

After the Riot: the Meaning for Multicultural Australia

Benjamin Herscovitch, Peter Kurti and Jeremy Sammut

INTRODUCTION

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On Saturday, 15 September 2012, a demonstration organised by Muslim groups outside the US consulate in the Sydney CBD erupted into violence. Police and property were attacked, and nine men were subsequently arrested and charged with a range of offences. The Sydney ‘riot,’ as it was dubbed by the media, imitated similar demonstrations in the days before in Muslim countries. The ostensible purpose of the demonstrations was to protest against an anti-Islam film produced in the United States. The film, *Innocence of Muslims*, had been posted on YouTube a few weeks before.

The protests began in one of the birthplaces of the ‘Arab Spring’ or ‘the Facebook Revolution’—Libya. Less than a year after the uprising, which culminated in the execution of former dictator Muammar Gaddafi by an enraged mob, the US consulate in Benghazi was stormed and burned by an Islamist mob, killing a member of the diplomatic staff; US Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other embassy staff were murdered in a rocket attack on the ambassador’s car. The timing of the protests was auspicious. The Benghazi attacks occurred on the anniversary of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001. Rather than a spontaneous expression of anti-US sentiment sparked by that ‘provocative’ and ‘offensive’ film, the demonstrations in Libya and elsewhere appeared to be coordinated by radical Islamist leaders determined to inflame their followers.

The copycat demonstrations and violence in Sydney shocked, but perhaps did not surprise, many Australians. For a number of years, there has been growing community concern about the integration of some Muslim citizens into the Australian community. Most concern has centred on the ethnic enclaves of southwest Sydney, around the suburbs of Lakemba and Bankstown, which have a high proportion of Muslim residents, many with a Lebanese background. Among thinking Australians, these concerns are not a manifestation of inherent prejudice; they are prompted by legitimate questions. Australian society has a long track record of successfully integrating migrants from diverse backgrounds. But, as the Sydney riot showed, something appears to have gone wrong with a subset of a subset of newcomers.

A common way of expressing these concerns is to wonder what the riot means for Australia’s status as a peaceful and harmonious multicultural society. To answer this question, The Centre for Independent Studies convened a forum at its office at St Leonards on

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27 September, and featured three speeches by CIS researchers. The speeches are reproduced here. Not all the speakers agreed with one another on all aspects of the topic. This is as it should be when dealing with such contentious and fluid events.

Benjamin Herscovitch argued that multiculturalism remains an overall success in Australia and the hallmark of a free society. Peter Kurti argued that in a multicultural society, key liberal values such as tolerance must be embraced by all racial, religious and ethnics groups, especially because liberal democracy is fundamentally incompatible with the intolerance preached by radical Islamists. Jeremy Sammut argued that the emphasis multiculturalism places on diversity will prove a threat to freedom and liberal democracy if Islamo-Fascist demands for restrictions on free speech are acceded to out of a misplaced 'respect for diversity.'

These three perspectives offered critics and supporters of multiculturalism much to agree and disagree with. The capacity audience appreciated the chance to talk about the pros and cons of multiculturalism. Public discussion of multiculturalism, along with immigration, is often discouraged by some members of the media and some politicians because of 'politically correct' fears that it will get out of hand and stir up 'racism.' The quality and value of the questions asked and comments made by the audience proved that it is possible to have an intelligent and respectful conversation about these very important issues. The question and answer session is available online at the CIS website and is well worth viewing.

In keeping with the spirit of open discussion displayed at the forum, we hope that publishing these speeches will encourage further debate in the community about what the riot means for the future of our country.

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In Defence of Multiculturalism

Benjamin Herscovitch

Introduction

The violent protest on 15 September 2012 in Sydney's CBD by Muslim activists has prompted much strident rhetoric about the health of Australia's multicultural society. Gerard Henderson, executive director of The Sydney Institute, summed up the mood when he claimed the riot provided 'yet more evidence that multiculturalism—after a promising start—has failed.'¹

Before we accept the gloomy prognosis of multiculturalism's self-appointed pall-bearers, we need to carefully take stock of the state of Australian multiculturalism.

By way of a response to the many reactionary and unempirical condemnations of multiculturalism, I provide a rationale for why Australia is multicultural and examine some of the indicators of the health of Australia's multicultural society.

In short, Australia is a resounding multicultural success story: Multiculturalism is tied to the very core of our liberal democratic values, while our culturally diverse society remains open and healthy.

Australia's liberal democratic multiculturalism

Geopolitics is part of Australia's multicultural story: Global conflicts and upheavals over the centuries have produced waves of new Australians. Famine in Ireland, total war and genocide in Continental Europe, civil war in Indo-China and Sri Lanka, state collapse in Sub-Saharan Africa, and many other wars and disasters have compelled so many to seek a new home in Australia.

Another part of the explanation is probably psychological: We have long had an impulse to populate this wide country. Post-World War II, we were told to 'populate or perish'; now the idea that only a populous and prosperous Australia will be able to compete in the century of Asian giants is gaining ground.

Economics cannot be overlooked either: A steady stream of immigration throughout Australia's history provided hands to keep the wheels of industry turning. Leaving a psychologically and physically shattered Europe after 1945, Europeans of many faiths and languages came here to build the Australia of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme and corporate giants such as the Westfield Group. New Australians from Asia are now bringing a wealth of technical expertise to Australia's hospitals, financial institutions and universities.²

Although all these explanations highlight elements of Australia's multicultural story and partially justify our multicultural policies, they are plausible only up to a certain point. Geopolitical, psychological and economic explanations ignore the crucial connection between Australian values and multiculturalism. Indeed, multiculturalism is not a challenge to Australian values because it is actually the logical extension of our values.

Australia is defined by its liberal democratic values. Like any other liberal democracy, Australia's record is not perfect. Nevertheless, our story is remarkable and cause for pride.

Since 1901, Australia has been one of only six countries to remain consistently liberal and democratic.³ This is partly explained by good fortune: We were far from the voracious belligerence of imperial and Nazi Germany, tsarist and communist Russia, and imperial Japan.

Multiculturalism is tied to the very core of our liberal democratic values, while our culturally diverse society remains open and healthy.

Australia's multicultural policy is testament to the mutually reinforcing relationship between liberal democratic values and multiculturalism.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that despite the vagaries of history and backsliding from time to time, Australia has steadfastly held to its liberal democratic values. These values inform every aspect of our political and legal systems, and shape our social relations.

Perhaps surprisingly to some, the place of liberal democratic values at the core of our national life means multiculturalism must remain a central element of the Australian social contract. Liberal democratic values entail multiculturalism: A commitment to liberal rights and freedoms is counterfeit unless it comes with a commitment to cultural diversity.

If we want to, as the Nobel prize winning economist Milton Friedman put it, 'preserve the maximum degree of freedom for each individual separately that is compatible with one man's freedom not interfering with other men's freedom,' then we must allow cultural diversity to flourish.⁴ The liberal commitment to allowing individuals to live as they see fit, provided they do not infringe on the freedoms of others, entails tolerance of diversity in all its forms.

Just as surely as our liberal democratic values entail a commitment to multiculturalism, the health of our multicultural society rests on a shared commitment to liberal democratic values. Unless diverse groups respect liberal rights and freedoms and democratic processes, peaceful coexistence cannot be assured. As former Prime Minister John Howard said in the wake of the Cronulla riots: 'A sense of shared values is our social cement. Without it we risk becoming a society governed by coercion rather than consent.'⁵

The need for a liberal democratic consensus to ensure peaceful coexistence means the relationship between liberal democratic values and multiculturalism must be mutually reinforcing. Although liberal democratic values entail multiculturalism, cultural diversity must equally be bound by the limits set by liberal democratic values. To borrow Tim Soutphommasane's words: 'Any right to express one's cultural identity comes with the responsibility to accept our parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, equality of the sexes, [and] freedom of religion.'⁶

Australia's current multicultural policy is testament to the mutually reinforcing relationship between liberal democratic values and multiculturalism: Our rights to maintain our diverse cultures come with civic responsibilities to uphold democracy and respect liberal freedoms.⁷ As the Citizenship Pledge affirmed by all new Australians makes clear: Loyalty to Australia and its people, a commitment to democracy, respect for rights and liberties, and obedience to the law are non-negotiable for all Australians.⁸

Despite the bluster from commentators and politicians, there is no conflict between liberal democratic values and multiculturalism. In fact, far from being antithetical to Australia's liberal democratic ethos, multiculturalism is its logical upshot. In the Australian version of multiculturalism, liberal democratic values entail a commitment to cultural diversity, while cultural diversity is equally bound by the limits set by liberal democratic values.

Australia's multicultural successes

While acknowledging that liberal democratic values entail a commitment to multiculturalism, some people might question the health of Australia's multicultural society. High ideals to one side, does Australian multiculturalism work? Is cultural diversity straining our liberal democratic consensus? Do we risk becoming a society governed by coercion because we cannot agree on the principles that should hold our society together?

We should be in no doubt that the riot does not call for national self-reflection on whether multiculturalism works. Quite aside from the illiberal and anti-democratic views expressed by a small number of Muslim protestors

not being shared by the overwhelming majority of Australia's 475,000 Muslims, the evidence also shows multiculturalism is not straining Australia's social fabric.⁹

Despite the health of Australia's multicultural society being difficult to measure in precise terms, there are some useful, if rough, proxies. A brief examination of the experiences of new Australians, Australian attitudes to cultural diversity, and the levels of interaction between different cultures shows Australia is a striking multicultural success story.¹⁰

A multicultural society will not function well if new arrivals do not become productive members of the broader community. In Australia, the evidence is overwhelmingly positive.

Shortly after arriving in Australia, 84.4% of new arrivals from the skilled migration stream, which is almost 70% of the overall migration program, are employed.¹¹ Only 4.8% are unemployed, while 10.8% do not have an income but are studying, caring for someone, volunteering, etc.¹² This compares favourably with the national unemployment rate of 5.1%.

Although only 50.3% from the family migration stream are employed, while 41.7% are studying, caring for someone, or volunteering, their rate of unemployment is still relatively low at 8.1%.¹³ Given that employment is the engine of both prosperity and engagement with the wider community, these are important results.

Australian attitudes towards cultural diversity tell a similarly encouraging story.

In a recent survey of more than 12,000 Australians led by a team of academics from five Australian universities, 86.8% of respondents said it is a good thing for a society to be made up of people from different cultures.¹⁴ More than half of the respondents also said they mix with members of different cultural groups 'often' or 'very often' in the workplace, while just under half do the same socially.¹⁵

Analysis of the 2006 Census confirms healthy levels of interaction between different cultures: Partners were of different ancestries in 30% of all couples, while the rate of marriage between Australians of different ancestries has been increasing with each successive generation regardless of ethnic background.¹⁶

As well as having diverse families, Australia has comparably low levels of residential segregation. Australians are more likely to live in mixed neighbourhoods than their British, Canadian, and in particular, US counterparts.¹⁷

Far from being fractured by destructive cultural divisions, Australia's diverse society is remarkably open and healthy. The lived experiences of Australians demonstrate that our society continues to embrace cultural diversity, while the vast majority of new arrivals quickly become productive members of the broader community.

Given that cultures meet every day in our families, neighbourhoods, workplaces, classrooms and backyards, it is nothing less than a paranoid delusion to say Australian multiculturalism has failed.

Conclusion

This is not an exhaustive analysis of the indicators of the health of Australia's multicultural society. It does nonetheless debunk the alarmist rhetoric about multiculturalism that has mushroomed in the wake of the recent riot.

Not only do Australia's liberal democratic values entail a commitment to multiculturalism, but the evidence also shows we remain a resounding multicultural success story. Indeed, the fantasy that multiculturalism has failed in Australia can only be sustained if we wilfully ignore the evidence.

Instead of unempirical and shrill claims about multiculturalism's supposed failure, commentators and politicians should focus on how our already healthy multicultural society could be made stronger. It is in this project that the promise of a peaceful, prosperous and diverse Australia lies.

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Given how well the Australian model of multiculturalism works, it is perhaps apt to conclude by paraphrasing something former Prime Minister Howard said on Australia Day in 2006, a month and a half after the Cronulla riots:

Although criminal behaviour should be met with the full force of the law, it does not call for either self-flagellation or moral panic. Our response should reflect this nation's unwavering commitment to diversity and tolerance, coupled with a determination to ensure Australia's liberal democratic values bind all parts of our community together.¹⁸

Endnotes

- 1 Gerard Henderson, 'Multiculturalism still has a long road to travel to reach all,' *The Sydney Morning Herald* (18 September 2012). Greg Sheridan, foreign editor of *The Australian*, similarly diagnosed a 'crisis for Australian multiculturalism.' See Greg Sheridan, 'The unacceptable face of multiculturalism,' *The Australian* (17 September 2012).
- 2 On the economic benefits of immigration, see Stephen Kirchner, *Hands, Mouths and Minds: Three Perspectives on Population Growth and Living Standards*, Policy Monograph 123 (Sydney: The Centre for Independent Studies, 2011).
- 3 Michael W. Doyle, 'Kant and Liberal Internationalism' in Pauline Kleingeld (ed.), *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 208–213.
- 4 Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 39.
- 5 John Howard, 'Shared values: The cement of our nation,' *The Age* (26 January 2006).
- 6 Tim Soutphommasane, 'Muslim unrest doesn't denote cultural crisis,' *The Age* (24 September 2012).
- 7 DIAC (Department of Immigration and Citizenship), 'The People of Australia: Australia's Multicultural Policy.'
- 8 DIAC, 'Australian Citizenship pledge.'
- 9 ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics), '2011 Census Community Profiles.'
- 10 On some of the reasons why Australia's multicultural society functions so well, see Oliver Marc Hartwich, *Selection, Migration and Integration: Why Multiculturalism Works in Australia (And Fails in Europe)*, Policy Monograph 121 (Sydney: The Centre for Independent Studies, 2011).
- 11 DIAC, *Settlement Outcomes of New Arrivals* (Ormond: Australian Survey Research Group, April 2011), 27.
- 12 As above.
- 13 As above.
- 14 University of Western Sydney, 'Challenging Racism: The Anti-Racism Research Project.'
- 15 As above.
- 16 Siew-Ean Khoo, 'Intermarriage, Integration and Multiculturalism: A Demographic Perspective,' in Michael Clyne and James Jupp (eds), *Multiculturalism and Integration: A Harmonious Relationship* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2011), 118.
- 17 Ron Johnston, Michael Poulsen, and James Forrest, 'The Geography of Ethnic Residential Segregation: A Comparative Study of Five Countries,' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 97:4 (December 2007), 733.
- 18 John Howard, 'Shared values: The cement of our nation,' as above.

Do We Need to Talk About Tolerance?

Peter Kurti

Tolerance is one of the key normative principles of *civil society*, a complex of freedoms, rights, commitments and procedures to resolve disputes peacefully.¹ And civil society is an arena where people associate voluntarily and agree on the balance between the interests of the individual and the needs of the communal. This arena will always be marked by a tension between pursuing individual interests and securing the common good.

The health of a liberal democracy can be gauged by the extent to which civil society is able to strike a balance between the public and the private spheres of communal life.

On the one hand, the Commonwealth's enthusiasm for preserving the shared sphere can frustrate, and even stifle, individual endeavour.

On the other hand, aggressive individual action can stymie the pursuit of the shared sphere of common life.

'The ends of men are many,' as Isaiah Berlin once observed, 'and not all of them are in principle compatible with one another.'²

In fact, it was the emergence of the idea of 'the ends of men' in the early modern period that led to the idea of *tolerance*.

Martin Luther insisted on the right of personal religious belief that was free of ecclesiastical control as long as the civil order was neither disturbed nor disrupted. Thinkers throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries defended this right.

As Bruce Sievers notes:

With the rise of the idea of individual conscience as a challenge to a single, state-imposed belief system, toleration became a way of reconciling radically divergent concepts of human community.³

So tolerance is the means by which we mediate between two characteristic commitments of civil society: a commitment to the rights of the individual and a commitment to the common good.

But tolerance is not particularly fashionable now. Many people are uncomfortable with the idea of tolerance because, I suspect, it implies the need to make a judgment.

The exercise of tolerance requires the expression of strong moral conviction. If I tolerate something, I am letting something *be* that I find objectionable or undesirable. Despite its badness, I say that the thing I tolerate should be left alone.

The exercise of that kind of conviction or judgment brings down the opprobrium of such luminaries as Catherine Deveny. What these critics demand is not tolerance but neutrality. To them, the standards of belief or conduct are entirely subjective.

'You can't make a judgment about anything,' they say. 'Who are you to judge?'

But is it really more acceptable to practise neutrality than tolerance?

The sight of signs being paraded through the streets of Sydney declaring *BEHEAD ALL THOSE WHO INSULT THE PROPHET* has certainly presented a challenge to those who favour neutrality over tolerance.

If I remain neutral about those signs, I rule out using the concepts of good or bad when talking about them. I will be placing habits of behaviour beyond public appraisal into a completely private realm. I will be ruling out the possibility of exercising my moral judgment about our common life too. In other words, if I remain neutral I cannot say, 'I don't care to see signs like that paraded through the streets of Australian cities.'

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The idea of a multicultural society is one that gives cultures complete freedom to develop in a country regardless of whether they conform to what the English philosopher Roger Scruton calls the prevailing 'root standards of behaviour'.

But multiculturalism has its critics—and Scruton argues that these critics are not racists but people who are trying to remind people:

We in the 'West' enjoy a *single* political culture, with the nation-state as the object of a common loyalty, and a secular conception of law, which makes religion a concern of family and society, but not of the state.⁴ (emphasis in original)

Scruton goes on to make a very important point:

People who see all law, all social identity, and all loyalty as issuing from a religious source cannot really form part of this political culture, and will not recognize either the obligation to the state or the love of country on which it is founded.⁵

The idea, then, is of a shared or common form of life within which cultural diversity is wholly acceptable.

The kind of cultural diversity that is not compatible with civil society is the one which 'rejects the constitutive practices that give [that society] its identity.'⁶

In a recent article on *The Drum*, Geoffrey Levey argued that Australian multiculturalism actually protects the shared values of our common life by preventing one form of life from dominating the others.

Australian multiculturalism aims to extend liberty and equality to all ... within the same liberal democratic limits and so allow all Australians the same opportunities and sense of belonging.⁷

But Levey got it the wrong way round. It's not multiculturalism that curbs the common way of life but the rule of law.

So if I'm not to remain neutral about the signs, can I at least tolerate them?

Yes, I think so. I certainly don't like them. And as I've said, the things we tolerate are invariably the things we don't actually like very much.

But I don't think they should be banned. I have no wish for the rule of law to encroach so completely on my way of life that it reduces my right or your right to freedom of speech.

So I don't support the recent demand made by NSW Upper House MP Shaoquett Moselmane for yet more restrictions on freedom of speech.

And of course, if people are free to carry around signs exhorting decapitation, I, in turn, am free to stand here and say that I think it is a despicable thing to call for anyone's decapitation.

But while I can tolerate such a sign, I think it imposes a great strain on the fabric of our common life.

For one thing, it is cruel and barbaric, and signals a refusal on the part of those who make and carry such placards to recognise that those of us who don't share the Islamist world view are nonetheless fellow members of Australian society.

I am quite certain that the majority of Australian Muslims want to live here in peace, to raise their kids safely, and to enjoy the free lifestyle of this country.

But a sizeable minority has a darker purpose: to open and inflame what representatives of the global Islamist movement Hizb ut-Tahrir have described as 'the deep-seated tensions between Muslims and the West.'

Despite the smooth assurances of those representatives of Hizb-ut-Tahrir, I doubt any hospitality extended by a restored Muslim caliphate to non-believers would be gentle.

Islam is not just a religion. It has a political identity and commands an allegiance from the community of believers (the *ummah*) that transcends what we understand as allegiance to the secular nation state.

As the Gatestone Institute's Michael Curtis observes:

The Islamist ambition is the exercise of power and control, and the imposition of Sharia law, which is not limited by the boundaries of individual nation states.⁸

The other area of strain suggested by the display of that placard is the somewhat peculiar human ecology of these protesters.

They speak about peace, yet they urge violence. They demand respect, yet they deride their critics. They assert a place in this country, yet they appear to have their 'root standards of behaviour' sunk elsewhere.

Roger Cohen, writing in the *New York Times*, remarked:

There are too many hypocrisies in Islam—deploring attacks on it while often casting scorn on Judaism and Christianity [and Muslim martyrs going to paradise] claiming the mantle of peace while inspiring violence.⁹

In conclusion, Australian society does have the ability to tolerate opinions or behaviour with which many of its members might not necessarily agree. And it has this ability because it is founded on a territorial jurisdiction that regards the sovereignty of the state as the source of law.

Tolerance is indeed a norm of our society that allows each member of our society to live with one another in peace. And I call for the exercise of tolerance, not neutrality.

But the exercise of tolerance must always depend upon a commitment to uphold a *common* way of life—a commitment that can only be grounded in a common political and legal culture.

And a tolerance that refuses to tolerate differences in common life is no tolerance at all.

As James Allan observed recently, in a healthy democracy if you don't like someone else's point of view, you respond by saying why. You don't threaten murder.¹⁰

Endnotes

- 1 Bruce R. Sievers, *Civil Society, Philanthropy and the Fate of the Commons* (New England: Tufts University Press, 2010), Kindle edition, 1.
- 2 As above, 110.
- 3 As above, 41.
- 4 Roger Scruton, *The West and the Rest: Globalization and the Terrorist Threat* (London: Continuum, 2002), 63
- 5 As above, 63
- 6 John Gray, 'Toleration and the Currently Offensive Implication of Judgement' in Digby Anderson (ed.) *The Loss of Virtue* (Washington, DC: Social Affairs Unit, 1992), 42
- 7 Geoffrey B. Levey, 'Defending multiculturalism is in all our interests,' *The Drum* (24 September 2012), www.abc.net.au/unleashed/4278128.html.
- 8 Michael Curtis, 'Is Islamic Ideology Totalitarian?' (Gatestone Institute, 18 September 2012), www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3348/islamic-ideology-totalitarian.
- 9 Roger Cohen, 'A 21st Century Islam' *The New York Times* (21 September 2012), www.nytimes.com/2012/09/22opinion/roger-cohen-a-2.
- 10 James Allan, 'Tolerance? That's a gag!' *Quadrant Online* (21 September 2012), www.quadrant.org.au/blogs/allan/2012/09/tolerance-that-s-a-gag.

A tolerance that refuses to tolerate differences in common life is no tolerance at all.

The Multicultural Mindset

Jeremy Sammut

A number of curious assumptions underpin the multicultural mindset. By this I mean the set of ideas about multiculturalism commonly ascribed to by elites in politics, government and academia. These ideas have, for the last 40 or so years, shaped thinking about how we should deal with racial and religious differences in a multi-racial or multi-ethnic nation.

It is important to examine these assumptions, and unpack their curiosities, because these assumptions are being mugged by reality. But despite the facts changing, I fear that minds will not. I fear the multicultural mindset will shape the response to the violent Islamist riots in Sydney and elsewhere in ways that will harm the principles of a free and tolerant society.

When the official policy was formulated in the 1960s, proponents of multiculturalism believed that cultural diversity was such a desirable social good that the force of the law should be used to achieve it. The challenge, as the multiculturalists saw their task, was to overcome opposition to ‘coloured’ or ‘alien’ immigration, as it was called in Britain and Australia, respectively. Racism would be stamped out by making all forms of racial prejudice illegal under the Australian *Racial Discrimination Act* (RDA) and the UK *Race Relations Act*.

This has always struck me as a curious way to go about trying to create a multicultural nation. The guiding assumption behind the multicultural project was that Australia was a racist country and these attitudes needed to be socially engineered out of the national soul at the end of the barrel of the RDA. If this was true, a non-discriminatory immigration policy would be a very bad idea. Imagine the kind of society that would be created—a society beset by racial and ethnic divisions that dragged citizens endlessly into court for discrimination against newcomers.

Fortunately, there have never been huge numbers of racial discrimination cases in Australia. Each year, the Australian Human Rights Commission receives only 500 or so complaints under the RDA. This is a tribute to Australia’s success in creating an overwhelmingly tolerant multiracial society.

The credit, of course, shouldn’t go to the RDA. Any idea that the threat of legal action has stopped Australians from being racist is ridiculous. The credit goes to ordinary Australians, the vast majority of whom have accepted the millions of people who have migrated here since World War II. Daily life in this country is proof that Australians can live and let live alongside fellow citizens of all colours and creeds.

This is a national achievement without local or international precedence until the second half of twentieth century. Furthermore, a harmonious multiracial society is an achievement that our forebears did not believe was possible. So impossible did they believe this to be that preventing the consequences of what they called ‘racial admixture’ was a key rationale of the exclusory immigration policy, known as the White Australia Policy, established in 1901.

The men who then governed Australia believed that racial and cultural differences would divide the nation into hostile camps. They feared the creation of a society politically divided by colour and creed—a society in which race-baiting and religious bigotry formed the central political dynamic.

These fears have now been disproven by the success of contemporary Australia’s non-discriminatory immigration program. But a prudent nation committed to immigration like Australia should not take this for granted. We should always take

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seriously the integration of migrants and pay attention to factors that might limit integration, such as the size and composition of the migrant intake. Ultimately, ensuring we remain a harmonious multi-ethnic society comes down to ensuring migrants are or become culturally compatible with the essential values of Australian society.

Multiculturalists tend to find this an uncomfortable issue. Words such as integration and compatibility undercut the central tenet of multiculturalism—which is that migrants have the right to keep their cultural identity to promote diversity. At worst, these words have been condemned as ‘racist’ code by those who yearn for the homogeneity of ‘old Australia’. Critics of multiculturalism who warn against encouraging cultural divisions, and believe immigration and citizenship policy should emphasise integration rather than diversity, have also been dismissed as alarmists or populists pandering to old fears and prejudices.

However, the assumption that disharmony in a multicultural society always stems from recalcitrant racism has been discredited in the wake of the riot.

We are now confronted by that strange brew: home-grown, foreign-imported Islamofascism. In response, multiculturalists have quickly reassured us that the law will again do its job, this time by dealing with the criminal acts committed by a few rioters. This was the first occasion on which internationally coordinated violent Islamist demonstrations had touched Australian shores. I hope there is no repeat. But this may be a vain hope, given the repeat episodes in other parts of the world. If radical Muslims have to be continually dragged before the courts for politically motivated crimes, it would be terrible commentary on the uncivil state of Australia’s multicultural society.

The ‘let the courts sought them out’ sentiment suggests that the problem is just the criminal behaviour of the rioters. This minimises the riot’s true significance. I wish we were dealing with just a criminal problem. What cannot be ignored is the broader and more alarming issue—the motivations of the violent and non-violent demonstrators alike. The real issue is that there is now present in Australia a growing sect of religious fanatics with a political agenda hostile to liberal democratic values, an agenda which only starts with curbing the right to free speech.

That a group has so dramatically dis-integrated from mainstream Australian society points to another flawed assumption of the multicultural mindset—the failure to take culture seriously.

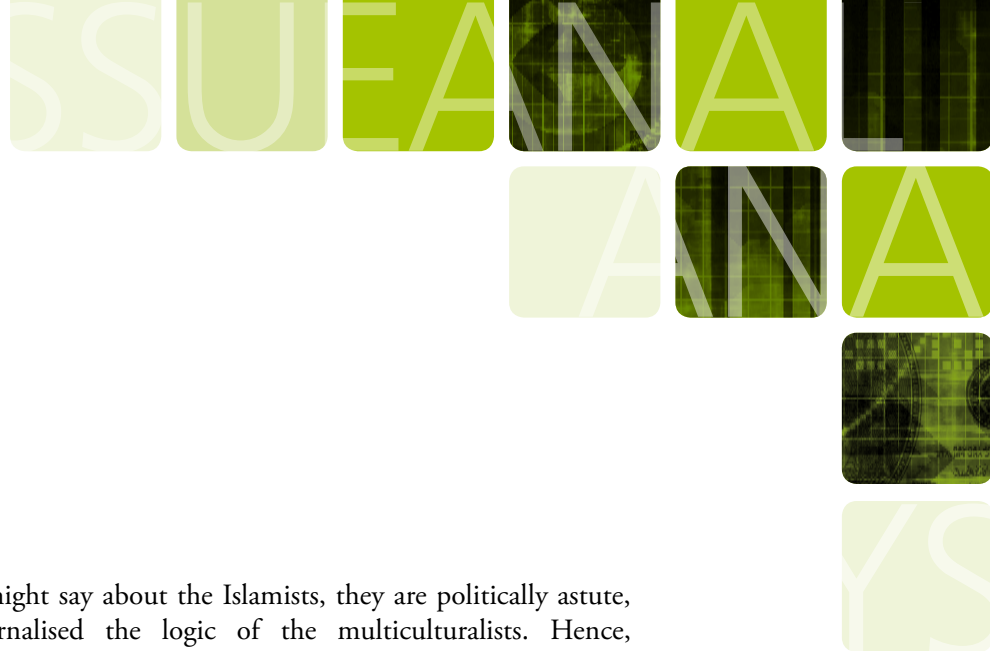
Although they preach the benefits of cultural diversity, I think many of the elites who support multiculturalism, for all their cosmopolitan sophistication, are culturally naive. They believe all human beings have the same core values and that people are more or less just like them.

This is the multiculturalism ‘just means better restaurants’ view of the world. In reality, different cultures can produce vastly different core values. To coin a phrase, multiculturalism means you might get hummus—but you might get Hamas as well.

Elites have a particular cultural blind spot when it comes to religion. Because they are secular-progressives and don’t take God seriously, they think no one else does either. Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore expressed something of this when she said on ABC’s *Q&A* that the rioters were the equivalent of a gang of drunken ‘Aussie’ youths rampaging up at Kings Cross on a Saturday night. Anyone who saw the protestors chanting ‘Allahu Akbar’ knows that the comparison is absurd. Maybe the Lord Mayor thinks ‘Allahu Akbar’ is a late night kebab joint in Woolloomooloo?

If I am right about the problems with the multicultural mindset, then I suspect that the errors have only just begun. Much will depend on the extent to which the riots are blamed on Islamophobia—either on the film [*Innocence of Muslims*] that was the pretext for the demonstrations, or on the discrimination and prejudice Muslims claim they routinely experience in Western countries, but to which people from Muslim countries nevertheless continue to flock.

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No matter what else you might say about the Islamists, they are politically astute, and their rhetoric has internalised the logic of the multiculturalists. Hence, the following argument has been advanced in supposed defence or justification of the violent demonstrations: the Islamist mob has rioted and demanded, if not literal beheadings, then at least the metaphorical cutting out of the tongues of those who insult Islam, because Islamophobes keep on saying Islam is a violent and intolerant religion.

The argument is obviously self-defeating. But playing the victim might just work. What it does is shift attention back to the topic multiculturalists are always comfortable talking about—the so-called ‘racism’ against minorities. Legitimising the grievances of the mob in this fashion is a long way from treating the protestors as criminals, and it gets us back to where we began regarding the use of the law to pursue multicultural harmony. It is not at all far-fetched to suggest that multiculturalists would look with favour on a legal remedy which, in the name of respecting diversity and preventing further turmoil, outlawed ‘provocative’ (and sure-to-be-termed) ‘hate speech’ against Islam.

Many commentators have pointed out the real threat posed to free speech is by Western governments unwilling to defend fundamental values. Witness the indecent haste with which the Obama administration apologised to the killers of the US ambassador to Libya.

Concerns that governments will seek to reach a political accommodation by appeasing Islamofascist grievances are not overstated. The multicultural mindset has intellectually programmed many elites to pursue this course. The multicultural mindset should therefore be recognised for what it has now become—a threat to freedom.



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