Review of Mark Lopez, *The Origins of Multiculturalism in Australian Politics 1945-1975*
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Where did the policy of multiculturalism come from? Did an army of worried social workers develop it in the 1960s to soothe the problems of non-English-speaking immigrants?[1] Did their many colleagues in education conjure it up to lift the self-esteem of migrant school children?[2] Did Whitlam give it to us?[3] Did Grassby?[4] Did we import it directly from Canada?[5] Did migrants create it,[6] and did they do so because the old Australia was intolerant and intolerable?[7] Did multiculturalism have to happen because assimilation wasn't working?[8] Or did politicians invent it in order to capture the ethnic vote?[9] All of these answers to the question have been proposed but none are adequate. Until now, however, there has been nothing else on offer.

Today we can do better because Australian multiculturalism has found its historian. His name is Mark Lopez and we haven't heard the history he has to tell us before. It's the story of how a tiny band of activists lobbied hard to establish multiculturalism, despite the fact that few of their compatriots—Australian-born or immigrant—wanted it ,and it's an absorbing mixture of intrigue, idealism, opportunism, luck and bravado. Then when they had achieved their goals some of them went on to write their own histories of their accomplishment. But these histories do not tell us where multiculturalism came from because, dedicated and altruistic though many of them were, none wanted to tell the story as it really was. They wanted to present the history of multiculturalism as the triumph of good over evil, the evil of assimilationism and integrationism, and they wanted to obscure their own role in this triumph. (As activists the multicultural few had worked hard to represent themselves as a flock; as historians they continued this labour.)[10]

Consequently Lopez has not used the secondary literature but has relied on archival material and interviews with the key players. He has interviewed lobbyists, those whom they lobbied, and well-informed contemporary analysts. The interview list includes Gough Whitlam, Al Grassby, Malcolm Fraser (and his former policy adviser Petro Georgiou), Michael MacKellar, Sir James Gobbo, Walter Lippman, Brian Howe, Ronald Taft and Charles Price.

Many of the activists who set the story into motion were old Australians or British immigrants. Names such as Jean Martin, David Cox, Alan Matheson, Des Storer, Arthur Faulkner, James Jupp, Brian Howe and Jim Houston are as common as are those of Jerzy Zubrzycki, Walter Lippmann, Andrew Jakubowicz, Laksiri Jayasuriya, George Papadopoulos and Spiro Moraitis. The story is not one of ethnic agitators and, though some of the activists were social workers or teachers, they were no army. Most of them could and did meet in the one room.

Zubrzycki, Moraitis and others of a non-Anglo background did not see themselves as advocates for a particular ethnic group. They were not working to advance the interests of Poles or Greeks but, like the others, were striving to transform the national identity of Australia from the old image evolved from the nation's British origins into a new image based on a pan-ethnic multiculturalism.[11]

This was an ambitious goal and as it crystallised in the mid 1960s it seemed one that they were unlikely to achieve. Political elites were not attracted to it and the general public, had they known of it, would have rejected it resoundingly. There was also little support for it among immigrants. Most were not involved in politics, ethnic or mainstream, and those who were organised into ethnic communities were caught up in mono-ethnic concerns, usually centred on home-land politics. Few were interested in the multiculturalists' philosophy. [12]

A further difficulty confronting the activists was the fissiparous nature of their own ideology. Lopez discerns four varieties of multiculturalism which, by 1975, were well-entrenched in different factional camps. (And despite the mythology, none of these came from Canada: inasmuch as foreign models played a part they came from the United States.)[13]

But by 1975 multiculturalism was well on the way to being established. In retrospect this outcome seems inevitable but it was in fact highly contingent. They activists could garner some support from members of the tertiary-educated middle class who were disenchanted with the old Australia and ready to be beguiled by something new, but very little from other quarters. And they met with real opposition, especially within the public service, but also from politicians. They also suffered a number of defeats. So how was it that they prevailed?

Part of the answer is that, by the end of the 1960s, there was a strong perception that many migrants were experiencing difficulties, a perception which was sometimes exaggerated but which did have a factual bias. But as Lopez makes clear, many assimilationists and integrationists cared about remedying these difficulties and were trying to develop mainstream policies to help. It was not clear that multiculturalism would alleviate the problems of gruelling or dangerous working conditions, long hours, lack of English, and the struggle to find appropriate housing. There was also no evidence that it would help with the education of migrant children.

So the perception that the immigration program had lead to settlement problems is only part of the answer. The other part is that the multiculturalists worked hard to promote their own vision, both as a remedy for settlement problems and as a blueprint for a new Australia, that they believed in what they were doing, and that they made the most of their opportunities.

Call them crusaders, conspirators or gamblers if you will (Lopez makes no such judgement), but this little group had their share of luck. For example, the countercultural ferment of the 1960s suited them. Few were part of it but, when all institutions were being assailed by sceptics and besieged by reformers, why not throw in the national identity as well? The change of Government in late 1972, from McMahon to Whitlam, was also lucky because it gave them opportunities to infiltrate government committees and advisory bodies. Another stroke of luck was the conversion of Malcolm Fraser; Papadopoulos and Moraitis introduced Fraser to multiculturalism in December 1973 and found him receptive.[14] Like any politician, he had an interest in courting the migrant vote but Lopez makes it clear that Fraser's commitment to multiculturalism was sincere. And it was he who institutionalised it not Whitlam. When Whitlam was dislodged by Fraser in December 1975, luck favoured the multiculturalists again because Fraser came to office as a man already convinced, though no one noticed this at time. (As he put it to Lopez in 1995, 'Anglo-Saxon Australia is dead. This isn't the kind of society we are'.)[15]

The predispositions of a few key politicians were helpful, but Fraser mattered most. Whitlam, though sympathetic was never, in this crucial early period, a real convert. As for Grassby, he began by being the tool of the activists rather than their leader. Through an extraordinary series of events he was manoeuvred into becoming a key spokesman for the new agenda, a role which he then went on to play so well that, in the eyes of many outsiders, it is he who has appeared to be the father of the revolution. (The plot here would make a splendid television drama.) The sequence of Whitlam followed by Fraser led to another stroke of luck: de facto bipartisanship on multiculturalism. The activists were all aware of its importance, but Jayasuriya articulated it the most clearly.

> 'Such a [multicultural] philosophy of community relations needs to be de-politicised and accepted by all major parties'. … [He] recalled that they feared that bipolar parliamentary debate and competition could 'tear it apart' in its nascent stages. 'I have always maintained

that and Walter [Lippmann] agreed with me. Because it was the only way in which it could have ever got accepted in this society because it was such a radical idea'.[16]

We are used to the idea of bipartisanship as part of the history of immigration and, until recently, this has gone hand in hand with bipartisanship on multiculturalism. What is the link between the two policies? Obviously immigration provides the raw material of multiculturalism; but does causation run the other way as well? Does a desire to promote multiculturalism drive immigration policy? Political leaders have denied this. For example, in 1989 Bob Hawke said, 'As public policy multiculturalism encompasses government measures designed to respond to [cultural and ethnic] diversity. It plays no part in migrant selection'.[17]

But this is not what many of the activists wanted. The faction which Lopez calls the 'cultural pluralists' argued openly for 'the transformation of society through poly-ethnic immigration'.[18] By the early 1970s a number of them were on the Immigration Department's Advisory Council and its Committee on Social Patterns. In July 1973 this Committee published a document which clearly argued for more immigration in order to boost multiculturalism.

> Australia needs more people, not just to augment the consumer market and develop expanding industries, but to develop a more diverse and viable society and to sustain cultural and social minorities whose contribution is needed to enrich any community, but especially one as remote as ours from the world's great centres of civilisation.[19]

Adverse public opinion, lack of support from immigrants, and opposition from numerous influential people and groups were obstacles which the new multiculturalists had to overcome. But the growing numbers of middle-class professionals enthused by cosmopolitan were an opportunity, as were changes of government, and the sympathy of a few key politicians, a sympathy which in turn led to bipartisanship. But no advance towards multiculturalism would have occurred without the sustained activity of a the tiny group of dedicated lobbyists whose achievements have now been brought out of the shadow and into the light.

Lopez, unlike many others working in this area, avoids making judgments about the virtues (or shortcomings) of multiculturalism, and of the assimilationist and integrationist polices which it eventually displaced. He is a historian not an advocate. But he is also a writer. Anyone who knows a little about his topic will be riveted to the page as they find out what really went on behind the scenes. Those who come to his book with no prior knowledge will learn a great deal about a key turning point in Australia's history and they will also enjoy the experience.

The Origins of Multiculturalism in Australian Politics was launched by the Governor of Victoria, His Excellency Sir James Gobbo AC CVO, at the Grollo Theatre, CO. AS. IT, in Carlton, Melbourne, on 28th August 2000.

Mark Lopez, *The Origins of Multiculturalism in Australian Politics 1945-1975*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2000, pp. 583 (ISBN 0 522 84895 8), recommended retail price A$44.00

References
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[5] F. Hawkins, *Critical Years in Immigration: Canada and Australia Compared*, New South Wales University Press (and McGill-Queen's University Press), Sydney, 1989, p. 217

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[7] G. Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, Pluto Press, Sydney, 1998, pp. 101, 105, 236. 242-3

[8] E. Vasta, 'Dialectics of domination: racism and multiculturalism', in E. Vasta and S. Castles (Eds), *The Teeth are Smiling: The Persistence of Racism in Multicultural Australia*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1996, p. 47

[9] R. Sestito, *The Politics of Multiculturalism*, The Centre for Independent Studies, Sydney, 1982, pp. 23, 32

[10] Jean Martin is a leading example, as is Andrew Jakubowicz. See M. Lopez, *The Origins of Multiculturalism in Australian Politics 1945-1975*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2000, pp. 11-14

[11] For the backgrounds, multiple committee memberships, and self-effacing tendencies of the activists see ibid., pp. 11, 23-24, 67, 131, 324-325, 330, 153

[12] ibid., pp. 38, 76-77, 150, 163, 168, 332

[13] ibid., 71-73, 117, 232, 265

[14] ibid., p. 257

[15] ibid., p. 440

[16] ibid. pp. 426-427

[17] Quoted in, 'An agenda for ethnic tolerance', *The Age*, Melbourne, 27 July 1989, p. 4

[18] Lopez, op. cit., p. 447

[19] *Final Report: Inquiry into the Departure of Settlers from Australia* quoted in Lopez, op. cit., p. 237. See also the speech written for Grassby by Jim Houston, which argued that Australia needed mass immigration to create and reinforce an ethnically diverse society, ibid., p. 246. See also ibid p. 426.