

Multiculturalism and White Paranoia in Australia

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This paper examines the historical emergence of the debates on multiculturalism in Australia by seeing them as part of the evolution of what it defines as Australia's colonial white paranoia. It examines the way white paranoia has shaped Australian society until its marginalisation in the early seventies. The paper argues that Australia's multicultural debates are grounded in the economic, social and historical circumstances which made dominant sections of the political class and the media willing from the mid-eighties onward to exploit white colonial paranoia and bring it to the fore as a potent political force once again.

Cet article porte sur l'apparition historique du débat sur le multiculturalisme en Australie dans le contexte de l'évolution de ce que nous appelons la paranoïa des coloniaux blancs dans ce pays. Nous étudions l'influence formative de cette paranoïa sur la société australienne jusqu'à sa marginalisation au début des années 70. Nous maintenons que le débat australien sur le multiculturalisme repose sur les circonstances économiques, sociales et historiques qui ont favorisé l'exploitation et l'actualisation comme force politique importante, par des secteurs dominants de la classe politique et des médias, de la paranoïa des coloniaux blancs.

Key words/Mots-clefs: Whiteness/"blancheur"; colonialism/colonialisme; multiculturalism/multiculturalisme; racism/racisme; assimilation; paranoia/paranoïa.

Introduction

In this article I examine the historical emergence and evolution of the debates on multiculturalism that Australia has been witnessing since the mid-1980s by emphasizing the crucial role of what I define as Australia's colonial White paranoia in shaping the content and intensity of these debates.

I begin with a brief historical account of how White paranoia has shaped Australia's society and culture from the time of federation (independence) in 1901 until the rise of multicultural policy in the early 1970s. I then show how this tendency was marginalized in the decade between the early 1970s and early 1980s and how it reemerged in the debates on multiculturalism of the mid-1980s onward.¹ As I argue, to understand the form and nature of these debates, we need to understand the economic, social, and historical circumstances that made dominant sections of the political class and the media willing to exploit White colonial paranoia and bring it once again to the fore as a potent political force.

White Colonial Paranoia in Australia

Since its emergence as a British colonial-settler society, Australia's national culture and identity have evolved in the shadow of ambivalent colonial tendencies. On one hand, more than other colonial-settler societies of the New World such as the United States, Australia's first-world wealth and democratic institutions are built on an almost complete eradication of the continent's Indigenous population and their even more complete social, political, and economic dispossession. Theoretically, this should minimize the presence and effects of the paranoid colonial sensibility that one finds in colonial-settler nations in constant fear of decolonization. This sensibility is largely due to the continued existence of a colonized political will trying to reassert its sovereignty over all or part of the territory. This is the case in Israel today, for example, as it was the case in Apartheid South Africa before decolonization. But Australia's Indigenous people are no longer capable of engaging in any significant anticolonial political practices of this kind: that is, although many Indigenous practices can be seen as anticolonial there is no serious Indigenous anticolonial movement aiming to regain sovereignty over Australian territory (Collishaw & Morris, 1977). And given its relative wealth and its stable democracy, one expects Australia to share with the US the "colonial *fait accompli*" confidence that permeates the latter's national culture. But this is not the case.

Although traces of such a confidence were and are still present, a form of White colonial paranoia has remained part of Australian culture long after the Indigenous population has been decimated. Paranoia denotes here a pathological form of fear based on an excessively fragile conception of the self as constantly threatened. It is also a tendency to perceive a threat where none exists or, if it exists, to inflate its capacity to harm the self. The core element of Australia's colonial paranoia is a fear of loss of European-ness or Whiteness and the lifestyle and privileges that are seen to emanate directly from them. This is a combination of the fragility of White European colonial identity in general and the specificity of the Australian situation. Levi-Strauss (1976) points out in his famous UNESCO article on race that

for huge portions of the human species, and during tens of millennia, the notion [of humanity] seems to have been totally lacking. Mankind stops at the frontiers of the tribe, of the linguistic group, and sometimes even of the village, to the extent that a great many of the peoples called primitive call themselves by a name which means "men"... thus implying that the other tribes, groups and villages have no part in human virtues or even human nature (p. 329).

Similarly, and despite the existence of a general category of "humanity" derived from Christianity, the European tribes of colonial capitalism constructed themselves as the ideal type of what it means to be a human being. The history of the rise of European colonialism shows how this "being the best type of human being" became associated with being White European.

We should remember that in the history of the West, access to this "best type of human being club" was not always open to the European lower classes. The rising bourgeoisies of Europe inherited from the court aristocracies of earlier times a perception of peasants and poor city people as a lower breed of humanity. The lower classes were racialized as innately inferior beings considered biologically ill equipped to access human forms of "civilization" that included particularly human dignity and hope. Human society in each emerging nation at that time did not coincide with the boundaries of the nation-states. Its borders were the borders of "civilized" bourgeois culture. Miles (1993), relying on Elias' (1978) classic work *The Civilising Process* examined how racist modes of thinking have already originated in the West in the modes of categorizing the working classes. It was the rise of the colonial nation state that saw the increasing inclusion of nationally delineated peasants and lower classes into the circle of what each nation defined as its own version of civilized human society. But this

deracialization and civilization of the interior went hand in hand with the intensification of the colonial racialization of the exterior. Now skin colour in the form of European Whiteness was emphasized more than ever before as the most important basis for one's access to dignity and hope.

As Bonnett (2000) has shown, this process involved a historical "bleaching" of the working classes. It was a continual process of historical change that led the British working classes from being perceived in some literature as "on a par with monkeys" to the point where Lord Milner at the battle of the Somme is supposed to have said, "I never knew that the working classes had such white skins" (p. 26). This is the history of the construction of Whiteness into a valorized racial causal category inviting the quintessential colonial racist logic, Question: Why are Europeans civilized and superior? Answer: Because they are White. It is here, however, that emerges the anxiety that is specific to colonial Whiteness.

Clearly some White Europeans were capable of living up to the civilized ideals of White Europeanness with greater success than others, and here class remained as important a marker as ever. Whiteness was only the means of accessing the ideal of "being very civilized," it did not guarantee achieving it. For the White working classes, it meant only that being White allowed one to hope to be civilized. But not everyone hoped with equal confidence. The members of the upper classes claimed a natural aristocratic access to high civilization. The working classes, however, were less secure in their possession of Whiteness. Like the phallus in Freud's theory, having *it* was a symbolic possession that created an expectation that great things can be achieved thanks to *it*. At the same time, *it* as a supposed causal power was so fragile and uncertain that it created a structural anxiety and a constant fear of not really having it or of losing it: a castration complex, a constant fear of losing what gives our life a sense of distinction.

Can I ever live up to the standards of my Whiteness and become as civilized as it promises it should make me? Will my Whiteness deliver its promises? White colonial paranoia was structured by an unconscious fear that the answers to these questions were simply No. It is a Whiteness that lives under the constant threat of not realizing the supposed potential it embodies by being subverted with the reality of class. As such, it is a Whiteness that is always ready to project onto external reasons the threatening impulse that is inherent to it. It is this structural tendency with its class specificity that the Australian settlers brought with them to the continent. This class-based anxiety of living up to Whiteness continues to mark Australia even today. One would think that the successful colonization of the continent and the creation of a society that for more than 100

years has provided its White inhabitants with a decent "civilized lifestyle" would be enough to bury this colonial paranoia. But this has not been the case. This is where we come to the specificity of Australian colonialism.

First, it should be noted that whatever traces of colonial confidence exist, built as they are on genocidal practices, they remain haunted by these constitutive deeds. The fact that no post-colonial pact was ever reached (no treaty with the Indigenous people exists, for example) has left Australian culture with a continual sense of unfinished business and has opened the way to a continual struggle by the remaining Indigenous population for some form of moral redress as well as material compensation. Thus, despite their relative weakness and the fact that they are hardly ever concerned with challenging White political sovereignty, the struggles of Indigenous Australians act as a constant reminder of the uglier aspects of the colonial past even for those most determined to forget or deny them.

Another factor that has bred colonial uncertainty is an Australian-specific sensitivity to and awareness of the impossibility of fully colonizing the natural environment. The relatively undomesticable nature of the Australian outback and the awareness of a constantly present and sometimes mystically defined "undomesticable remainder" even in domesticated spaces has given Australia's colonial culture a sense of its own fragility that seems to be missing from the confident frontier culture that marks US colonial history (Ang & Symonds, 1997). An awareness of one's fragility is usually considered healthier psychologically than its unconscious denial, and it could be argued that this awareness has helped shape some of the better aspects of traditional Australian culture including its trade mark self-deprecating sense of humour. However, combined with the nationalist inherent drive to domesticate everything, it translates into anxiety vis-à-vis undomesticated cultural otherness that has continually marked the Australian psyche.

Finally, as is well known, because of its distance from the mother country and because of its geographic location, Australia's early settlers, or at least those who had the power to shape the identity and culture of the settlements, constructed Australia as an isolated White British colony in the heart of a non-European (read also uncivilized) Asia-Pacific region. Here Australia shares with countries like White South Africa and Israel a fear of being swamped by what is perceived as a surrounding hostile and uncivilized otherness. "From the far east and the far west alike we behold menaces and contagion..." stated the Australian leader Alfred Deakin in 1898 (Burke, 2001, p. 17; see also Ang, 2000; Morris, 1998). This is not only a fear that the uncivilized other can eventually take over the country through military invasion. It is also a fear that through sheer numbers the

uncivilized others slowly penetrate the place, and their different cultural forms and norms slowly pollute colonial society and identity. Here the colonizer expresses the fears of losing the “civilized” cultural identity that propelled the colonial project and gave rise to the nation in the first place. However, it should be remembered, as Memmi (1965) explained long ago, that behind all this is an often unconscious fear of losing the social and economic privileges gained from one’s structural position as a colonizer.

1. Around the time of federation in 1900 when Australia was moving toward becoming an independent nation, many Australians worried that by weakening the country’s links with Britain their fears of being swamped by Asians would become a reality. The phallic fear of losing one’s Europeanness (and the privileges that came with it) was as prevalent as the hopes unleashed by the newly inaugurated era. It gave Australia a characteristically timid confidence for a nation about to gain its independence. This timidity gave birth to the foundational White Australia Policy. On one hand, this policy reflected the hopes of the founding fathers for an Australian society as a projection of a White racial identity, that is, that Australia is an expression of a constitutive Whiteness and an example of what the British White race can achieve. On the other hand, the policy expressed the fear that this constitutive Whiteness was under threat and needed to be protected by a stringent racial policy that worked to maintain the White racial character of the nation. This meant both a domestic policy geared toward the continuing extermination of the culture of the colonized Indigenous people and an immigration policy geared toward excluding non-Whites from entering Australia and from acquiring Australian citizenship (Markus, 1994). Ideologically, then, White paranoia was structured by the following discursive pattern.
2. British civilization is the highest of all civilizations in terms of ideals and achievements. Although as mentioned above, European colonialism had monopolized Whiteness and civilization in general, there was fierce national competition between European countries as to which national European Whiteness (French, English, etc.) embodied the highest ideals of civilization.
3. British civilization is racially determined. That is, as defined in the logic of developmental racism, White British racial identity is causal. Possessing it allows certain people to create and/or be committed to societies that express the high values of British civilization.

4. Those who are not White are by definition unable to appreciate or to commit themselves to, let alone create, societies that uphold the British values of democracy, freedom, and so forth. The sheer presence of non-Whites, either voluntarily or involuntarily, undermines those values and the culture based on them.
5. Being all located in poor countries, non-Whites are generally not used to high standards of living and are happy to accept low wages. Thus not only do they undermine civilized culture, they also undermine the civilized high standard of living of White workers.²
6. The more a White society is penetrated by non-White elements, the less it is capable of expressing the values of White civilization; therefore, it is imperative to maintain a White society as racially pure as possible.

The White Australia Policy did not only keep Australia homogeneously White: it actually made it even more homogeneous than it had been at the time of federation. According to historian Markus (1997), the demographer,

Charles Price has estimated that in 1891, (Australia) was 87 per cent Anglo-Celtic and 6 per cent north European. Eastern and southern Europeans combined came to less than 1 per cent, Asians 1.9 per cent, and Aborigines 3.4 per cent. By 1947 ... the Anglo-Celtic component had increased to 90 per cent, the northern European was unchanged, and the combined total for Aborigines and Asians had fallen to 1.1 per cent (p. 152).

As the history of Australia for most of the first half of the century was a history of rising living standards, the White Australia policy worked to engrain further in a population already predisposed to believe in the idea of a racial causal logic linking White racial identity and high civilized standards of living.

From the White Australia Policy to Multiculturalism: The Repression of Colonial Paranoia

The White Australia Policy prevailed well into the 1960s. However, from World War II onward it slowly eroded both as a population/immigration policy and as a racial conceptualization of society. From an ideological point of view, Markus (1994) points out that, as the 1960s approached, it was becoming increasingly unacceptable internationally to uphold the

racial tenets of the White Australia Policy. These were now decried as forms of racist ideology. From an immigration point of view, fears of declining population and the need to look for sources of large-scale migration other than Britain were beginning to be expressed by academics as early as the 1930s (Lopez, 2000). These fears began to be shared with the rest of the population when they were given public prominence during and in the aftermath of World War II. This was a time when the possibility of a Japanese invasion of Australia highlighted the need to “populate or perish” (Castles, Kalantzis, Cope & Morrissey, 1988, p. 23). Notwithstanding the above, the most important boost for an increase in the rate of immigration came from Australia’s industrialists, who were facing a shortage of labour.

In the aftermath of World War II, Australia committed itself to a 1% immigration based annual population growth. Because immigrants from Britain were not enough to sustain such a rate the Australian government began accepting relatively large numbers of non-British migrants. Although to begin with it accepted the displaced persons from northern and eastern Europe, it quickly had to recruit its immigrants from the “darker shade of white” regions of southern Europe and the Mediterranean. Despite the fact that the immigration program continued to give overwhelming preference to British migrants and to finance recruitment campaigns in Britain, it was bound to worry a population whose sensibilities continued to be shaped by the structural paranoia of the White Australia Policy.

The government’s policy of assimilation that was launched in the wake of the new immigration program was in many ways directed toward soothing this paranoia more than being a settlement program for the new immigrants. Assimilation carried a clear message to the White population: migrants will not perturb or change Australia’s Anglo-Celtic culture. It is the migrants who have to change themselves to fit into it. For the incoming migrants, assimilation was more a general ideological directive to assimilate than a set of institutions aimed at producing a desired outcome.

Despite all this, the new non-White immigration and the ideological nature of assimilation dented the ideological structure of White paranoia described above. It dented it first through the settlement of not-so-white new immigrants. But it also dented it more fundamentally by puncturing the causal racial logic that underlay it. It was no longer possible to sustain the argument that Australia’s British culture and civilization were a direct result of racial Whiteness and still argue that non-Whites could be made to assimilate into this culture. This is why assimilation created a fundamental split in how this paranoia expressed itself. One part of the population adapted it to assimilation by moving from a racial to a cultural formulation.

The changes were minor but important. First, Australia's colonial civilization was now increasingly perceived as more generally European rather than strictly British. Nevertheless, it was still, as always, under threat. Second, the threat was no longer purely racial. It was increasingly perceived as cultural. This became the ruling ideology on both sides of the political divide. Thus in 1959 the Minister for Immigration saw himself as enacting a policy that would attract "the types of peoples here who can most readily be absorbed, so that we can mould Australia into an Anglo-European community embodying the old and the new" (Bullivant, 1985, p. 13).

Although certain races such as Asians were still fundamentally perceived as unassimilable and thus dangerous, there was now a further nonracial division between assimilable and non-assimilable non-Whites. Thus the threat to Australia was a hybrid of racial thinking and culturalist thinking. It was through this developing shift from race to culture that assimilation and the White Australia Policy were made ideologically compatible in government circles and among those who supported the policy.

Because all the dominant political, economic, and ideological forces embraced this shift, those who still clung to a totally racial conception of Whiteness and a more strictly British conception of Australian civilization, although they remained a sizeable section of the population, found themselves for the first time on the margins of Australia's public sphere: so much so that assimilation was introduced with little public debate. As Lopez (2000) points out,

There was a relative consensus of approval for the program among policy-making elites in the public service, major socialising institutions (mass media, education system), and all levels of government. This dramatically reduced the scope for political debate (p. 45).

This was an important shift. For the first time there was no serious political force in Australia willing to prop up the racial expressions of White paranoia and give them a privileged position in public space. It was a shift that became a feature of Australia's immigration and settlement politics well into the 1980s. Like taxation, immigration and settlement policy became perceived as something that ought to be worked out by politicians, preferably through bipartisan politics. If governments were to tax according to the will of the people, it would be clear that taxation would be minimal and against the interest of the nation. Similarly, it was believed, was the case with immigration.

What characterizes this period, then, is not the disappearance of the racial strand of White paranoia, but rather its increased marginalization. Although it remained alive in some parts of the media and in places like the Returned

Soldier League (RSL) clubs, the business-quality media-political class deep consensus that formed about immigration and settlement policy meant that no political force was willing to take it on board and use it for political advantage. This consensus, which saw itself as reflecting the more enlightened and adaptable part of the population, was so powerful that it endured the slow abolition of the White Australia Policy, which by the mid-1960s was almost universally recognized as offensive (Castles et al., 1988). But perhaps the proof of its power and durability was more in its survival of the shift from an assimilationist to a multicultural settlement policy and its capacity to carry large sections of the population with it with a minimum of public debate.

Since World War II and the rise of assimilation, Australia's settlement policy was a response to the effects of its immigration program. By the late 1960s the effects of the post-war immigration period were being felt, and as Australia's immigration program was beginning to recruit even lesser shades of white, it was becoming clear that assimilation did not happen. That is—post-war migrants—the Lebanese, the Greeks, the Italians, and the Yugoslavs, or even the “whiter” ones like the East European Jews, the Poles, and the Germans—had not simply become Australians. They did not shed their previous cultural practices, and they did not become indistinguishable from the population of British origin, at least not as quickly as expected. Moving in Australia's cities, one could witness the formation of ethnic streets and enclaves (Martin, 1978).

The government responded by abandoning assimilation and shifting to an integrationist settlement policy. The latter, like assimilation, was heavily directed at soothing the still alive-and-well cultural paranoia of the White people who had found assimilation acceptable. Integration, it was argued, meant that it was unreasonable to ask newly arrived migrants to become “like us.” They would always maintain their cultural practices and habits. Their sons and daughters, however, would have to be worked on to ensure that they become fully Australians. In this sense integration was saying that assimilation took more time than expected, and it was an invitation to the White population not to panic in the face of the now visible non-British ethnic presence in public spaces.

However, integration also prefigured multiculturalism in that it was the first state/bureaucratic recognition that Australia was no longer a homogeneous White European society and contained non-English speaking communities (the non-assimilated first generation) whose needs required special government policies. Ultimately, the fantasy of a White European Australia as an ideal that Australia yearned to maintain continued to be the basis of all government policies and the

conceptions of Australia that went with them until 1973, when the newly elected Labour government of Gough Whitlam—the first in 23 years and committed to the expansion of the welfare state—began to advance the first timid conceptions of a multicultural Australia (Markus, 1994).

The Specificity of Australian Multiculturalism

Because it has become associated with the processes of globalization today, multiculturalism has undergone a paradoxical homogenization and Americanization of its meanings and its social significance. However, when it was introduced into Australian society, multiculturalism defined a number of social and political realities. It is impossible to understand the debates about it without examining the transformations it has undergone.

Australian multiculturalism embodied a set of differences that reflected the complex realities in which it was grounded and the diverse social forces that had an interest in advancing it.³ First, multiculturalism was perceived as both a descriptive and prescriptive concept. Descriptively, as many insisted, multiculturalism was not a government choice. Multiculturalism described the inescapable fact that Australia's immigration program has created a society with more than 100 minority ethnic cultures that existed with but also transformed Australia's Anglo-Celtic culture and were transformed by it.⁴ Prescriptively, multiculturalism was the set of policies adopted by the state to govern this inescapable reality. It involved not only accepting that cultural difference exists and must be catered to, but also entailed celebrating it as a positive aspect of society that should be promoted by state institutions.

Second, and closely related to the above, was the difference between multiculturalism as cultural government and multiculturalism as national identity. This was and still is a subtle difference. The difference is perceived as that between multiculturalism as a marginal reality in a mainly Anglo-Celtic society and a multiculturalism that displaces Anglo-Celtic culture to become the identity of the nation. In the first the culture of the ethnic minorities was imagined as contained and had little effect on a still largely European Australian mainstream culture. In the second the migrant cultures were actually hybridizing with the European Australian culture, thus creating a new multicultural mainstream.

Third, are the differences between multiculturalism as welfare and as a structural socioeconomic policy. Both of these multiculturalisms were less about culture as such and more about access to the institutions of

Australian society. Both were concerned that most non-English-speaking migrants to Australia were positioned in the most economically unfavourable positions in society (Collins, 1988). But although the first was mainly concerned with facilitating access to the state in the form of interpreting services or providing state help to ethnic communities in the form of specific grants, the second had a more radical conception of the role of the welfare state and saw it as a tool for dealing with the structural class inequalities produced by Australian society around ethnicity.

Fourth, there were the differences between multiculturalism as social policy described above and multiculturalism as cultural policy. It is what Bullivant (1981) nicely called the difference between life chances and lifestyle multiculturalism. Whereas the first is concerned with socioeconomic issues, the second is the closest to the forms of cultural pluralism that are most identified with multiculturalism today. It is more concerned with cultural traditions and practices. Its core element is the shedding of the ethnocentric claim that Anglo-Celtic culture is the most desirable culture to aim for and accepting a cultural relativism that recognizes that no culture is superior to another. This version of multiculturalism was crucial for the ethnic (non-Anglo-Celtic) middle class, who to compete against the traditional Anglo-Celtic middle classes needed recognition of the worth of their cultural traditions and backgrounds more than they needed welfare and English programs (Jakubowicz, Morrissey & Palser, 1984).

"Life-chances multiculturalism" had a timid beginning during the short years of the Whitlam government (1972-1975). In 1975, starting with the Conservative government of Malcolm Fraser began the general onslaught on whatever claims the Australian welfare state had of being a tool for dealing with structural inequality. Indeed as Castles et al. point out, the Fraser government promoted multiculturalism in its cultural pluralism sense to promote a culturalist version of Australian society at the expense of a class version. It was "a key strategy in a conservative restructuring of the welfare state whose main purpose was the demolition of Whitlam-style social democracy" (p. 57).

Together with the rise of Asian immigration, the greatest taboo of the White Australia Policy, it is the movement in less than 10 years from a descriptive multiculturalism perceived primarily as a form of welfare and of cultural government to a multiculturalism that is more prescriptive and perceived to be primarily about

national identity that signalled the reentry of White Paranoia in both its cultural and racial guises into the sphere of public debate.

The Rise of Identity Multiculturalism and the Resurfacing of White Paranoia

The most important ideological shift that marked the move from the conservative Liberal government of Malcolm Fraser (1975-1982) to the Labour government of Bob Hawke (1982-1992) is the stronger emphasis away from multiculturalism as cultural government and toward multiculturalism as national identity. The difference between the two, mentioned above, can be restated as the difference between saying, "We are an Anglo-Celtic society with a number of diverse non-Anglo cultures that we strive to manage," and saying "We are an Anglo-Celtic multicultural society because we have been transformed by the existing diversity of cultures."

It can be seen that the first formulation embodied a multiculturalism that was not radically incompatible with the old conception of a white Australia. The second formulation, however, is a more radical break with the Australian identity of the past. It entailed an Australia that was still Anglo-Celtic, but that had been fundamentally transformed by its immigration program, so much so that it now had a different identity. Here multiculturalism was not a feature on the side of an old-fashioned Anglo-Celtic society. It was a new conception of an Australia where multiculturalism represents a higher type of Anglo-Celtic civilization. This version appealed to the growing number of increasingly well travelled and cosmopolitan middle-class Australians who wished to shed the image of Australia as a racist colonial backwater and appear in a more symbolically competitive light in the eyes of other nationals. In emphasizing "a unified nation of diverse cultures," it was also a version that provided a national ideological counterpart to the corporatist economic ideology of unifying labour and capital advocated by the Hawke government. But it was also a version of Australia that alienated many White Australians who had found multiculturalism as cultural management acceptable, reviving in them the paranoid fears of cultural extinction. They found this too radical a step to make, and from that moment, began to move closer to the historically marginalized section of the population that was still holding onto a racially defined White Australia.

This shift also happened during worsening economic conditions and rising Asian migration compounded by the Labour government's moves to make Australia a Republic, severing Australia's last symbolic ties with the British monarchy and its drive toward granting the Indigenous people some

form of land rights, which revived among the most vulnerable Whites irrational fears of losing their homes to Indigenous people who were going to “grab the land back.” This climate of economic uncertainty and revived internal and external traditional threats increasingly sent White paranoia into overdrive.

More important as prominent sections of the mining industry, fearing for their land, adopted a strong oppositional stance against the government’s commitment to grant Indigenous people some form of land rights, and with the Liberal Party electing as its leader John Howard, one of the few ideologically driven monoculturalists in Australian politics, the consensus that, as argued above, led to the marginalization of White paranoia from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s was finally shattered. White paranoia reentered the political stage, and the long era of debating multiculturalism began.

Debating Multiculturalism in the Shadow of White Decline⁵

The ideological cornerstone of the resurfacing paranoia was a sense of White decline: a sense that being White Australian was in danger of becoming the new discriminated-against minority.

This claim of reverse discrimination was at the heart of the Blainey (1984) debate, when the Australian historian while worrying about excessive Asian migration also voiced his worries about the fate of Australians of British background. He felt that the latter were losing the right to maintain their own culture:

If the people of each minority should have the right to establish here a way of life familiar to them, is it not equally right—or more so, in a democracy—for the majority of Australians to retain the way of life familiar to them? (p. 124).

Since the Blainey debate there have been a number of other similar debates where the discourse of decline has taken up prime media space.⁶ It is well exemplified by radio presenter Ron Casey’s (Casey & Sleeman, 1989) outburst over what he saw as the decline of Australian idioms such as ‘bonzer’⁷: “I suppose it’s too much to ask Australians to use words like *bonzer*. In another 10 years, with all the blinking Japs and slopes we’ve got coming into this country, it’ll be ‘Bonzai’, ‘Bonzai.’” (p. 12).

Ten years later and after many similar periodical claims, Hanson (1996), newly elected leader of the anti-immigrant One Nation Party was still arguing: “We now have a situation where a type of reverse racism is applied to mainstream Australians by those who promote political

correctness" (p. 1). That this ideology of decline is an expression of the old White paranoia in all its pathological dimensions is made clear by the fantasies that accompany it. Casey (Casey & Sleeman, 1989) imagined himself pursued by "ethnics" out to get him because of his views:

I became a little paranoid about my safety and that of my family ... I could sense the hatred welling in the ethnics ... I would walk quickly to the car, but I don't mind saying that not a morning went by for weeks that I didn't turn the ignition key without a sense of foreboding (pp. 42-43).

Even some of its more intellectually sophisticated proponents become prone to conspiracy theories. Thus in Blainey's (1989) account of the Asianization of Australia, we are told that

Unknown to the public, unknown probably to parliament, but certainly known to ministers for immigration, a secret room lies inside the scoreboard ... Inside the room are devised plans that run counter to the immigration principles announced to parliament (p. 101).

In Casey's (Casey & Sleeman, 1989) autobiography, the analysis of the effect of Asian migration reaches truly phantasmagoric proportions where Australia is imagined in 2020 to be populated by Chinese, Japanese, Indonesians, Malays, and Indians and where

Those of European extraction, the ordinary white Australians, could live in small enclaves in South Australia or be driven back to Europe or to parts of the United States ... Ghettoes of Australian labourers—or "white coolies"—could live in outer metropolitan areas to service the Asian factories (pp. 187-188).

We find an updated version of this paranoid imaginary, the historical antecedents of which can be found as far back as the 1840s Anglo-Asian encounters, in Hanson's (1996) *The Truth*. Here we meet the president of what is imagined to have become the Republic of Australasia in the year 2050: Poona Li Hung, "a lesbian ... of multiracial descent, of Indian and Chinese background" who is also "part machine—the first cyborg president. Her neuro-circuits were produced by a joint Korean-Indian-Chinese research team" (p. 194).

Given the pathological nature of this ideology, the content of the debates about it are structured in an exceptionally predictable way. They always consist of people expressing forms of White paranoia and others trying to present either statistical or historical evidence or logical arguments

to prove that there is no basis for the paranoid views expressed. More often than not because of the closed-circle logic in which it is grounded, the counterargument leads to a reinforcement of the paranoid view, which feeds on a sense of “things are so bad *because* so many people can’t even see what is happening” and finish by creating images of dark conspiracies to which everyone has fallen victim except the paranoid ones themselves.

This points to the fact that *debate* is a misnomer. For what really happens is more like a parallel presentation of differing points of view. Because they refuse intersubjectivity and have to feed narcissistically on their own “truth” to survive, all forms of social paranoia are not to be argued with, especially when they are positioned prominently in the public sphere. One either relegates them to the marginal spheres of society where they belong, or exploits them politically to reach one’s political goal. This was the road chosen by John Howard’s conservative side of politics.

White Paranoia Rules OK: John Howard and the Politics of White Restoration

In his well-documented history of the origins of multiculturalism, Lopez (2000) points to something important about assimilationist ideology. Originally, he argues, it was a strategy for the preservation of a predominantly Anglo-Celtic society. But as Australian society changed demographically, culturally, and socially, to hang onto an idea of assimilation involves the radical proposition of changing society *back* to what it was. The problem is that this society has demographically, socially, and culturally disappeared. Objectively, there is no Anglo-Celtic core society to assimilate into.

This puts us face-to-face with the importance of “debating assimilation” for the White decliners. The very idea of debating assimilation, whether for it or against it, works to produce a fantasy space where there is an Anglo society that one ought or ought not assimilate into. Consequently, the debate shields the assimilationists from the reality they are trying to avoid: that it is they who have not assimilated into a changing society. This generally points to the closed-circuit logic needed for the White paranoid fantasy to reproduce itself.

John Howard’s most crucial ideological move was to give credibility to the fantasy of a core Australian culture that, while changing, is still in deep continuity with the Australian culture of the assimilationist era: no room for multiculturalism here. This theme is well developed in one of his addresses to school students and repeated on many other occasions:

I remember when I left school ... the Australia that I lived in, in 1956 was a wonderful country... it's important to understand that there are some things about our country that don't change, and shouldn't change, and we should fight hard to stop changing. ... There are certain enduring Australian values that I still identify and are still as strong and as worthy and as valuable to us as Australians as they were when I left Canterbury Boys High School in Sydney in 1956 ... There is that continuity, that golden thread of Australian values that hasn't changed. And in turn, the Australia that your children will inherit when they leave school will also be different. But there will be a continuity, there will be a golden thread of basic Australian values that will be there. (10 July, 1998, St Paul's School, Queensland)

Australian values go even farther down history. Howard sees Australia as a country that has managed to "preserve a core set of Australian values that maintain a long continuity of values connecting us now in the last years of the 20th Century, with the early beginnings of the Australian federation almost 100 years ago" (24 July 1998, Address to the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Perth). In fact some of the values go down even farther than that: "We are, as all of you know, a projection of western civilization in this part of the world. We have inherited the great European values of liberal democracy." These "enduring Australian values" are not only "important today" but "will continue to be important into the future" (8 October, 1998, Address to the Australian Business Limited, Sydney).

Values for Howard constitute an *essence* not only in the sense of a transhistorical reality, but also in the sense of a causal force: Forget about economic relations, forget about power relations, and forget about history: a nation is but an expression of the set of transhistorical values and beliefs upheld by its individual nationals. The values are never imagined to be contradictory, and as such the nation that expresses its values well is always united by those values. Any opposing values are by definition opposed to national interest. Howard refers to "the great Australian values that bind us together" and about being united by "a common love of Australian values."

It is on this construct that Howard articulates White paranoia. For despite his firm belief in the transhistorical nature of Australian society based on these values, Howard also advances the thesis that society and its people are drifting or have drifted away from the core values and that there is a need to bring them back. There is no paranoid politics without some whingeing about some corruption to the core values of society. Very originally, Howard does not argue that the Australia of

the past was a better expression of Australian values. He believes that Australians today still live according to these values. People are out there living the Australian way—as it has been initially *projected* by western civilization, of course—but their important presence has been buried by the emphasis on multiculturalism, Asia, and Aboriginal land rights.

However, it is not only the reality of the enduring presence of Australian values that has been threatened by the negative politicians and intellectuals. The latter are also propagators of guilt, and what needs to be restored is also the pride that people should have when reflecting on Australia's essential goodness. "We are right to be proud of having built one of the most prosperous, most egalitarian and fairest societies in the world. We are right to be proud of our tradition of mateship in both peace and war" (Sir Robert Menzies Lecture).

Howard, therefore, sees himself as engaged in an Essence War with intellectuals (particularly historians) and politicians who are always concentrating on the Bad aspects of Australian history and society. They pick up on Bad deeds to pronounce Australians as essentially Bad. He picks up on the Good deeds to pronounce Australians as essentially Good. This has been the general structure of Howard's argument throughout: We are realists. We recognize that we Australians have done good things and bad things. But the bad things we have done are conjunctural; we need not forget that we are essentially Good.

In this political vision where the self "courageously" admits the wrongs of the past but only to reassert its fundamental goodness, the self is constructed as a know-all that has already submitted itself to a self-criticism. It thus manages to immunize itself against any critical voice other than its own: "I don't need someone else to tell me about my wrongs. I've already admitted them, but you're making too much of them." Thus any voice that attempts to *insist* that the misdeeds committed in Australia's past and present cannot be so easily dismissed is immediately transformed into a Bad voice: the voice of the *Bad other*, the one hell-bent on undermining the essential goodness of Australia and the pride of its people.

Osama is Coming to Get You! Debating Australian Multiculturalism After September 11

Given the nature of the White paranoia that has shaped Australia's debates about multiculturalism, these debates have always centred around the construction of an *unintegrated other* and the subsequent debating

of the necessity, possibility, and desirability of his or her integration. Australia's historically favourite other has always been the Asians. The continuity of the Asian as other lay in its double portrayal as a racial and a cultural other: someone who looked different and acted differently. The White Australia Policy was designed with Asians in mind, and in 1996 Hanson was still being swamped with Asians. In the last couple of years, however, probably to the relief of Asians, White paranoia has shifted its gaze towards a more global threat: Muslims and Islam.

The emergence of the Muslim as the Australian other did not really begin until the Gulf War, although Australian culture shares with other Western cultures the orientalist legacy of colonialism. Since the late 1990s Muslims have become increasingly the main recipients of the "problems with multiculturalism" discourses. Muslims are portrayed like the Asians as fundamentally different in their political and cultural aspirations and their lifestyles. But what gives the Muslim other an edge over the Asian is that the latter is also portrayed as actively hostile to Western civilization. If the Asian was perceived as an assimilation problem, the Muslim is perceived as both an assimilation and a national-defense problem. Thus when a newspaper report featured a story of "Lebanese Muslim Gangs" target-raping Anglo-Australian girls, this led to a "they're raping our daughters" type of debate in which all Lebanese or Arabs or Muslims became an enemy within, extending the West versus Iraq war into the Australian suburbs expressing "well-known" tendencies in Arab culture.

Adding fuel to the "Muslim question" was the debate about Australia's treatment of asylum seekers highlighted by the Tampa affair, in which Afghan asylum seekers rescued by a Norwegian ship were refused the right to have their refugee claims assessed on Australian soil. To win the ideological battle against those who claim the government was acting inhumanely, the minister of immigration and the prime minister began actively to promote the idea of the asylum seekers being possible criminals as well as doing unspeakable things to their children, like starving them and throwing them into the sea⁸ in order to gain asylum.

But September 11 sealed the position of the Muslim as the unquestionable aggressive enemy other in Australia today. If one listens to the now regularly reported musings of the White paranoid state of mind, Muslims are a community of people always predisposed toward crime, rape, illegal entry to Australia, and terrorism. And interestingly, Australia declared itself a possible victim of terrorism even though it is most probable that not many terrorists training with Osama bin Laden would know it exists!

Notes

- 1 See Stratton (1998) on the reemergence of race politics in Australia.
- 2 This last assumption was most important in shaping the Australian working class's commitment to the White Australia policy. See, for example, the classic work by Curthoys "Conflict and Consensus" (1978) and other works in Curthoys and Markus (1978).
- 3 See Lopez (2000) for an excellent empirical history of these forces.
- 4 The 1996 census shows that Australia has 4,664,647 people out of a total population of 17,892,423, born outside Australia. Of those, about 1,439,000 born in an English-speaking country. The leading five community languages other than English with more than 100,000 speakers were Italian, Greek, Cantonese, Arabic/Lebanese and Vietnamese. A further 10 languages were each spoken by more than 40,000 people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997).
- 5 The theme of White decline is fully developed in Hage (2000).
- 6 These have been instigated by radio commentators (Ron Casey), Returned Services League Club officials (Bruce Ruxton), even Finance Ministers (Peter Walsh) and ex-Treasury officials (John Stone).
- 7 Bonzer is an Australian colloquial term meaning "excellent."
- 8 Now an established attempt at misleading the public that has led to an ongoing Senate inquiry.

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