet. However people who belong to all those groups around the world who are today subject to political pressures based on religion, live happily in our community.

What do we have to do then to defend our happy and harmonious society?

How do we firewall our carefully nurtured environment of community harmony against the impact of those events happening abroad, which are feeding such deep hatreds and envies?

Many believe that part of the process of building that firewall is the challenging task of raising our level of knowledge of each other's religious beliefs.

The Commission has been engaged very deeply in this pursuit for some time and is giving support wherever possible to organisations which are taking important steps towards inter-faith understanding. We do acknowledge that the religious divide in our society is a major challenge.

And, there is no doubt that the popular direction for people working in community affairs or community relations in the past twelve months has been towards inter-faith dialogue. In this state there have been many significant events. Some of these the New South Wales Government and the Community Relations Commission have initiated or strongly supported, others have come from community organisations with an active involvement or sponsorship from the Commission.

For example, you will recall that last year the Premier of New South Wales, the Hon Bob Carr, invited the high profile New York Muslim leader, Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, to come to Australia and talk about the issues confronting Islam in a western setting and the challenges for western society in absorbing large numbers of Muslims from around the world.

He was embraced by the media, because he spoke in a way they found accessible, logical and moderate. We wanted him to talk to those programmes which reached the broader community. For example, he spoke not once but twice on the John Laws programme in quite substantial interviews and they created a warm rapport.

Imam Feisal spoke to many other radio and television programmes, addressed public meetings in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide and in a dramatic statement of inter-faith unity addressed a thousand people, including representatives of every religion represented in New South Wales, alongside the Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal George Pell, in St Mary's Cathedral.

In October last year, the Premier of New South Wales hosted an Iftar dinner, the ceremonial breaking of the fast during Ramadan, the first to be organised by a government leader in Australia. It was attended by senior clergy of various faiths, including several strands of Islam itself, and along with dozens

of lay people of different religious backgrounds sitting together and sharing the same meal.

In the last twelve months there have also been major celebrations of the Hindu festival, Diwali, and the Buddhist commemoration of the birth and enlightenment of the Lord Buddha, inside Parliament House itself in Sydney, attended by political leaders and people of many faiths.

These events were big successes in their own way.

However, along the way we may have learnt some lessons about the promotion of effective co-existence of religious diversity within society.

To my mind, some of these lessons have emerged quite naturally from these encounters.

One important lesson is that we need to shift the emphasis. We may be trying too hard to find out how similar the major faiths are. I don't think that is going to succeed. We must be able to acknowledge that there are substantial differences between the major beliefs and then accept that fact.

There will also be doubt for some about just how those differences can be reconciled, because of the fact that most religions profess to be the one and only path to eternal salvation.

What we need to do now is to accept that our religious beliefs will not converge or merge, that we must respect the right of each other to hold those exclusive disparate beliefs and that we must find out how to live our lives in the commonality of Australian citizenship.

That means ensuring all laws are understood and respected by everyone in the community and are, in fact, embraced by all, because it is our common respect for the laws of the country that gives us our most important point of commonality.

Therefore the way we safeguard our community harmony as a multi-faith society is not to expend our energies searching for common beliefs but to strengthen our unity as fellow Australians, accepting and respecting religious differences.

Once upon a time, Catholics and Protestants were divided in this country because of the history of conflict in other places, but through shared experiences, dare I say mateship, in wars, sporting achievements and economic development, growth and prosperity, we grew into a united nation where religious differences counted for much less, alongside the common identification as Australians.

Now, a whole new set of challenges has emerged as the diversity of our religious beliefs expands exponentially and conflict threatens. People are afraid that we will be thrown off course by different beliefs and customs. You can hear that every day of the week in the simple expressions of fear and confusion from ordinary Australians on talk back radio right across the country.

There is an urgency to seek that commonality of **Australianism**.

Invariably our religious leaders, who have so positively and courageously entered into inter-faith dialogue must carry this message, with the support of their fellow clergy, into their daily teachings in schools and places of worship.

To demonstrate that need, I refer to two examples in Sydney this year which showed far too clearly how close to the surface those fears and confusions are. In the first example we had a young Muslim Sheik who suggested that if women dressed in a particular way it would make them eligible for rape. Two weeks later a young Muslim high school student insisted that she be allowed to wear a head-to-toe outer tunic, covering her school uniform, because, she said, her religious beliefs required it.

Both incidents precipitated a hailstorm of public outcry and bitter invective towards all Muslims and their religious beliefs and at the so-called spinelessness of government agencies in confronting these challenges. But these two incidents represent a major challenge for all of us as Australians and we need to work out where those issues fit. But there is yet another important lesson which has emerged from the flurry of inter-faith activity. There seems to have been a focus on dialogue between what is known as Abrahamic faiths, the religions of the book – Judaism, Christianity and Islam. To me, an emphasis on finding common ground between these three prominent

faiths is good. However, in an Australian context, it risks marginalising other major faiths, like Buddhism, the fastest growing religion in Australia, and Hinduism, with all their various strands which are now finding great expression throughout Australia. There are many other faiths followed by Australians that fall outside the Abrahamic tradition. We must not ignore them.

This point only strengthens my argument in favour of seeking our commonality as Australians.

The people of this nation now follow a multiplicity of religious beliefs which may not be able to be reconciled in religious or even theological terms. So we must explore the strength we have as Australians united and learn to maximise that force if we are meet our dream of becoming the great people of the world and an absolute model for the planet. Accept the difference, respect the difference, and be united by your commitment to Australia.

That task of fulfilling and maintaining that dream will be in the hands of the children still at school. However they may confront an even more basic issue than that which I have been discussing - the very existence of multiculturalism as public policy. In their world as adults, will Governments continue to provide for difference? Will public opinion roll back what people in this room will see as achievements and successes, because they believe multicultural policies are divisive?

MUSLIMS IN AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY

Security in Government Conference 10 May 2006, Canberra

In May 2006, Stepan Kerkyasharian was invited to Canberra to address a major Federal Government sponsored conference entitled Security in Government. He was asked to outline the social environment in which young Muslims find themselves within Australian society.

Muslims in Australian Society

Security in Government Conference 10 May 2006, Canberra

You all know about Sunnis and Shiites. Do you all know about Habashis, Ahmadiyas, Druze, Bohras, Alawis, Ismailies, Sufis or Wahhabis?

Do you know which is the largest Muslim community in Australia? Is it Lebanese, Pakistani, Indonesian or some other? Do you know which ethnic community adheres to which sect of Islam, or are they not ethno-specific?

Unless you know the answers to those questions, then coming to terms with Australian Muslims would be very difficult.

So let's take a bird's-eye view of the map of Islamic Australia. I hasten to talk about the "Islamic Communities", because they are not all homogeneous and some sectors may have very little to do with others. In fact I venture to say they may have more in common as Australians than as fellow Muslims.

- o Muslims are the third largest religious group in Australia, and make up 1.5% of the population. This follows Christians (68% of the population) and Buddhists (1.9%).
- o In 2001 there were 140,928 Muslims in NSW – this is half the Australian population.
- o Between 1996-2001 the number of Australian Muslims increased by 38%.
- o 75% of Australian Muslims live in the top ten Local Government Areas – Bankstown, Canterbury, Auburn, Liverpool, Parramatta, Blacktown, Rockdale, Holroyd, Campbelltown and Botany Bay.
- o Australian Muslims speak a range of languages such as Arabic, Turkish, Persian (Farsi), Bosnian, Bahasa Indonesia, Bengali, Malay, Dari, Albanian, Hindi, Kurdish and Pushtu.

- o Australian Muslims by definition share a common religion. Most Australian Muslims are Sunni but there is a significant minority of Shi'ite Muslims and smaller numbers of Bektashis, Ahmadias, Alawis and Druze.
- o Muslims in New South Wales, for example, are very diverse - they come from 124 different countries including Lebanon, Turkey, Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Pakistan, Indonesia, Iraq, Bangladesh, Iran, Fiji, Cyprus, Somalia, Egypt, India and Malaysia.
- o The main birthplace for Australian Muslims is Australia, with 38% of Australian Muslims born in Australia.
- o Despite the general belief that all Muslims are of Arab or Middle-Eastern background, less than 20% of Australian Muslims were born in these countries.
- o The main birthplace countries recorded by Australian Muslims in NSW were Australia (38%), Lebanon 15%, Turkey 8%, Pakistan 4%, Bangladesh 4%, Afghanistan 3%, Iraq 3%, Indonesia 3% and Iran 3%.

What we see is an extraordinary diversity of language, ethnicity and religious practice.

However what is common to them all, including those born in Australia, is the challenge they face in integrating into and participating in Australian society, on an equal basis with Australians of all other backgrounds. This equality in participation has to be both ways – mutual – they have to be accepted and they must accept their responsibility as Australians as a “Quid pro quo”.

This is particularly difficult for those young people who are attracted to the radical ideas of some young preachers who will argue that you cannot be a good Muslim and a good Australian.

We need to set foundations on which we can construct new social dynamics which include a significant Islamic component, ever mindful of the existing landscapes. In this way, we can navigate through in such a way that we don't try to lay foundations in quicksand – being mindful that we can be deceived by taking things at face value.

There are significant barriers to be overcome.

First is the War on Terror. The democratic nations involved need to maintain public support. This requires a certain kind of rhetoric, which creates a global anti-Islamic environment. Consequently the common perception worldwide is that the war on terror is a war against Muslims justified by the often heard catch cry that “all Muslims are not terrorists but all terrorists are Muslims”.

Nothing illustrates this point more graphically than an incident during the Iraq-Kuwait war. A video broadcast by SBS TV showed members of the Australian navy dressed up “Arabic style” mockingly “praying” like Muslims. They obviously saw Muslims as the enemy, oblivious to the fact that their main ally – Kuwait – was an Arabic Islamic state, more so than the enemy which was Iraq.

To illustrate further: is it not fascinating that while there is strong Anti-Islamic feeling in Australia, the fastest growing religion is actually Buddhism? I have not attended any conference or meeting or heard anyone question or raise the issue of the impact of Buddhism on society at the very basic social levels, let alone a possible threat to security.

So: why Islam? Is it the religion itself, is it our attitude to that religion, or is it the way we dealt with Islam, when it first manifested itself as a social force?

To my understanding, the answer is both our attitude to Islam and in the way that it shapes that attitude.

Just as the international discourse flowing from the war on terror impacts on our ability and strategies to engage and cohabit with our fellow Muslim Australians, so do other international events and activities impact on the ability of Muslim Australians to adapt to their new homeland.

I refer to the diversity that exists within it and I have heard too often people equating Islam with ethnicity. This false transposition leads, on the one hand, to complete misunderstanding and, sometimes, wrong strategic approaches to the Muslim community and, on the other, allows Islamic extremists to create a false façade behind which they can hide. This means they can obfuscate and muddy the waters, rather than confront issues which need resolution.

The impact of government approaches to issues and public policy also has an affect. In the last two decades most governments in economically developed countries have classified all activities into three categories – welfare, the so-called “Safety net” concept; law and order and business.

Consequently, issues such as community relations and, for that matter, health, education and public transport have to be forced into either one of these three categories and most of them end up in business where community benefit is bench-marked against economic indicators. Others such as community relations, in this case integration of Australians of the Muslim faith, as today’s conference testifies, is put into the law and order silo.

A good example of the community also being conditioned to view issues within these three categories is the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils’ (AFIC) decision last week to form a youth sub-committee and couching it in crime prevention language with the media saying it will prevent another ‘Cronulla’. The question you have to ponder - Why could not AFIC proudly announce that it has formed a youth movement pure and simple?

The other conflicting factor is the confusion which is exploited by ultra conservatives in our society; attributing the so called “Islamic problem” to multiculturalism and, saying “multiculturalism is reinforcing this type of division”.

This woolly thinking was typified by a comment made by a parliamentarian earlier this year, that Australia would become a Muslim nation if non-Muslims were given access to the abortion pill RU 486.

She eventually apologised to the Muslim community.

It highlighted a growing change in our society. Eight years ago there was a fairly well-defined dividing line between migrants of non-English speaking backgrounds and members of the dominant culture. There is now a second dividing line based on religion which intersects, creating strong divisions within ethnic groups, for example strong anti-Islamic feelings within the Arabic-speaking Coptic community and even amongst members of the traditional

Lebanese Christian community who have been part of our society for over a hundred and ten years. Therefore the community divisions are more complex and competing, depending on the issue at hand.

As the focus of this conference is security in government, I want to draw attention to the fact that much has been said about Muslim fundamentalism and extremism and the perception that terrorist plots are hatched or ideas of terrorism are developed in places of worship and prayer halls. Many believe that such places propagate a more fundamental version of Islam and are actually training grounds for terrorists or places where terrorist activities are planned.

In my view it is wrong to jump to that conclusion. It may be true to say that there are significant numbers of Muslims who adhere to their religion and take the whole Koran literally. However, they do so within the boundaries set by Australian laws. We must be cognizant of this fact. They are simply very devout Muslims who equally abhor death and destruction and terror.

However, they inadvertently may create an environment where unscrupulous terrorists look for potential recruits. It will be wrong to pursue the innocent in a trawling action to identify the illusive and calculating ‘talent spotter’.

Media reports recently of a speech given in Bankstown by a leader of the self-styled Party of Liberation (or Hizb-ut-Tahir) tell us why we should be on the alert. This is a group of well-educated young Australian Muslims who claim they are working for the creation of a global Islamic state, or a caliphate, under strict Sharia law.

A speaker at the meeting reportedly outlined the movement’s goal of overthrowing Western democracies: “Islam can never coexist one under the other or one within the other”. He added: “When the state is established, when people can see the mercy of Islam, they embrace Islam in droves”.

What needs to happen is, on the one hand, to understand and be accepting of the religious needs and aspirations of Muslims while at the same time engaging them as equal partners where issues of concern are confronted in a

constructive dialogue. This, hopefully, would invariably lead to a modification of attitude and approach on both sides who could then share ownership of the solution.

I suggest that, compared to the United States, Great Britain and some other European countries, Australia is better placed at this point in time to be able to achieve a cohesive multi-faith society which is accepting of Islam and where Islam can just be another religion within our national social context.

At present we have the advantage because we have a higher level of social capital. I refer to the generational aspect of migration. In Australia we are still dealing with first generation and second generation migrants of Muslim background, whereas in other similar countries they are in the third and fourth generation.

First generation migrants have a deep seated sense of gratitude to Australia because it has offered them a new life, freedom, democracy and socio-economic safety and well-being. They will have imparted some of this to their Australian-born children. Therefore the second generation still has a residue of this social capital. It is an asset which can be utilised effectively by government to assist the Islamic community to adapt itself to the Australian environment.

I want to comment on some current strategies of interfaith meetings and Islamic youth conferences, which are being planned by some states, communities and the Commonwealth.

I attended the first national Islamic youth conference organised by the Commonwealth. It was a group of brilliant young Muslims from all over Australia. Virtually all Australian-born who at the end of the day appeared to reach a consensus that although they were Australians, and part of Australian society, the rest of Australia was not accepting of them.

I therefore feel obliged to issue a warning that any such conferences must always include non-Muslims. They should be forums for young people to challenge and to confront each other openly about matters which alienate them. Heated discussion and debate, if necessary, should be encouraged so

that the forum coalesces into a group of Australians recognising religious differences and finding common ground rather than having separate meetings with Muslim youth who find common ground, not as Australians but as Muslims, and focus on common elements which separate them from the rest of Australia.

Another important issue is what I call 'Virtual Isolation Zones' exacerbated by new technology. In this day and age, the main forms of communication for news and local events are either through hearsay or through print and electronic media, and the internet. Given the considerable size of the Arabic-speaking Muslim community in Sydney, the community networks would invariably reflect the community attitudes to local and international issues.

The Arabic print media does provide a reasonable amount of information about local events. However the community is swamped, twenty-four hours a day, with a torrent of news and attitudes from abroad by way of dozens of channels of Arabic television with virtually all of its content being from overseas, in particular from the Middle East. Therefore there is an information isolation zone which has not been addressed to date by Australia. Many Muslims are getting their slant and their view on international events from abroad. This is not a healthy state of affairs.

In radio, this is being addressed to some extent through SBS Radio which presents news in a similar fashion to that of other Australian news services. They also provide talk-back opportunities for people to argue issues in the Australian context and for Australian government agencies to promote messages to listeners in their first language.

Community radio also provides some of this type of broadcasting and offers good opportunities for promoting Australian issues and Australian values in an objective and impartial manner. However, views from abroad can be sought out and broadcast on these stations and these can be views which may not reinforce Australian views. There is also some direct relaying of radio programmes from abroad which propagate foreign viewpoints. On top of all of that, radio programmes from almost anywhere can be accessed on the internet. All of this adds up to a lot of influence.

However, we know that television is probably the most powerful communication medium and here, regrettably, there is a total vacuum. SBS Television was created in the 1980s to promote mutual respect, understanding and acceptance. I accept SBS is a unique channel providing entertainment of high artistic and intellectual value, as well as sports. It deals with issues regarding the settlement of migrants from an intellectually high, almost academic level. Its message is directed at mainstream Australia.

Over one billion dollars has been invested in SBS since the Iraq-Kuwait war.

But who is providing the alternative to the overseas television programming which is winning the hearts and minds of ordinary Australians of non-English speaking background away from Australia? More importantly and to the point: where on television is the strong welcoming and accepting message from Australia to first generation Muslim Australians who naturally turn to messages from overseas through satellite TV and the internet?

Now there is an urgent need to address this particular discrepancy. In other words, to communicate with our fellow Australians about their own social environment, in a language they understand, so that we can bring them closer to the rest of us.

The Government must consider as a matter of urgency the funding of full-time television channels in various languages which can communicate Australian messages and Australian views of local and international issues – to combat the views about all those things coming from completely different political and social environments.

This may sound like a media issue. It is not. It's a vital issue of Australia's national security. If our youth get their ideas and goals from abroad; the rest of that scenario is already well-known in England, in France and in Spain, three countries with whom we may easily compare ourselves.

Finally, accepting and respecting difference is good community relations. It is not a welfare safety-net; neither can it be couched in business terminology. If ignored, it does become a law and order issue for sure.

I liken terrorism to a malaria epidemic. Sure, we need to capture and kill as many mosquitoes as we can and use mosquito nets to keep them out.

However at the end of the day someone has to drain and dry the swamps. That is community relations. It is not political correctness. It is not chasing the ethnic vote. It is a damn good investment.

THE IMPACT OF FOREIGN MEDIA

The Journalist and Islam Conference Parliament House 8 December 2006, Sydney

*On Friday 8 December 2006,
Mr Kerkyasharian was invited
to a major gathering at
Parliament House Sydney
under the banner The
Journalist and Islam to
analyse the state of play of
the media's treatment of
Islam in Australia. He
examined in this paper the
media influences from abroad
that impact on Muslims,
especially young Muslims
living in Australia.*

The Impact of Foreign Media

The Journalist and Islam Conference

Parliament House

8 December 2006, Sydney

I have two questions which I believe this conference should be addressing and seeking answers to. Firstly, how do we move from a situation where Islam is seen as exotic, threatening, disruptive, exclusive even un-Australian? Then secondly, how does Islam move to acceptance as one of the religions of Australians?

The recent example of media hysteria about the discovery that chocolate bars including Kit Kats and a host of other products carry a halal-safe sticker sadly demonstrates that anything anti-Muslim is still a good news story.

Media and consequently journalists have a key role to play in effecting a positive response and outcome to the questions I posed. At the very least, the Australian media must report on, must reflect on the reality of Islam within our society as the faith of a large number of fellow Australians. It cannot continue to ignore the positive aspects of a major section of our society. In this, an important distinction needs to be made. The distinction between Islam – a religion; and Muslims – people who are adherents of the Islamic faith.

Many significant positive developments flow from this. What is necessarily sanctioned or supported by Islam is not necessarily the behavioural norm of Muslim Australians. Therefore pronouncements such as Sheikh Alhilali's reprehensible justification of rape would not be interpreted as the accepted norm for Australian Muslims and the "debate" for want of a better word, and as inexcusable as it is, would be confined to a religious context.

The failure of the Australian media to make this distinction and to directly talk to the Muslim community as a community in its own right and not one that is driven by fundamentalist religious norms has created a huge vacuum in our communication infrastructure.

Television is the mass communicator at present and it does shape national attitudes. It is closely followed by radio and the print media.

The vacuum created by our mainstream media has seen the proliferation of foreign television programmes available by satellite, giving a very large group of Australians a different perspective on world news from that presented in Australia .

I am amazed at the level of ignorance at the depth of penetration of this medium and its function as a strong communication medium of influence – of the mainstream media and within the Australian society at large.

There is a lot of anecdotal evidence that the Lebanese community in Australia formed a very different view of the war between Israel and Hezbollah this year because they were watching coverage from Arabic language channels originating in the Middle East or Lebanon itself.

This is what I call the ‘Virtual Isolation Zones’ which have been exacerbated by new technology. To give a comprehensive construct of this Virtual Isolation Zone would be the subject of a full paper so I will not elaborate here. However, let us take a bird’s-eye view of what is available

Two days ago I checked to see just what was currently available to audiences in Sydney :

And let me remind you that these are successful commercial operations, meaning that consumers like them and pay for them.

UBI World TV

Available by subscription and satellite. \$59.95 a month, almost half the platinum pack of Foxtel. 71 subscription channels in 9 languages covering over 15 countries plus a number of free channels.

It has 28 Arabic channels from a variety of Middle Eastern sources including Al Jazeera and Teleliban.

MySat TV

Has 7 Arabic satellite TV services from various parts of the Middle east including Al Jazeera, Future TV, Noursat and other programmes from Lebanon.

World Media

Has Arabic Channels – ArtVariety, LBC International from Lebanon and Al Jazeera Arabic from Qatar . I believe the English language AL Jazeera service will be available shortly from the same company

Globecast Australia has 11 Channels from the Middle East including Turkish, Iranian, Kurdish channels and Arabic programmes from Abu Dhabi, Oman, Assyria and Qatar.

Dial-A-Dish - A company which actually supplies and installs dishes and other equipment for viewing satellite programmes from abroad. It also claims to be a primary agent from a wide selection of service providers around the world through Lyngsat.

It promises access to free-to-air programming in most parts of the world. From the Middle East they list Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine Territory, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait, Qata, Syria and the United Arab Emirates.

And don't forget there is always the opportunity to view television programmes on personal computers via the internet.

Television programmes of almost every description are available for viewing on PCs. One easily accessible website offers access to 2,000 television channels.

In a talk given to the Security in Government Conference in May this year, I said much of the blame for the success and influence of this avalanche of foreign TV falls on our Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) whose charter requires it to “provide multilingual and multicultural radio and television services that inform, educate and entertain all Australians and, in doing so, reflect Australia’s multicultural society”.

The SBS Website claims that: “SBS Television is watched by more than seven million Australians each week. What they see is a unique mix of Australian-produced and international programs drawn from over 400 national and international sources. Programs in languages other than English - which comprise more than half the SBS Television schedule - are accessible to all viewers through SBS-produced English language subtitles .”

Yes, but what about Australian-produced programmes in community languages that educate, that draw newcomers in and make them feel welcomed, accepted and included? Why do we need to keep telling people the news in their own language coming from foreign sources which may not have any of the constraints and professional standards of journalism demanded in SBS’s own news bulletins and current affairs programmes. Taking news bulletins from countries where different professional standards and different concepts of journalistic independence may apply is not conducive to the integration of people from any part of the world.

The SBS budget has been something like two billion dollars since the first Gulf War.

Is SBS TV seen by the Muslim community as the vehicle for the promotion of better understanding of Islam? Is it seen by the rest of the community as the medium for assisting Muslims to effectively participate in Australian Society? I would venture to say: No.

So what other sources are there for particularly, Arabic-speaking Muslims to learn about their own Australian environment?

The Arabic print media in New South Wales does provide a reasonable amount of information about local events. However they are a small drop in the ocean when compared with foreign TV, twenty-four hours a day. In other words, many Australian Muslims do get their slant and their view on international events from abroad. This is not a healthy state of affairs.

In radio, this is being addressed to some extent through SBS Radio which presents news in a similar fashion to that of other Australian news services like the ABC. They also provide talk-back opportunities for people to argue issues in the Australian context and for Australian government agencies to promote messages to listeners in their first language.

Community radio also provides some of this type of broadcasting and offers good opportunities for promoting Australian issues and Australian values in an objective and impartial manner. However views from abroad can be sought out and broadcast on these stations and these can be attitudes which may not reinforce Australian views. There is also some direct relaying of radio programmes from abroad which propagate foreign viewpoints. On top of all of that, radio programmes from almost anywhere can also be accessed on the internet. All of this adds up to a lot of influence.

However, television is probably still the most powerful communication medium. SBS Television was created in the 1980s to promote mutual respect, understanding and acceptance. I accept SBS is a unique channel providing entertainment of high artistic and intellectual value, as well as sports. It deals with issues regarding the settlement of migrants from an intellectually high, almost academic level. Its message is directed at mainstream Australia.

But who is providing the alternative to the overseas television programming which is winning the hearts and minds of ordinary Australians of non-English speaking background away from Australia ?

Let us not forget that we are now into the second and third generation of immigrants who adhere to the Islamic faith. These are predominantly English-speaking. They would normally turn to the mainstream media and TV for their information needs. But again they are probably being let down much more by our mainstream media than the generation who are fluent in their home language and catered for very well by non-Australian media right in their living rooms in suburban Australia.

How can one then not conclude that the Australian media in general has been creating two separate states of living in this country. The local media's response to the fact that many Muslims seem to be living a non-Australian life is to attack multiculturalism and say the Muslims don't want to integrate.

In the 80's when I worked in SBS, we researched data showing that there was a significant following for commercial television news programs by ethnic communities. But many of those viewers have now been lured away by the operators of television services from abroad. In other words, much of the Australian media has not capitalised on its opportunities and has now lost hundreds of thousands of viewers, readers and listeners. This is a disaster for commercial media and for the cohesiveness of our nation.

OK then, what should the media's role be? It has to take Islam and the hundreds of thousands of Muslim Australians seriously. They are not just a news story featuring rapes, riots and intolerance. They are not only about the ravings of a few eccentric, if not dangerous, imams. They are about a solid chunk of Australian society who do have different backgrounds, do have different practices and different rituals of worship. So what? There are many groups who can lay claim to those attributes.

Australian Muslims are also interested in sport and fashion and education and science and entertainment like everyone else. They even have much to offer in some of those fields, but what do we know of their knowledge or views? What ideas do they have, especially ideas that spring from their life experiences, possibly in a very different social and political system. We don't know the answers to those questions. What I want is to see and hear Muslims

talking about all these things, not in the news pages, but in the features pages and the opinion pages and in those seemingly endless people-and-personality-profile pages and the weekend magazines.

Instead what do we have? We have an information vacuum about what Muslim Australians do, other than take part in terrorism and massive religious rallies. This stuff just reinforces anti-Muslim views and attitudes which, in turn, strengthen the sense of alienation felt by Muslim Australians when they consume the Australian media.

It's easy to get Muslims on the front page, like this week's story about the schoolboys in Melbourne allegedly urinating on the Bible. But the stuff on the front pages is never good, and it's always about extreme words or actions of some sort. Not that those stories shouldn't be published, not that they shouldn't be on the front page. But where is the other journalism reporting Muslims in Australia? Even the Daily Telegraph's attempt at a good news story this week about the New South Wales nominee for Young Australian of the Year, Iktimal Hage Ali, was neutralised by quotes from an Islamic website criticising her for not wearing the veil, dressing like a western woman and sipping champagne. How about an in depth interview with Miss Hage Ali about her achievements and visions? Maybe we have to wait to see if she is chosen Young Australian of the Year next month. Can her thoughts be ignored then?

It seems to me that before the broad community begins to see Muslims as equal fellow Australians, the media must create the necessary environment. Stop linking those Australians who profess themselves as Muslims to horrendous events abroad, because there is no link. Just as there is no automatic link between Australians from the Basque region of Spain and the regular shocking acts of terrorism committed by ETA, the Basque separatist movement.

I have spoken of several important media issues which seem different but are linked. Firstly the representation of Islam in the mainstream media, the failure of television and SBS in particular to engage with the Muslim community with messages that make them feel included, and the consequent

ballooning of foreign television programmes which bring both political and religious messages to young Australians, doing nothing to draw them into the Australian way of life and creating an ongoing cyber ghetto within our society.

This is not just media and journalism. As the import of this conference implies, it is a vital issue of Australia's national security. If our youth feel that they are not part of this society as reported by the media, and additionally get their ideas and goals from abroad, the rest of that scenario that can lead to horrific acts of terrorism is already well-known in England, in France and in Spain - three countries with which we may easily compare ourselves.

I believe all the issues I have raised are urgent, serious and important, and must be faced and neutralised before we can further advance this wonderful, harmonious and unique nation.

