

Multiculturalism as Nation-Building in Australia: Inclusive national identity and the embrace of diversity

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Key Words:

Multiculturalism, Australia, national identity, national culture, nation-building, policy

Research aim:

This article aims to discuss the relationship between multiculturalism and national identity, focusing on the Australian context. It argues that inclusive national identity can accommodate and support multiculturalism, and serve as an important source of cohesion and unity in ethnically and culturally diverse societies. However, a combative approach to national identity, as prevailed under the Howard government, threatens multicultural values. The article nevertheless concludes that it is necessary for supporters of multiculturalism to engage in ongoing debates about their respective national identities, rather than to vacate the field of national identity to others.

Results/Conclusion:

Despite the contribution of multicultural policy to the integration of large numbers of ethnically-diverse immigrants since the 1970s, from the mid-2000s Australia's national governments, both conservative and Labor, were less willing than in the past to promote the symbolism of multiculturalism, instead emphasizing Australian citizenship. As in Europe, there was a symbolic retreat from multiculturalism, in part stimulated by the threat of Islamic extremism and terrorism. At the same time, most national multicultural policies remained in place, including funding (albeit reduced) for multicultural broadcaster SBS and for Ethnic Communities' Councils at both national and state levels, the 'access and equity' strategy aimed at full participation and equality among Australia's diverse population, anti-discrimination, and anti racial vilification policies, and promotion of national 'Harmony Day'. Unlike national governments, many state and local governments continued to promote the virtues of multiculturalism. Recognizing the growing importance of religious diversity and expression to multiculturalism, important initiatives emerged such as interfaith dialogues, organized primarily by local government and civil society organizations (even where supported by federal or state government funding).

Implications:

Cultural Group(s):

Location of study:

Age group:

Number included in study:

N/A

Type of participants:

N/A

Research approach:

Type of data:

Qualitative

Secondary data sources used:

Specific scales or analytical techniques used:

Implications/ Recommendations:

Notes: