

**‘Don’t mention it...’:
what government wants to hear and why about multicultural
Australia¹**

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Abstract

Research into migration, settlement, racism and multiculturalism has been a major theme of the Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Research Centre at the University of Technology, Sydney, since its inception in 2006. In this article the author, a scholar with over forty years of research experience in this thematic area, draws on his experience of the interaction between research, policy and politics to argue that independent research that tackles difficult questions can contribute to wider social understanding of complex issues. He demonstrates the impact both of the investment in and expansion of research, and the contrary contraction and deprivation of resources. Key research exercises discussed include the Henderson Poverty Inquiry, Jean Martin’s 1970s study of the first Indochinese arrivals, the Galbally Report, the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs, the Bureau of Immigration Population and Multicultural Research, the Office of Multicultural Affairs, the Eureka Harmony reports, the Challenging Racism project, the Scanlon Social Cohesion project, and The People of Australia report.

Knowledge and Power in multicultural Australia

The relationship between research and policy has long been a contentious space, in which politics and knowledge struggle for ascendancy in determining the allocation of scarce public resources. For libertarian advocates such as Tim Wilson, formerly of the Institute for Public Affairs, policy should reflect values, and therefore frame research.

Writing just before his appointment in 2014 as Human Rights Commissioner by the incoming conservative Coalition Government, Wilson concluded that in his view:

¹ A longer and earlier version of this article appears in (Husband (ed) 2014). This article appears with permission of the chapter copyright holders.

public policy is not driven by evidence, it is informed by evidence. Public policy is driven by the political values of those elected to govern. Those values determine what issues the government believes need to be tackled, how they then approach it, how they weigh evidence, and the policy solutions ultimately proposed. An 'evidence-based approach' amounts to discarding the choice of democracy for government by technocratic bureaucracy, particularly when much of the evidence is financed by government to justify their decisions. (Wilson, 2013)²

Wilson's statement serves by way of peroration to a long narrative about how public policy (in our case, about settlement and cultural diversity) is framed by and then selectively seeks out evidence to reinforce specific hierarchies of power. In Australia's multicultural society the power hierarchy is dominated by the foundation imperial peoples. Their interests are reflected in the functioning and impact of the institutions that their descendants and those who support them continue to control.

This article explores the process that began to be apparent at the end of White Australia, when a concern with evidence and research about Australian society drew the bureaucracy involved in higher level strategic planning over immigrant settlement to a consideration of what such research should cover, how it should be done, who should do it, and how it should be used (Mackey, 2014)³. The extraordinary decisions taken in the late 1940s and early 1950s to create a nationalistic White Australia had a long pre-history, reified in the constitution and the racial exclusion laws associated with the foundation of the Commonwealth in 1901. This vision was reiterated most famously by Australian Prime Minister Billy Hughes in 1921, when he effectively sabotaged the attempts of the Japanese to have the visionary League of Nations accept a non-racial goal for the post Grand War world (Fitzhardinge, 1983)

The rise of evidence over ideology?

White Australia, dismantled slowly though it was through the 1960s, was to last as policy into the early 1970s; its final demise would await the election of the Labor Party under Prime Minister Whitlam in 1972; ironically the ALP had once been White Australia's strongest champion. The Whitlam government would last a brief three years, facing its end just as the

² Tim Wilson wrote this for *The Australian*; he was appointed in 2014 as Human Rights Commissioner. His IPA colleague Louise Staley has a rather different view where she notes 'the comprehensive implementation of evidence-based policy will ensure that the public sector has the tools and approach to deliver' (Staley, 2008).

³ Richard Mackey, Director of Research and Evaluation Projects in the Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection, advocates the new 'research and policy dynamic' encapsulated in the Public Governance, Performance & Accountability Act 2014. Mackey references Joseph Schumpeter's concept 'the perennial gale of creative destruction' of capitalism, 'which strikes not at the margins of the profits and the outputs of the existing firms but at their foundations and their very lives' (Schumpeter, 1976:82).

American war in Indo-China was reaching its terminal phase. With the fall of Saigon hundreds of thousands of refugees fled for hoped-for sanctuaries. The first major empirical study of the first wave of these refugees was undertaken by sociologist Jean Martin, but this too did not long survive the end of the Whitlam government⁴. The incoming conservative Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser's government terminated her research, despite what proved to be strong support from Fraser himself for multiculturalism, and his advocacy for the acceptance of Vietnamese refugees. Even so, from that point on the tension between ideology and social science would bedevil the creation of knowledge about Australia's increasingly multicultural society.

The return of the Hawke ALP government in 1983 redirected public attention once more towards the potential value of social science research in the creation and evaluation of public policy, though not necessarily in positive ways. The ALP commissioned a review of, and then closed down, the Australian Institute for Multicultural Affairs (AIMA)⁵, a Fraser-era institution under the direction of Petro Georgiou, just previously senior adviser to Prime Minister Fraser and architect in many ways of the Galbally Report. AIMA had been criticised by ALP influentials in the academy and civil society for having a political agenda allied to the Liberal Party, an antipathy to anyone with Labor links, and an aggressive mode of interaction manifested most clearly in its director's personal style. Facing rising criticism of inaction over its replacement, the Hawke government then created a Bureau of Immigration Research (later to become the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research). In turn the BIMPR was closed down by the incoming Coalition government (BIMPR 1996:72-80) under John Howard in 1996, but this time there was to be no institutional replacement, only a small very policy-focussed research group in the Immigration and Ethnic Affairs/Citizenship Department. The Rudd and Gillard and Rudd (again) Labor governments (coming to national power in 2007 and 2010 and 2013) left this situation unchanged, with the only sign of their awareness of the issues reflected in a raft of inquiries and advisory bodies advocating for some national research framework around settlement and community relations (Australia, 2011;2012;2013). Yet at the defeat of the second Rudd Government in 2013, nothing had been put in place.

⁴ To be published after Jean Martin's death as Lewins and Ly (1985).

⁵ Discussed in two documents from the AIMA Council, Council of the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs (1983) and Council of the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs (1986:7-13; 28-29).

Despite its perceived bias AIMA had done one crucial thing: it had instigated a process of interaction and communication among and between its diverse stakeholder groups – from government, through academe, large not-for-profit organisations, corporate research consultancies, and the emergent ethnic sector.

While there had been a small social science research community generated by the imperatives of the Department of Immigration's recruitment and settlement program, it was really with the advent of the first modern Labor Government after 1972 that the relation between the academy and the state seriously expanded, soon to be caught up in ideological and partisan arguments over the type, value and use of social science knowledge. The five decades of relationships that have followed the initial recognition of cultural diversity as a feature of public life in Australia, have been marked by a volatile fluctuation in the closeness and impact of research, and the trust or mistrust by Government of the academy.

Ground rules

While there had been a small but important group of researchers concerned with immigration and settlement from the advent of the post-war immigration program (Borrie, 1975) (demographers, sociologists, psychologists and social anthropologists), the first sustained government research into the social and political impact of the 'migrant presence' as it became known, was initiated by Liberal Immigration Minister Billie Snedden in the dying days of the White Australia policy. Snedden's Department of Immigration, well known as a bastion of conservative and assimilationist ideology, was required by the Minister to report on the number, extent and operation of 'national groups'. Jim Houston, a bi-lingual francophone ex-teacher, was assigned to the task in 1968, and began to tour Australia tracking down, documenting and writing up the governance and activities of over a thousand of what would today be described as ethnic community organisations. While Houston's report was finished for some years before it was made available to a select circle (National Groups Unit, 1974), it created in the mind of the bureaucracy and among politicians aware of its existence an increasing realisation of the size and potential influence of the migrant groups. In 1973 Houston was approached by recently appointed ALP Immigration Minister Al Grassby, to prepare a working paper on settlement issues and policy; reporting directly to Grassby and by-passing the Department Houston produced a game-changing paper, the first to foreground the idea of Australia as a multi-cultural society (Grassby, 1973). Grassby as a

political figure would become inextricably tied to this concept, and its explicit goal of recognising and including ethnic communities in the ongoing conversation about the Australian nation.

The first main social policy research report that *inter alia* considered ‘migrants’ produced for an Australian government, the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty, was chaired by a Melbourne economics professor, Ronald Henderson, and initiated in the dying days of the long durée Coalition government (1949-1972). These studies were not ultimately published until the end of the Whitlam government period (Henderson, 1975), though they encapsulated the welfare reform agenda that had driven the extension of the Inquiry in its full form by Whitlam.

Henderson found that when the cost of housing was taken into account, recently arrived migrant household units had a one in eight likelihood of falling below the poverty line. For an immigration program that had long been lauded as a fool-proof means of introducing fairly low cost labour into the economy, such revelations supported emerging arguments about the role of migration in facilitating a dual labour market, one characterised by ethnic background and English language skills (Collins, 1988). Henderson referred to the pattern of systematic exclusion and endless self-exploitation of parents and children that typified the life experiences of poorer non-English speaking background immigrants. Martin was to make a similar argument about the failure of the education system to deliver on its rhetoric, collecting and presenting evidence that was to be published after the end of the Whitlam government (Martin, 1978).

Thus by 1975 Government was aware of the role that research could play in uncovering social issues that might well lie below the everyday concerns of the public service, even though such research could present the political leaders with challenges that would appear difficult to address, let alone resolve. The value lay in the role of research as an early alert mechanism, allowing time to develop and implement policies that might otherwise be overwhelmed by suddenly emerging crises. However despite such potential benefits, such research and the research communities around its production often were viewed by both the bureaucracy and the politicians as too risky and uncontrollable.

Wollongong Centre for Multicultural Studies

From 1979 to 1982 my job was to develop the 'Centre for Multicultural Studies' (CMS) at the University of Wollongong. Wollongong is an industrial steeltown about 50 miles south of Sydney, with a large working class migrant population, and a very limited and diminishing set of job opportunities for women. The city was facing a series of significant transformations brought on by the acceleration of globalisation. Women's traditional employment in clothing and textiles, no longer protected by tariffs, was moving offshore; the residual clothing industry was based on domestically-produced piece-work, known as 'outwork' (piecework undertaken by women in their own homes for small payments). The industry was poorly paid, badly regulated, dangerous and highly exploitative. Some women had tried unsuccessfully initially, to get work as 'steelworkers' at the Steelworks, leading to an ultimately successful Jobs for Women Campaign⁶.

Meanwhile the Steelworks was undergoing major changes in technologies of production, creating significant job losses exacerbated by product dumping by importers and international low-wage competition. These class and gender dimensions of change were further complicated by a sudden 'racialisation' of the city generated by the inflow of Vietnamese workers produced by the end of 'White Australia' and the refugee intake in the wake of the end of the Vietnam War. Racist groups were flourishing, and existing European immigrant groups were not necessarily as comfortable with Asian migration as they had been with each other. The university Centre would play a leading role in the creation of the community-based Illawarra Migrant Resource Centre (IMRC), an agency funded under a Commonwealth program recommended by the Galbally Report.

Research projects included one on outwork in conjunction with the IMRC, which had identified the crisis in women's employment as a first priority. The project tracked the workflow associated with outwork, from the source (usually a major clothing brand in Sydney) through the middlemen to the outworker. At the time outworkers were judged as 'self-employed', and were harassed by trade unions, and abandoned by health and safety officials. However in a move 'outside the square' the IMRC with CMS came across an injured outworker suffering from overuse injuries, brought on by very stressful working conditions, and poor ergonomics. A case was taken to the Workers' Compensation tribunal;

⁶ See the news reports on the jobs for Women Campaign at <http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/library/media/Video/id/466.World-News-Women-at-work>

the evidence demonstrated that this outworker met all the conditions of being an employee, only that she worked at home. She had no control over the labour process, the price she was paid, or the conditions of employment. The Court found that she was effectively employed by the middleman on behalf of the brand company, and they had responsibility for her safety and injuries. Within a year or so the trade-unions had changed their position on outworkers, and began to recruit them as members and argue for improving their conditions of work.

Research and policy under Labor 1983-1996

Through the 1980s I worked on a number of projects that sought to use social science methodologies to bring social 'realities' to the awareness of policy-makers. One of these, 'Equal Disappointment Opportunity' (Meekosha and Jakubowicz, 1987), provoked a considerable reaction from the Department of Community Services, even though the Minister at the time Sen. Don Grimes was most supportive. The tension was generated by a complete disagreement over the nature of the research problem: the Department was under pressure to adapt to the cultural diversity of Australia's ethnic communities, by this time very much more influenced by the tens of thousands of Indo-Chinese who had arrived under the orderly departure programs of the previous six or seven years. The Department had developed a raft of programs covering everything from children's services to aged care, and felt that the programs were fine, but believed that ethnic communities either did not understand them or were not willing to use them: that is, there was a 'migrant problem' that lay in their cultures and required cultural change among the potential clients. Our research on the other hand pointed to the distance between what was provided, and the needs as articulated to us by our community research partners. Furthermore there was evidence of structural racism, where procedures that awarded access to services were biased in favour of majority culture clients. The situation was not improved by an atmosphere of funding crisis where the government in its 1986 Budget forced departments to reduce expenditure, such that across the board the major service departments all sacrificed their programs for ethnic minorities as their first action. The report's title came from an interview with a senior public servant, who proclaimed the best that could be hoped for between majority and minority community people seeking access, would be 'equal disappointment opportunity'. As part of our research contract required the Department to agree that the report could be distributed to everyone who participated in the research, public pressure from community organisations finally forced its release. The Department refused to endorse the report or act on its findings; indeed we

were handed the copyright in the research and the 'official' copy placed in the National Library carried a statement distancing the Government from the findings of the report. The library copy held by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship/Border Control has been endorsed 'Departmental use only'⁷. The impact of the research was difficult to assess; many of the evidence-based arguments we made did trickle through the system, and they had purchase for some years over practice.

Within a short time any corporate memory of the report, its context and its implications faded, especially as department structures changed. Within two years (when commissioned for another project on Assisted Accommodation) we were unable to find any officer within the Assisted Accommodation area of the Department that had any awareness of the report, despite its detailed documentation of accommodation assistance priorities for ethnic communities (Chesterman, 1988). Moreover many of the issues which we raised were still unresolved nearly thirty years later, remaining on the agenda of lobby groups seeking to advance services for cultural minorities (Migliorino, 2013; Vamvakinou, 2013a; 2013b).

The facilitation and destruction of communities of knowledge

The early investment in research under the Whitlam government, especially through the Poverty inquiry, produced a base line of data about the relationships between various parameters of inequality, including social class, gender, disability and ethnicity, and the challenges for social policy of these often-hidden dimensions. Such insights also fed the growth of a more engaged social policy environment, one which sought to empower communities through recognition of both the shared and the specific dimensions of need. The Australian Assistance Plan (1974) and a new Cities Program (1975) brought together many of these dimensions with a geographical awareness of the concentrated and overlapping effects of disadvantage in specific localities. In this they reflected Australian versions of the initiatives developed under targeted urban programs in the USA and Canada, and in the Community Development Project in the UK. The interaction of government, the academy, and civil society organisations with local communities produced some of the first modern community organisations. Thus in NSW the Western Sydney Regional Council for Social Development, an agency sponsored under the Australian Assistance Plan of the Whitlam government would be one of the first to espouse the importance of community development

⁷ The Trove record shows the annotated copy limiting access held by the Immigration Department library at

and leadership facilitation among ethnic groups, feeding the process that created the Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW in 1975, and then the state government's own Ethnic Affairs Commission in 1976 (to be relabelled after 2000 as the Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural NSW).

While conservative governments seem to have the greater suspicion of social science research (as exhibited by each incoming conservative government in Australia in 1975, 1996, and 2013), the Labor Party has had its own tussles with the field. Social science (apart from economics and demography) as a set of research practices seems to require a quite high level 'product champion' in order to gain a place at the policy table. Shaver (2014) demonstrates the key role of PM Whitlam's ex-adviser Dr Peter Wilenski as head of the Immigration Department in securing Dr Jean Martin's place; as soon as Wilenski was removed, Martin's support in the bureaucracy died.

Under the Fraser government (1975-1983) which had sent Martin packing, Fraser's adviser Petro Georgiou, a political scientist, drove the agenda for the Galbally Committee, and was then appointed to head the Australian Institute for Multicultural Affairs (AIMA). Fraser's defeat in 1983 by Bob Hawke was followed by Georgiou's departure from AIMA, a review of the Institute in 1983 by a team of ALP appointees (including social scientists) (Committee of Review of AIMA, 1983) and its closure in a scorched earth ethno-cleansing during the 1986 'horror' Budget. The Fraser/ Georgiou/ Galbally trio had been particularly innovative in the field of ethnic and multicultural affairs. Labor on the other hand, while not antagonistic to multiculturalism, had no significant product champions, though the Shadow Minister Mick Young and his adviser Ursula Doyle would play key roles in sustaining the bi-partisan milieu during the early period of the Hawke government.

However, faced with a demand from their Prime Minister to cut back expenditure, every Minister turned to their newly instituted ethnic priorities as a source of savings. This context saw AIMA closed, SBS almost amalgamated into the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, and damaging cuts in welfare and education. The widespread negative reaction to the 1986 Budget debacle forced the Government to reconsider its direction on research, producing two new agencies – a Bureau of Immigration (1989) Multicultural (1994) and Population

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/18265927?q=equal+disappointment+opportunity&c=book&versionId=21439401>

Research (1995) in Immigration (BIMPR. 1996) and an Office for Multicultural Affairs (1989) within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. The Bureau would hold regular conferences, initiate its own research, and contract researchers to produce a broad range of policy related and wider social research. OMA would in parallel also contract specific policy research associated with Government priorities. At the time this did not seem to be confusing, as the types of work tended to be rather different. For instance the Bureau was more concerned with population and immigration issues (multiculturalism was a later addition to its brief), while the Office explored attitudes and values associated with multiculturalism, and how key agencies of the multicultural project were performing (eg the Special Broadcasting Service or the media more widely).

Besides providing new resources to support academic research, and generating a wide range of publicly accessible data and studies, both the agencies contributed to a flourishing of knowledge, debate and argument around issues associated with immigration, settlement and diversity. If we take the growth in the community of policy-responsive social science in relation to cultural diversity to begin in the early 1970s and fluctuate (though build) through the period until 1996, the election of the Howard government in that year marked a serious braking of the momentum.

In the name of financial prudence but in fact as the sharp end of an ideological attack on multiculturalism, the 1996 Coalition government began to terminate a number of Hawke and Keating era initiatives. The Office for Multicultural Affairs was closed, and the very limited (and now ideologically suspect) multicultural affairs area moved back *in toto* to Immigration, with its research role also truncated. The Bureau was also closed and its remaining acceptable research transferred back to the Departmental structure of Immigration. The impact of this latter move can be deduced from two key documents, one being the last list of Bureau publications, the other being the slightly defensive tone of the following year's annual report from the Department.

The final BIMPR projects and publications list appeared in its last Bulletin (August 1996). Key 'new projects' included a study of how poverty had changed in Australia from 1975 to 1996, led by the recently departed director of the BIMPR, Dr John Nieuwenhuysen, in his new role as CEO of the Committee for the Economic Development of Australia. There would also be studies of the impact of immigration on Australian cities, the initial labour market

experiences of immigrants and other projects drawing on the first wave of the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA), the only real BIMPR initiative to long survive the agency's demise. The Bureau also supported the first study of black African settlement, signalling the arrival in Australia of humanitarian settlers from the Sudan, and an assessment of the impact of twenty years of the Galbally reforms on migrant welfare on civil society.

Projects that were well underway when the Bureau was closed included a 1996 Census Atlas, a second encyclopaedia of the Australian People, a survey of population issues, a century of photographs of immigration, and an exploration of citizenship and national identity. Work was being supported on Muslim women, homelessness among Indochinese youth, the ethnicity of immigrants, and the first major study on religion and immigration. There were dozens of other research projects in the field, illustrating the efflorescence of intellectual curiosity and the energetic engagement with a multiplicity of dimensions of social change, and the vigorous excitement of a multicultural society two decades in from its first acknowledgement as such. One major contribution supported by the Bureau was the publication in the pre-internet era of a series of commissioned bibliographies, ensuring the widest possible circulation of research that addressed social issues. Central to the concerns of the Bureau were the position and experience of immigrant women - in terms of health, employment and participation. In all some 21 pages of projects are reported, and hundreds of publications had been supported, as listed on the Making Multicultural Australia site (www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au). The tap however was turned off very quickly.

The 1996-1997 Annual Report of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs under its sub-program on Research and Statistics, noted the demise of the BIMPR:

Most activity focused on managing and producing research reports commissioned by the former Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research (the Branch continues much of the core work formerly undertaken by the Bureau, whose Melbourne office formally closed on 15 November 1996); ongoing management of the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA) and the release of associated information; production of a range of statistical publications and services; provision of library services; and the development of a Business Plan to produce a more focused strategy for better meeting portfolio research and statistics needs. (DIMA, 1997)

There was no definition of what might be core, and what 'non-core', though the Department went on to note under the heading '(i) Needs of the Minister and the Portfolio' that

The LSIA remained the central research activity of the Portfolio. It is designed to provide reliable data for Commonwealth and other agencies to monitor and evaluate immigration and settlement policies, programs and services, and to provide a basis for the development of future policies. ...

It is the most comprehensive survey of immigrants undertaken and, because of its longitudinal methodology, it avoids many of the pitfalls and potential allegations of speculative or unsubstantiated research findings that haunt many research endeavours....

The Department continued with an exculpatory statement, setting the scene for readers seeking an explanation for both the ending of the research, and its consequences:

While no new research was commissioned, the number of research reports published surpassed by 20 per cent the number published during the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research's (BIMPR) final year of operation. This increase was achieved through a combination of the special efforts of staff and the adoption of in-house editing and advanced digital publishing technology. This has also resulted in necessary cost savings.

The sub-program finalised and published 42 research reports and initiated a new internal bidding round for research proposals for 1997-98. It also sought to enter into research partnerships with several external agencies to access other research funds that may be available from non-portfolio sources.

The closure of the BIMPR resulted in a rationalisation of the Department's library services and a refocusing of its core activities to meet the portfolio's information needs...

The main impact of the closure was to significantly constrain the range of research and the types of issues. While there was a last spurt of material released from the end of the Labor period, thereafter the research function of the Department (its name would drop the Multicultural component in 2006 to be replaced by Citizenship, and in 2013 Citizenship would be replaced by Border Control) would contract and lose its overarching concern for the social justice questions that had driven a key dimension of the Bureau era. The research population in the academy would also decline significantly over the following years, its communal networks fragmented, and research funding withdrawn. Government would also restrict the flow of information, and tie research ever more closely to the priorities of the Department in meeting the Coalition's agenda. Social justice was not part of the Coalition lexicon, though concern about social cohesion definitely was.

Theorising Harmony under Howard

At the 1996 election that returned the Coalition to power after thirteen years of Labor government, a rising rhetoric about national identity, the racial makeup of Australia, and the question of racism pervaded the political scene. Added impetus for this debate had been contributed by Pauline Hanson, a pre-selected Liberal candidate in Queensland, whom Howard had to dis-endorse after she made some significant comments that were widely seen as racist. Hanson went on to win her seat as an independent, and enter the Federal Parliament. She then established her own political party, 'One Nation', which was successful in the 1998 Queensland state election to the degree that the Coalition lost power there, and the ALP was returned on One Nation preferences⁸.

Prior to the election the Commonwealth Senate (in an alliance between libertarian and Coalition forces) had rejected Government attempts to criminalise race hate speech, with the Coalition committing itself to a pathway of 'education'. Following its victory the Coalition commissioned a market research firm to survey Australian attitudes to cultural diversity and propose strategies as to how issues of racism might be addressed. The research was completed in 1997, and on the back of its findings and recommendations, the Government announced the Living in Harmony program, with the key component being Harmony Day (elsewhere in the world known as the International Day for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination). Unlike other research commissioned by the Commonwealth in the past, and published for public access, the research reports were locked away under orders of the Prime Minister, under rules of Cabinet secrecy.

Why was this research, on which a program that would last for over fifteen years would be based, apparently so dangerous? For thirteen years I tried to find out, requesting from Minister after Minister and Parliamentary Secretary after Parliamentary Secretary access to the data. At the time those of us interested surmised that the research would reveal rather too high a level of support for the perspective advanced by Hanson, against whom Howard was running a wrecking campaign steered by one of his then junior ministers Tony Abbott, who by late 2013 would be Prime Minister of Australia. Despite approaches and Freedom of

⁸ Unlike the UK where each MP is elected 'first past the post', many Australian jurisdictions allow some form of preferential voting, which sees the lower supported candidates having their votes redistributed until one candidate receives 50% +1 of the formal votes cast. Preferences prove crucial to most election outcomes.

Information requests from journalists, the reports were never released. Then in 2011 the Labor Attorney General Robert McClelland arranged for the normal government strategy on information (keep it locked up unless it has to be released) to be reversed (make it available unless it has to be kept confidential) (OAIC, 2013). Soon afterwards a Department official indicated that I might like to try again with a FoI request: this time it worked. I received the research reports, minus the research brief and the survey schedule, then after a further FoI, the implementation strategy and documents associated with the launch of the Living in Harmony program, including a slightly weird 1998 launch video which sought to encapsulate the research findings (DIAC, 1998/2012).

Announcing the commencement of the research in 1996, the new Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock proposed that ‘Australia has been fortunate to be comparatively free of the more virulent forms of racism... we cannot afford to be complacent... Increasing community awareness through community education is our best viable long-term approach’ (20 Aug 1996). With that statement Ruddock pre-empted the findings of the research and guaranteed that whatever anti-racism strategy might emerge would not step outside the confines of his ‘education’ template. The findings of the research are important for two reasons - firstly to identify why a conservative Government might find them so threatening that they would need to be locked away prospectively for thirty years and secondly to identify how governments might want to limit the dissemination of information about society as part of their strategy of political control. Essentially the Coalition leadership had a number of problems: its lack of firm action at that point on Hanson’s more outrageous statements was increasingly painting it with a similar brush, especially in international media reporting; it was anxious to invalidate any allegations by its political opponents that racism lay deep in the heart of Australian conservatism; and it did not want to legitimise more extreme right wing claims that Hanson’s attitudes were ‘mainstream’. At the same time they were appropriating some of her policies to try to win back conservative voters who had drifted further to the Right.

Ultimately none of the data nor the findings and recommendations was released for wider public scrutiny, nor was its methodology or analysis tested in any scientific literature. Nevertheless, the key finding of the research, which was advice not to mention racism and to stress Harmony, did become the core logic of community relations strategies from that moment on. Thus the Government policy that followed avoided issues of racial discrimination, denied that Australia was a ‘racist society’, ignored issues of minority rights,

and concentrated on building harmonious and tolerant relations between groups. This approach survived the anti-terrorism panic after 11 September 2001, the bombings of Australian tourists and others in Bali in 2002, the London transport bombings of 2005, and the summer riot in Cronulla in Sydney in 2005.

However the general focus on wider community relations began to tighten in the face of these global events, towards a specific concern with the behaviour of Muslims. By 2006 the Howard government moved most of the research funding associated with the Harmony project to focus on Australia's Muslim communities, under the so-called National Action Plan. Through the 11 years of the Coalition rule the level of public knowledge about diversity, which had been so remarkably expanded through the work of the BIMPR, was reduced to dependence on a small trickle of uncontroversial research reports, many of which were only released (if at all) after they had been cleansed of any elements that might elicit adverse public comment.

Social Inclusion and Social Research

The long years of conservative control of information about diversity has really only been relieved through the work of a small group of socially-committed scholars. The suppression of the Eureka reports had been one trigger for the focus by a Sydney social geographer Kevin Dunn on quantifying racism in Australia. He had received some support for his work on Islamophobia and local government from the tail-end resource of the BIMPR; however he was to depend on Australian Research Council support for his major studies, with another geographer Jim Forrest, of the extent and location of racism, and its socio-economic and attitudinal correlates. The scope of the work was expanded with the collaboration of Yin Paradies, a Melbourne-based psychologist. They managed to bring together critical social theory about racism with systematic surveys based on matching Census profiles. By the return of the Labor Party to government in 2007 the Dunn and Forrest studies⁹ were effectively the only large-scale survey-based empirical work in the public realm.

One of the key areas of concern for the new government was the problem of social exclusion, and its implicit response in policy, 'social inclusion'. The social inclusion discourse was imported from North America and the New Labour period in the UK. A Social Inclusion

⁹ Examples of their extensive research include Forrest and Dunn (2006a;b).

Board was asked to develop criteria for social inclusion, and report on the extent and nature of social exclusion.

The first Board report of 2008 (Australian Social Inclusion Board, 2009)¹⁰ made no mention of issues of ethnicity or racism, understandably as it drew on existing Government statistics and research, none of which had explored this territory for over a decade. The next report (Australian Social Inclusion Board, 2012) responded to widespread criticism of this failure by drawing on Dunn and Forrest's work, but was able to make little policy sense of the data and findings. The Board and indeed much of the government's research infrastructure, had been stripped of any capacity to consider questions of ethnicity, culture, migration and refugee status, or experiences of racism, as issues requiring some considered and collective response.

The new institutional locus for some of this policy directed work was to be Monash University. In conjunction with the Scanlon Foundation, and the Australian Multicultural Foundation, Prof Andrew Markus set in place a long-term project that would track and test Australia's social cohesion, social capital and levels of trust in community, government and society¹¹. This privatisation of research funding marked a new pathway: while the conservative government had cut funding in part to dry up alternative sources of information that were uncomfortable for policies they had adopted, the potential for non-state actors to advance new knowledge marked an important turning point. Until this point 'private' research had tended to be available only through 'pay-per-view' or purchase from market research and similar companies, and thus corralled to businesses and government.

Under Labor after 2007, the quantum of research commissioned by Immigration began to grow again, and the Department slowly moved to a more open orientation to its commissioned research, agreeing to the release of material and the reporting of research before the full political vetting of previous times had been completed¹². Usually though the approval for use of research carried a caveat that no recommendations that had not been

¹⁰ The closing of the Board has removed its reports from easy access: but see Australian Social Inclusion Board (2009).

¹¹ Scanlon Foundation Social Cohesion Research Program reports since 2007 are available at <http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/mapping-population/scanlon-foundation-surveys.php>.

¹² Following the re-organisation of Departments with the return of the Coalition in 2013, Immigration Research can be found at <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/research/index.htm>, while Settlement and Multicultural Research is now at <http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/publications>.

endorsed by the relevant Minister could be floated in the public realm. The Department was wary of anything released under its sponsorship that might embarrass the minister¹³.

The Coalition Government's Multicultural Advisory Council had lapsed in 2006, and was not re-invigorated by the new government until 2008. The Labor Minister gave the Council a brief to prepare a report on multicultural issues and suggest directions for development. The report, *The People of Australia*, recommended that a research capacity be re-established (Australian Multicultural Advisory Council, 2010). It was not until early 2011 that the government, now dependent on The Greens for parliamentary support, released its response, and accepted that something would need to be done on the research question, flicking it to the now re-named Australian Multicultural Council (created in August 2011) to define. The AMC had done nothing on this issue (for which it was given no resources) by the re-election of the Coalition in September 2013.

Meanwhile two other review reports surfaced, one following on from *The People of Australia*, on Access and Equity in Government Services (Access and Equity Inquiry Panel, 2012), the other a Joint Parliamentary Report on Multiculturalism and Migration (Vamvakinou, 2013a). Access and Equity had been introduced as a policy framework and government institutional set of practices in 1984 by the then ALP Immigration Minister Chris Hurford, to refocus policy on the disadvantage experienced by immigrants seeking employment in and services from the National Government; it had waxed and waned in effectiveness over the decades. By 2010 it had become routinized and secured little purchase on the activities of government departments. The Access and Equity Review recommended that

19. That the Australian Government consider adequacy of current provision for research, including national research priorities, on the practical outcomes of the migration program. This assessment should particularly include research on interactions between the Australian Government and Access and Equity target groups and interactions with temporary entrants (Access and Equity Inquiry Panel, 2012).

The Government response to the Review produced in March 2013 reflected an increasing awareness of the wider issues for social science research that could underpin robust policy. It supported the Review recommendation, and added:

¹³ One example negotiated by the author was Jakubowicz et al. (2013), reworked from data but without recommendations presented in Collins et al. (2013).

Australian government departments are considering key challenges in incorporating social science research and evidence into policy development and the government's future research priorities for policy. The Australian Government is considering a National Research Investment Plan which provides a strategic framework and a set of principles to guide the government's investment in research. The Plan aims to ensure Australia has the capacity to conduct research in areas of national priority and provides advice on the future role of the national research priorities. In addition, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship has an annual program of research into the practical outcomes of the migration program. It is set each year to address priority issues, data, research, evaluation and analytical gaps to inform the work of the department. All relevant research produced by agencies is to be referred to in Agency Multicultural Plans (Australian Government, 2013) ¹⁴

Meanwhile the Parliamentary Report argued a stronger line about the effects of the failure of policy to adequately support and communicate research that might help the migration settlement process to be more successful. In summary it concluded:

The reduction in national research capacity has had a significant impact on the ability of agencies to deliver, monitor and evaluate their efforts. The absence of qualitative research also hampered the work of the Committee. As such, rebuilding research capacity is a priority to ensure policy and programs are well informed, tailored and effective (Vamvakinou, 2013a:10).

One of the Committee's chapters focussed on research and multiculturalism, opening with the reflection that

The Committee heard from a number of sources about the challenge of accessing useful data across a whole range of issues. Advocates of research included academics of world standing, state government bodies, and even the Prime Minister's office, which complained that its Social Inclusion policy couldn't function effectively because data was so poor¹⁵. Submissions expressed concern about the decline in research capacity, especially qualitative research relating to immigration, cultural diversity, and settlement participation in employment outcomes. (Chap.7)

The Committee then detailed how the Director of the Community Development Division of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and the Director of the Australian Population and Migration Research Centre had both expressed concern about the lack of research

¹⁵ Hundreds of detailed submissions (some of them racist and anti-immigrant) are at http://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/house_of_representatives_committees?url=mig/multiculturalism/report.htm at Appendices A and C.

capacity and findings, with the latter noting an undermining of research since the closure of the BIMPR. The Committee supported the Access and Equity Review recommendation, and included some additional ideas:

Recommendation 14 at 7.31 The Committee recommends increased collection, by the Australian Government, of accurate and up-to-date disaggregated data in order to identify trends in migration and multiculturalism, and to measure and address Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) related disadvantage.

Recommendation 15 at 7.32 The Committee recommends the establishment of a government funded, independent collaborative institute for excellence in research into multicultural affairs with functions similar to that of the former Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research.

The institute should have a statutory framework articulating key principles of multiculturalism, functions in research and advice to government, and a cross sectoral independent board.

This institute should actively engage with local communities, private business and non-government organisations and provide data for better informed policy.

The qualitative and quantitative research capabilities of the institute must enable up-to-date and easily accessible data and research analysis on social and multicultural trends.

More dedicated research into long-term migration trends occurring within Australia and the social effects of migration—such as the local impacts of migration on cultural diversity and social inclusion within Australian society—should be supported. The Committee particularly recommends an increased emphasis on qualitative data collection.

Recommendation 16 at 7.33 The Committee recommends the Department of Immigration and Citizenship collect data to support research to collect data on secondary migration in order to better drive services to where needs exist.

Recommendation 18 at 8.40 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government undertake greater qualitative and quantitative research on Australian expatriates, and diaspora communities settled in Australia to better inform Government policy. The Committee recommends that such research should be carried out by an independent research institute in collaboration with business councils, chambers of commerce and community groups. This research could be undertaken by the previously proposed independent collaborative institute for research into multicultural affairs.

The Committee's final report was released in March 2013 to an already heated pre-election context, where the financial profligacy of the Labor Government was a major target of the

Opposition's campaign. So while the Opposition members and senators on the Committee supported all these recommendations, they did so with this proviso:

Coalition Members and Senators support ... these recommendations in principle, but are mindful that the recommendations would involve the expenditure of new funds. Coalition Members and Senators consider that these recommendations ought only to be implemented if it can be undertaken within existing budgetary parameters (Vamvakinou, 2013a:249).

The Way Backward

The re-election of the Coalition in September 2013 brought with it the expected but uncompromising negative attitudes to social policy and research. Its Wastewatch Committee targeted social science and humanities grants by the Australian Research Council as 'not a good spend of Australia taxpayer money' (ABC, 2013). The ARC was to lose \$103 million over 4 years in the first Coalition Budget, with the Government declaring that it would mostly come from the humanities and social sciences, with money redirected to medical research. The ARC however has continued with its 2013-2016 Strategic Plan, which does not target the humanities and social sciences¹⁶.

It is worth considering the implications of such a move were it to succeed. The projected spend for new projects funded by the ARC for 2013 in 2012 provides some idea of the likely impact. In the Social, Behavioural and Economic Sciences panel, some \$43 million had been committed over three years, in Humanities and Creative Arts about \$32 million. On a rough basis that is about \$25 million p.a.; the proclaimed cuts would break down to about \$25 million p.a. That would mean, should the cuts eventuate after the rhetorical impact had lessened, that there would be no support for any new humanities or social science research. Given the comments in the reports above on the dire state of research within and sponsored by government, and the current dependence of scholars on the ARC for any research that addresses cultural diversity and social justice, the consequences would very be serious.

¹⁶ ARC website accessed 27 July 2014 http://www.arc.gov.au/about_arc/Goals_Discovery.htm, where the Objectives remain '1.1: Fund excellent, internationally competitive research by individuals and teams that will produce high quality outcomes 1.2: Build Australia's research capacity through supporting and facilitating research training and career opportunities for excellent Australian and international researchers 1.3: Support research in priority areas that will deliver national benefits 1.4: Enhance research capacity and outcomes through support for international collaboration'.

At the time of writing it is too early to assess changes in settlement and multicultural policy under the Coalition Government. The Australian Multicultural Council appointed by the ALP in 2011, and charged with advising on research, was extended until June 2014, and then all appointments lapsed. During its time in office it played little if any role in developing a research agenda. The reorganisation of Departments, that has separated immigration and settlement research from multicultural research, has once more created a false dichotomy and fragmented policy about how Australian society might keep abreast of what in reality remains a continuous process of immigrant adaptation and integration.

Multicultural policy reached its apogee in government commitment, rhetoric and support in the late 1980s and early 1990s, towards the end of the Hawke administration. Since that period the philosophy, the policy parameters, and their implementation have moved between more generous and less generous interpretations of their scope. The rhetoric has however been rather more volatile, subject to moments of inflammatory political opportunism, or driven by perceptions of short-term political benefit. While the building of a corpus of research intensified during the period of the ALP government, concluding with a significant investment in research around asylum seekers generated by the Report of the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers¹⁷, there are signs that new government-sponsored research has come to a halt.

In the period of the most recent ALP Government the Immigration wing of the former Department released some 24 commissioned studies, while only one, on Department of Immigration and Border Protection user satisfaction, seems to have been released since the 2013 September election. Unfortunately the Department of Social Services, now responsible for settlement and multicultural research, has restructured its publications page on the Web so that it is impossible to easily distinguish between commissioned research outcomes, in-house information pamphlets, and application forms – all get captured on the Publications page¹⁸. This specifically obscurantist tactic will reduce the value of the previous research and may well ensure its use is limited.

¹⁷ *Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers* website at <http://expertpanelonasylumseekers.dpnc.gov.au/>

¹⁸ See web site at <http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/publications>. The DIBP Irregular Migration Research Program had one significant iteration in 2013, with the small grants funding halted by the incoming Government – see <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/research/irregular-migration-research/>.

Drawing together the past and present of research on cultural diversity under Governments of all political colours in Australia, one might well conclude that this occasionally tense but in general productive relationship has served Australia fairly well. When research is rich and diverse in terms of topics, disciplines and methodologies, so public debate from the professional/technical to the popular and demotic has been enriched with data, and stimulated by the surfacing of difficult but nuanced questions. When research is suppressed and left as a residual activity on the edge of academic engagement, then the national debate becomes halting, driven by innuendo, momentary debates fed by inter-group flare-ups, and poorly articulated questions of either policy or practice.

There is a very real sense in which scholars have both a responsibility and an obligation to illuminate the value that research necessarily plays in shaping public debate, and in hardening the logics that underpin public policy. Surely some of such an imperative can be seen as self-serving, since the research field grows as resources are contributed. Yet it is also clear that when research shrinks and questions are no longer asked, or investigated with rigour and seriousness, then the society as a whole suffers. Evidence-based debate is replaced by anecdote and prejudice; difficult questions of inter-group relations, discrimination, opportunity and marginalisation, not only slide under the radar, but also allow real unease to fester and perhaps turn to violence and conflict, as took place in Cronulla in December 2005 in an atmosphere of political denial during a government-fostered research drought¹⁹.

In the mid-nineteenth century in the USA a nativist anti-immigrant party appeared for a short period. It was known as the 'Know Nothing Movement'. If I may be allowed to make a comment, 'shades of back to the future'.

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¹⁹ The events are discussed in the award-winning SBS-Northern Pictures online documentary (2014) *Cronulla Riots: the day that shocked the nation*, at <http://www.sbs.com.au/cronullariots/>.

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