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## The role of social science in the construction of ethnic minorities in Australia

### Abstract

Paper for the Conference "Der Beitrag der Wissenschaften zur Konstitution ethnischer Minderheiten", Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Forschung, Universität Bielefeld, 13-16 September 1987.



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The Role of Social  
Science in the  
Construction of Ethnic  
Minorities in Australia  
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# THE ROLE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF ETHNIC MINORITIES IN AUSTRALIA

Stephen Castles

Paper for the Conference  
"Der Beitrag der Wissenschaften zur Konstitution ethnischer Minderheiten"  
Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Forschung  
Universität Bielefeld  
13-16 September 1987

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Scientific discourse in civil society not only interprets reality, it also helps to modify and recreate reality. To say this immediately raises the ancient philosophical problem: what (if anything) is reality, and how do we know? From its very beginnings, social science has found it necessary to confront this problem. Answers have ranged from Durkheim's precept that "social facts" should be treated as "things", to Popper's resigned conclusion that we can verify nothing, but must merely aim to constantly falsify what we think we know.

This is not the place for a treatise on the sociology of knowledge. That discipline is fraught with problems, not the least of which is the issue of distinguishing between the sociology of knowledge itself and the methodology of the social sciences. In one of the most important contemporary works in the area, Berger and Luckmann assert that:

To include epistemological questions concerning the validity of sociological knowledge in the sociology of knowledge is like trying to push a bus in which one is riding.<sup>2</sup>

The simile is appealing, but we must remember that it is extremely difficult to draw clear distinction between different types of human knowledge. If, as Berger and Luckmann say "man (!) produces reality and therefore himself", this is done in a variety of discourses, which affect each other. The "common sense" of the "person on the street" both influences and is influenced by the speeches of the politicians, the policies of the state, the analyses of the social scientists and the popularisations of the media. Why should we treat the discourse of social science differently from the others? Of course, we are part of it, but we are part of the other social processes which create reality too.

Social science creates reality in a dual sense: first, by interpreting social phenomena in the processes of research and teaching, we produce and transmit knowledge, which helps shape people's consciousness and influences their actions. Secondly, and more directly, as social science is a conscious element in the reproduction of civil society, our discourse becomes part of the process of

creation of ideologies, policies and institutions. In turn, these help to decide what we will analyse, what theoretical and methodological tools we will use, what our findings are, and how they will be used.

There is no clear distinction between social scientific, political and popular thought, except perhaps with regard to the institutional frameworks in which they occur. That becomes clear when our objects of research and findings are politically controversial - but then that is the rule rather than the exception. Nowhere is that clearer than in the interlinked areas of racism, immigration and ethnic relations. The creation of the nation is one of the central concerns of the state in capitalist societies.<sup>3</sup> That involves drawing boundaries, both in the sense of deciding who belongs to the collectivity (immigration and citizenship laws), and in the sense of regulating the interaction of different sections of the population (race relations and ethnic affairs policies). This applies in all modern nations, but is particularly evident in settler colonies, where nation-building has been based on expropriation of indigenous peoples and the immigration of peoples from a variety of sending countries. The "classical immigration countries" of the New World (the USA, Canada, parts of Latin America, Australia) have had to put considerable intellectual resources into the development of ideologies, laws and policies concerned with colonisation, genocide, dispossession, immigration, race relations and ethnic affairs. The discourses for doing this have variously been named philosophy, religion, law, race science, and - today - social science (with its sub-branches of economics, demography, political science, sociology, geography, education, psychology, etc.)

In Australia, the state has played a central role in the regulation of immigration, the management of racial/ethnic divisions, and, most recently, in the construction of ethnic pluralism. Academics in Australia appear to be peculiarly close to government. There is a high degree of cooption of academics into governmental review boards, advisory committees and the like. The frequency of such points of contact between bureaucracy and academia casts doubts on the possibility of any critical distance. On the other hand this closeness does mean that academics in Australia cannot altogether withdraw

into the ivory tower. Our analyses do affect policies, and we cannot wash our hands of this. As we shall see, social science discourse in immigration, race relations and ethnicity have been closely related to policy developments.

This paper is an attempt to review current debates on the sociology of migration and ethnic relations in Australia. Main positions include:

- the culturalist celebration of ethnic pluralism
- the assimilationist emphasis on the need for a unitary culture and value system
- the insistence on the absence of social structure by stratificationist sociology and neo-classical economics
- a neo-Weberian focus on ethnicity as one status system among others
- the political economy of ethnic/racial divisions as one aspect of the social structure of late capitalism
- feminist emphasis on the significance of patriarchy in both ethnic and class relations.

The various discourses all focus on the official policy of multiculturalism, which has been in force since the mid-1970s, and its implications in various fields (welfare, education, immigration policy, electoral politics, labour market policy, etc). This is not the place to examine the theoretical foundations of these different sociological approaches. But it is necessary to look very briefly at the historical development, which have given rise to multiculturalism, before examining current sociological debates.

## **2. The Construction of Racial and Ethnic Divisions up to 1945**

Racial and ethnic divisions have played a central role in the development of Australian society since colonisation in 1788. Only about 1 per cent of the current population of 16 million are classified as descendants of the Aboriginal inhabitants; the other 99 per cent are migrants or their descendants. Around 3 million residents (21 per cent of the population) were born overseas. About the same number were born in Australia, with at least one overseas-

born parent. The marking out of the boundaries of the nation has involved both racist exclusionism, and differential forms of incorporation.

Exclusionism applied first with regard to the Aborigines. The legal doctrine of British colonialism denied that Aborigines had occupied the land. They were classified as savages, without recognisable forms of society, state or laws.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, ideas on progress and rationality provided a justification for European expansionism: technological superiority was taken as proof of a higher level of civilisation. This justified pushing indigenous peoples aside, taking their land, and destroying the material basis of their existence. The Aborigines were not for the most part incorporated into colonial capitalism as workers. Race "science" asserted that Aborigines were inferior to the white "nordic" settlers, and would eventually "die out."<sup>5</sup> In the meantime they were to be controlled by police and missionaries, and kept servile through provision of rations and religious indoctrination. Later on, the policy shifted to one of compulsory assimilation. Racism against Aborigines, present throughout Australian history, has helped shape attitudes towards migrants of non-European background.

The debates on immigration to Australia, which have been a constant political issue since 1788, are too complex to be summarised here.<sup>6</sup> Employers looked in turn to various forms of cheap labour: convicts, British paupers brought over on assisted passages, Irish migrants driven by famine, Chinese coolies, Indian workers, South Pacific Islanders, indentured workers from Italy. The majority of 19th century migrants came from Britain. Australian workers tended to oppose assisted passage schemes, and to call for limitations to immigration, to protect their conditions. But once in Australia, British workers soon became incorporated into the developing class structure, often joining the chorus of protest at further entries. All other ethnic groups met with racism of varying intensity. Anti-Irish feeling - strong within the British working class - was a powerful factor in Australia, but led to discrimination and local conflicts rather than to exclusionism. Italians and other Southern Europeans encountered considerable hostility, often leading to demands for



immigration bans, or measures of legal discrimination, such as prohibitions on land ownership, or on working in certain industries. As late as the 1930s there were "anti-Dago riots".

But racism focussed above all on non-Europeans. Chinese migrants entering Australia at the time of the mid-19th century gold rushes encountered hostility, discrimination and violence. Later, racist propaganda was extended to cover the recruitment of Indians and South Pacific Islanders by Queensland plantation owners. The demand for a "White Australia" became a rallying cry of the early labour movement, along with the call for democracy and protection of labour. One of the first acts of the new Commonwealth Parliament in 1901 was to pass the Immigration Restriction Act., establishing the White Australia Policy, which was to remain in force until 1967.

Immigration was smaller in volume between the 1890s and the Second World War. The relatively small number of non-British migrants (Italians, Greeks and Yugoslavs in the 1920s, Jewish refugees from 1938) encountered great hostility. This was the period in which the Australian population seemed to be moving towards greater homogeneity than ever before (or since). By the end of the period, 90 per cent of the population were Australia born, and most of the rest from Britain. It was also the period in which a specific Australian identity was being created, as a specific part of the British "race", living within the British Empire. Richard White has vividly documented the changing attempts to define the "Australian type": the muscular sunburnt bushman, the "Coming Man", whose self-reliance and physical prowess would renew the British race, the Digger who proved himself at Gallipoli, the Bondi lifesaver.<sup>7</sup> This stereotype ignored the contradictions of "British ethnicity" (particularly between the English and the Irish), it was sexist, and - above all - it was racist.

The racist construction of Australian identity had three elements (all of which are to be found equally in popular, in political and in social scientific discourses):

The first was economic. Workers, farmers and small businesspeople feared the competition of Asians and Southern European, because they

would work hard for wages that "an Englishman could not live on". The impoverishment of migrants from underdeveloped areas - the result of imperialism and the uneven development of capitalism - was transmuted into a belief in the "higher level of civilisation" of the British and Northern Europeans. Migration might lead to a slave economy or a plantation system, rather than a workers' paradise for free labour. The argument had a core of rationality: employers did intend to use migrants as wage-cutters and strike-breakers. But this was transformed into a general form of racism, which dominated working-class politics until 1945.<sup>8</sup> Thus we find the paradox that racist policies could be justified in terms of progress and social justice, as in Prime Minister Deakin's speech of 1903:

(The White Australia policy) means the maintenance of social conditions under which men and women can live decently. It means equal laws and opportunities for all... It means social justice and fair wages. The White Australia policy goes down to the roots of national existence, the roots from which the British social system has sprung.<sup>9</sup>

The second was an anthropological or eugenic argument, based on the biologically-based "race science". Lyng's book **Non-Britishers in Australia**, provides a graphic example of this, and shows how long this discourse prevailed, being published as late as 1935. The world was divided up into the white race, the yellow race, the brown race and the black race, all of whom had quite different physical, psychological and social characteristics. The white race, in turn, embraced three sub-races: the Nordic or Aryan race, the Alpines and the Mediterraneans. The Nordic were destined to dominate all others because of "their restless, creative energy" in which they surpassed "all other branches of mankind". Races could be distinguished by measuring their skulls, among other things. Racial domination by the superior race was inevitable and desirable, because it brought about progress. But the superior race could be corrupted and undermined through mixing with the inferior ones.<sup>10</sup>

The third was the political-ideological concept of the need for racial unity (today we would say ethnic homogeneity) for the process of nation-building. "The unity of Australia was nothing if it did not

imply a united race" said Deakin in Parliament in 1901.<sup>11</sup> The debates of the time were full of this sentiment, and the crucial need for homogeneity became an unquestionable principle for most Australians. In her careful and sober account of **The History of the White Australia Policy**, published in 1926, Myra Willard asserted that the policy was essential for a variety of economic, social and political reasons and that:

Because of the vital nature of the policy which Australians believe to be necessary for the preservation of their nationality, all classes, all creeds, all parties, united for its adoption.<sup>12</sup>

When Australia embarked on its post-war immigration program, there is little doubt that most Australians still shared Willard's view that "racial unity is essential to national unity and consequently, to national progress and usefulness".<sup>13</sup>

### **3. From Racism to Pluralism**

The shift from open racism to an official policy of pluralism in less than 30 years required a major intellectual effort to redefine the nation and its ethnic boundaries. The background to this development is the post-war immigration program, which has changed the ethnic composition and social structure of the Australian population. There is no room for a description of this massive state-controlled recruitment program here.<sup>14</sup> Suffice to say that the Australian population has more than doubled since 1945, and that about half this increase has been due to immigration. About 40 per cent of the population are immigrants or their children, and over half of these come from non-English speaking countries. The population is now one of the most diverse in the world, with about 100 ethnic groups, speaking some 80 immigrant languages and 150 aboriginal languages.

The immigration program was economically motivated: the long boom throughout the capitalist world, together with the strengthening of Australian industry in the War, provided the conditions for economic growth and for creating a national manufacturing sector. This led to a need for large supplies of additional labour. In view of traditional working-class suspicion of immigration, the ALP Government needed an ideological legitimation for the program. This was found in the appealing slogan of "populate or perish", which played on wartime

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fears of invasion, resurrecting the slogan of the "yellow peril". The empty country had to be filled, otherwise the Asians would take it away. Immigration could thus be legitimated within the racist construction of the nation.

But that meant the migrants had to fit into the British-Australian "national type". At first, Immigration Minister Calwell asserted that there would be 10 British migrants for each non-Briton. When it became evident that this was unrealistic, the solution was found in policy of assimilationism: "New Australians" were recruited from Eastern Europe (via the displaced persons camps), then Northern Europe, later from Southern Europe, but it was claimed that they could and would rapidly become assimilated into the British-Australian way of life.

The task for social scientists was obvious: they had to work out what potential migrant groups could be regarded as "assimilable", and what policies and institutional frameworks were needed for assimilation. The Australian Institute of Political Science held a Summer School to discuss population policies in 1946. The conclusions were pessimistic: speakers saw considerable problems in "filling Australia's empty cradles".<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, migrants of "assimilable types" would be hard to come by: the British were unwilling to come, there were too few Scandinavians, Central Europeans were likely to be secret Nazis, Jews and Southern Europeans were unacceptable (because of popular antisemitism and anti-Italian feeling), and people from the "human ant-hill" of Asia were totally unwelcome.<sup>16</sup> Only one speaker predicted the end of the White Australia policy.<sup>17</sup>

The Secretary of the Department of Immigration established a close working relationship with social scientists at the Australian National University and elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> Demographers like W.D. Borrie and Charles Price, and psychologists like Ronald Taft and Alan Richardson were influential in devising policies for assimilation. Dispersal of immigrants was recommended, to prevent ethnic segregation. "New Australians" should learn English quickly, and use of their native languages was to be discouraged. Immigrants were to

be regarded as permanent settlers, and encouraged to bring in their families and take Australian citizenship. School had a key role to play in ensuring that the second generation would have no culture but that of Anglo-Australia. The psychologists devised "scales of Australianism" to allow individual measurement of the absorption process.<sup>19</sup> Australia, like W. Europe, needed "factory fodder", but the systems of incorporation into class relations were very different: the European method was recruitment of temporary foreign "guestworkers; the Australian that of compulsory assimilation.

When the Australian Institute of Political Science held a further Summer School on the issue in 1953, the tone had changed considerably. The then Minister of Immigration, Holt, and his predecessor, Calwell, held speeches celebrating the achievements of the immigration program. Academics like Borrie and the economist Karmel still had their doubts about the economic benefits, but representatives of heavy industry were eager to emphasise the decisive role of New Australians in the expansion of the steelworks of Port Kembla, Newcastle and Whyalla. For the first time, research findings on the development of immigrant organisations were reported, casting doubt on both the possibility and the desirability of assimilation.<sup>20</sup>

By the 1960s the basic contradiction of assimilationism was becoming obvious: it was based on the idea that migrants would be dispersed, both socially and geographically, and become submerged in the Anglo-Australian majority. But the New Australians were needed as manual workers for manufacturing. The operation of the labour and housing markets led to high degrees of concentration in inner-city manufacturing areas. Together with the xenophobic climate, this partial segregation provided the pre-conditions for community formation, based on national groupings. Ethnic businesses, schools, churches, political organisations, social and cultural groups and media developed. The various groups developed their own infrastructures and petit-bourgeois leaderships. At the same time, educational and welfare professionals were beginning to see the situation in terms of a problem of migrant deprivation or disadvantage.

A new generation of social scientists began to analyse the situation, basing their approach on the debate on ethnic identity, pluralism and the inadequacy of the melting pot model which was gaining momentum in the USA, as well as on debates on "race relations" in the UK. James Jupp's **Arrivals and Departures** was significant in relating immigration and settlement to wider issues of social structure in Australia.<sup>21</sup> Jean Martin analysed the inability of Australian institutions (in education, health care, etc.) to get to grips with the realities of the "migrant presence".<sup>22</sup> Her work laid the foundation for the discussion on "ethnic rights" and "migrant disadvantage" which became significant within welfare and community organisations in the late 1960s and the 1970s. At the same time Jerzy Zubrzycki, at the Australian National University, was developing an approach which emphasised the importance of the ethnic group, while linking cultural diversity with the problem of securing overall social cohesion (of which more below). The social science discourse was moving from assimilation to integration: migrants were to be seen not as individuals to be absorbed, but as groups who were distinctive in socio-economic and/or cultural terms, and who would remain so for a transitional period.

By the end of the 1960s, policies were being re-shaped in this direction. Other major changes were soon to undermine the old racist consensus:

- the White Australia policy was abandoned in 1966. This was a formal gesture, relating to Australia's poor international image, but it created the legal conditions for large-scale entries of Asians a decade later.
- A referendum held in 1967 granted citizenship to Aborigines. Assimilationism had clearly failed here too. An apartheid system was no longer acceptable. Again a token change opened the gates for more important moves, such as the Land Rights campaign of the 1970s.<sup>23</sup>
- Increasing international competition for migrant labour until the early 1970s led the Australian Government to extend recruitment to the Middle East. In the late 1970s, refugees were admitted from Indo-China. In the 1980s, Asian immigration grew both through

entries of skilled workers, and family reunion. The result was the growth of "visible minorities" - Australia was not only multi-ethnic but increasingly multi-racial.

- The recession of the mid-1970s led to new debates on the merits of immigration. Emphasis shifted from labour migration to refugees and family reunion, although business circles are currently demanding increased recruitment of workers again.

The debates around the introduction of the policy of multiculturalism cannot be dealt with in detail here.<sup>24</sup> When the Whitlam ALP Government was elected in 1972, after 23 years of conservative rule, it cut migrant intakes drastically, while defining migrant welfare and education as important parts of a general program of social reform. By setting up Migrant Task Forces, and building mechanisms for public participation into the Australian Assistance Plan, the Whitlam Government encouraged the further politicisation of migrant issues. Although Immigration Minister Grassby spoke in terms of "a multi-cultural family of the nation" policies were conceived in laborite social welfare terms, rather than in a culturalist framework. The policy changes in this period reflected both the onset of the recession, and the shift from primary to chain migration - there are some parallels with Western Europe here.

Under the Fraser Liberal-Country Party Government, which ruled from 1977 to 1983, priority shifted from social policy to ideology. Its advisory body, The Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs, strongly influenced by the culturalist approach of Jerzy Zubrzycki, now Professor of Sociology at the Australian National University, laid down four principles to guide policy: social cohesion, cultural identity, equality of opportunity and access, and equal responsibility for, commitment to, and participation in society.<sup>25</sup> The **Galbally Report** of 1978 called for a re-alignment of social policies towards migrants. Although the Report stated that migrants should have access to the same government services as other citizens, a need was seen for "ethno-specific" services, at least for an interim period. Some were to be provided by the state, such as English as a Second Language Teaching, the Special Broadcasting Service, the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs. Other needs

were to be covered through grants-in-aid to ethnic organisations.<sup>26</sup> As Andrew Jakubowicz has pointed out, this ethnic group model for understanding the position of migrants and for delivering welfare services was designed to strengthen traditionalist ethnic leaderships. Their conservative and often sexist attitudes were seen as a stabilising factor, with the potential to contain potential class conflicts. Such strategies of cooption and control on ethnic lines are to be found in countries like the USA and Britain<sup>27</sup>, and most recently in West Germany too.

#### **4. Conditions of Production for Sociological Knowledge**

Before looking at the competing social science approaches, it is necessary to remind ourselves of the conditions of production of scientific knowledge in Australia. Nearly all work in the area is produced in two interrelated hierarchical systems: the governmental bureaucracies (state and Commonwealth), and the institutions of higher education (universities, colleges of advanced education, colleges of technology). Both systems are complex, with a variety of policy-making, research, service-delivery, control and monitoring bodies. The reports, research findings, papers, articles, books, lectures, seminars, etc produced in these bureaucracies have a hegemonic character. People involved in practical work in industry, welfare, education, health care and so on, may challenge the knowledge produced by the government and higher education, but they can only gain a hearing if they can get support from groups with influence within these institutional frameworks. This is because it is the major bureaucracies which have the power to define what is knowledge (and thus what is reality). In government, defining power is exercised through policies, personnel practices, bureaucratic chains of command and financial control. Higher education appears at first sight somewhat more democratic. In fact the system of appointment, promotion, tenure, teaching, exams and research fund allocation make for conformity. Knowledge (and reality) are defined by the system of "peer review", which controls publication of books and articles, as well as the distribution of research funds (e.g. through the Australian Research Grants Scheme). Admission to the academic elite is regulated by tortuous rituals (such as the doctoral thesis), which emphasise the reproduction of codified wisdom, rather



than innovation. The ideological concept of the "academic community" provides a mantle of common endeavour and objectivity for what is, in reality, an authoritarian enterprise.

There is a growing third system for the production of knowledge: that of the private consultant firms. These compete with university researchers for research contracts from government and the private sector. Many of their staff come from academic or government jobs, using their old contacts to obtain and carry out work. Such consultants have to work at a profit, without the basic facilities (libraries, computing facilities, disciplinary spread) that universities enjoy. They emphasise the clearly delimited social survey, which produces quantitative results. Private consultants are extremely dependent on the favourable reception of their findings by government, and are highly unlikely to produce critical work.

How can "new" knowledge ever appear in such systems? It is possible firstly because complete and static conformity would negate the role of the social sciences for policy-making. If analysis is blind to the real contradictions of social structure, they will be allowed to develop to the point where dramatic and threatening changes can no longer be avoided. Crisis management requires flexibility, the ability to head off dangerous developments, and to co-opt potential dissident leaderships. The battle of the paradigms may be a storm in a teacup, but it provides options and alternatives for the social engineering of powerful bureaucracies. Secondly, neither the state nor the institutions of higher education are monolithic. Of necessity, they include agencies with sometimes contradictory and competing roles, as well as people with varying political and social views. Critiques of policies and structures, and ideas for change developed by social movements, do spill over into the academic "community". This heterogeneity is the precondition for a scientific discourse. It should not blind us, however, to the hierarchical and intrinsically conservative structure of the academic establishment.

In Australia, a major focus for the interaction of academic and state bureaucracies have been the commissions or advisory bodies, linking academics, business people, trade unionists, community leaders and

the like. In the multicultural area, the most important such bodies are the four state ethnic affairs commissions (in Victoria, NSW, SA and WA), along with the recently appointed Commonwealth Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs and the Office of Multicultural Affairs in the Department of the Prime Minister. Many government departments and agencies have their own advisory bodies. Their role is ambiguous: on the one hand they appear as instruments of democratic consultation (though only with people selected by the government as transmission belts for public opinion); on the other, they function as a fig-leaf to legitimate bureaucratic control of social contradictions. Academics play a major role in such institutions, both as members, and as research and policy consultants. It is very hard to play a significant role in sociological discourses without getting drawn into such gilded cages. And, after all, most of us want the opportunities and privileges that such co-option brings.

##### **5. Social Science and Multiculturalism<sup>28</sup>**

In the last fifteen years, multiculturalism has become a widely (though not universally) accepted ideological framework for the examination of the position of migrants and ethnic minorities in Australia; indeed current attempts to redefine Australian identity (for instance through the 1988 Bicentenary celebrations) are based on multiculturalism as a theorem for a poly-ethnic nationalism. This apparent consensus is only possible because of the several contradictory concepts of multiculturalism, which exist side-by-side, both in politics and social science.<sup>29</sup>

This section presents a highly condensed summary of the various approaches to the study of immigration, race relations and ethnic affairs in Australia. A rigid separation between the contributions of sociology and of other disciplines - such as education, linguistics, economics, political science, geography, psychology, law, history - is impossible. Inevitably, the classification of a wide range of analyses from varying theoretical and disciplinary perspectives into a number of categories is arbitrary. Other classifications would be possible, and would also have their merits.

### a) Culturalism

Probably the most influential approach in the last decade has been the culturalist construction of the migrant group in terms of ethnicity. Its most prominent representatives have been J. Zubrzycki at the Australian National University and J. Smolicz in Adelaide. This approach has been highly influential because its emphasis on the interrelationship between cultural diversity (seen in ethnic terms) and cohesiveness of society as a whole, has closely matched the need for facing up to the problem of the polyethnic nation. The heyday of the approach was in the Fraser period (1977-83), but it remains significant today, particularly in education, and in that new sector of the state popularly known as "the ethnic affairs industry". The conceptualisation of social interaction in terms of ethnicity - rather than class or gender - corresponds with the interests of professionals in the ethnic affairs areas, as well as of leadership groups within ethnic communities.

One of the most influential statements of the culturalist view of the world is the 1982 policy document **Multiculturalism for all Australians**,<sup>30</sup> which was strongly influenced by Zubrzycki. It calls for acceptance of ethnic diversity as a long-term and legitimate feature of Australian society, which is likely to be maintained for generations. A central problem of the approach is the tension between cultural pluralism and the cohesiveness of society as a whole. In a recent statement on the topic, Zubrzycki poses the problem as follows:

Can multiculturalism as an ideology provide a basis for a new kind of universalism which legitimises the incorporation of ethnic diversity in the general structure of society? Underlying this wider issue is an even more fundamental question: what is the meaning of multiculturalism as a set of universal social values?<sup>31</sup>

Cultural pluralism, for Zubrzycki is based on the fact that:

...we tend to define our identity not just in terms of our family relationships but also in terms of those other particularistic values that may often derive from ethnic ties. This is the phenomenon of primordial bonds...<sup>32</sup>

Zubrzycki aligns himself expressly with the views of US theorists like Geertz, Novak and Greeley, who attribute ethnicity to a "natural -

some would say spritual - affinity".<sup>33</sup> Ethnicity is something natural and pre-social in this concept. That, presumably, is why it is seen as transcending class and gender, allowing theorists of cultural pluralism to virtually ignore these dimensions of social structure.

How is this natural ethnicity to be reconciled with the needs of social cohesion, in societies where migration brings together a variety of ethnic groups? Both Zubrzycki and Smolicz are acutely aware of this problem. The former points to the danger of pluralism developing into a system of "separatism", in which ethnic groups establish their own institutional structures in competition to those of of society as a whole. Smolicz puts the problem in similar terms: posing three possible options: separatism, "residual multiculturalism" (in which "minority cultures are reduced to a subcultural status on the lines of other subcultural variations within the majority group", through the loss of their native tongue), and "stable multiculturalism" (meaning maintenance of language and culture of ethnic groups, but sharing of "overarching values" and institutions).<sup>34</sup> This concept of "overarching values" is central:

In a society composed of more than one ethnic group, there can exist a variety of relationships between the dominant (frequently the majority) group and the minorities. If such a society is governed by a degree of concensus, rather than coercion, there must have evolved a set of shared values that overarch the various ethnic groups. Within such a cultural "umbrella", ethnic groups may retain certain core values, such as a distinct language, family tradition or religion.<sup>35</sup>

As Andrew Jakubowicz has pointed out, this focus on the shared values of cultural groups, and their positive or negative functions in maintaining social order in culturally diverse societies, harkens back to Durkheim's concern for the role of shared value systems in maintaining social solidarity.<sup>36</sup>

The culturalist approach sees society as being made up of parallel ethnic groups with coherent, homogeneous and intact cultures. Culture is seen not a dynamic process of group interaction with the social world, but reduced and trivialised to static forms of folklore,

tradition, costume and cuisine. Language is seen as central in maintaining identity, but tends to be abstracted from its social meaning in a particular society. The existence of regional, class and gender differences within national cultures (including that of the majority group) are largely ignored. Or if they are taken into account, it is not to understand class and power relations within the migratory process, but rather to further trivialise the culture concept, by breaking it down into an infinite galaxy of small "sub-cultural" groups.

Culturalism has little to say on the tension between the legitimacy of cultural maintenance, and the role of culture in regulating access to economic resources and political power in a class society. Proficiency in language, use of elaborated codes, manipulation of cultural symbols determine entry to upper-level occupational positions, both directly and indirectly (through their role in the allocation of education credentials). The role of culture with regard to the transference of class position from one generation to the next has been a major sociological theme for many years. The problem is far more acute when ethnic and class culture interact. The state can legislate for "access and equity" in its own services, but it cannot prevent cultural markers being used in society as a whole. Policies of cultural pluralism may actually be detrimental to the equal opportunity of migrant workers' children: they become locked into what are seen as inferior sub-cultures by those in power, and this blocks social mobility. Proponents of culturalism are aware of this problem: Zubzycki, for example accepts the critique that multicultural education may be reduced to providing a second-rate "Mickey-Mouse curriculum" for "ethnic" children.<sup>37</sup> He and Smolicz see the answer in a policy which avoids "separatism", by embracing all children in a universalistic education system, while taking account of pluralism through the teaching of community languages and cultural values to all children.

But how are community languages to change the situation, if they are not taken seriously by those with political and economic power, and when they do not confer benefits for students' life chances? Culturalists cannot address this issue, because their theoretical

framework (in particular the assumption of relatively homogenous and static national cultures) makes it impossible to address the issue of the relationship between culture, class and power. The central category of culturalism - ethnicity - is based on assumptions about "human nature", and is not derived from an analysis of the historical development of capitalist societies. Thus the category can tell us little about change and conflict in contemporary society.

#### b) Neo-Assimilationism

In this category, I am summarising a number of theories, which are in many ways diverse, but appear to me to share a common implication: the desirability of a return to assimilationist policies. Such approaches are most common in psychology, education and sociology, though they are also to be found in economics and history.

Some recent work on education attempts to explode the "myth of ethnic disadvantage". Research by Birrell and Seitz<sup>38</sup>, Bullivant<sup>39</sup>, Williams<sup>40</sup> and Mistilis<sup>41</sup> presents evidence, which, the authors claim, demonstrates that children of non-English speaking background are doing as well in education as other Australians. These writers also point to the evidence of the 1981 Census, which appears to show marked inter-generational mobility of ethnic groups of Southern European origin. Bullivant goes so far as to claim that working class "ethnic" children are doing far better than working-class Anglo-Australian children, whom he names the "new self-deprived". The explanation he advances is that working-class Australians lack the right attitudes towards work, risk-taking and education, and their family discipline is too weak. By comparison, most migrants (particularly Asian) are successful because of their "ethnic motivation" and strong family discipline. Birrell and Seitz share this view, and revive arguments reminiscent of the "culture of poverty" approach, or Moynihan's argument on the "pathological black family" as the cause of black poverty in the US<sup>42</sup>

This approach has won considerable popularity within the educational bureaucracy, for it provides a rationale for cutting special education programs for migrant children. At a time when business is calling for increased immigration for economic reasons, while economic

constraints make the provision of increased post-arrival services difficult, the argument of the "myth of ethnic disadvantage" falls on fertile ground: you can have the migrants, without any need for additional social expenditure. In a recent paper, Birrell has attacked all multicultural education, except English classes for migrant children, as unnecessary, wasteful and educationally harmful. His attack was focussed in particular on the recently announced National Languages Policy<sup>43</sup>, which is designed to make available teaching of languages other than English for most Australian children.<sup>44</sup>

The "neo-assimilationists" share the critique of "culturalism", which we mentioned above. They argue that pluralist education actually disadvantages migrant children, by binding them to second-class educational provisions, and maintaining cultures which do not help to secure social mobility within Australia. This argument has also been put by psychologists, working in the tradition of Taft and Richardson (see above), and seeking to assess migrants' success in adapting, by looking at their attitudes, values etc. They argue that maintenance of practices of socialisation, sex role determination and the like from certain countries of origin (such as the Lebanon) will disadvantage children.<sup>45</sup> The pluralist affirmation of the equality of different cultures is thus rejected - some are more suitable for success in Australia than others.<sup>46</sup>

In this paradigm there is no questioning of the cultural norms of the dominant male-orientated white Anglo middle class. Migrants are seen essentially as deviant, and in need of adaptation. Behind the apparent concern with equality of opportunity, is a demand for a return to cultural homogeneity and hence to assimilationism of the type prevailing up to the 1960s. Though seldom expressed overtly, the approach seems based on the belief that a nation can only function on the basis of a hegemonic (and eventually monistic) ethnic group. It is no coincidence that this critique of multiculturalism gained ground after the growth of Asian immigration and the "Blainey Debate" of 1984. The historian Blainey argued that it was not immigration in itself that was harmful, but Asian immigration, because Asians were not assimilable<sup>47</sup>. At the time, Birrell echoed this approach, adding the curious twist that Asians were particularly harmful to the

Australian environment and way of life. It was such arguments that fuelled the upsurge of populist racism, vocalised by such figures as Bruce Ruxton, leader of the Victorian Returned Servicemen's League, in the mid-1980s.

Once the discussion of "assimilable types" is reopened, there is a whole range of possibilities. Blainey and Birrell may regard Asians as too different to assimilate. Others - such as Bullivant, and the new right critic of multi-culturalism, Lauchlan Chipman, see Asians as perfect migrants, because they work hard, value education, discipline their children, accept private enterprise values, and keep themselves to themselves. In this variant, economic assimilability is the criterion, and cultural difference is seen as insignificant. There are similarities here to the next group of theories, in which the functioning of the market becomes the sole arbiter of the migratory process.

### c) Stratificationism and Neo-Classical Economics

A growing body of sociological research in Australia examines the social status of migrants, in comparison with that of native-born Australians. Status is operationalised into variables such as occupation, labour force participation, earnings, and occupational mobility, and measured empirically, using large-scale survey data, and Census statistics. A key method is the use of multi-variate analysis to control for the influence of specific factors (such as education, training, pre-migration work experience) on social status and mobility. In sociology this empiricist approach has been developed most notably by a group based at the Australian National University, including researchers such as Broom, Jones, McAllister, Kelly and Evans. It has been closely linked with the neo-classical human capital approach in economics, which has been centered at the Bureau of Labour Market Studies and the Centre for Economic Policy Research at the ANU, and the National Institute for Labour Studies at Flinders University. I will not deal in detail with the methods, findings and theoretical problems of this paradigm here.<sup>48</sup>

In brief, the answer of these researchers to the question of the specific problems of ethnic minorities in Australian society, is that



there are no ethnic minorities and no specific problems.. The conclusions arrived at, using highly aggregated data, are that migrants have no major disadvantages concerning work, income and social position. They merely have short-term adaptation problems which they quickly overcome. Moreover, there is a very high degree of inter-generational mobility.<sup>49</sup>

This sociology is firmly rooted in the positivist tradition of classifying only measurable "things" as "social facts". The primacy is on the instrument of measurement, which takes on the role of defining the object of investigation. Progress in the science is thus based on refinement of methods, rather than on advances in the conceptualisation of social phenomena, or better understanding of their interrelationships. This leads to problems, when better tools of measurement show that some of the confidently-advanced conclusions of the past have been wrong.<sup>50</sup>

In the area of migration and ethnic relations, the main problem lies in the operationalisation of ethnicity (using the surrogate of birthplace) as a point variable, to be included as a dummy variable in path analysis. This ignores the complexity of the ethnic background of the many migrant groups. Moreover, the correction away of differences of education, training, etc., in multivariate analysis, creates an abstract category of ethnicity, which has nothing to do with the historical character of migrant labour systems in contemporary capitalism.

The popularity of this approach with policy-makers is not hard to understand. It is unable to theorise or, indeed, even to perceive, the function of labour market segmentation based on ethnic/racial divisions and gender for the restructuring of the capitalist economy. The empiricist deconstruction of class and gender relations within the migratory process, reduces the function of the paradigm to that of an affirmative administrative science. Based on the liberal ideology of the "open society", this type of sociology provides findings to legitimate neo-assimilationism, and, above all, to justify government in doing nothing to combat structural barriers which disadvantage specific groups of migrants.

#### d) Neo-Weberian Approaches

By contrast to the preceding paradigms, the neo-Weberian school, as one of the major streams in contemporary sociological theory, does have a concept of the historical nature of ethnicity, and its links with other dimensions of economic and social power relations (above all class) in capitalist society. The theoretical basis for analysing ethnic relations in Australia is provided by a coherent body of thought on nationalism (e.g. the work of Gellner<sup>51</sup>), on the "new ethnicity" (above all Gordon,<sup>52</sup> Glazer, Moynihan and Bell in the USA<sup>53</sup>, Smith in the UK<sup>54</sup>), and the relation between race and class (Rex<sup>55</sup>, and several other researchers from the Centre for Research on Ethnic Relations at Warwick University).

The major themes of this school of thought are the development of ethnic identification and the conditions under which it is likely to mobilise social groups, the symbolic basis of ethnicity and the types of leaderships able to manipulate these symbols, the tension between ascribed and achieved status, and the interaction between ethnicity and class in determining social consciousness and life chances in industrial societies.<sup>56</sup>

As mentioned above, Jean Martin's work in the 1960s and 1970s concentrated on the inability of Australian political and social institutions to understand the reality of the situation of migrants, and the impact they were having on Australian society.<sup>57</sup> Her policy-orientated work highlighted problems of migrant disadvantage, and drew attention to institutional barriers which caused these. The development of multiculturalism owed much to her work. But she argued that multiculturalism, as a new ideology, was taking a form which ignored the structural implications of cultural pluralism for society as a whole.

Current neo-Weberian work on ethnicity presents critiques of assimilationist, Marxist and empiricist approaches, but it is sometimes hard to be sure of the school's own understanding of ethnicity, and the consequences to be drawn for Australian social

policy.<sup>58</sup> Starting from the point of view "that society is a system of knowledge", McCall, Burnley and Encel derive a definition:

Ethnicity is that form of named rhetorical distinctiveness that emphasises a transgenerational commonality of symbolic meaning, sustained and reinforced by recurring social action.<sup>59</sup>

Does this mean that ethnicity is simply a subjective construction? McCall, Burnley and Encel say that they "are not claiming that there is something out there, divorced from intersubjective reality, called 'ethnicity' that there is more of than in the past". But they vehemently attack Marie de Lepervanche's statement that there are no ethnics, but only ways of seeing ethnics, and state that "an ethny is a phenomenological reality, the constituents of which most resemble kinship". They appear to define "ethnies" as minorities, which have arisen through migration, or through conquest by colonising powers (the latter they call "Fourth World populations"). They add: "as we are concerned with power and its operation, we take ethnic to mean foreign or exclusion from the national definition of a country".<sup>60</sup>

This is somewhat different from most current social science usage in Australia, in which the majority is defined as an "ethnic" group too. The Weberian concept of "closure" can be taken to refer to the drawing of boundaries by a hegemonic group to maintain privileges, as well as to the use of ethnic group solidarity by minorities to gain privileges. But in other points, McCall, Burnley and Encel seem to be following this approach, particularly as applied by Glazer, Moynihan and Bell. They argue that ethnicity "uses powerful affective ties to achieve economic goals", and that ethnic elites aim to achieve welfare goals, to obtain places in the bureaucracy and to secure affirmative action programs for their groups. Certainly, McCall, Burnley and Encel reiterate Bell's argument about the significance of increasing state intervention in social and economic issues as a cause of ethnic mobilisation.<sup>61</sup>

In effect, these theorists see the ethnic group as a social construction, and yet as reality in terms of the social meaning it has for its members. The problem here is that this point of view seems to imply that you are ethnic if you feel that you are, but not if you don't. Since most people don't, at least most of the time, the salience of ethnicity as a category logically comparable with objectively based

ones such as class and gender becomes doubtful. How then can this theory react to multiculturalism, which is based on the idea that everyone is ethnic, and that this is a major factor in their social interaction?

One answer is that given by Birrell, who classifies ethnics as a "special interest"<sup>62</sup> manipulating political principles for their own ends: an alliance between ethnic intellectuals and professionals within the ethnic affairs sector fights for special privileges.<sup>63</sup> This use of Bell's concept of "ethnicity as a strategic choice" comes close to political polemic.

In his keynote address to the last AIMA Conference, Sol Encel also related his concept of ethnicity to current policy debates. He cited the Jewish and Catholic communities in Australia as cases of structural and cultural pluralism, and stated that it was too early to say whether post-war migrant groups would develop such institutional separatism. This seemed possible for some groups, such as Greeks and Arabs, but on the whole:

... the dominant form of accommodation between ethnic minorities and the Australian community at large has been under the rubric of multiculturalism, a term whose vagueness has had some unfortunate effects.<sup>64</sup>

However, he does nothing to clarify this vagueness. Encel states that the migrant women outworkers are the most exploited and powerless section of the Australian workforce; sex, class and ethnicity are all relevant, but none of them is reducible to each other, because they arise "from different aspects of the social process". This means that the debate about multiculturalism "is only marginally concerned with questions of exploitation and power", which leads Encel to repeatedly criticise social scientists who try to link the three dimensions of inequality in their analysis.

To sum up, the neo-Weberian approach certainly provides a corrective to primordialist ahistorical views of ethnicity. But its own construction of the ethnic group lacks clarity. The merit of such work lies in the emphasis of the role of economic interests in ethnic mobilisation, and in linking this to the growth in state control of economic and social resources. But the relationship between this and

the "affective bond" is far from clear. Elsewhere, neo-Weberian theory has emphasised the link between ethnic identification, language, education and the definition of the nation<sup>65</sup>. Australian exponents of the theory, like Encel have raised this issue, looking at historical models (e.g. in the Austro-Hungarian Empire). But neither he nor other neo-Weberians have provided any useful answers on what this could mean for Australia specifically, as a multi-ethnic society.<sup>66</sup>

#### e) The Political Economy of Migration and Ethnic Relations

This approach has its intellectual roots in the Marxist tradition of a science of society, which takes the mode of production as a starting point for understanding social structures and relationships. Racial/ethnic and gender divisions are analysed within the historical context of the uneven development of capitalism, as one aspect of the social arrangements developed for mobilising and controlling labour. Migrant workers, or racial minorities should be looked at in terms of their common social and economic situation rather than in terms of particular group characteristics like skin colour, religion, language, etc. The discussion on migrant labour and racism is closely linked to the world-wide debate on the nature of the world economy, and the role of capital, resources, commodity and labour mobility within it.

Debates on racism and exploitation of particular categories of labour took off in the USA after the ghetto riots of the 1960s. In recent years, a major academic focus has been the theory of segmented labour markets.<sup>67</sup> In Britain, the struggle of black workers, youth and women have been reflected in the development of a political economy of racism, which particularly emphasises the role of the state in constructing racism. The journal **Race and Class** and the research group at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham have been particularly influential.<sup>68</sup>

These international currents have influenced Australian radical thinking. In recent years there has been growing understanding that the structure of Australian society can only be understood in the context of the history of colonisation. Historical accounts of racism have played an important part in the development of critical

thought.<sup>69</sup> In the 1970s, an attempt was made to develop an historical analysis of the political economy of contemporary Australia, with special emphasis on the twin processes of dispossession of the Aborigines, and differential forms of incorporation of various groups of immigrants into the developing class structure.<sup>70</sup>

In the 1970s, community action groups and ethnic organisations drew attention to the situation of migrant workers, and the implications of this for institutional structures and policies. Prominent among them were the Centre for Urban Research and Action and the Ecumenical Migration Centre in Melbourne, the Greek Welfare Association and the Italian FILEF. This discourse influenced government policy making, the development of ethnic affairs structures, and academic work in the area. This tradition of policy-orientated research has been taken up by government, for instance in the Ethnic Affairs Commissions ( in particular, the research and policy division of the Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commission - VEAC).

A central issue is the role of migrant labour in the restructuring of Australian manufacturing after the Second World War, and the effect this has had on class structure. The work of Jock Collins,<sup>71</sup> Constance Lever-Tracey<sup>72</sup>, Michael Quinlan and the VEAC<sup>73</sup> have been particularly important here. The debate on whether migrant workers should be regarded as "reserve army of labour" has sometimes been pursued in somewhat abstract terms, but there is general agreement on the crucial role of migrant labour in the Australian economy, and that this is based on the use of racial and ethnic divisions to create a segmented labour force. There has been much criticism of the stratificationist approach to social mobility: Marxists have concentrated on the lack of English proficiency and educational credentials as a barrier to mobility into the salaried white-collar middle class. Collins has emphasised that mobility into an "ethnic" petit-bourgeoisie, often based on self-exploitation and use of unpaid family labour power, is the only way out of unskilled factory work for most migrants. Other writers have looked at power relations at work, their relationship with birthplace, gender and form of migration, and their effects on migrants' life chances.

The University of Wollongong has been a centre for much of this critical research. Andrew Jakubowicz has developed a sustained analysis of the social policy field affecting immigrants and ethnic minorities. He argues that the role of the state in the management of ethnic minorities through education and welfare strategies has been one of the most important dimensions of social control in post-war Australian capitalism, with significant implications for class mobilisation and the position of women.<sup>74</sup> The Centre for Multicultural Studies has, since 1977, been a focus for critical research on the position of ethnic minorities in Australian society, and on the ideology of multi-culturalism. The work of Michael Morrissey has concentrated on issues of social policy, health and labour market programs, while Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis have worked mainly on education, culture and ideology.<sup>75</sup>

Intrinsically, the radical political economy approach to the problem of migration and ethnic minorities is hostile to the construction of ethnicity as a criterion for social stratification, which may (e.g. in the neo-Weberian view) be seen as similar in scope to class. The focus is rather on the process of construction of minorities, through utilisation of ascriptive criteria, based on birthplace, culture, gender, etc, and the institutional and ideological frameworks in this occurs. Ethnic categorisation or racism are seen forms of mediation of class relationships. In other words, race or ethnicity are real to members of minorities, because their position in class society is defined through these categories. This implies that action against racism (or sexism) is a precondition for more general class-based politics. Clearly an understanding of the historical and societal roots of racism, nationalism and sexism are crucial for understanding class structure in a society like Australia. There are still many unresolved issues within Marxist debates on ethnic and race relations, and there is a need for further work on the problems of consciousness, ideology, culture and education in this context.

A crucial problem for social scientists working in a radical political economy framework is the relation between their research, and political action to overcome inequality and discrimination. On the one hand, radical theory emphasises the social context of research, and

the need to use findings to support movements for change; on the other hand, as already pointed out, there is a tendency for the state to coopt social scientists into policy-making roles. Critical analysis can easily become the most useful knowledge for social control, because it can provide the tools for predicting social conflicts, and for managing them. Little has been done to effectively challenge this role.

#### f) Feminism

As in so many other areas of social science, the experience of women, and the role of gender in defining ethnic and race relations has been neglected until fairly recently. In the 1960s and 1970s, the international women's movement pointed to this deficiency in radical analyses of labour migration and the construction of ethnic minorities, just as the black anti-racist movement showed the need for a non-reductionist examination of the role of racism in class relations.

There has been some work on female migration to Australia, from a non-feminist perspective, such as that of Appleyard and Amera, Evans and Young.<sup>76</sup> Current feminist approaches are generally linked to critical theory, in the Marxist tradition. The focus is on patriarchy, as a system of oppression and exploitation, that is not reducible to capitalist class relations. Feminists examine the way the definition of "women's work" and the denial of the significance of household labour are used to increase the exploitation of female labour. Marx's theory of value is criticised, because household work is excluded from the definition of labour which produces surplus value.

Feminists examine the relationships between gender, class and the migratory process. They criticise the way ethnicity has been constructed by the ideology of multiculturalism to legitimate the persistence of patriarchal and sexist forms of social control. Ethnicity and patriarchy can become mutually reinforcing structures, which in turn stabilise the capitalist social order. This focus is reflected in the recent book on **Ethnicity, Class and Gender in Australia**. Gill Bottomley's contribution examines way the gender, ethnicity and class interact in the lives of Southern European women,



particularly Greeks. Her work is enriched by her comparative research on gender roles in Greece.<sup>77</sup> Jeannie Martin criticises neglect of gender in Australian research on migrant workers. She argues the need to address the split between production and consumption:

One starting point would be a systematic account of the specific way immigrant women are constructed in social reproduction, and the very complex ways in which this interacts with, conflicts with or feeds on, both the sexual division of labour from their country of origin as well as their class position in their new country.<sup>78</sup>

In the last few years, these concerns have received added practical impetus from the exposure of the appalling situation of migrant women outworkers. The division between the spheres of production and reproduction is being undermined by the development of the informal economy. This has made the theoretical issues raised by feminists important for trade unionists and policy makers.

## **6. Conclusion**

This overview has shown how much effort has been put into social scientific analysis of migration and ethnic relations in Australia. This is not surprising, in view of the great significance of migration for Australian development since 1945. The impact of migration is not just an academic issue: it has been a major theme of political discourse, and social scientists have been heavily involved in development of social and educational measures, policy analysis, policy making, and in the provision of legitimation for policies. Obviously, the discourse has not been unitary. There have been competing paradigms, and their content and influence has shifted in response to economic and political changes.

Until 1945, the dominant discourse in both politics and social science was fundamentally racist. The construction of the white colonialist nation on the basis of genocide and dispossession went virtually unquestioned. The White Australia Policy was seen as vital to the nation.

From 1945 to the 1960s, immigration policies remained racist, but in a new form: assimilationism meant defining the cultures of the

migrants as inferior, and calling for their destruction. Social science was called upon to define who was assimilable, and under what conditions. In the 1960s and 1970s, in response to the undeniable development of ethnic segmentation, this approach was superseded. Two competing discourses emerged: one examined the situation of migrants in structural terms, and related this to social policy; the other assumed a "primordial" ethnicity, and aimed to develop a new ideology of cultural pluralism. Out of these two strands emerged the contradictory policy of multiculturalism.

I have identified six discourses which currently compete in the analysis of immigration and ethnic relations in Australia.

Culturalism remains influential, for its concern with the issue of building a cohesive nation out of many diverse groups has an obvious appeal. The assumption of static, homogeneous cultures, and the denial of the saliency of class are also of value, and fit well into conservative models for social policy. Culturalism provides a basis for the use of ethnic petit-bourgeois leaderships to defuse potential conflicts, and to provide a mechanism for social control.

Recently, culturalism has been challenged by work in sociology, education, psychology etc., which has argued that pluralist policies are actually harmful, because they perpetuate ethnic disadvantage, which would otherwise disappear. Social and economic absorption will take place automatically, as a result of the "ethnic work ethic". The neo-assimilationists also claim that cultural pluralism is detrimental to national cohesion and solidarity, and that, left to themselves migrants' children will not want to maintain their languages and culture.

The empiricist work of the stratificationists in sociology and the human capital school in economics tends to reinforce the neo-assimilationist drive. By constituting the ethnic group as an abstract category, with all its historically specific characteristics removed through mathematical procedures, this paradigm can argue that there are no issues of inequality, disadvantage or exploitation. The role of the state can be reduced to administering immigration policy, in

consultation with business interests. Settlement, labour force participation and education can simply be left to market forces, which will guarantee optimum assimilation (in an economic rather than a cultural sense).

The neo-Weberian approach is much more rooted in an understanding of the historical and societal dimensions of social interaction. Ethnicity is constructed as an affective category which can be utilised in strategies of mobilisation to obtain concessions from powerful bureaucracies. What are the policy implications? If ethnicity is "a strategic choice", i.e. a way of gaining concessions from the state for special groups, its legitimacy is doubtful. It loses the special "primordial" significance claimed by the culturalists. But in that case, ethnic demands for policies to fight inequality and to abolish structural barriers to participation and mobility can be dismissed as the special pleading of interest groups. This argument can easily be combined with the findings of the neo-assimilationists that there is no ethnic disadvantage, and with the mathematical models of the stratificationists, which deconstruct ethnicity altogether. Together, these three paradigms could come to form a new "conventional wisdom", which would justify a move away from policies to combat the structural barriers which cause inequality and deprivation for many migrants.

The critical counterweight to these approaches is provided by social scientists whose work is guided by the perspectives of radical political economy and feminism. These demand an analysis of the situation of ethnic minorities within the context of an understanding of the historical structures of capitalist society. The epistemological interest is provided by postulates of equality and liberation. But such work is not without its problems and contradictions. The greatest question mark lies over the role of critical social science within educational and administrative bureaucracies designed for social control and crisis management. There is no easy answer to that.

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<sup>2</sup> P.L. Berger and T. Luckmann, **The Social Construction of Reality**, London, Allen Lane, 1967, p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> See B. Anderson, **Imagined Communities**, London, Verso, 1983; E. Gellner, **Nations and Nationalism**, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1983; T. Nairn, **The Break-up of Britain**, London, Verso, 1981.

<sup>4</sup> The dispossession of the Aborigines was based on the legal doctrine that Australia was a "settled" rather than a "conquered" colony. This goes back to the precept of Roman law that property can be acquired by taking possession of something with no owner - such as a wild animal or an uninhabited island. British colonial law considered that Australia was vacant, because its inhabitants - hunter gatherers without a recognisable state form - had not in their eyes taken possession of the land. As the great 18th Century apologist of colonialism, Sir William Blackstone explained, British law applied immediately and completely in a settled colony, while native laws were valid, at least until specifically changed by the King of England, in a conquered colony. See: K. Maddock, **Your Land is our Land - Aboriginal Land Rights**, Penguin, Ringwood Vic, 1983, Chapter 2.

<sup>5</sup> J. Lyng, **Non-Britishers in Australia**, Melbourne University Press, 1935.

<sup>6</sup> See: M. de Lepervanche, Australian Immigrants 1788-1940: Desired and Unwanted, in: E.L. Wheelwright and K. Buckley, **Essays in the Political Economy of Australian Capitalism**, Vol. 1, Sydney, Australia and New Zealand Book Company, 1975; and Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, **Don't Settle for Less - Report of the Committee for Stage I of the Review of Migrant and Multicultural Programs and Services**, Canberra, AGPS, 1986, Chapter 2.

<sup>7</sup> Richard White, **Inventing Australia**, Sydney, George Allen and Unwin, 1981.

<sup>8</sup> See: A.T. Yarwood, **Attitudes to Non-European Immigration**, Melbourne, Casell, 1968, for a wealth of examples.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted from: M. Willard, **History of the White Australia Policy to 1920**, Melbourne University Press, 1923, p. 204.

<sup>10</sup> Lyng, op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted from K. Rivett (Ed.), **Immigration: Control or Colour Bar?** Melbourne University Press 1962.

<sup>12</sup> M. Willard, op. cit., p. 202.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 207.

<sup>14</sup> The literature includes too many accounts to mention here. The brief description in **Don't Settle for Less**, op. cit. is useful. A very readable summary is provided by J. Wilton and R. Bosworth, **Old Worlds and New Australia**, Ringwood Victoria, Penguin, 1984.

<sup>15</sup> G. Cuthbert, Filling the Empty Cradles, in: W.D. Borrie et al., **A White Australia - Australia's Population Problem**, Sydney, Australasian Publishing Co., 1947.

<sup>16</sup> H.L. Harris, Australians from Overseas, in: Borrie et al.

<sup>17</sup> A.P. Elkin, Is White Australia Doomed? in: Borrie et al.

<sup>18</sup> Wilton and Bosworth, p. 21.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pp. 21-24.

<sup>20</sup> H. Holt et al., **Australia and the Migrant**, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1953.

<sup>21</sup> J. Jupp, **Arrivals and Departures**, Melbourne, Cheshire-Lansdowne, 1966.

<sup>22</sup> Among Jean Martin's many works on the topic, I will just mention here: **Community and Identity**, Canberra, ANU Press, 1972; **The Migrant Presence**, Sydney, George Allen and Unwin, 1978.

<sup>23</sup> Legal disputes on land rights opened up a fruitful field of work for Australian anthropologists. Their research on customary law and the Aboriginal relationship to the land was vital in the assessment of land