

# "Food's great, but ..."

## Evolving attitudes to multicultural Australia, 1985 - 1995

Bailey, Carol "'Food's great, but ...' Evolving attitudes to multicultural Australia, 1985 - 1995", 1995.

**Carol Bailey**  
**Department of Communication Studies**  
**University of Technology, Sydney**

Australian Association of Social Research Conference  
Melbourne 1995.

Mackay Research, prominent in qualitative Australian social research since the early 1980's, has produced two reports on Australian attitudes towards multiculturalism in Australia, the first in 1985, entitled The Multiculture and the second, Multiculturalism, in September this year. This paper compares findings from these two reports, indicates some directions of attitudinal change in the preceding decade, highlights specific areas of current concern for Australians about multicultural policy and outcomes and presents findings relevant to social justice. The qualitative methodology is discussed.

### **Synopsis**

Perhaps not surprisingly, Australians in 1995 are found to exhibit a disparate, often confusing array of attitudes towards multiculturalism, however certain trends are apparent. Despite the belief of many commentators that Australia is coping successfully with its move towards a pluralist society, the evidence from this research indicates that any sense of national pride and self-congratulation is vastly outweighed by a generalised sense of threat to traditional values

and Australian identity which appears to have increased in the past decade. The sense of transience associated with multiculturalism reported in 1985, appears, by 1995, to have given way to a sense of profound irreversible change in the Australian way of life and a degree of anger, disquiet, confusion or at best resignation. Many issues apparent in 1985 such as assimilation, ghettos, naturalisation and the need for migrants to speak English continue to concern Australians ten years later. Other issues such as concern about a decline in living standards appear to have subsided. Emerging concerns include Asian migration, Islamic customs, racial hatred and perceived overly generous social security provisions. On the basis of this research Australians more readily perceive disadvantages than advantages to multiculturalism, and struggle to find much beyond the one consistently cited overwhelmingly positive aspect of multicultural Australia: the greater diversity and sophistication in food and restaurants.

An interesting finding from this research concerns the belief by many Anglo-Australians that they are subject to reverse discrimination, about which little can be said in the current climate of political correctness. Hope for the future appears to lie with increased tolerance on the part of the next generation and increased integration through intermarriage and experience.

A number of social justice issues are addressed through this research including racism, assimilation and ethnic ghettos, the implicit assumption that "real" Australians are white Anglos, the difficulties faced by migrant children "caught between two cultures", and the merits or otherwise of the family reunion

scheme. The paper concludes by stating that wider public debate is needed to address the very real concerns of many Australians and calls for a public forum to more fully discuss the desired outcomes of multicultural and immigration policy and the future directions for Australian society. Such a forum must encourage civil discourse, free from both the excesses of hate speech and the strictures of political correctness. Whatever choices are made, responsibilities must be faced.

## **Introduction**

It is not unusual these days to pick up the paper and find a picture of a group of smiling students from a city school - a school where 20, 40 or even more nationalities comprise their population - and to be told how successfully they are coping with the challenge of ethnic diversity. For example the Sydney Morning Herald, November 27 featured students from Fairfield High where "94% are from non-English speaking backgrounds" (Garcia and Pitt, 1995:12).

Nor is it unusual to hear and read commentators such as Donald Horne or conference delegates such as those who attended the Global Cultural Diversity Conference in Sydney in April this year applaud Australia's seemingly smooth transition from a White Australia policy to a Multicultural Policy, and our success in creating a relatively harmonious ethnically diverse society (Schneider, 1995).

Of course there are mavericks such as Graeme Campbell the sitting member for Kalgoorlie who just last week was expelled from the ALP for his publicly stated views on the need to cut immigration and especially non-European migration, in opposition to government policy.

So, what is the state of debate in this country about multiculturalism? Given the climate of political correctness operating, do people feel able to freely and fully express their views if these differ significantly from government policy? A Sydney Morning Herald article last week, featuring those in marginal electorates still

undecided about their voting intentions in the coming election, quoted one interviewee thus:

"I'm very worried that the face of Australia is changing. If you mention immigration you're called a racist. I'm not, but I think it's wrong we're expected to change the way we do things to suit new people. They should change to suit us. We're multicultural but I'm worried we're losing our heritage. If there were people who could stop that happening I'd vote for them."

This came from a white 65 year old woman. How representative is she of current opinion? Do we really know what middle Australia thinks about current policy?

We do have some information. As practitioners in the area of social research probably most if not all of you are aware of the work of Hugh Mackay and his small organisation Mackay Research which has conducted and published social research on Australian attitudes to various issues since 1979. In 1985 Mackay Research conducted research which resulted in a report entitled The Multiculture. In September this year, ten years later, they conducted further research into current Australian attitudes towards multiculturalism and released a report Multiculturalism detailing those findings.

I think it is important to see whether Australian attitudes to multiculturalism (MC) have changed over the decade, and if so, how. So what I have done in this paper is to compare the findings from the two reports to gain a sense of any shifts in evolving attitudes to MC in middle Australia and to focus on the implications of current attitudes.

At this stage I need to say that this paper is presented with the full permission of Hugh Mackay. It came about in the following way. Briefly I have been most interested in Hugh's social research for a number of years, and took the opportunity presented by study leave this semester to approach Hugh and ask to become involved with his research, to which he willingly agreed. I was fully briefed on his approach, observed 2 groups, performed my own content

analysis and wrote up a report, and was fully involved in the all-day debriefing session and subsequent findings from which the final report emerged, written by Hugh. I was therefore involved in data collection and analysis that resulted in the 1995 report, but had no involvement in the 1985 report and no access to the original data of that report.

When I suggested to Hugh that it would be useful to compare the reports he agreed, and provided me with a copy of the 1985 report, but stated he did not have time to be involved in the writing or presentation of this paper and was happy for me to be solely responsible. The paper therefore represents my own thematic analysis but obviously relies almost totally on findings from Mackay Research. Essentially I am presenting and commenting on the similarities and differences in attitudes as reported by Mackay Research.

What I want to do now is to briefly detail the methodology employed by Mackay Research in its two reports, then move on to report my findings and finally suggest social justice questions and issues raised by this paper.

## **Methodology**

Mackay Research uses 2 qualitative research methods, affinity groups of 5-8 participants, and in-depth unstructured interviews. Unlike many focus groups used in market and other research, affinity groups approximate more closely to natural groupings occurring in society in that all members know each other and meet in a natural setting, usually the home of one of the members. The research therefore reflects the group dynamics (including opinion-leadership) that influence naturally occurring group discussion and conversation among friends, neighbours or workmates.

Following an initial statement of the purpose of the research and the ground that may be covered, the researcher/interviewer takes up an essentially passive role, asking no direct questions but encouraging members to range widely and spontaneously over all aspects of the

subject which interest or concern them. Ideally the interviewer refrains from expressing either verbally or non-verbally any discriminatory response to the material. All is deemed equally interesting and noted. This fly-on-the-wall approach aims to produce conditions approximating as closely as possible real-life conversation where people freely express their opinions on a particular topic in a relaxed atmosphere. A similar non-directive approach is used in intensive interviews.

To quote Mackay (1995:60):

“Data resulting from this technique is essentially qualitative and anecdotal. Accordingly no attempt is made to quantify the findings of this research, nor to distinguish between majority and minority opinions. The report(s) offer a summary of views expressed, though greatest emphasis is given to those opinions and attitudes which appear to be most consistent across the whole sample. In interpretation, the guiding principle is to identify ‘consistency within diversity’”.

## **The samples**

The 1985 report was based on 10 discussion groups and 9 in-depth interviews with Australian and migrant men and women, between the ages of 25 and 55. Due representation was given to working and non-working women. All groups and interviews were drawn from the upper-middle to lower-middle socioeconomic strata. The field work was conducted in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Wollongong during August 1985.

The 1995 report was based on 12 group discussions and 22 interviews with men and women between the ages of 20 and 70 years, 70% of them born in Australia and 30% born overseas. All were drawn from upper-middle to lower-middle socioeconomic strata, avoiding the extremes of wealth and poverty. The fieldwork was conducted in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Wollongong and the NSW Southern Highlands in August 1995.

## Findings

In 1985 Mackay concluded his report The Multiculture with the statement that "Probably the safest generalisation to make about Australians' attitudes towards the multiculture in 1985 is that they are confused, anxious and yet resigned" (1985:51). As the 1995 report makes clear, middle Australia exhibits a vast array of attitudes towards MC and immigration policy, but perhaps the safest generalisation to make is that the confusion and anxiety apparent in 1985 appear to have strengthened rather than diminished and the 'quiet resignation' seems more tinged with resentment, dismay and alarm. This research clearly shows that for those interviewed the advantages of MC are far outweighed by the disadvantages.

### An Array of Attitudes

Obviously this is not the case for everybody and it must be stated at the outset that, as would be expected, the full spectrum of attitudes towards MC was found in this research.

Positive support is obvious in the following comments (1995:10):

"It is working in Australia. There are ethnic tensions, but from my point of view, I'm proof it can work and I like to think it can work for other people too."

"I think multiculturalism is healthy. It makes people strive. Otherwise, we can get stale... we'd shrivel up and die."

"Multiculturalism is really the only way. It's an aspect of respecting the individual. No-one should have to discard what they grew up with. We should all pull together in as many different ways as we can... those other cultures have so much to offer... wisdom, ideologies, ways of getting around things. There's an accumulation of experience from around the world."

However a strong sense of pride and self-congratulation in Australia's comparatively successful record of coping with MC was not

readily apparent in the 1995 research - which is surprising given the media reports referred to earlier and the fact that this was one of the findings in the July 1995 Mackay Report Society Now.

Some people are still clearly antagonistic to MC in 1995:

"I think multiculturalism is just an absolute pain in the neck. I haven't heard anyone talk about it in glowing terms. (1995:11)"

"You hear people from the schools speaking over the television 'Multiculturalism is so good in schools. We've got twenty-seven different races here and they all get on wonderfully well'. That's what's put forward. But if you speak to someone who lives in the district, they don't tell you that the different nationalities get on well. They tell you stories that are often quite horrifying. You've got two classifications of people: those who make the rules and think they work - or just want them to work - and those who live with the situation and very often find that the rules don't work. (1995:9)."

The more commonly expressed attitude however is one of resignation to a perceived fait accompli, and at best a reluctant acceptance. They don't particularly like it, they weren't consulted "nobody asked me whether I wanted a multicultural Australia", but they feel that "you can't change the tide, it's beyond our control". Whereas in 1985 Mackay reported a feeling of transience associated with multicultural policy, by 1995 there is clear agreement that Australia has profoundly changed since the 1950s, and changed for good though not necessarily for the better. Grudging acceptance of this fact is often accompanied by a sense of bewilderment and disbelief that it could have been allowed to happen.

Those who take a more neutral and accepting stance believe there must be good aspects to MC but struggle to find much beyond the increased variety and sophistication in the food, which in both reports is more or less universally acclaimed to be a positive benefit.

“Thank God for Lygon Street! Cuisine is better as a result of migration. Imagine being stuck with steak and two veg forever. (1985:38)”

The title of this paper came about as I was struck by the silence that ensued in one of the groups I observed when they decided to shift from concerns about MC to positive aspects. A similar remark (1995:11) captures the same degree of puzzled good-will:

“Education-wise it's good... there must be some good that comes from it.”

So, not surprisingly, the Australians consulted in this research revealed the full spectrum of attitudes, including oppositional ones:

"I think Asians are so arrogant."... "I don't I find them very polite."

"Who wants to go to Cabramatta tonight - no-one would go there in their right mind."... "I shop there during the day."

"It's good for the kids to learn about different cultures". "Mm. Except on dress-up days."

"Food's good."

"I've got something against the food. The smell of Indian food knocks you over, the stale smell of curry knocks me over."

"It's beyond our control now, whatever will be will be."

"We can change immigration policy."

### The Term Multiculturalism

One of the findings from the research is that the term MC appeared not to have wide currency in the population in 1985, and it was sometimes equated with folk festivals, ethnic dress-up days at school. The term seems to be more clearly part of mainstream vocabulary in 1995, and the population appears to be better informed about its meaning. However Mackay suggests that the term tends to evoke negative responses and

anxieties about the future, and contrasts it with the term "cosmopolitan" which more positively connotes the increased sophistication, diversity and stimulation in Australian society today compared with earlier periods (1995:7). Further research on this point could be useful.

### Multiculturalism: A Threat to our Identity

As mentioned earlier, for the great majority of those interviewed in both 1985 and 1995 the disadvantages of MC far outweigh the advantages.

Many of the major concerns apparent in 1985 still worry people a decade later, in many cases even more so. In 1985 MC seemed to many people to represent some kind of threat to Australian values, unity and identity. The pace of change, the perceived large numbers migrating to Australia all aroused anxieties (1985:7):

“Things are changing too fast for us. They bring in too many at a time. It's the sudden influx that worries me.”

“They're taking over the country.”

“I don't know if it's my imagination, but there seem to be more migrants than ever coming in, and a lot of them are Asian. It's inevitable that this will cause problems for them and us.”

“If we're not careful, our destiny will be taken out of our hands.”

Despite some accommodation to MC in 1995, these same fears still exist in the sample studied. There is a general fear of fragmentation in society, of dilution of our developing culture and value system - even though we may not be at all clear about what those are (1995:26-7):

“We're losing our Australianness... whatever that is.”

“We had a culture and it's unique, and it's being diluted by all these little groups that are coming in.”

“Probably the worst thing about multiculturalism is

that Australia doesn't have its own identity. There are too many cultures here, so it's a bit of everything. There's no such thing as 'Australian' - it's Maltese, Italian, or whatever it is."

Interestingly the previous comment drew the following response which, while ignoring indigenous Australians, makes the important point that all Australians originated from somewhere else:

"How can we be anything but multicultural when we live in a relatively young country? Nothing's really Australian because two or three generations ago, someone had to come from overseas. You're only Australian because you live here: your background is from overseas."

However there appears to be a real fear that, as Mackay puts it (1995:15), MC will turn out to mean a series of sub-cultures or ethnic ghettos with little in common.

### Ghettos

A strong objection to ethnic "ghettos" comes through clearly in both reports with many comments to the effect that "you become a stranger in your own country" in certain localities. For example from the 1985 report (1985:8):

"But up in Cabramatta, you only see Vietnamese now - no-one else."

"There's more migrants than Australians at our local school."

"In some suburbs like Mitcham, you play 'spot the Aussie.'"

The same comments emerge ten years later where a number of interviewees feel like "a minority in our own country" even in mainstream institutions:

"When Jenny had her baby (at Auburn) she was the only Australian there."

"He was the only Australian in his class."

"The Immigration Department is a fascinating place, there is no Australian accent there."

Migrants en masse seem to attract strong negative prejudice that breaks down more readily when they are encountered as individuals.

"I do get upset by them in groups, but I'm quite good mates with a few individuals. After a while you don't notice they are ethnic. (1985:25)"

Whereas the 1985 report refers to 'pockets' of migrants who 'congregate together' the 1995 report quotes people referring to 'ethnic ghettos' and 'enclaves', more strongly negative terms, suggesting a strengthening of opposition to distinct isolated sub-cultures.

Perhaps paradoxically the 1995 report also reveals greater sympathy and understanding of the migrant point of view, and recognises the naturalness of wanting to cluster together with people like yourself.

So the 1985 one-sided view "If they are all going to live together in one suburb, what hope have they got of assimilating with the rest of us" (1985:17) changes to the more sympathetic

"It's natural... you can't stop the Italians coming together. (1995:40)"

"But if you were in a foreign country, wouldn't you want to associate with your own people and catch up on the gossip? (1995:12)"

"If we went to the bloody Philippines, we'd stick together, wouldn't we? (1995:40)"

"I suppose Australians would be the same. If you knew there were other Australian families and you lived in a completely foreign country, you would tend to band together. (1995:23)"

### Racial Hatred, Crime and Violence.

Linked with ghettos is the belief that MC has brought new divisive forces into Australian society. In particular it has introduced racial

hatred which is increasingly expressed through terrorism and violent crime. Many of those interviewed believe violently expressed racial hatred is foreign to the egalitarian Christian values they traditionally associate with Australia.

Both studies report concern about a perceived increase in 'knifings and bombings' which tend to be attributed to Vietnamese, Turks and Yugoslavs (the groups attracting the most negative prejudice).

"A friend of mine at the Police Station told me that there were fourteen knifings involving Vietnamese one Saturday night and that was not uncommon. You never hear about that sort of thing in the paper. (1985:36)"

"It doesn't seem right that some of these people are bringing their political problems to Australia and carrying on with all their hatreds here. It's nothing to do with us... (1985:36)"

The fears expressed in 1985 that we may well be importing political violence through our policy of MC are still present in 1995, no doubt exacerbated by intervening events such as the Gulf War, the war in Bosnia, problems in Macedonia and the death of John Newman.

"There's an area in Brisbane that's full of Croats and Serbs. They think they're escaping Yugoslavia, but maybe their problems are being transferred here."

"The only thing I don't want to see happen is people coming here and bringing their problems with them. Like Greece and Turkey have had problems since 1854, but it's not nice to see demonstrations over that issue in a third country."

"When we see what's happening in other countries every night on the news, I can't help but worry, are these people coming here and bringing their hatreds with them."

### **Assimilation is Sought.**

On the basis of these two studies, Australians strongly favour assimilation and integration as opposed to MC, probably even more so in 1995

than in 1985. It's apparent however that many opposed MC even in 1985 (1985:15-16):

"My idea is that when you migrate, you should integrate and learn our customs."

"Why did they come here in the first place? They should leave their old traditions at home."

"Half the problem is they bring their culture with them."

In 1995, as Mackay notes (1995:30) opinions vary from 'wistful yearnings for the old days of assimilation' to unquestioning acceptance of the view that migrants should at least integrate if not assimilate.

"I think they should be encouraged to become Australian as fast as possible. You can never forget your culture - your past - but you should accept the Australian way."

"When I came to Australia thirty-five years ago, it was a policy of assimilation."

Migrants who can integrate and "blend in" are seen as more desirable. "The best migrants are those who want to integrate into our society." National groups such as the Celts who speak English and have their own culture but blend into Australian society are looked upon favourably. Other groups such as the Dutch, Greeks and Italians are perceived to "blend better" than Asians and certain Middle Eastern nationalities who are seen to be more alien and "other", too different.

"Italians and Greeks... they blended in more... they still tended to get together in their own areas but they blend better."

By 1995 there seems to be some loss of hope or complacency that "the passage of time will solve the problem", that the perceived distinct sub-cultures present today will merge within a generation or so to form a more diverse but also unified culture.

"I'm not saying that we don't like the influence of

migrants. And I'm not saying that diversity is a bad thing. What I'm against is the idea of all these racial and ethnic groups being separate from each other, and preserving their own identity. (1995:31)"

### English is Essential

Lack of English is perceived as a key problem, and the learning of English is considered central to the assimilation process in both reports. Some Australians believe English should be a pre-condition for settlement in Australia, and many criticise migrants for speaking their own language in public places, for 'not bothering' to learn the language, and for relying on their children to be their interpreters.

"A lot of the trouble is they don't speak English and they won't learn. (1985:14)"

"No-one should be allowed into the country unless they can speak the language. (1985:14)"

"If they are not going to speak our language, how can they call themselves Australian? (1995:31)"

"If we are going to be multicultural, we all need to have the same language. One thing I find uncomfortable is being with a group of people and suddenly I'm the only one left who speaks English - the others are all speaking something else. I know we have a common language, but I am still excluded because they are using some other language. I think if I say something then I will look as if I am racist. But I think what they are doing is racist. (1995:32)"

The limited acknowledgment of the pressures migrants face to retain fluency in their own language, noted in the 1985 report (1985:15), is not reported on in 1995, perhaps indicating a stronger consensus on the part of Australians that all Australians should speak English.

### Naturalisation

The 1985 report indicates that Australians believe that migrants should adopt Australian customs and culture on arrival in this country, but there is little if any mention in 1985 of the importance of migrants taking out Australian

citizenship. The subject of naturalisation however figures quite prominently in 1995, coinciding (?) with the current government push to encourage the one million migrants eligible to take out Australian citizenship to do so. A number of subjects passionately believe that migrants should become naturalised and owe allegiance primarily to Australia, especially if they use the social security system (1995:32-3).

"To receive the benefits of our society it should be a condition that they learn the culture and become a citizen within a limited time."

"I think naturalisation should be compulsory after a certain time. They shouldn't be allowed to benefit from our country's resources without committing themselves to it."

"We have to make it a law, say after you have been here for two years... this applies to the English and Irish as well."

"I can understand people wanting to retain links, some of them economic, but by and large, let them be Australian first."

### Government Policy is not Widely Understood

Both reports demonstrate that there is considerable confusion, bewilderment and ignorance surrounding government policy on MC and immigration, leading to prejudice and speculation. The same sorts of questions which appeared in 1985 ("What is the government policy on immigration anyway?") reappear in 1995. People are confused about whether or not there is a definite policy; whether certain groups are encouraged; how the points system works; whether there is a skills requirement, and if so which skills are wanted; who is allowed in under the family reunion scheme; what quotas operate; where refugees fit in and so on. They query why some people with both sponsors and jobs are excluded whereas others, who immediately go onto social security, are allowed entry (1995:46-7).

"I'm not exactly sure what the current frame of reference for our immigration policy is, or how it

works - what it prohibits or encourages.”

“I don't know what the current level of immigration is, or what the restrictions are on particular countries.”

“You have to have points... our neighbour did not have enough points. He doesn't speak English, so he did the test in his own language.”

“How do you get these points? How do really poor families get in?”

Many don't believe the government has a clearly thought-out policy on immigration or MC and fear it is a social experiment whose outcome is quite unknown and likely to be detrimental to Australia's welfare. A few suggest it is politically motivated to win the ethnic vote and part of the agenda to remove the monarchy and bring in the Republic.

“I think the Labor Party made a decision to bring in people who would bring down the monarchy.”

“Do you think they want so many people from non-English backgrounds, so there will be a bigger vote for the Republic, when the time comes?”

Though some believe that for defence, developmental and humanitarian reasons Australia should welcome unlimited immigration, the dominant view in both reports is that Australia should restrict or curtail immigration, at least for a period, and particularly at a time of high unemployment. In any case migrants should be encouraged to move away from the cities (though it is acknowledged by some that country jobs are not available), and preference should be afforded to English speaking and European migrants rather than Asians (1995:48-50).

“We've got the most enormous country. A lot is desert, but there's still a lot of unoccupied coastline. I think we should open our arms to others.”

“My impulse is to say, 'Enough's enough'. We should be saying no for a while, until we try and get our own house in order.”

“If they had to go to the country and help to develop new areas, fair enough. But what is the point of putting them in places which are already strained to the limit?”

“I think Australia should keep a European structure. That would be much better, because it means more homogeneity.”

It is generally agreed that refugees should be accepted, provided they are 'genuine'. Compassion here is mixed with a certain degree of suspicion, and also concern about permitting entry to unlimited numbers when our own country has enormous problems of its own. There is less support for the family reunion scheme which is seen by some to encourage ghettos and 'rip-offs' rather than bringing out people who genuinely wish to become Australians (1995:52):

“I don't agree with the boat people. I think that initially a lot of them were refugees - desperate, with terrible stories - but not so much now. But I still don't believe in them staying in Port Hedland for years... we should quicken up the process of assessing them and send them home if they are not genuine.”

“Other countries don't have these family reunion policies where, if part of the family migrates they can get the hangers-on over, and pay them the aged pension.”

### **Australians are Too Tolerant, Too Generous**

Even those in favour of MC tend to believe that Australians have accommodated to migrant concerns more than they should (1995:38):

“Generally speaking I'm in favour of multiculturalism. I think Australia has come a long way as a result of all our different and diverse ethnic groups. But sooner or later there has to be some common identity... some shared values. That means there has to be give-and-take. At present I think Australians are going too far one way, without getting enough back.”

This brings out one of the shifts that seems to have occurred in the decade between the two

reports. In 1985 the fear seems to be that migrant groups are "taking over" our country and changing our identity. The 1995 frustration and anger seems to be more about us "giving it away": we are deliberately setting out to lose our own identity.

Both reports bring out that many Australians wonder whether we have been too generous in our immigration policy, too generous in adapting to migrant needs rather than expecting them to conform to Australian customs, and too tolerant of differences and the rate of change in our society. This is especially galling when migrants indicate a clear preference for their own cultural practices, refusing to accept or conform to ours, and indeed indicating they believe theirs are superior. Perhaps through our tolerance we are contributing to the demise of our own traditions and our emerging identity. To quote from the 1995 report (1995:37, 20-1):

"We think Australians should accept all these different cultures, but it's all these different cultures coming in that are not accepting the Australian culture. Multiculturalism will never truly work until that happens."

"The problem is that we are being asked to tolerate whatever they want to do. I don't think they come here with the attitude that they should be prepared to tolerate us and fit in with our way of doing things."

"Something I've realised about this whole multicultural thing: at one stage I thought the migrant was always the victim but something I've noticed, as these communities get established in Australia - like the Lebanese - is that they don't accept the Australians."

"...they become racist against Australians... I've heard Egyptians say things about Australians like, 'Oh, the way they bring up their children is terrible', implying their culture is a much better one."

"A lot of the schools here elevate the Australian culture to high heavens. For goodness sake, what culture! I shouldn't say this but, compared to our background, the Australian culture is really very

poor."

An issue highlighted in the 1985 study concerned the belief that migrants 'have taken more than they've given' (1985:40) by concentrating only on improving their material circumstances (admittedly through hard work), sending money out of the country and often exploiting the system without a concomitant emotional commitment to Australia.

"They know every angle, all right... everything that they are entitled to."

Perceived exploitation of social security by migrants is a widespread concern expressed in the 1995 report, although the issue appears to be more one of inappropriate government generosity than migrant abuse of the system. Serious questions are raised about the ease of obtaining unemployment benefits in particular, which seems to indicate not just resentment about draining resources but also that we are trying too hard to prove how generous we are (1995:35):

"So many go on the dole as soon as they arrive, and I don't think that's right. The government is too lenient. We'd get nothing if we went overseas [to their countries]... not a brass razoo."

"If Australia is prepared to give overseas immigrants two years' social security and accommodation when they come, I'd say we are very generous. I don't think I agree with that. I think we should be educating our children better instead of bringing in brains from overseas."

"The word must be out in Asia - you can come down here and be paid not to work! What a joke!"

Mackay (1995:36) states that:

"For some older Australians - including long-established immigrants - there seems to have been a shift from a situation in which migrants had to 'prove themselves' (by hard work, and by their attempts to assimilate) to a situation where it is the host community who have to 'prove themselves' by their level of tolerance and generosity."

## Reverse Discrimination

Closely connected with the view that Australians have been overly generous and tolerant in their dealings with migrants is the belief by many that it is the host community that suffers discrimination rather than the new arrivals. Again this concern is present in both reports.

In the 1985 study reverse discrimination in favour of migrants is noted in the form of lower interest housing loans, easier access to welfare and concessions, and preference for jobs (1985:41-3):

“Migrants are treated like gods, better than what we are. They get the carpet rolled out for them.”

“The Post Office is now full of Asians because they've been directed to employ Asians. Once you used to have to be a citizen to get a government job... if five blokes turn up to apply for a job, the Asian has to get it.”

“How do they get drivers' licences when they obviously can't speak English.”

“There weren't many Australians in the school play this year. They cast the migrant kids to try to get their parents interested in the school, which is wrong.”

“Domestic staff at the hospital don't pay tax if they are sending money home to their parents. But we don't get any concessions for supporting our parents here.”

Similar concerns about perceived preferential treatment for migrants at the expense of other Australians continue to trouble Australians in the 1990s, though with the added complication of political correctness in everyday speech whereby white Anglos can be the butt of any remarks but must circumscribe any criticism of ethnic Australians.

“If a migrant takes exception to me virtually nothing happens, but if I do then I am liable to anti-discrimination laws.”

“Look at crime - if an Australian causes a crime it is Bill Smith, if an ethnic does it, you don't find out the name till the trial. It's skewed.”

## Racism

Racism has always been part of Australian history and, as these reports show, prejudice continues, though some shifts appear to have occurred.

Certainly as Mackay notes (1985:45-9) Australians believe themselves less prejudiced than previous generations, and the migrant perspective confirms that Australia has become more tolerant of the older established migrant groups who arrived in the early post-war period, particularly the Greeks and Italians. In fact both studies suggest that Australians see greater and more virulent prejudice operating between ethnic groups than between white Australians and any particular ethnic group (1985:45-9):

“My father used to call them 'reffos' and 'Balts'.”

“Once you didn't feel free to mix with Australians, because they didn't accept you. Now it's a completely different story.”

“If you think we're racist, you should hear what some of the Europeans say about Asians.”

“Compared with most other races and most other countries, I think we are a really tolerant lot.”

The most extreme Australian prejudice seems to be reserved for the Aboriginals (1985:48):

“Tasmania had the right solution to the Aboriginal problem - shoot the lot of them.”

“You talk about intermarriage. I'd be far more worried if my sister wanted to marry an Aborigine than if she wanted to marry a European migrant.”

“To really feel uncomfortable, go to Tennant Creek. (1995)”

Findings from the 1985 study show that former prejudice against Italians and Greeks had

subsided; the British, though perceived to integrate best were often derided as "the whingeing Poms"; and Turks, Yugoslavs, Lebanese and Vietnamese attracted most prejudice. This seemed to be connected with concerns about violence and aggression, racial hatreds and the tendency to band together rather than integrate, but it is also apparent that the most recently arrived groups attract the most prejudice, both from Anglo-Australians and established migrants. Germans, Scandinavians and Japanese were perceived as desirable, partly because they have a high standard of living. Large-scale admission of Asians was objected to but mostly this boiled down to objections to Vietnamese and scepticism about their genuine refugee status.

A major shift in racial prejudice appears to have occurred in the decade between 1985 and 1995. While Turks, Yugoslavs and Lebanese are still perceived negatively, the primary focus has become Asians generally - Vietnamese, Koreans, Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos and Cambodians. In fact Mackay believes that in 1995 the word multiculturalism immediately triggers debate and fears about Asian migration and Asian influence in Australian society (1995:41). Asians as a group are seen to pose the most problems integrating into Australian culture. Their appearance, religions, languages, names, attitudes and cultural practices all set them apart, delineate them as "other" and give them high cultural visibility. Fear of an Asian 'takeover' and destruction of traditional culture is apparent, though some minority support for Asian immigration exists (1995:41-4):

"Nothing against the Asians, but they stay in their groups and don't mix the way the Italians do."

"Asians stand out so much. If we had more European migrants, they'd fit in more. And it's better for them if they blend in."

"Her name was Ha and all I could think of was ha ha. It sounded so stupid when I said it."

"We seem to be more tolerant towards people who look like us, like Europeans, than Asians. It's more

than just appearance... Asians don't mix as well."

"Immigrants are mainly Asian and whether or not this is good, they'll eventually overrun Australians and that isn't a good thing. So why should we import them? The way I see it, Asians shouldn't be more than 7% of the population."

"Australia may be part of Asia geographically, but culturally it isn't. Economically they've improved but they're still behind in relation to human rights and social benefits. All these things have to be covered first. The propaganda we get every day that Australia is part of Asia doesn't match up with the human reality."

"Asians would be the best shot as far as immigrants are concerned. Because we are isolated from the rest of the world, it would be the wisest move, whether you like them or not."

Attitudes to work, education and leisure further differentiate Asians from the mainstream culture. Perhaps this is most apparent in school where Asian students frequently outperform their Anglo counterparts, but at the expense of participation in sporting and other activities that form part of the broader school life. The migrant need to achieve requires a single-minded focus on academic results and a self-imposed segregation which conflicts with both the traditional Australian belittling of the swot and the belief that migrants should fit in and integrate. Therefore any sense of admiration for the achievements of Asian students tends to be coloured by resentment and disapproval.

The 1995 study also reveals that increasing prejudice towards Asians is matched by an increase in prejudice and fear directed towards Muslims. In this case intolerance has shifted from ethnicity to religious ideology (though it bears noting that many of the groups attracting prejudice have large numbers of adherents to Islam). Doubtless the rise of international terrorism attributed to Islamic fundamentalists, together with the Gulf War and the Bosnian crisis, have all contributed to a heightened awareness of Muslims in the community and a deepening uneasiness at the perceived threat to

our value system and Christian culture  
(1995:26-7):

“Muslims all demonstrating, that worries me.”

“We were a so-called Christian country. I am concerned that other religions are very strong - maybe there are advantages and disadvantages... From a Christian point of view there is only one way, but we need to be tolerant.”

“We have this background based on the Christian ethic. How can anyone understand our music, art, literature or our laws without some background in the Christian religion? You have to understand Christianity to understand Australia.”

“I don't mind people's private religious beliefs - Australians have always been pretty tolerant about that, apart from the old-fashioned hostility between Catholics and Protestants. But what I object to is when Muslims start treating their women in a way which is un-Australian.”

“Muslims have the opposite problem, they're male-dominated. There are problems for female teachers from male students.”

“The women walk behind the men... a different class of chauvinism from Australia altogether, you see them in the shops walking behind.”

“It's the things they get up to - making their women wear those veils, and female circumcision of babies... we wouldn't let anyone else do that sort of thing in Australia, so why do we let them?”

“A few months ago, a Muslim father shot his daughter and her Australian boyfriend. It's bad when they bring their traditions with them.”

Despite their unease about Islamic practices, Australians sympathise with the situation of young Muslim women with their constrained dress code unsuitable for the heat of Australian summers and sporting activities in schools, and their restrictions in visiting friends, sleeping overnight etc. (1995:54):

“I feel sorry for the girls at school who have to wear

their tea towels on their heads. On a hot day you see them covered from head to toe... gee they must be hot.”

“Muslim girls can't go swimming except in all their clothes... those girls must sit there and feel out of it.”

“There was a girl at the sports carnival who was in a full-length track-suit with a towel on her head, trying to do the long jump. The others were half-naked.”

“A friend of my daughter's can't go to a sleep-over party. Her brothers can go anywhere. It's hard for her... she has to find excuses for not staying over. She was allowed to come to our party, but had to leave at 10 o'clock.”

In fact Australians sympathise generally with the plight of children of migrant families "caught between two cultures". These children often face problems in learning the language, socialising, dating and coping with parental pressure to accept arranged marriages, or at least to marry within their own group

“It must be very hard to be brought up in Australia and still have traditions.”

“My neighbour is Turkish, 22, and she is going to marry a Turkish boy. Everyone is really happy. She had to hide when she went out with non-Turkish men.”

“A bloke bashed up his daughter because she refused an arranged marriage.”

“The children of Lebanese parents we know don't answer their parents if they speak in Lebanese... the girl and boy would never marry Lebanese. It all depends on the family.”

Anglo-Australians in 1995 also show some awareness of their own racist tendencies and tensions:

“How would you feel if your children brought someone home, if your daughter brought home a Lebanese boy, if your son brought home an Asian girl?”

"I must admit that when Tim started at school, that's when I realised I must be racist. 'Haven't you got any Australians in your class' I asked him when I saw the names. I was shocked that there were so many in his class this year, strange names that he can't pronounce."

They also believe that primary school age children exhibit little or no prejudice but that this changes when they reach high school (1995:55):

"Our children just accept the different races. They've got used to it. They're more tolerant than we are."

"Where we have kindergarten and primary schools with racial mixtures, kids grow up understanding and accepting each other. The younger you start mixing, the better. Now you've got Asian kids with Aussie accents and they're as Australian as you can get."

"It all changes at high school. They're racist... all races stick together."

"Shannon is very racist since high school. He's terrible. He used to mix in primary, but he doesn't now."

Nevertheless there is a general belief and hope that racial prejudice is diminishing and will continue to do so in future generations. The hope is that immigrant children, educated and brought up in Australia, will integrate more easily into Australian society than perhaps their parents have done. In any case, those optimistic about Australia's future tend to believe that assimilation will eventually, and quite naturally, occur through intermarriage and education.

"Kids in Australia are more accepting of other people, regardless of colour, because it's so much the norm to see different races."

"A couple of my son's friends have married boat girls, and it's working out fine. They're all very happy with each other. They're all good citizens."

However the 1995 report ends on a cautionary note with stories from migrant mothers

complaining that "under the influence of multiculturalism, their children were actually resisting the push towards assimilation" (1995:56):

"I have tried to bring my daughter up as if she is an Australian. She knows I came from Yugoslavia, but I have tried to put all that behind me. I'm not having much luck with her: she is telling everyone that she is a Serb!"

"My daughter seems intent on being Italian. I say to her 'You're not Italian... you're Australian.' But she is determined to be Italian. If she knew what she had left behind she would not be so keen. We have a very happy life here... it has been a big success."

### Diminished Concerns

The previous discussion has focussed on findings common to both studies and on emerging concerns in the 1995 report. Some noted areas of concern in the 1985 report rate little or no attention in the 1995 report, presumably indicating that these are no longer of great importance. These include the view that migrants will lower our standard of living through acceptance of non-award wages and conditions and sub-standard housing, and to a lesser extent that they will contribute to unemployment by taking jobs away from Australians. Given that Australia has passed through a recession since the 1985 study, it is interesting and surely significant that the 1995 report makes very limited mention of "migrants robbing Australians of jobs". In contrast to 1985, Australians these days appear more likely to believe that migrants do the menial jobs that Australians don't want, and express greater concern, as mentioned earlier, about abuse of the social security system. Comments from 1985 include (1985:26):

"Some of them have got three or four jobs and that must be cutting out jobs for Australians."

"Our young people are the ones who need the jobs."

"I don't think they should be bringing in migrants to fill apprenticeships while there are so many of our

young ones out of work.”

“Real Australians are white Anglos.”

It is clearly apparent from reading these reports that there is an underlying assumption on the part of white Australians that "real Australians" are white with an Anglo-Saxon or Celtic background. This can be seen in the 1985 report (1985:8, 41, 42) and the 1995 report (1995:18):

“In Hercules Street, you're lucky to see an Australian.”

“There's more migrants than Australians at our local school.”

“The Post office is now full of Asians... ”

“There weren't many Australians in the school play this year.”

“He's the only Australian in his class.”

“In my daughter's school photo, there are Indians, Pakistanis, Vietnamese, Chinese and only three or four Australians.”

Clearly white Australians at least have not yet come to terms with multiculturalism. However this does raise the question: exactly what do we mean by "an Australian" in our multicultural society and what terminology should we use to distinguish white Anglos? (Obviously in what follows, for simplicity, I have completely ignored the Aboriginal position that they are the only real Australians and theirs is the traditional Australian culture).

Is an Australian someone who is born here? Legally they are of course, but the evidence suggests that at least children of Asian migrants and those who look very different from white Anglos are not assumed to be Australian, nor accorded equal status. We appear to be addressing this problem in part by, for example, devising the term 'Australian-born Chinese'.

Is an Australian simply someone residing more

or less permanently in the country? Clearly this is not sufficient for most people who continue to distinguish 'ethnics' from 'Australians'. It also brings up the fact that there are degrees of commitment to a country. Naturalisation of those not born here is seen by many Australians to indicate greater commitment to Australia, and they want the government to make naturalisation a requirement for receiving benefits. Yet, as some migrants point out (1985:22), a certificate of naturalisation may amount to no more than a piece of paper and not signify any true emotional commitment at all. You cannot legislate allegiance of the heart and for many "you are always what you were born", so it simply may not be possible for those who migrate to Australia as adults to transfer their allegiance. If this is so, then social justice demands that naturalisation must not be a strict requirement of migrants.

How do you accurately specify mainstream Australian culture in these post-modern days? What is 'mainstream' in an increasingly diverse society? How can you make any sort of general statement at all without first stating which group or groups you are referring to? At least in some contexts it makes sense to clarify that one is referring to white Australians, but what terms are correct/acceptable/meaningful?

The term Anglo or Anglo-Australian has some currency and has been used in this paper, though it suffers because strictly speaking the term Anglo does not include those of Irish, Scottish or Welsh background. These groups are almost certainly intended to be included by those who employ the term Anglo however. There has been some support recently for the term Anglo-Celtic, though that has been criticised by Donald Horne (1995) on the grounds that Celtic is not a useful descriptor of either language or cultural background. Nor is there, nor has there ever been, a nation-state called Celtland. Horne prefers "of British/Irish origin", and this may be the best solution. He also suggests (tongue in cheek?) use of the term "Skippy" to refer to someone who sees themselves simply as Australian.

## **Social justice implications**

Finally in this paper I wish to briefly address just some of the social justice implications raised by these reports. In some cases this involves raising questions rather than providing answers.

### **Support for Migrant Traditions**

In the context of migrant children "caught between two cultures", to what extent should schools accommodate their family traditions in relation to dress, observance of religious holidays and festivals, certain religious practices? To what extent should we accommodate attitudes which may be abhorrent, such as extreme sexism towards female teachers on the part of young males of, for example, Lebanese descent?

To what extent should we/can we support cultural practices such as clitoridectomy or other forms of female genital mutilation, when these are perceived as culturally essential by those who uphold them?

To what extent can we allow different legal systems to operate in Australia - as for example the recognition of Aboriginal tribal law in some remote areas of Australia?

How do we achieve community in a pluralist society? Can we find connection yet remain committed to multiculturalism? Can we move beyond tolerance to a positive valuing of diversity?

### **Assimilation and Ghettoes**

Based on this research Australians clearly prefer assimilation and object strongly to ethnic ghettoes, believing them to be a divisive factor in Australian society. However, expecting migrants isolated by language and cultural barriers to function well apart from support systems and people of their own ethnicity is unrealistic and inhumane. This was tragically confirmed in September this year when a Sri Lankan woman at St Clair in Sydney's west

killed both herself and her two young children by dousing herself in petrol and setting it on fire (Bearup, 1995). This case is especially sad since authorities were alert to her position and knew there was a strong risk of suicide due to post-natal depression and physical and emotional isolation. However the increase in non-English speaking background migrants in the western areas of Sydney is not matched by growth in the services to support them, such as public transport, social clubs and migrant resource centres. Clearly there is a high human cost in not having and tolerating ethnic communities/ghettoes.

### **Family Reunion Scheme**

The Family Reunion Scheme was one of the issues that attracted criticism in this research. The scheme is seen to contribute to the formation of ethnic ghettoes and entrenched ethnic communities which themselves act as a source of division and fragmentation in Australian society. If those who migrate to Australia under this scheme are also elderly, in poor health, have poor command of English or poor job prospects then it is likely they will require perhaps long-term help with social security, contributing to "the drain on public resources".

Obviously this raises vexed questions. The number of migrants to Australia increased by 25% for the year 1994-5, and according to a report published in late 1994 by the Centre for Population and Urban Research at Monash University, "there are now three times as many migrants arriving under the family reunion program for every one person satisfying Australia's independent selection criteria for residency" (Freeman, 1995). Sydney received 44.3% of new arrivals, up from 38.8% nine years ago.

According to Dr. Bob Birrell, Director of the Centre (quoted in an article in the Sydney Morning Herald this week)

The Australian rules for family reunion are really quite lax, the most generous rules in the Western

world. They don't need a probational visa, once the spouse arrives they become a permanent resident, there is no check to see if the marriage is bona fide two years later, as there is in Britain and America. There is no requirement that the sponsor undertake to provide for the spouse for the first couple of years. They have access to all the benefits of citizenship on arrival, except they cannot have unemployment benefits for the first six months.

This certainly supports the view of many consulted in the Mackay studies that we may be too generous in our policies, leaving ourselves open to abuse and "being taken for a ride".

The Sydney Morning Herald article makes clear in its personal story of an Iraqi refugee family, how important it is for the health and well-being of refugees and those who have been in camps for years, to renew contact with their families and bring them out to Australia where possible.

It may well be that by permitting extended family to join their members already in Australia, the family reunion scheme enables that family to function more effectively and become more contributing members of Australian society by reducing stress levels and the need for counselling and other services. Older unemployed relatives can take on child care responsibilities, thus freeing the couple to work; younger adults may make it possible for a small family business to be formed and so on.

However there is a cost involved which must be taken into account. Those arriving under the family reunion scheme may well need support services to help them cope with the emotional adjustment required not only in meeting up with family after perhaps many years of separation, but also in adapting to a new culture and lifestyle. They may also require considerable financial support to help them get started, or if families break up. The Sydney Morning Herald article points out that the needs of the recent influx of Chinese immigrants (attributed to family reunions of the 40,000 Chinese students permitted to remain in Australia following the 1989 uprising) cannot be addressed with

existing resources.

It would appear that the situation for refugee groups traumatised by their war and torture experiences is even worse, with few specialised counselling services available. Those with little or no proficiency in English, and whose qualifications are not recognised in Australia, risk becoming an underclass with little access to housing or employment.

As a society we must more fully and frankly address the issues. If we make the humanitarian choice to accept our fair share or more of the world's refugees; if we choose to continue our current generous policy of family reunions; if we continue to accept large numbers of migrants from cultural backgrounds quite unlike those of Britain or Europe; we must also accept our responsibility towards those people and ensure their needs are adequately addressed and met.

We must also ensure that the rightful needs of "the host community" are respected and met. At the very least this would seem to mean that they be more fully informed about policy than they appear to be from this study. There also appears to be a strong case for greater government consultation with the community about the desired goal for a multicultural Australia. Whatever the government may believe, the truth of the matter is that many Australians feel uninformed and confused about government policy on migration and multiculturalism, and increasingly anxious about the outcomes of those policies, which they believe they had little input in developing.

A public forum is needed where the process of consultation and debate is free from the strictures of political correctness to ensure frank and open discussion. We must not curb the expression of honest opinion if we are to have any chance of reaching an outcome to which at least the majority can agree. At the same time we must actively encourage civil discourse and seek to avoid the excesses of 'hate speech' prominent in other parts of the world and credited with inciting violence, particularly racial violence.

This is quite a challenge for us as we face the new millennium.

## **References**

Bearup, G. (1995). "When the loneliness kills ...", in Sydney Morning Herald, Sept. 19, 1995, page 9.

Freeman, J. (1995). "Just landed", in Sydney Morning Herald, Dec. 5, 1995, page 11.

Garcia, L. and Pitt, H. (1995). "Success in any language", in Sydney Morning Herald, Nov. 27, 1995, page 12.

Horne, D. (1995). "The great Celtic con job", in Sydney Morning Herald, Sept. 2, 1995, page Spectrum 7A.

Mackay, H. (1985). The Mackay report: The Multiculture, September 1985. Sydney: Mackay Research.

Mackay, H. (1995). The Mackay report: Multiculturalism, September 1995. Sydney: Mackay Research.

Schneider, A. (1995). "Negotiating multiculturalism: A communication role?" Australian & New Zealand Communication Association News No. 3 Sept. 1995.