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The Politics of Difference: The Political Representation of Ethnic and Racial Minorities

by

Gareth Griffith

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Briefing Paper discusses the political representation of ethnic and racial minorities in Australia. It consists of an empirical first section, a more theoretical second section and a third section which sets out the research findings on ethnicity and voting behaviour. Some of the main findings include:

- Institutions such as parliaments, the judiciary, police and unions remain largely unrepresentative of Australia's diverse population (page 6).

- The overseas born, particularly those from non-English speaking countries, are not well represented in Australia's governments. In 1991 participation by people born overseas in non-English speaking countries or with at least one parent born in a non-English speaking country was 6.7% (page 6). On the other hand, people born in non-English speaking countries make up close to 14% of Australia's population (page 5).

- The participation rates of indigenous Australians in our policy making institutions were low (0.6%) in comparison to their proportion in the population (1.6%) (pages 3 and 6).

- The multi-member constituency is more amenable to the nomination of candidates of different ethnic backgrounds than the single-member electorates in Australia, as there are few single-member areas in which NESB Australians are a majority or where a particular minority forms a sizeable proportion (page 9).

- Three principles operate in relation to the selection of Australia's political elite: the elective principle, the bureaucratic principle and the nominated principle. James Jupp found that the elective principle offered the fewest opportunities for newcomers to rise to positions of influence (page 10).

- Jupp did not view the under-representation of ethnic minorities as a permanent feature of Australian political life. At the same time he raised the question of whether governments have any responsibility to shape elites and to ensure that they reflect the ethnic character of society (page 11).

- Minority representation raises some of the most complex and difficult issues of democratic politics, including the question of introducing affirmative action in the form of quotas for some minorities and concerning the possibility of affirming group rights and group representation (pages 14).

- The implications of the official policy of multiculturalism for the political representation of ethnic minorities would seem to be quite limited (page 17).

- The case for the introduction of electoral quotas for ethnic minorities is far more problematic than it is in relation to the representation of women in Parliament (pages 19-20).

- The case for reserved seats for indigenous Australians has been made from time to time, growing more persistent in the 1980s and 90s (page 24). The case is based on four propositions: microcosmic representation, symbolic representation, the representation of political interests and systemic discrimination (page 28).

- Comparison is often made between the lack of effective representation for Aboriginals in Australia with the fact that Maori representation has been guaranteed in New Zealand since 1867 (page 31). Some caution needs to be exercised when engaging in analysis of a comparative nature in this area (page 37).

- Until the 1970s the impact of post-1945 immigrants from non-English speaking countries on the Australian party system was negligible. The situation in Australia contrasts markedly with the United States and Canada where the political influence of migrants is often considered critical to electoral' success at all levels of government (pages 38).

- One key question posed by the available research in Australia is whether, within an essentially class-based party political system, the ethnic vote is constrained along traditional, socio-structural lines, or along different lines which are specific to the migrant communities themselves (page 39).

- To date, the research on ethnicity and voting behaviour in Australia seems to be divided on the issue of the electoral significance of the "ethnic" vote, as indeed it is on the existence of the "ethnic" vote. There would seem to be a need for more research in this area, dealing in particular with differences between and within the various ethnic groups and looking too at ethnic voting patterns in cross-generational terms, as well as in terms of the specifics of electoral geography (page 45).

1.   INTRODUCTION

The concern of this Briefing Paper is with the political representation of ethnic and racial minorities in Australia. The Paper consists of an empirical first section, a more theoretical second section and a third section which sets out the research findings on ethnicity and voting behaviour. It begins therefore with an overview of the facts and figures relating to ethnic political representation in Australia (pages 3-11). Having established this empirical basis, the Paper then looks at the concept of political representation, which serves as an introduction to the contemporary debate about the ways, if any, in which representative democracy can and should accommodate, in theory as well as practice, the differences which exist in any complex modern society. The question of the representation of ethnic and racial minorities is viewed as a subset of that wider debate concerning the politics of difference (pages 12-24). Subsequently, the question of "reserved seats" for Aboriginals is discussed as a special case in regard to the representation of ethnic and racial minorities in this country (pages 24-31). Considered in this latter context, for comparative purposes, is the example of Maori political representation in New Zealand (pages 31-37). As noted, the final section presents an overview of research findings on ethnicity and voting behaviour in Australia (pages 38-46).

This Briefing Paper does not attempt to present a comprehensive account of what is a vast and complex subject. A list of selected further reading is provided at Appendix A.

2.   MULTI-ETHNIC AUSTRALIA

Based on the 1995 report of the National Multicultural Advisory Council, *Multicultural Australia - The Next Steps*, the following comments can be made regarding the ethnic composition and origin of the Australian population:

(i) Indigenous Australians

*   In 1991 there were approximately 239,000 Aboriginal peoples and 27,000 Torres Strait Islanders, 1.6% of the total population.

*   In 1991 indigenous peoples comprised between 1 and 3% of the population in all States. However, in the Northern Territory 23% were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples. Still, two-thirds of the total indigenous population lived in NSW, Queensland and Western Australia. About 32% lived in rural areas, compared with less than 15% of all Australians.

- Among the Aboriginal population in 1991, 43% of Aboriginal families with children had two Aboriginal parents, while the rest had a non-Aboriginal mother or father.

- In 1991 Aboriginal languages were spoken by 41,000 people.

(ii) Non-indigenous Australians

- Since European settlement, the population has grown from around 300,000 to nearly 18 million; about 40% of this growth has been due directly to immigration. Since 1947 alone Australia has received more than 5 million immigrants from over 100 countries.

- At the time of the 1991 census, nearly 7 million (42%) of the 16.9 million people then living in Australia were either born overseas or had one or both parents born overseas.

- Estimates of ethnic groups based on first and second generation immigrants show that people of British descent were the largest ethnic group from an English-speaking background, at about 1.4 million or 8.5% of the population in 1991. People of Italian descent were the largest ethnic group from a non-English background, at about half a million or 2.7%. People with origins in Vietnam were the largest Asian group, at over 140,000 or nearly 1% of the population. However, these are said to be conservative estimates because they only include the Australian-born who have both parents born in a specific overseas country.

- Other estimates suggest that in 1988 the "pure" Anglo-Celtic element made up 48% of the population; the non-Anglo-Celtic element about 22%; and the mixture of the two the remaining 30%.

- In 1994 the three largest birthplace groups were all English speaking: Australia, the UK and Ireland, and New Zealand. The next three were all Southern European: Italy, former Yugoslavia and Greece. Next came Vietnam, Germany, the Netherlands and China.

- In 1994 an estimated 826,200 or 4.6% of Australian residents had been born in Asia, up from 276,100 or 0.02% in 1981. Residents born in Europe (excluding the UK and Ireland) totalled 1,161,200 or 6.5% in 1994, slightly less than the 1,170,600 or 7.8% in 1981. The proportion

for the UK and Ireland had fallen over the same period from 7.9% to 6.8%.

- People born in non-English speaking countries make up close to 14% of Australia's population.

- In 1991 about 25% of Sydney's population aged five years or more spoke a language other than English at home.

- In 1991 the two most widely spoken languages in Australia after English were Italian and Greek, which were spoken by 409,000 and 275,000 people respectively. Chinese languages were spoken by 251,000 people and, together with Filipino languages and Vietnamese, showed the greatest percentage increase in speakers between 1986 and 1991.

- The intermarriage patterns of second generation immigrants suggest that nearly three-quarters marry outside the same ethnic group. It has been estimated that the number of Australians of ethnically mixed origins will be over 40% by the year 2000.

- The overseas born population is distributed unevenly throughout Australia. In 1991 Western Australia had the greatest proportion of its population born overseas (29.3%), while Tasmania had the lowest (10.7%). Victoria had the greatest proportion of people born in non-English speaking countries (16.9%), while Tasmania again had the lowest proportion (4%).

- The overseas born tend to be more urbanised than the Australia-born population.

3.   PARTICIPATION IN POLICY MAKING INSTITUTIONS

Again the information is based on the 1995 report of the National Multicultural Advisory Council, *Multicultural Australia - The Next Steps*:

- Institutions such as parliaments, the judiciary, police and unions remain unrepresentative of Australia's diverse population.

- The overseas born, particularly those from non-English speaking countries, are not well represented in Australia's governments.

- In 1991, 693 or 71% of "legislators or government appointed officials" in Australia's three tiers of government were at least second generation Australians.

- The participation rates of indigenous Australians were low (0.6%) in comparison to their proportion in the population.

- Participation by people born overseas in non-English speaking countries or with at least one parent born in a non-English speaking country was 6.7%. The under-representation of this group, relative to their proportion of the population, has not improved since 1986. In fact participation levels have decreased.

- The relevant figures are set out below in Table 1.

Table 1:   Legislators and government-appointed officials by birthplace and level of government, 1991

Birthplace	Commonwealth Government	State/Territory Government	Local Government	Other Sectors[a]	Total
Australian-Born					
Indigenous	3	3	0	0	6
Both Parents Australian-born	151	404	138	41	734
Both Parents born in ES Countries	30	69	30	7	136
At lease one parent born in NES countries	6	18	0	3	27
Overseas-born					
ES countries	19	52	12	17	100
NES countries	13	24	4	29	70
TOTAL	**222**	**570**	**184**	**97**	**1073**

Source: OMA 1995, from ABS Census of Population and Housing 1991 (unpublished data)
[a]   Other sectors include those 'not stated'.

The above Table 1 refers to "legislators and government-appointed officials". The term government-appointed officials is defined to include such persons as judges, diplomats and mediators. As such, the figures do not purport to be a true reflection of the political representation of ethnic and racial minorities in our elected assemblies. Indeed, it may be the case that the figures tend to overstate the participation of such groups, especially at the level of parliamentary representation.

This is certainly the case in regard to the number of indigenous Australians in the Commonwealth Parliament. The true figure for 1991 (and 1995) was zero. In fact, only one indigenous Australian has ever been elected to the Commonwealth Parliament, Senator Neville Bonner, who was originally chosen by the Parliament of Queensland to fill a casual vacancy in 1971 and was then re-elected in 1974, 1975 and 1980. In 1980 he headed the Liberal ticket in Queensland. In 1983, when he was dropped to third place, he resigned from the Liberal Party and stood unsuccessfully as an independent. It

seems that an indigenous Australian has never been elected to the NSW Parliament.

Table 1 may also overstate the participation rates of persons from a non-English speaking background in our elected assemblies, especially as this applies to those born overseas. James Jupp et al made the point in 1989, stating that at that time only eight NESB immigrants had entered the national Parliament since the post-war immigration program began in 1947.[1]

One important distinction needs to be made in this context. This relates to the potential of different electoral systems for the participation of ethnic and other minorities in our elected assemblies. In particular, the system of proportional representation as this operates for the Senate and for some State Houses of Parliament, including the NSW Legislative Council, needs to be borne in mind in this regard. It tends to be the case that academic analysis of ethnic representation looks more at the system of single-member electorates, often with special reference to the elections for the House of Representatives. In doing so, it may run the danger of overstating the actual and potential under-representation of ethnic and racial minorities. In any event, this is an area in which generalisations need to be treated with particular care.

4.   WHAT IS AN ETHNIC REPRESENTATIVE?

The issues involved in this complex subject become more complicated still when one pauses to consider precisely what is meant by an ethnic "representative". In fact, the potential impact of different electoral systems for ethnic representation was touched upon by Jupp et al in relation to their discussion of what is meant by the term ethnic "representative". They say that ethnic "representatives may be divided into four categories:

- **Those who rely on a base of NESB voters to a major extent.** Jupp et al comment that this concept of representation is "traditionally feared and resented in Australia, although quite common and accepted in the United States or Canada".[2]

- **Those who are sensitive and responsive to NESB voters although not NESB themselves.** Jupp et al comment that this second category "is

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[1] J Jupp et al, *The Political Participation of Ethnic Minorities in Australia*, Centre for Immigration and Multicultural Studies 1989, p 9.

[2] Ibid, p 32.

currently the most common in Australia and reflects the choice of winning candidates by political parties which are dominated by the Anglo-Australian majority. The archetypal relationship was that between Al Grassby and the Griffith Italian community, both as a State and Federal MP".[3]

- **Those who are of NESB but do not have a distinctively NESB electorate.** This third category are described by Jupp et al as "accidental" in the sense that they are often very well integrated and assimilated into majority-dominated institutions".[4]

- **Those who are of NESB but have been chosen as part of a party ticket for multi-member electorates.** According to Jupp et al: "The fourth category is found in the Senate, in some State upper houses and in local authorities elected on an area-wide rather than a ward basis. It may be sustained by the tendency (also found for women) for proportional representation systems to be used by the parties to secure the election of minority representatives. The American model of the 'balanced ticket' is relevant here, namely the nomination of a range of candidates of different ethnic backgrounds to maximise support from minority voters. The multi-member constituency is more amenable to such treatment than the single-member electorates in Australia, as there are few such single-member areas in which NESB Australians are a majority or where a particular minority forms a sizeable proportion. However, the creation of 'balanced' multi-member tickets is dependent on the good-will of the political parties".[5]

This is only one approach to the subject of defining what is meant by an ethnic "representative". Its value in this context is that it highlights some of the problems of terminology encountered in this area, which in turn serves as another cautionary note in relation to the use of statistical data or other empirical generalisations. From another perspective, it emphasises the intricate relationship between the conceptual and empirical aspects of the debate.

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[3] Ibid, p 32.

[4] Ibid, p 33.

[5] Ibid, p 33.

5.   ANALYSING AUSTRALIA'S ELECTED ELITE

Jupp discussed the issues related to ethnic political representation further in a policy options paper he edited for the Office of Multicultural Affairs in 1989. What Jupp presented here was an analysis of ethnic participation in relation to Australia's political elite. He made the point that three principles operate for the selection of elites: the elective principle; the bureaucratic principle (based on merit recruitment and promotion) and the nominated principle (where bureaucracies or elected officers select members of boards or other agencies). Paradoxically, Jupp found that the elective principle offered the fewest opportunities for newcomers to rise to positions of influence. Bureaucracies now accept EEO programs which target NESB applicants for recruitment and promotion. Jupp notes, too, that nominations are fairly easy to manipulate to create broadly "representative" agencies. He adds: "However, election through the ballot box is strongly influenced by the desire to please the largest possible number of voters. Despite massive immigration those elected are normally of Anglo-Celtic origin or orientation. Moreover, in many elected institutions there is a degree of self-perpetuation, including the handing down of positions from fathers to sons, or in recent times, to wives or daughters".[6]

Jupp then proceeded to make the following observations:

- At the national, State and municipal elected levels it is usually true that representatives do not mirror the ethnic composition of their electors and that locally-born Anglo-Australians are far more likely to be nominated and returned. That is most true of the House of Representatives and least true in metropolitan municipalities.

- The election of "non-Anglo" representatives normally requires a strong local base in a minority ethnic community (Jupp does not comment on the potential different electoral systems may have in this respect).

- Ministries are usually even less representative than parliaments.

- All the Aborigines elected to parliaments have come from tropical Australia, being confined to the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia.

- Those local councils with substantial "ethnic" membership are usually in areas of immigrant concentration; in State politics the largest number of

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[6]   J Jupp ed, *The Challenge of Diversity,* Office of Multicultural Affairs 1989, p 35.

"ethnic" representatives tend to be from the same areas of Melbourne and Sydney.

- In all systems minority representatives normally have a base in their own community and in geographical areas where the community is large or is in the majority. There are few geographical areas in which Anglo-Australians are not a majority, which means that there a few "ethnic representatives" in Australia compared with the United States or Canada.

It is important to stress that Jupp did not view this under-representation of ethnic minorities as a permanent feature of Australian political life. His conclusion was that, "with the passage of time there will be changes...as elite recruitment remains fairly open and the importance of inherited wealth was never as important as in Britain or Europe". Also, he ends with a question, which is central to the second, more theoretical section of the Paper: "The basic issue is whether government (directly or through influence) has any responsibility to shape elites and to ensure that they reflect the ethnic character of society".[7]

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[7] Ibid, p 40

6.   THE CONCEPT OF POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

AH Birch has explained that the term "representative" is used in at least three logically distinct ways:[8]

*   To denote an agent or spokesman who acts on behalf of his principal. In this usage, a representative is, or should be, bound by the instructions of his or her principal. In this context a representative acts therefore as an agent or delegate.

*   To indicate that a person shares some of the characteristics of a class of persons. This usage is exemplified in the term "representative sample", which indicates that the main characteristics of the population will be mirrored in the sample, or more loosely it is used to denote that a person is in some respects typical of a larger class of persons to which he or she belongs. Birch comments, "The statement that a man is a representative in this sense does not tell us anything about his functions or intentions or even about his behaviour. It simply tells us something about his personal characteristics".[9]

*   To indicate that a person symbolises the identity or qualities of a class of persons. This usage is said to suggest that a representative calls to mind or serves as a concrete embodiment of a whole group or category of persons.

For Birch, the concept of "political representation" is not reducible to any of these usages. Instead, he is inclined to treat the latter term as a specialised usage, stating that the essential characteristic of political representatives is the manner of their selection, not their behaviour or characteristics or symbolic value. On this narrow basis, political representation is defined in procedural terms, the pre-condition of which would seem to be the holding of a formal election.

However, Birch does accept that elected representatives can also be representatives in some or all of the three general usages of the term. In relation to the subject at hand, the last two usages of representative are perhaps the most important. In particular, the argument is put that, ideally, elected representatives should be similar to their electors so that the assembly would be a social microcosm of the nation. Writing from the perspective of a unitary

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[8]   AH Birch, *Representation*, Pall Mall Press Ltd 1971, p 15.

[9]   Ibid, p 17.

state, Birch comments: "Advocates of this view have suggested that an assembly cannot be properly representative of the nation if its social composition is conspicuously different from that of the electorate".[10] The implications of this line of argument for ethnic and racial political representation are clear enough. Symbolic representation is also important in this context. Writing before the advent of gender-neutral language, Birch acknowledges that "there can be no doubt that in many political situations the election or appointment of a representative of a minority group has a significance out of all proportion to the real power he enjoys because he symbolizes the recognition of the political rights of the group in question".[11] Again, the implications for the political representation of ethnic or racial minorities are reasonably clear.

We have, therefore, isolated two meanings of representation which are of particular relevance to the debate about minority political representation; namely, microcosmic political representation, in which the membership of our elected assemblies is to be reflective of society at large, and symbolic representation. In keeping with Birch, this is not to suggest that political representation is reducible to these usages. For example, it tell us nothing about the proper function of political representatives: are they to act in some way as delegates for particular interests? or should they seek, ideally, to transcend the particularities and differences found in society and act instead as trustees of the common good?- The first, more cynical view of political representation finds support in the work of the American theorist and statesman, James Madison. Whereas the second view was championed around the same time in England by Edmund Burke. He presented what has come to be known as the Whig concept of representation which, in essence, held that if Parliament was to be the centre of political power then Members of Parliament should be free to do what they thought best in the national interest rather than act merely as agents for their constituents. In fact the Whig view of representation serves to remind us that democracy is a relatively new concept in terms of the parliamentary system. Basically, with its emphasis on the idea that the task of parliamentary representatives was to pursue the national interest, the Whig view maintained that it was enough for Members to take account of the sectional interests in society without there being any need for those interests to be represented in any proportional sense in Parliament. Under the Whig theory of "virtual representation" it was enough that the interests of such major industrial cities as Manchester and Sheffield were

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[10] Ibid, p 20.

[11] Ibid, p 21.

represented by the Members of other industrial cities. The debate has of course moved on since then.[12] In a practical sense most political representatives now have a dual role as representatives of a political party and as constituency advocates.

From the above comments it can be seen that a comprehensive account of political representation would be a complex undertaking. By isolating two meanings of representation the intention here has been only to establish a conceptual framework in which to discuss the key concerns of the debate on the subject of the political representation of ethnic and racial minorities.

7.   DEMOCRACY AND DIFFERENCE

It is widely acknowledged that minority representation raises some of the most complex and difficult issues of democratic politics. This is true both in terms of the theory of representative democracy and its practice.

In some ways the issues are not entirely new. The pluralist theory of democracy advocated by many American political theorists in the 1950s and 60s argued that politics is a matter of competition between interest groups and that democracy is sufficiently guaranteed by the chance for any group to compete. However, pluralism was never concerned with minority representation as such. EM McLeay has noted in this regard: "The political representation of the groups within a society has been regarded as necessary by political parties, interest groups, minorities and the makers of constitutions, yet theories of political representation have generally been critical of 'microcosmic', 'descriptive' or 'typical' representation. There has been a notable absence of concern about the representation of minorities distinguishable by racial, cultural or class differences from the rest of society".[13]

Also, it has been said that pluralism pays insufficient attention to political equality; it fails to recognise that in any hierarchical society some interests count for more than others. This is not new either. It is after all one of the central themes of the Marxist critique of liberal democracy. However, that critique was traditionally fixated on class to the exclusion of all other social cleavages. Recently, this line of argument has received new impetus and focus

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[12] Ibid, p 51.

[13] EM McLeay, "Political argument about representation: the case of the Maori seats" (1980) 28(1) *Political Studies* 43-62, p 43.

from the feminist account of representative democracy. Anne Phillips puts the case in these succinct terms: "Democracy implies equality, but when it is superimposed on an unequal society, it allows some people to count for more than others".[14] She goes on to say that, despite its theoretical commitment to political equality, embodied in the right to vote, in practice representative democracy has resulted in an imbalance of power: "our democracies are significantly skewed towards the representation of white men, who make up the overwhelming majority of politicians and who determine what gets on the political agenda".[15]

Built into the feminist contribution to democratic theory is a concern with difference. The main focus has been on the differences between men and women and the implications of these for representative democracy. However, the debate has travelled beyond that point to encompass differences amongst women themselves, discussed under such headings as class or colour, and beyond that again, in the work of Iris Marion Young and others, to address the wider subject of group differences. There are many strands and layers to the argument, which claims that: (i) the inequalities our democratic systems embody have been sustained by a myth of homogeneity, which maintains that when citizens engage in political discussion they should strive to be impartial, thus transcending particular contexts, needs and interests in order to address the common good; and (ii) that representative democracy needs to recognise difference more adequately.[16] This in turn raises difficult questions concerning affirmative action in the form of quotas for certain groups and, more difficult still, concerning the possibility of affirming group rights and group representation.

The basic difficulty with group rights (which are discussed further at page 22) is that they seem to contradict the ideas of political individualism and equal respect which lie at the heart of the liberal conception of representative

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[14] A Phillips, "Democracy and difference" (1992) 63 *The Political Quarterly* 79-90, p 80.

[15] Ibid.

[16] According to Susan Mends, there are at least two aspects to the feminist contribution to democratic theory. One is that some differences are ineliminable and that, therefore, democracy can only be aimed at through difference and not by the removal of difference. The other is that what counts as difference is not value-neutral, "To be different is to deviate from some norm and, in democratic societies, that norm is invariably a male norm": J Dunn, *Democracy - The Unfinished Journey*, Oxford University Press 1992, pp 207-219.

democracy. Charles Taylor has explained that the debate actually revolves around conflicting notions of equal respect. For one, which is described by Taylor as the politics of equal dignity, ."the principle of equal respect requires that we treat people in a difference-blind fashion". For the other, the politics of difference, "we have to recognise and even foster particularity". Taylor goes on to explain: "The reproach the first makes to the second is just that it violates the principle of nondiscrimination. The reproach the second makes to the first is that it negates identity by forcing people into a homogenous mould that is untrue to them". More than that, the second argument claims that the supposedly neutral set of difference-blind principles of the politics of equal dignity is in fact a reflection of one hegemonic culture and that, as a result, the difference-blind society is itself discriminatory.[17]

In more general terms, the importance of the debate about democracy and difference for the issue of ethnic and racial representation is that it contributes to a picture of a complex and diverse society.

8. MULTICULTURALISM

To that extent at least the ideas associated with the politics of difference have been complemented in recent years by certain developments in the areas of policy and law. In particular, in Australia the move away from assimilationism and integration towards the policy of multiculturalism has facilitated a growing appreciation of the nation's cultural diversity. The principles of multiculturalism set out in the 1989 National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia read as follows:

- All Australians should have a commitment to Australia and share responsibility for furthering our national interests.

- All Australians should be able to enjoy the basic right of freedom from discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion or culture.

- All Australians should enjoy equal life chances and have equitable access to an equitable share of the resources which governments manage on behalf of the community.

- All Australians should have the opportunity fully to participate in society and in the decisions which directly affect them.

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[17] C Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton University Press 1992, p 43.

- All Australians should be able to develop and make use of their potential for Australia's economic and social development.

- All Australians should have the opportunity to acquire and develop proficiency in English and languages other than English, and to develop cross-cultural understanding.

- All Australians should be able to develop and share their cultural heritage.

- Australian institutions should acknowledge, reflect and respond to the cultural diversity of the Australian community.[18]

Various assessments of multiculturalism are available. James Jupp commented in 1991 that the policy, as formulated in Australia, was basically "ameliorative and cautious, attempting to bridge the sometimes incompatible expectations of the majority and the minority".[19] Viewed in this light, the policy of multiculturalism can be seen as something of a delicate balancing act in which difference is tolerated and even encouraged, but not at the expense of compromising every citizen's paramount commitment to the nation state and not in any way that might alienate the majority or be seen to threaten social harmony. Stated in this way, the implications of the policy of multiculturalism for political representation would seem to be very limited indeed. Its significance is that to a considerable extent the policy shapes and reflects the agenda of the mainstream debate about cultural diversity in this country.

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[18] National Multicultural Advisory Council, *Multicultural Australia: The Next Steps - Towards and Beyond 2000, Volume 1*, AGPS 1995, p 4.

[19] FG Castles ed, *Australia Compared: People, Policies and Politics*, Allen and Unwin 1991, p 53.

9.   STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS

In an important sense both the concept of multiculturalism and the general debate about democracy and difference pose more questions than they answer. They reveal the differentiations between citizens and, to varying degrees, they point to the things that we as citizens have in common. The hard question is to decide what, if any, implications this mix of difference and commonality has for representative democracy. Does it matter if ethnic and racial minorities are under-represented in Australian Parliaments? If so, should anything be done to redress the balance? At a general level the argument on behalf of minority representation was made in these terms in 1986 by the New Zealand Royal Commission on the Electoral System: "Democracy demands that interests be given their due weight in the competition for influence on public policy, and this in turn requires that they be adequately and effectively represented. Since the identification of the individual representatives with their groups is likely to have a strong bearing upon their effectiveness as representatives, democracy also recognises the need for the direct and fair representation of diverse groups by members of those groups".[20]

That still leaves the practical questions unanswered. Also, it gives rise to the inevitable threshold question of which groups deserve representation and, beyond that, how are these to be defined? Writing in an American context, Iris Marion Young presents us with something of a shopping list approach to the problem: "Clear candidates for group representation in policy making in the United States are women, blacks, Native Americans, old people, poor people, disabled people, gay men and lesbians, Spanish-speaking Americans, young people, and nonprofessional workers".[21] To complicate matters further, Young recognises that most people have multiple group identifications and that groups can come into being and then fade away.

Beyond that there is still the question of the balance that needs to be struck between the representation of minorities and the maintenance and development of an overarching sense of national identity and purpose. The issue, then, is how to accommodate difference without compromising unity.[22]

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[20] The Royal Commission on the Electoral System, op cit, p 88.

[21] IM Young, "Polity and group difference: a critique of the ideal of universal citizenship" (1989) 99 *Ethics* 250-274, p 265.

[22] For an account of the issues involved in a New Zealand context see - A Sharp, *Justice and the Maori*, Oxford University Press 1990. The implications of this work for the politics of difference were considered in - A Sharp, "Representing Justice

One thing is clear. The policy of multiculturalism is far more cautious in its goals and strategies than is the more radical doctrine which has been characterised here as the politics of difference. The plain fact is that the policy of multiculturalism is more attuned to political realities. Whereas the doctrine of the politics of difference is inherently more speculative in nature.

A strong assumption behind the politics of difference seems to be that our elected assemblies should, to a reasonable degree at least, represent the community in a microcosmic sense, being constituted as something of a sample of the community at large. Not only would this contribute to the legitimacy of our system of democracy, it would also facilitate a more efficient and fairer representation of the diversity of interests found in society at large. Anne Phillips expresses the case in this way:

> It is indeed dangerous to pretend that who or what we are is irrelevant, to ask people to submerge their group differences in an abstract citizenship, to say that politics should only be a matter of ideas. Such complacency leaves democracy too much at the mercy of existing power relations, which will just reproduce existing patterns of power. More specifically, the composition of political representation does matter, and we need the kind of institutional changes that will guarantee proportionality - at least by ethnicity and gender.[23]

Thus stated, the issue invites comparison with the debate concerning the options and strategies relevant to the representation of women in Parliament. These were discussed in detail in the Parliamentary Library's Briefing Paper 19/95, *Women in Parliament*, by Marie Swain. They include: the introduction of a quota system for women; weighted votes; reserved seats; direct appointment; and encouraging more women to participate in the political process.

In many respects the situation in regard to ethnic and racial minorities is far more complicated. For one thing, women are not a minority group in society, a fact which would seem to place the issue of gender representation on a

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and the Maori: on why it ought not to be construed as a postmodernist text" (1992) 4 *Political Theory Newsletter* 27-38.

[23] A Phillips, op cit, p 89. In fact Phillips and other advocates of the politics of difference tend to qualify their support for the idea of microcosmic representation. For example, Phillips notes that she does not favour "the kind of politics in which people were elected only to speak for their own group identity or interests" (page 85).

somewhat different footing, practically as well as theoretically. Moreover, whereas gender is a relatively straightforward and stable criteria for the purposes of determining political representation, membership of an ethnic minority can in contrast be fluid and dynamic, especially in a country like Australia where there is a relatively high level of social mobility. The point is illustrated in a recent report of the National Multicultural Advisory Council in this way: "Up to two-thirds of second-generation immigrants are marrying outside their ethnic groups, and by the year 2000 people of ethnically mixed origin will constitute over 40 per cent of the population".[24] Commenting on the difficulties involved in relation to the subject of official definitions of ethnicity, Jupp has said that, "in immigrant societies like Australia there has been considerable ethnic mixing which makes rigid definition impossible and undesirable. Instead a vague category such as non-English-speaking-background forms the basis of much public policy".[25] Problems of this kind are in fact recognised by Anne Phillips. She says that they help to explain why, in Britain, the case for parity between women and men has so far met with greater success than the parallel case for parity between different ethnic groups: "In the case of Britain, for example, the all-embracing concept of 'black' people rapidly dissolved into a distinction between the Asian and the Afro-Caribbean communities, and then subsequently into finer distinctions between a wide variety of ethnic groups. What in this context counts as 'adequate' ethnic representation".[26] The conclusion Phillips arrives is that she favours the introduction of quotas, for women at least, but that the case on their behalf should rest on the concept of political equality and not on the more problematic idea of group representation.

Perhaps the general point to be made here is that the options canvassed to increase the number of women elected to Parliament are relevant in a speculative sense to the discussion of the political representation of ethnic and racial minorities. However, it may be that in a more practical sense the extent of that relevance should not be over-stated. For practical purposes, in this country the debate about ethnic minority representation is conducted largely in the framework of the policy of multiculturalism. It would seem that such a policy would embrace the politics of difference to the extent of supporting the idea that our elected assemblies should approximate a microcosmic representation of the community at large. As noted, the 1989 principles of

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[24] Multicultural Australia: The Next Steps, Volume 1, op cit, p 1.

[25] FG Castles ed, op cit, p 44.

[26] A Phillips, op cit, pp 88-89.

multiculturalism state that "Australian institutions should...reflect...the cultural diversity of the Australian community". Again, the hard question is: how is this to be achieved? Taking the recent report of the National Multicultural Advisory Council as a guide, the three main options to be considered in this context are as follows:

- **Evolution and equality of opportunity:** This is basically the strategy in keeping with the official policy of multiculturalism. The National Multicultural Advisory Council acknowledges the under-representation of ethnic and racial minorities in our elected assemblies in the past and present but, except for the case of indigenous peoples, counsels against the introduction of special measures. The argument is put the imbalance is likely to be corrected in the normal course of events, "through the social and economic mobility which is characteristic of most immigrants and their children". The strong implication here is that, at least as regards political representation, the policy of multiculturalism is fundamentally assimilationist in nature. One goal of multiculturalism therefore is to encourage members of the ethnic community to participate in the political processes at every level. In the vernacular, it represents a combination of the time-honoured principles of "she'll be right" and "a fair go".

- **Affirmative action:** It follows therefore that the idea of introducing affirmative action policies in the form of quotas was rejected by the National Advisory Council on the grounds that they "would be strongly resisted by many Australians, including potential beneficiaries, as antithetical to principles of fairness and merit-based appointment". Another way of putting this is that the majority would be likely to treat attempts by ethnic minorities to differentiate themselves for the purposes of political representation as hostile and politically divisive behaviour, employing the argument that everyone is equally a citizen. Besides, minorities might reject proposals for affirmative action precisely on the grounds that it may be seen as implying inferiority. It is notable in this context that none of the major political parties have endorsed the idea of affirmative action for ethnic minorities.

- **Reserved seats:** From time to time the suggestion has been made that special seats should be set aside in State or Federal Parliament for Aboriginal representatives. The proposal is predicated on the view that, in terms of political representation, the case of indigenous peoples is unique and that the difficulties commonly associated with group representation are outweighed only in this special case. The National Multicultural Advisory Council seemed to agree, saying this was an appropriate moment for

reflection to occur on the way in the national Parliament might better portray the presence of indigenous peoples in Australian society. Its recommendation on this issue is discussed below, following a brief comment on the issue of group representation for indigenous peoples.

10. GROUP REPRESENTATION FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

One account of the subject of group rights for indigenous peoples is found in the work of Will Kymlicka. His theme is the relevance of liberalism to culturally plural societies and his main concern is to justify group rights for any aboriginal community. Kymlicka's definition, which was formulated with the North American experience in mind, of what he means by the term aboriginal community does not correspond in all its details with the circumstances facing Aboriginal Australians. His definition reads: "a stable and geographically distinct historical community with separate language and culture rendered a minority by conquest or immigration or the redrawing of political boundaries".[27]

However, with some modification the general line of his argument could suggest ways of grounding group rights for indigenous peoples in Australians. Unlike Iris Marion Young, Kymlicka is concerned to explain the legitimacy of group rights for aboriginal communities from within the liberal theory of representative democracy. Liberalism, he maintains, is best understood in its classically individualist terms of enhancing our choices over the kind of life we should lead, and it is a tradition that encourages self-examination. Liberals believe that people can and should detach themselves from whatever traditions or values they have inherited, for "no particular task is set for us by society, and no particular cultural practice has authority that is beyond individual judgement and possible rejection". On the other hand, "cultural structures" provide the essential context within which people become aware of the options open to them and can then judge their worth. Where a cultural community is threatened with disintegration, this then puts its members at a severe disadvantage - and it is in order to rectify this inequality that these communities require special status. The possible political implications pointed by Kymlicka include the proposals by aboriginal leaders in the Canadian North for, amongst other things, a guaranteed 30% aboriginal representation in regional government.[28] More generally, Kymlicka sees the need to devise constitutional provisions "which will be flexible enough to allow for the

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[27] W Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture*, Clarendon Press 1989, p 258.

[28] This account of Kymlicka's work is based on A Phillips, op cit, p 83.

legitimate claims of cultural membership, but which are not so flexible as to allow systems of racial or cultural oppression".[29]

Kymlicka elaborated on these views in his recent work, *Multicultural Citizenship*. He explained there that group representation should not depend on the idea of microcosmic or mirror representation, but should be defended instead on more contextual grounds, "as an appropriate mechanism for representing certain groups under certain conditions". Kymlicka suggested there are two kinds of contextual arguments to be considered in this regard, namely, systemic discrimination and self-government. On the issue of systemic discrimination, he commented: "The point here is not that the legislature should mirror society, but rather that the historical domination of some groups by other groups has left a trail of barriers and prejudices that makes it difficult for historically disadvantaged groups to participate effectively in the political process".[30] Further, Kymlicka recognised the tensions in his own liberal argument for group rights, noting along the way that appeals to equality and diversity may lead in conflicting directions. At the same time he maintained that group representation is not inherently illiberal or undemocratic: "It is a plausible extension of our existing democratic traditions, and there may be some circumstances where it is the most appropriate way to ensure an adequate voice for minority interests and perspectives. Since it is vital that minorities have a fair hearing in the political process, proposals for group representation themselves deserve a fair hearing".[31]

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[29] W Kymlicka, op cit, p 255. Charles Taylor makes the comment in regard to Kymlicka's work that, whilst his reasoning "is valid (perhaps) for existing people who find themselves trapped within a culture under pressure, and can flourish within it or not at all", it may not justify measures designed to ensure survival through indefinite future generations. However, Taylor recognises that for the populations concerned that is precisely "what is at stake" - C Taylor, op cit, p 41. For other comments on Kymlicka see - M Freeman, "Are there collective human rights?" (1995) 43 *Political Studies* 25-40; C Kakathas, "Are there any cultural rights?" (1992) *Political Theory* 105-139.

[30] W Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship,* Clarendon Press 1995, p 141. Kymlicka discusses the conceptual and empirical problems associated with microcosmic or mirror representation at pages 138-141. One of his main arguments is that, taken to its logical conclusion, the principle of mirror representation seems to undermine the very possibility of representation itself: "If 'no amount of thought or sympathy, no matter how careful or honest, can jump the barriers of experience', then how can anyone represent anyone else?" (page 140).

[31] Ibid, p 151. Importantly, Kymlicka argues that group rights must respect two restraints: minority rights should not allow one group to dominate other groups; and they should not enable a group to oppress its own members (page 194).

Indigenous Australians might argue that they cannot choose an alternative to their Aboriginal identity, that their Aboriginality is the inescapable context in which they must (and should) live out their lives. Moreover, in an Australian setting the cultural structure, as Kymlicka calls it, of Aboriginality is itself a locus of disadvantage and dispossession, and one that been threatened with disintegration in one form or another since colonial times. It is in fact a paradigm of what is meant by systemic discrimination. Indeed, until very recently even the existence of indigenous Australians has been denied by legal doctrine. Seen in this light, therefore, it could be argued that the assertion of group rights is inherent to the processes of cultural survival, recognition and reconciliation for indigenous Australians. At the very least, it might be said, the claim for group representation in this context deserves a fair hearing.

11. RESERVED SEATS FOR INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

The case on behalf of reserved seats for Aboriginals has been made from to time over the years, growing more persistent in the 1980s and 90s. In recent years it has been considered in the light of the High Court's Mabo judgment and, in particular, in terms of the further measures that need to be taken to address the dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and their subordination to a structure of governance to which they did not acquiesce.

Taking an historical perspective on the proposal for reserved seats, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation reports: "The proposition of indigenous parliamentary representation should not be seen as a new or novel one. Not only is it one which operates in Australia's near neighbour, New Zealand, with which Australia shares much constitutional history, but it has been on the formal indigenous political agenda for nearly 60 years". The Council goes on to say that in 1938, separate indigenous representation formed part of the list of indigenous demands given to the Prime Minister of the day, Joe Lyons, following the "Day of Shame" meeting in Sydney on 26 January at the time "white Australia" was celebrating the sesqui-centenary of colonisation: "The petition presented to Mr Lyons specifically demanded representation in the national Parliament for indigenous people as a method of empowering them to influence and have control over their own destinies".[32]

Scott Bennett finds even earlier support for the proposal. He notes in this regard: "William Cooper of the Australian Aborigines' League in Victoria spoke of this as early as 1934, and in 1937 he presented a petition to the King

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[32] Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, *Going Forward: Social Justice for the First Australians*, AGPS 1995, p 42.

calling for such guaranteed representation in the Commonwealth Parliament. In 1949 Doug Nichols wrote to Prime Minister Chifley calling for one Aboriginal MHR to be elected on a single roll of Aborigines, a call that was dismissed on the grounds that it was not permitted by the Constitution. In more recent years the Western Australian Land Needs and Essential Services Committee made a similar call in 1982...".[33]

In 1983 Frank Walker, then the NSW Minister for Aboriginal Affairs is reported to have advocated changes to the Federal and State electoral laws to give Aboriginals greater parliamentary representation. At a National Aborigines Week reception in Sydney on 5 July 1983 he said that "electoral laws should be made to provide one Aboriginal Senator for each State or territory. These Senators would be elected by Aborigines in each State and Territory entitled to vote on an Aboriginal roll. Similarly in NSW four Aboriginal electorates should be created for the Legislative Assembly". Mr Walker went on to comment, "I can already hear some voices crying apartheid or tokenism. It is neither. Rather, it entails positive discrimination for Aboriginals to enable them to serve in our Parliaments".[34]

In its Final Report of 1988 the Constitutional Commission said it had received a number of submissions on the question of separate representation for the Aboriginal people. The National Aboriginal and Islander legal services Secretariat argued that, because the interests of the component parts of the Commonwealth are safeguarded by the Senate, the Aboriginal people should be represented there, as an electorate, as if they were a State. The Public Interest Advocacy Centre endorsed this view, arguing that this would be an important step towards redressing the inequalities which the Aboriginal people have faced for the last 200 years. The Aboriginal Development Commission submitted that, if a certain number of seats in the Senate were designated for Aboriginal representatives, Parliament would have ready access to expert opinion on laws affecting the Aboriginal people.[35] The Constitutional Commission does not seem to have formed an opinion on the matter.

In 1995 the proposal for separate indigenous representation received support from a number of quarters. In its report, *Recognition, Rights and Reform*, The

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[33] S Bennett, *Aborigines and Political Power*, Allen and Unwin 1989, p 126.

[34] "An Aboriginal in all our Parliaments", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 July 1983; D Bennett, *Aboriginal Seats in Parliament*, Commonwealth Parliamentary Library Research Service 1983.

[35] *Final Report of the Constitutional Commission*, Volume 2, AGPS 1988, p 718.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ASTIC) recommended:
**"The Commonwealth Government should investigate the possibility of
reserved seats in the Australian Parliament by commissioning a report on
how this can be achieved".**[36] ASTIC commented that, while it is difficult to
define what the appropriate level of indigenous representation should be in the
Commonwealth, State and Territory Parliaments and in local government "it is
considered that measures should be taken now to institute political reform".
According to ASTIC these measures should include:

- reserved seats in Parliament for indigenous Australians at both the
  Commonwealth and State level;

- ward structures in local government areas having significant Aboriginal
  communities; and

- conditions on Commonwealth local government funding which encourage
  greater indigenous representation on councils.

In support of the recommendation ASTIC said that an essential element in the
inclusion of indigenous Australians in Australian life is to provide opportunities
for participation in mainstream political processes as well as providing a
variety of self-government and self-determination options. From that starting
point, the need was identified to consider how Australia's democratic
institutions should be adapted to reflect an enlightened approach to indigenous
participation. ASTIC stated: "The indigenous peoples of Australia are a very
special constituency, quite unlike other minorities, with unique interests and
special claims to participation in Australia's political processes. Whether it be
Commonwealth, State or Local Government, a democracy based only upon
electoral majorities will inevitably be skewed towards the promotion of
majority interests and will tend to deny participation of indigenous peoples". It
went on to say that Australia lags behind other countries, notably Canada, the
United States and New Zealand, in the recognition of indigenous peoples in
formal political structures. It noted, too, that since 1987, the indigenous people
of Norway, the Sami, have had their own Parliaments. ASTIC claimed that
political participation would foster: greater equity in the provision of services;
governmental accountability; the articulation of indigenous policy perspectives;

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[36] ASTIC, *Recognition, Rights and Reform*, AGPS 1995, pp 48-51. A further
recommendation was that, as an interim measure, the Commonwealth Government
should introduce legislation to provide the Chairperson of ASTIC with the right: (a)
to observer status in Parliament; (b) to speak to either House on Bills affecting
indigenous interests, and (c) to make an annual report to the nation on indigenous
affairs.

broader participation in policy development; and a wider understanding of indigenous issues in the broader community.

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) recommended in its submission to the Commonwealth Government: **"that, in any constitutional consultation process, an element should be provided for an educational strategy on the possibility of separate indigenous seats, based on an indigenous electoral roll, in the House of Representatives and in the Senate"**. CAR believed that before any constitutional amendment can be considered, it is important for such a proposal to have widespread support.[37]

The National Multicultural Advisory Council recommended: **"that a select Committee of Parliament be established to consider options for achieving greater representation of Australia's indigenous peoples in Parliament. In this context, the Council was cognisant of the proposal by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation for further consultation and discussion on the feasibility of reserving seats in Parliament for indigenous peoples"**. The National Multicultural Advisory Council supported the view that, in terms of parliamentary representation, the case of indigenous peoples in unique: "Their position as the original owners of Australia is now recognised by law. Policies of self-determination and self-management in indigenous affairs are supported, at least in principle, by the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments. Similar to indigenous peoples in Canada, indigenous peoples in Australia represent a 'first nation' of communities, which have traditionally not been reflected in the parliaments established since European settlement".[38]

Also, in a book published this year, Father Frank Brennan has lent his support to the proposal for constitutional reform. Specifically, he advocates reserving four seats for Aboriginals in the Senate: "Aborigines are almost 2% of the population. There are 200 seats in the Parliament. So Aborigines should be guaranteed four seats". He went on to pose the question: "Should they also be guaranteed a place in the Ministry?".[39]

From the above survey of the proposals on behalf of reserved seats for indigenous Australians it can be said that the case is based on a combination of four key propositions, namely, microcosmic representation, symbolic

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[37] Going Forward: Social Justice for First Australians, op cit, p 42.

[38] Multicultural Australia: The Next Steps, Volume 1, op cit, p 14.

[39] F Brennan, *One Land, One Nation*, University of Queensland Press 1995, p 210.

representation, the representation of political interests and systemic discrimination. All of these are predicated on the idea that indigenous peoples occupy an historically unique position within the Australian polity, a position characterised by dispossession and disadvantage of an economic, cultural and legal kind. If a special case of positive discrimination is made now on behalf of Aboriginal Australians on the basis of race or ethnicity, in an important sense it is precisely because Aboriginal Australians were actively discriminated against for so long on exactly the same grounds. The four key propositions mentioned above can be outlined in more detail as follows:

- **Microcosmic or mirror representation:** The claim is that Australia's elected assemblies should reflect the contemporary existence of indigenous Australians in more or less proportional terms. The proposal includes an element of positive discrimination to the extent that the representation of other minorities in Parliament would not be reserved. However, it could be said that, in essence, the proposal merely reflects the principle of proportionality in circumstances where, realistically, the prospect of attaining a fair level of representation for Aboriginal Australians through the normal political processes are very remote indeed. It is in that respect an argument for political equality.

- **Symbolic representation:** This proposition contains several dimensions. One is that the guarantee of reserved seats for indigenous Australians would give them a visible presence in Parliament, which would be an important achievement in itself. As AH Birch suggested, the election of a representative of a minority group can have a significance out of all proportion to the real power he or she enjoys because that person symbolizes the recognition of the political rights of the group in question.[40] In the case of indigenous peoples that significance can be particularly profound. The importance of the Maori political representation in New Zealand is often explained in these terms: as a symbol of a lost autonomy; an affirmation of cultural pride and well-being; and as a base for a continuing search for more appropriate constitutional and political forms. In 1986 the New Zealand Royal Commission on the Electoral System commented: "The Maori seats have significance for Maori in ways that go beyond the issue of political representation".[41]

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[40] AH Birch, op cit, p 21.

[41] The Royal Commission on the Electoral System, op cit, p 85.

- **The representation of political interests:** This is best viewed as the probable if not inevitable by-product of the case for microcosmic representation, namely, that minority groups are more likely to be represented effectively by members of those groups. As the ASTIC report discussed above suggests, this can have advantages both for indigenous peoples and for the community at large, resulting in more effective policies and a better understanding of Aboriginal culture and concerns.

- **Systemic discrimination:** As noted on page 23, Kymlicka saw this as a sound basis for what he called a "contextual argument" for group representation. Such an argument, it is said, is not dependent on a general theory of microcosmic or mirror representation, the conceptual and empirical problems of which were discussed by Kymlicka. Instead, the idea of systemic discrimination recognises the historical reality of the domination and dispossession of indigenous Australians and argues the case for positive discrimination in order to overcome the barriers and prejudices which stand in the way of their effective participation in the political process.

Thus, the basis of the argument for reserved seats for indigenous peoples is reasonably clear. There are of course opposing views. These can be summed up as follows:

- **Opening the floodgates:** The claim could be made that other minority groups would demand similar special provision and that, as a consequence, the introduction of reserved seats for indigenous peoples would either open the floodgates to group representation or to widespread political dissatisfaction.

- **The backlash argument:** There could be a substantial backlash against such special provision, fuelled by the opposition in some quarters to the recognition of Aboriginal land rights.

- **The democratic argument:** There is the argument that in a democratic system, the protection of minority interests ought to be the responsibility of Parliament as a whole and not just of the representatives who happen to belong to the minority group. In that sense, the proposal is destructive of the underlying principles of our representative democracy.

- **The limitations of microcosmic or mirror representation:** The idea of microcosmic representation, it can be claimed, effectively accepts the limits to the extent to which people are able and willing to "jump the barriers of experience". Whereas the real need is to fight against those limits, in order

"to create a political culture in which people are more able and more willing to put themsleves in other people's shoes, and truly understand (and therefore become able to represent) their needs and interests".[42] On this basis, microcosmic representation is both a false start and a false goal.

- **The balance of power argument:** Recent electoral history in NSW shows that the establishment of extra seats dedicated to any group in either or both Houses of Parliament could have a profound effect on the balance of power. This could be the case if those additional members operated as Independents, or if they belonged to a particular political party or were more or less permanently aligned with one party. Moreover, that conclusion need not be restricted to NSW. For example, the introduction of four reserved seats in the Senate could have even more important implications for the balance of power in the federal House of review, or for that matter in the House of Representatives. Seen from that perspective, it could be said that the claim made by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation - that dedicated indigenous seats will not affect who forms the government of the nation - fails to address the issues at stake in their full complexity.[43]

- **Tokenism:** Conversely, if the Aboriginal representatives lacked political power then the argument could be made that the reserved seats were simply a form of tokenism which would in some way serve to underline the "inferior" status of Aboriginals.

Perhaps one means by which some of these criticisms might be met would be by granting only limited voting rights to the reserved seats, similar in kind to the system that once operated in relation to Senators from the Territories who could only vote on matters affecting the Territories they represented. Presumably the difficulty then would be in determining precisely which matters, if any, fall outside the interests of indigenous Australians. Also, critics of the proposal might claim, among other things, that such an approach would drive Aboriginal affairs into some kind of political ghetto.

One difficulty involved in assessing the arguments for and against reserved seats for Aboriginal Australians at this stage is that the proposal lacks a clear focus. Is it to be limited to the Senate, as Frank Brennan suggests, or expanded to include the House of Representatives? Are any or all of the State Houses of Parliament to be involved? And then there is local government to

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[42] W Kymlicka (1995), op cit, p 140.

[43] Going Forward: Social Justice for the First Australians, op cit, p 42.

consider. If nothing else, the complexity of Australia's constitutional structure needs to be borne in mind when discussing the issue of reserved seats for indigenous peoples. Symbolically, it may make more sense to argue for representation at a national level. Whereas practically representation at a State or local government level may be of more value, bearing in mind that these tiers of government are in the main responsible for some of the major issues of concern to Aboriginal Australians, such as the provision of health and welfare services and the administration of the criminal justice system. That complexity should also be borne in mind when comparison is made with Maori political representation in New Zealand.

12. MAORI POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Comparison is often made between the lack of effective representation for Aboriginals in Australia with the fact that Maori representation has been guaranteed in the New Zealand Parliament since 1867. Frank Brennan's work is a case in point, where the Maori seats are used as a lever for constitutional reform in this country.

Historical note: The precise arrangements in New Zealand have now changed with the introduction of a new electoral system - the mixed member proportional system (MMP). Between 1867 and the introduction of MMP the Maori population was guaranteed four seats in New Zealand's unicameral legislature. The history of the making of the *Maori Representation Act 1867* was set out in detail in MPK Sorrenson's appendix to the 1986 report of the Royal Commission on the Electoral System, *Towards a Better Democracy*. It is explained there that the legislation was introduced as a temporary expedient, involving no "high principle". According to Sorrenson, "It was a useful way of rewarding Maori "loyalists and placating Maori rebels, while also assuring critics in Britain that the colonists would look after Maori interests". A specific problem was that the property qualification of the time effectively barred Maori's from voting. Only males aged 21 years and over who owned or leased land of a specified minimum value were entitled to vote. As the overwhelming majority of Maori at the time held their lands in common, most failed to qualify for the vote. The arrangements under the *Maori Representation Act 1867* provided a practical solution to this problem. However, as Sorrenson explains, it was "still hoped that in due course, when Maori had obtained the necessary property qualifications, they would vote on a common roll and the 4 Maori seats would disappear".[44] The Act was only intended to remain in force for five years. In 1872 it was extended for another five years, and in 1876 it

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[44] Report of the Royal Commission on the Electoral System, op cit, p B-20.

was extended indefinitely.

It was also the case that, despite the special arrangements made for them, Maori were markedly under-represented, with only four seats for a population of about 50,000, compared with 72 European seats for a population of about 250,000.

Maori representation in operation: According to the Report of the Royal Commission on the Electoral System, a system of dual representation based on separate electoral arrangements for Maori and non-Maori was established in 1893, with the abolition of the provision which allowed Maori who met the property qualification to vote in a European as well as a Maori constituency. In 1986 a definitional change "gave half-castes the choice of being enrolled for a Maori or European constituency". In 1967 the Electoral Act was amended to remove the prohibition against those on the Maori roll standing as candidates in European electorates and vice versa. Further changes were introduced in 1975, including the establishment of the "Maori option", whereby all persons of Maori descent could choose after each census whether to be enrolled on the Maori or the General (formerly "European") roll, the MEP or GEP respectively.[45] Also, until 1975 the MEP was defined in terms of one-half or more Maori blood, but under the *Electoral Amendment Act 1975* this definition was broadened to include persons descended from a Maori. According to one commentator, Frank Nolan: "Thus the MEP was both extended through the broader definition and contracted through the option. As a consequence, members representing Maori electoral districts had a changed constituency. Whereas their previous adult constituents comprised all those of half Maori blood (the old definition), now their constituents comprised only some of a wider group of Maori (the new descent-and choice-based definition)".[46] However, the non-adult population must also be calculated for electoral purposes. This is because, in New Zealand, the principle employed in the derivation of electoral populations is that total population is to be used. Under the 1975 reforms the approach adopted was to allocate children to the same population as their parents, except that where the parents were in different populations their children would be divided equally between the MEP and GEP populations. This was altered in 1993 when it was decided to allocate all the children of Maori descent between the populations in the same ratio as the adults. Nolan explains, "This is already applied to those adults that do not

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[45] Ibid, pp 82-84.

[46] F Nolan, "Maori electoral populations" (1993) 45(2) *Political Science* 209-215, p 209.

register. It is simple and easy to implement, consistent for adults and children, independent of the order of processing and overcomes the legal problems with the parent-child relationship".[47]

The Royal Commission on the Electoral System: Of course the New Zealand electoral system has undergone profound changes in recent years. A major catalyst for change was the Royal Commission on the Electoral System, which reported in December 1986. The Royal Commission recommended the adoption of the Mixed Member Proportional System (MMP). In the event of the MMP system being adopted at referendum, but not otherwise, the Royal Commission also recommended the abolition of the four reserved Maori seats: "In the form of Maori representation we have proposed for MMP, there would be no separate Maori constituency or list seats, no Maori roll, and no Maori option".[48]

At first glance this recommendation would seem to be out of kilter with the Royal Commission's advocacy of "the need for the direct and fair representation of diverse groups by members of those groups". In fact the Royal Commission was in no doubt that Maori interests should continue to be represented in Parliament by MPs who are also members of the Maori community; but it went on to point out that having Maori MPs "is necessary but not sufficient for effective representation of Maori interests". The Royal Commission concluded that those interests would be represented more effectively under the MMP system, if certain significant modifications were in place. In particular, what the Royal Commission suggested was that the 4% threshold be waived for parties primarily representing Maori interests whereas other parties would have to win that proportion of the list vote or at least one constituency seat in order to be entitled to any list seats. It was explained that: "Our suggestion that the 4% threshold be waived for Maori parties is intended to provide further incentives for other parties to take proper account of Maori concerns, and to enhance the chances of the Maori people mounting a successful electoral challenge if they become dissatisfied with the performance of the existing parties". Interestingly, the report went on to say: "There may also in time come to be a case for the 4% threshold to be waived for parties primarily representing other significant minority ethnic groups within the

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[47] Ibid, p 215.

[48] Report of the Royal Commission on the Electoral System, op cit, p 101.

community".[49]

For the moment, however, the Maori population was seen to occupy a unique status among minority groups: as result of its position as the indigenous people; due to its constitutional status arising from the Treaty of Waitangi; and because of the existence of the Maori seats. The advantages of the special Maori representation were recognised by the Royal Commission, notably that it ensured that Maori interests, rights and culture were represented in Parliament by Maori MPs. Nonetheless, for reasons deriving from democratic theory, the Royal Commission argued that, in a democratic system the protection of minority interests ought to be the responsibility of Parliament as a whole and not just of the MPs who happen to belong to the minority group: "All MPs ought to be accountable in some degree to Maori electors".[50] Under the reserved seats system, on the other hand, the representatives of each community, Maori and non-Maori, were ultimately responsible only to the particular community that elected them. Other reasons of a more practical kind were also put forward on behalf of abolishing separate Maori representation, including:

- **Ineffectiveness:** The reserved Maori seats have guaranteed a Maori voice in Parliament, but at the same time they have, in effect, restricted Maori views to a tiny minority of MPs. This was said to be because Members representing General seats do not need to reflect Maori concerns to ensure their political survival.

- **Party political affiliations:** It was thought that the effectiveness of the "guaranteed" voice was complicated by the fact that since 1943 the maori seats had been won exclusively by the Labour Party. This has meant that when the Labour Party has been out of power, Maori MPs have had no direct input to executive policy-making. Also, neither the Labour Party nor any other party has had any real electoral incentive to commit resources to the development of policies for the Maori people, or to campaign vigorously for their votes.

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[49] Ibid, p 101. For a comment on this suggestion see - M Chen, "Remedying New Zealand's constitution in crisis: is MMP part of the answer?" (1993) *New Zealand Law Journal* 22-39, p 28.

[50] Ibid, p 88.

- **Low turn out:** As in other safe seats, there is little incentive for Maori electors to vote. It can be said, too, that the low numbers of Maori registering on the Maori Roll and voting in Maori electorates indicates a lack of interest and confidence in the system of separate Maori representation.

- **Unwieldy electorates:** That system has also meant large and unwieldy electorates for Maori MPs. One commentator has noted in this regard: "By way of example the Member for Southern Maori is required to service an area approximately forty times bigger than that required to be serviced by a General member in the area covered by Southern Maori. As a consequence the practical link between Maori members and their constituents is very tenuous indeed".[51]

It should be stressed, however, that the case for abolishing separate Maori representation was made only in the context of the proposed introduction of the MMP electoral system; and then only after the proposal had been submitted to referendum.

In the event, the proposal to abolish the Maori seats was rejected. Writing in 1989, Richard Mulgan summed up the issues at stake in the following terms:

> Maori leaders have often been equivocal in their attitude to the Maori seats. On the one hand, they complain about the cynical origins of the seats and the relatively slight influence that Maori Members of Parliament have been able to exert on particular governments. However, when calls are made to abolish the separate seats, as they frequently are, Maori leaders are quick to come to their defence. There is no doubt that they value the guaranteed presence of specifically Maori Members of Parliament. Indeed, Parliament symbolizes the political and legal unity of the nation. From the bicultural point of view, the Maori people must be represented in Parliament. Whether or not the Maori members exercise any effective political influence, their mere presence is essential symbolically. A Parliament without Maori members could not be said truly to represent the nation.[52]

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[51] RJ O'Connor, "The future of Maori representation in Parliament" (May 1991) *New Zealand Law Journal* 175, p 176.

[52] R Mulgan, *Maori, Pakeha and Democracy*, Oxford University Press 1989, p 138.

Maori political representation under MMP: The debate concerning separate Maori representation went through a number of stages. Philip Temple notes that in its first draft the Electoral Reform Bill would have abolished the Maori seats whether or not MMP was chosen by mean of a referendum. Afterwards, the drafters reverted to the model proposed by the Royal Commission, under which the seats would be abolished with the introduction of MMP, but there was to be no 4% threshold for Maori parties. Temple comments that representations from Maoridom and their pakeha supporters saw both provisions thrown out and a completely new formula proposed. Now, the number of Maori constituencies would be determined by the same quota used to determine general constituencies.[53] The number of Maori seats would depend, therefore, on the number of people on the Maori roll. For the first time since 1867 the number of Maori seats could increase (or decrease) on a population basis, as determined by a special Maori option. This proposal was reflected in the *Electoral Act 1993*.

In 1992 a non-binding referendum was held, which established that there was a popular desire for change, and showed that MMP was the most preferred alternative. A further binding referendum held at the time of the general election in 1993 approved the introduction of MMP as proposed in the *Electoral Act 1993*.[54]

Under MMP the New Zealand Parliament will have 120 seats. Half its numbers will be elected from general constituencies on a First Past the Post basis (FPP). The number of South Island general constituencies has been fixed at sixteen. After each census this number is divided into the South Island population to provide a quota by which the number of North Island and Maori constituencies can be determined. The arrangement for Maori representation is set out in section 45 of the *Electoral Act 1993*, which provides that the Maori electoral population is to be divided by the quota for General electoral districts in the South Island and "the quotient so obtained shall be the number of Maori electoral districts". Temple explains that for the first MMP election there will be 44 North Island general constituencies, thus completing the 60 FPP general constituency seats. Five Maori seats were determined using the formula set out above, following a roll option exercised in 1994. The balance of 55

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[53] P Temple, *Making Your Vote Count Twice: Referendum '93: MMP vs FPP*, McIndoe Publishers 1993, p 35.

[54] For an account of this process and the events surrounding the 1993 referendum see - S Levine and NS Roberts, "The New Zealand General Election and Electoral Referendum of 1993" (1994) 46(1) *Political Science* 40-69.

parliamentary seats will come from closed national lists. The threshold for party parliamentary representation is 5% of the list vote or one FPP constituency.[55]

The upshot in the immediate future for Maori representation, therefore, is that the number of Maori seats has increased from four to five. This will come into place with the advent of MMP at the next general election

13.   SOME COMPARATIVE COMMENTS

Meaningful comparison is always difficult. In some respects the differences are as pronounced as the similarities. Whereas people of Maori descent are around 10 per cent of the total New Zealand population, indigenous Australians make up less than 2 per cent of Australia's population. The differences between the general constitutional frameworks of New Zealand and Australia has been mentioned. Added to this is the distinctive constitutional status of Maori under the Treaty of Waitangi, for which there is no Australian equivalent. On the other hand, the common thread is found in the indigenous status of both Maori and Aboriginal Australians and, arising from this, there is the common experience of political and cultural colonialism. No one has suggested that separate Maori representation is or will be a panacea for the problems faced by New Zealand's indigenous peoples. However, experience shows that the Maori population has resisted with great tenacity any attempt to abolish their reserved seats. That in turn would suggest the value of separate Maori representation to the people themselves, perhaps as a statement of some kind - of identity, pride, survival, recognition, assertion and all the other mixture of complex elements that make up the politics of difference viewed from the particular context of indigenousness.

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[55] P Temple, Changing the rules in New Zealand: the electoral reform referenda of 1992 and 1993" (1995) 66 *The Political Quarterly* 234-238, p 237.

14. ETHNICITY AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR

A further dimension to the debate about ethnicity and political representation is the question of the extent to which voters favour candidates of their own ethnicity, which in turn raises broader questions concerning ethnicity and voting behaviour in Australia.

An initial point to make is that there is a paucity of research in this field. A second point is that much of the research which has been undertaken focuses on the federal level of politics. The findings which are set out below follow a broadly chronological order, the purpose of which is to give a sense of the development of thinking and research in this area.

- Until the 1970s the impact of new immigrants on the Australian party system was negligible. McAllister comments that: few ethnic interest groups actively canvassed migrant causes; the existing political parties made little effort to attract migrant votes or activists; and there were few non-English speaking migrants among the ranks of federal and State elected representatives.[56] Something of the mixture of indifference and hostility to post-war immigration was revealed in Rodney Cavalier's analysis of three ALP branches in the 1950s, Guilford, Hunters Hill and Panania. Cavalier comments that "Whenever unemployment rose, resolutions called for cuts in migrant intakes. Hunters Hill wanted more British migrants, less European - 'Europeans are not a good class as a rule and the number of migrants was disrupting the economy'".[57]

- Jupp concluded in 1986 that the prevalent situation in Australia is one of "an overwhelmingly English-speaking, British-derived and nominally Christian majority which occupies a central role in all aspects of life, including the political, with the rest of the population drawn from a multiplicity of origins, touched upon by the dominant culture at many points, at varying levels of 'assimilation' and only able to make political headway through institutions set up by the dominant majority".[58]

- The situation in Australia contrasts markedly with the United States and Canada, where the political influence of migrants is often considered critical

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[56] I McAllister, *Political Behaviour*, Longman Cheshire 1992, p 142.

[57] G Whitlam et al, *A Century of Social Change*, Pluto Press 1992, p 97-98.

[58] J Jupp, "The politics of multiculturalism" (1986) 58 *Australian Quarterly* 93-101.

to electoral success at all levels of government.[59]

- In the United States, national origin appears to be a persistent influence in the voting patterns of later generations of immigrants.[60]

- Australia is one of the most ethnically heterogeneous of Western democracies and the sheer numbers of overseas-born in the electorate give prima facie importance to ethnic electoral behaviour in this country. Yet, up to the early 1980s surprisingly little was known about how migrants vote. In Australia the expectation was that voting behaviour, whether of individuals or of geographical electorates, could be explained in "class" or "occupational" terms.[61] Thus, some studies assumed that individual ethnic groups did not deliver a "block vote" to one party or another, but rather, acted "just like everyone else, only more so". By contrast, other studies suggested that particular ethnic groups had a predisposition to vote for one party or another.[62] Aitkin found that non-British migrants were least likely to vote Labor, while the analysis of time series data by Mistilis suggested an increase in Labor support among the overseas born.[63] Adding a cautionary note, McAllister and Kelley commented that "All these arguments remain highly tentative, as their authors recognize, because of weaknesses in the underlying data".[64]

- One key question posed by the available research is whether, within an essentially class based party political system, the ethnic vote is constrained along traditional, socio-structural lines, or along different lines which are

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[59] I McAllister (1992), op cit, p 142; J Jupp ed, *Ethnic Politics in Australia*, George Allen and Unwin 1984, pp 7-9.

[60] ME Poole et al (eds), *Australia in Transition*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1985, p 266.

[61] J Jupp, "The ethnic vote: does it exist? a case study of Melbourne" (1981) 2 *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 5-23, p 5.

[62] I McAllister and J Kelley, "Class, ethnicity, and voting behaviour in Australia" (1982) 17 *Politics* 96-107, p 96.

[63] D Aitkin, *Stability and Change in Australian Politics*, ANU Press 1977, p 157; N Mistilis, "The political participation of immigrant electors" (1980) 15 *Politics* 69-71.

[64] I McAllister and J Kelley (1982), op cit, p 96.

specific to the migrant communities themselves?[65]

• In 1983 McAllister and Kelley analysed changes over time in the voting
  patterns of the three major birthplace groups using the results from three
  nationwide surveys conducted in 1967, 1973 and 1979. In all three surveys,
  Northern Europeans (most British) emerged as politically indistinguishable
  from the Australian-born majority, while Eastern Europeans were
  consistently anti-Labor. Mediterranean voters, by contrast, were
  significantly anti-Labor in 1967 and 1973, but had become significantly
  more likely to support Labor by 1979. The authors speculated that the anti-
  Labor preferences of Eastern Europeans seemed to follow from long
  standing anti-communist sentiments, while the switch in the political
  allegiances of Mediterranean voters was probably a result of the efforts of
  the Whitlam Government to capture the migrant vote in the mid 1970s.[66]

• Summing up the research undertaken by McAllister and Kelley in the early
  1980s, Forrest says that, using data aggregated at the Federal electoral
  level, McAllister and Kelley derived factor scores from principal
  components analysis for a range of indicator variables relating to socio-
  economic status, rural urban differences, familism and ethnicity, to act as
  independent variables in a multiple regression approach to explanation of the
  distribution of the Labor vote (the dependent variable) in 1977. In
  comparing the relative importance of these four dimensions, they found that
  socio-economic status and rural-urban differences were about equally
  important, and one main (Mediterranean) aspect of ethnicity about a quarter
  as important as either of the other two. In contrast, familism had no
  significant impact on the Labor vote. On the issue of ethnicity, their overall
  conclusion was that it made a modest though significant contribution to
  variations in voting behaviour.[67]

• With reference to an analysis of the 1987 Federal election results,
  McAllister reported in 1988 that the patterns observed in 1979 had been
  sustained nearly a decade later. He concluded: "Overall, Labor is the net
  beneficiary from the ethnic vote; without support from Southern Europeans
  in the 1987 election, they would have trailed the Liberal-National coalition

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[65] J Forrest, "Social status, urbanisation and the ethnic dimension of voting behaviour
in Australia" (1988) 11 *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 489-505.

[66] I McAllister and J Kelley, "Changes in the ethnic vote in Australia" (1983) 18
Politics 98-107.

[67] J Forrest (1988), op cit, p 493.

by 2 per cent of the total vote". The point was also made that the relatively recent immigration of sizeable numbers of Asians precluded any over time analysis of their voting, although the 1987 results suggested a slight advantage to Labor".[68]

- In 1992 McAllister commented further on the problems involved in evaluating the voting patterns of immigrants. One is that not all immigrants become citizens and therefore have the right to vote. Secondly, national opinion surveys rarely have samples that are sufficiently large to examine the voting patterns of particular birthplace groups; normally all that is feasible, particularly where longitudinal analyses are concerned, is a crude aggregation based on geographical region of origin.[69] Jupp had commented in a similar vein in 1988, stating "There has been very little effective surveying of immigrant attitudes and voting behaviour. Samples of the overseas-born are often too small for reliability, especially when further subdivided into ethnic groups".[70]

- In fact McAllister in 1992 noted one exception to the lack of reliable survey data in this field, namely, the survey conducted in 1988 by the Office of Multicultural Affairs which included a large overseas born component. He explains that the survey did not ask for voting history or intention, but it did ask respondents to indicate their party identification. It found that "Party support varies between the ethnic groups, not just in terms of which party the group supports, but in the proportion that have no party identification". He goes on to say that, with the exception of those born in the British Isles and Poland, Labor has an advantage among all the ethnic groups, ranging from a 50% point lead over the Liberal-Nationals among Greeks, to a 20% point lead among Yugoslavs. As noted, the survey's further finding was that the proportion who do not identify with a political party is higher than the Australian born among all of the ethnic groups. McAllister suggests this relative lack of party identification can be attributed to the fact the migrants have grown up (at least to adolescence) within another political system.[71]

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[68] I McAllister, "Ethnic issues and voting in the 1987 federal election" (1988) 23 *Politics* 11-15.

[69] I McAllister (1992), op cit, p 143.

[70] I McAllister and J Warhurst eds, *Australia Votes*, Longamn Cheshire 1988, p 191.

[71] I McAllister (1992), op cit, pp 143-145.

● McAllister has concluded that the advantage which flows to Labor from the
  ethnic vote is electorally significant. In particular, he has argued that,
  without the support of the ethnic vote in the 1987 federal election, it is
  likely that Labor would not have been re-elected.[72] Also, that "strong Asian
  support for Labor seems likely to give the party a significant electoral
  advantage for the foreseeable future.[73]

Ethnicity and Labor choice (per cent of respondents)

Birthplace	1967 %	1979 %	1987 %
Australia	38	44	44
Southern Europe	30	57	63
Eastern Europe	28	37	22
Northern Europe	27	33	52
Britain	39	52	n.a.

Sources: Aitkin 1982: 159, 335 (1967, 1979); McAllister 1992: 145 (1987)

● However, McAllister's "significant electoral advantage" thesis needs to be
  approached with some caution. In 1988 Jupp concluded that "electors of
  non-English speaking overseas birth are distributed in such a way to
  minimise their electoral importance".[74] This "electoral geography" factor
  was in fact alluded to by McAllister in a footnote where he said: "The
  electoral significance of the overseas born vote is, of course, somewhat
  reduced by the fact that they are more likely to live in electorates which are
  already strongly Labor".[75] But he did not elaborate any further. Recently,
  Economou has suggested that this concentration of the ethnic vote may have
  led to a serious overstating of its impact. He formulates the methodological
  case in these terms: "No thorough understanding of the potential impact of
  'ethnic voting' is possible...without combining analyses of voting behaviour

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[72] I McAllister (1988), op cit, pp 11-15.

[73] I McAllister (1992), op cit, p 146.

[74] I McAllister and J Warhurst eds (1988), op cit, p 168.

[75] I McAllister (1988), op cit, p 15.

with an overview of some important aspects of electoral geography".[76]

- On a methodological note, Economou makes the further point that the surveys used by McAllister[77] and by McAllister and Kelley[78] employ place of birth as their indicators of ethnicity. Economou's contention is that "for some communities the notion of 'ethnic' identity may extend into Australian-born generations. Thus party strategists are confronted with a phenomenon that may be larger than the survey figures suggest".[79] What is recognised here is the issue of the "cross-generational" factor in the analysis of patterns of ethnic voting.

- Economou compares key socio-demographic data drawn from the 1991 census with results from the 1993 federal election. He concludes that: (i) ethnicity is of marginal importance in the outcome of federal elections; (ii) "ethnic" voting is a sub-set of blue-collar voting and the fact that the ALP enjoys the voter alignment of "ethnic" Australia is therefore a function of socio-economic factors rather than an inherently better policy approach on ethnic issues than its conservative opponents; (iii) "ethnic" voters are part of Labor's core blue-collar constituency and are highly concentrated in safe electorates in Labor's industrial heartland in Melbourne and Sydney; (iv) it follows that, in terms of the transfer of seats, "ethnicity" is not a major factor in Australian elections; (v) the prominence of "ethnic" characteristics in the more affluent, Liberal-held seats of Menzies and Bruce suggests strongly a de-alignment of the "ethnic" vote in accordance with upward social mobility; and (vi) that conclusion underscores the argument that voting alignments tend to be an expression of socio-economic status rather than of specific characteristics such as ethnicity.[80]

- Further to the issue of de-alignment, it is interesting to place Economou's findings alongside McAllister's 1991 analysis of the formation of party loyalties among immigrants. Again, McAllister's work was based on the 1988 survey by the Office of Multicultural Affairs. Its concern was with the

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[76] N Economou, "An overstated electoral importance? a note on ethnic voting and federal electoral outcomes" (1994) 2 *People and Place* 45-51.

[77] I McAllister (1992), op cit.

[78] I McAllister and J Kelley (1982), op cit.

[79] N Economou (1994), op cit, p 46.

[80] Ibid, pp 50-51.

party identification model which has been used to explain the political stability of Anglo-American countries. The model assumes that political partisanship is reproduced from one generation to another as parents transfer their party loyalties to their children. That assumption does not hold for immigrants, in the light of which McAllister says that political socialisation theory suggests that one of three alternatives should occur: that migrants will not form new party loyalties; that their political preferences will be driven by economic self-interest; or that they will be re-socialised within the host society. McAllister's main finding was that, lacking the affective bond to parties provided by parental political socialisation, immigrants appear able to change their party loyalties relatively easily and that they tend to do so on the basis of economic self-interest. This suggested for McAllister that immigrant groups are "potentially a floating vote". He explains, "In so far as they are not anchored to any political party through inherited loyalties, they are open to the political appeals that can be made to them by party elites".[81]

This approach needs to be distinguished from Economou's emphasis on socio-economic factors which uses class as the main determinant of voting behaviour. What McAllister seems to be suggesting is that the immigrant voter's perception of economic self-interest is tied more closely to ethnicity than to class. On this basis, the "ethnic" vote is connected in a more or less direct way to the "ethnic" policies of the major parties.

•   Seemingly more consistent with Economou's findings is other research undertaken by McAllister which suggested that the apparent decline in the link between social class and party in Australia has been overestimated and social class remains the predominant social cleavage within the party system. However, the conclusion of that research was that, although the decline in class voting had been exaggerated, it was nonetheless weaker in the 1980s than it was in the 1940s and 1960s. There had therefore been an "erosion" of the traditional class cleavage in Australian politics.[82] For McAllister (and others) that finding was in itself an invitation to move beyond social class analysis to examine such factors as gender, religion, ethnicity and more sophisticated conceptions of socio-economic status.[83]

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[81] I McAllister, "The formation and development of party loyalties: patterns among Australian immigrants" (1991) 27 *ANZJS* 195-217.

[82] FL Jones and I McAllister, "The changing structural base of Australian politics since 1946" (1989) 24 *Politics* 7-17.

[83] I McAllister (1992), op cit, p 130.

That would seem to be the best direction from which to approach his work on ethnicity, as an attempt to explain the increasingly complex realities of Australian politics.

- In broad terms Economou's work seems consistent with the 1993 research findings of James Forrest concerning voting behaviour in New South Wales elections for the Legislative Assembly during the 1980s. However, Forrest does not discuss "ethnic" voting patterns in a concerted way. Rather, he treats ethnicity as one among many factors impacting on electoral cleavages, including the dominant socio-economic factors, notably economic sectors. On the issue of ethnicity, he concluded that birthplace cleavages were "not significant", but added that they "provide pointers to particular swings within overall trends". De-alignment was one issue here.[84]

- Perhaps a clearer picture of Forrest's approach is gained from his 1988 research. There he concluded that: (i) to a significant extent, the ethnic vote is constrained along traditional, socio-structural lines; (ii) the ethnic vote is also constrained in part along lines which are specific to the immigrant groups themselves; and (iii) this ethnic dimension of voting behaviour is not at all uniform in its impact from one group of electorates to another. On the latter point, for example, Forrest found that the pro-Labor vote among southern Europeans and eastern Mediterraneans was stronger in Melbourne than in Sydney.[85]

In general terms, what seems to emerge from this is a sense of the difficulties involved in the making of any empirical generalisations in this field of research. Forrest ended with a call for more specific research into: (i) the extent to which migrants from similar backgrounds may be socialised differently in different "spatial contexts" - metropolitan vs non-metropolitan, inner city vs outer suburbs etc; and (ii) the impact of the ethnic vote and political behaviour in specific electorates or groups of electorates, thus expanding on the kind of work undertaken by Jupp in 1981.[86]

- In conclusion, the research to date seems to be divided on the issue of the electoral significance of the "ethnic" vote, as indeed it is on the existence of the "ethnic" vote. There would seem to be a need for more research in this

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[84] J Forrest, "Class and other cleavages: voting behaviour in NSW in the 1980s" (1993) 28 *Australian Journal of Political Science* 258-270, p 268.

[85] J Forrest (1988), op cit, p 502.

[86] Ibid, p 502; J Jupp (1981), op cit, pp 5-23.

area, dealing in particular with differences between and within the various ethnic groups and looking too at ethnic voting patterns in cross-generational terms, as well as in terms of the specifics of electoral geography.

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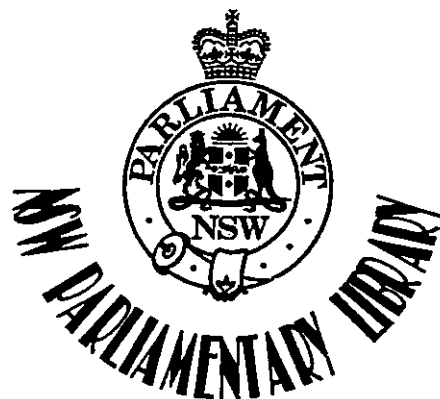
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