AUSTRALIAN Mosaic

BELONGING IN MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA

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THE MAGAZINE OF THE FEDERATION OF ETHNIC COMMUNITIES' COUNCILS OF AUSTRALIA

FECCA

FECCA IS THE NATIONAL PEAK BODY REPRESENTING PEOPLE FROM MULTICULTURAL BACKGROUNDS IN AUSTRALIA. FECCA'S MISSION IS TO ENSURE THAT THE EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES OF MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES ARE HEARD BY GOVERNMENT, BUSINESS AND THE BROADER COMMUNITY, AND THAT EVERY ASPECT OF LIFE IN AUSTRALIA IS INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE FOR ALL.

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FECCA

Contents

ADDRESS BY FECCA CHAIRPERSON Mary Patetsos

I am delighted to welcome you to issue 55 of the *Australian Mosaic* – the flagship magazine of the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA). This issue was developed on the land of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri Peoples of the Canberra region and FECCA pays our respect to Elder's past and present and recognise them as the custodians of the land on which we work, live and gather.

Stories of belonging in this country are not complete without recognising the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their continuous custodianship in this nation. A true sense of belonging means having a say about one's own life and for Australia this must start with enshrining a First Nations Voice in the Constitution. FECCA will continue to walk with First Nations People in this process.

Belonging is also about a feeling of home for people who have left their original country for a myriad of reasons. People arrive in Australia with hopes and dreams of a new life. Often these dreams involve living free from persecution and better opportunities for their children. Experiences of welcome are incredibly important in this process and FECCA works hard to make the journey easier by ensuring migrant and refugee voices are heard in parliament, in business and in the general community. We will continue this work to ensure everyone in Australia can experience a sense of belonging in a successful and socially cohesive multicultural Australia.

I hope you enjoy reading the different stories on belonging and home in this issue of the *Australian Mosaic*. I am truly grateful to all the contributors who have been willing to share with FECCA their stories and experiences of multicultural belonging.

INTRODUCTION FROM FECCA CEO Mohammad Al-Khafaji

Welcome to issue 55 of the *Australian Mosaic: Belonging in Multicultural Australia*. In this issue we have invited contributors to share their experiences of belonging in Australia, one of the most successful and diverse multicultural countries in the world.

I want to start with extending a very warm thank you to all contributors who have shared their personal stories. Some are heart-warming and some heartbreaking, but all are important and necessary to understand if we want to strive to be better and more welcoming as a nation.

There are many versions of belonging in Australia – all individual, unique and important. People's initial experiences when arriving in a new country are critical in developing a sense of belonging throughout their settlement journey. People who have been in Australia for a long time may still struggle with feeling at home. Some have had positive experiences initially and feel at home straight away.

I know from my own experience that it is a journey. Belonging for me means not fearing that my identity, language or culture is something I need to hide, instead I can feel comfortable and be proud of who I am.

It is important that our leaders celebrate the diversity in this country and encourage people to express their culture freely. It is important to make sure that an expression of culture is normalised in mainstream society. People should not have to hide their culture, their language and their identity. This can only happen when people feel safe from vilification and racism, something that is difficult to address when it comes from very small sections of the community. Our political leaders have a critical role to play here in setting the tone, and there's always more they can do.

OUR POLITICAL LEADERS HAVE A CRITICAL ROLE TO PLAY HERE IN SETTING THE TONE, AND THERE'S ALWAYS MORE THEY CAN DO

For a truly multicultural society where everyone can feel they belong, it is imperative that our leadership make sure we have an effective and well-funded national anti-racism strategy. Our leaders must set the tone for what is acceptable behaviour. People must feel comfortable in coming forward and report abuse and harassment.

An anti-racism strategy should be informed by the community and could include many elements to ensure a socially cohesive and successful multicultural nation. Some of these elements should be better training for the police on how to handle racism complaints, and an education campaign to ensure people know what to do as bystanders when they witness harassment.

The Hon Alex Hawke, Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs, reflects on belonging and social cohesion in his foreword to this issue of the *Australian Mosaic*. I thank the Minister for his contribution.

Thinking of what prompts a sense of belonging for everyone, I want to reflect on the article by Professor Megan Davis. Explaining the Uluru Statement from the Heart, Professor Davis notes how the statement can offer a meaning of belonging built of respect, empowerment, justice and truth for all people in Australia – not just for the Indigenous population. By walking together with First Nations people on a path towards a better future through justice and truth, Australia's migrant communities can be part of a new future where **everyone belongs**. It is an important article to read and talk about among your family and friends.

We have fantastic contributors for this edition. Dr Hass Dellal AO from the Australian Multicultural Foundation writes about belonging through engagement and participation, while Ida Walker notes the importance of a common journey for European settlers, newer migrants and people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background. For Lena Nahlous, belonging is not possible when structural exclusion still exists. For South Sudanese communities in Alice Springs, belonging is connection through employment.

FOR SOUTH SUDANESE COMMUNITIES IN ALICE SPRINGS, BELONGING IS CONNECTION THROUGH EMPLOYMENT

Reading through the personal stories of belonging in this issue of the *Australian Mosaic*, it is clear there are several factors impacting on people's sense of belonging. Examples include having a family in Australia; access to equitable Government services such as Medicare; a sense of stability; feeling you can contribute to society; and having friends and good neighbours.

THESE STORIES ARE MOVING AND PERSONAL AND FOR US TO UNDERSTAND AND SHAPE THE FUTURE OF AUSTRALIA, WE MUST FIRST LISTEN TO THESE DIVERSE VOICES

Brian Obiri-Asare speaks of shared experiences of racism between himself and the Indigenous people living in Tennant Creek and how racism impact on people's sense of belonging. Romel Montemayor Lalata reflects on his meeting with First Nations women and how this finally made him feel some sense of home in Australia. Sowaibah Hanife and Tahiri Askari both reflect on belonging, identity and fitting in while not always feeling accepted. Nofovaleane Mapusua says it is difficult to feel a sense of belonging while still waiting for permanent residency as a Samoan man with a disability.

Similar feelings are expressed in *Citizenship Story* where belonging is linked to hope – that one day they may be reunited with family, one day being able to vote, one day being able to travel with a passport that is respected internationally. For Dr Reihaneh Attaran belonging is feeling welcomed while Sonia De Mezza notes how belonging is a process and with time society adapts and new arrivals find their way. For Augustino Moedu, interviewed by Vanessa Radicevksi, belonging is sharing experiences with other migrant and refugee communities.

These stories are moving and personal and for us to understand and shape the future of Australia, we must first listen to these diverse voices. They could be our future doctors, engineers, researchers, Olympians and just ordinary citizens that make Australia great.

For me, I am optimistic. I feel lucky and proud to be an Australian and I know we are moving in the right direction towards a more welcoming country that embraces people from all walks of life.

Again, I want to thank everyone who contributed their personal stories to this issue of the Australian Mosaic. I hope you enjoy this read.

WE ASKED FECCA STAFF IN THE OFFICE HOW THEY EXPERIENCE BELONGING IN AUSTRALIA. THESE ARE THEIR ANSWERS:

Belonging is raising a family in my new country, seeing my children grow up and have the opportunities Australia offer. Belonging is also having a network and a job where I can feel respected.
(Norwegian background)

Being able to speak my own language without being embarrassed. Being able to wear traditional clothing with pride.
I was very embarrassed when I was younger as you just want to fit in. Now as an adult I find pride in these differences and have learn to not only celebrate my differences but the differences of others.
(Filipino background)

Belonging for me is the ability to express yourself in your language, as a very fundamental right in life, despite having a strong accent. I have heard from many how language is being used as a tool for dominance or subjugation. This dominant culture makes people fell less capable when they notice others can't wait for them to finish their sentence, or worse even, others finish their sentence for them.
(Filipino background)

I often find that the Australian society and the Government lack a true multicultural understanding where they genuinely embrace the values of inclusion, respect and equity.
(Chinese background)

Being able to feel safe wherever I go in Australia. I had a bad experience travelling in regional Australia when I was younger and I still feel anxious, especially when going to more remote country towns.
(Filipino background)

A defining moment of belonging for me is when I got my Australian Citizenship. Despite being a citizen though, I have regular identity crisis in my day-to-day life. I know that for some Australians I am not Australian and for some Chinese I am not Chinese.
(Chinese background)

Belonging is learning about First Nations people in this country, to feel connected to something deeper and meaningful.
(Norwegian background)

BELONGING IN A MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA:
STRENGTHENING OUR COHESION TOGETHER

THE HON ALEX HAWKE,
MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION,
CITIZENSHIP, MIGRANT SERVICES
AND MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS

An individual's sense of belonging is entirely unique – it could be something as simple as a smile from someone on the street or someone offering to help with directions. Big or small, these acts have the potential to change a person's outlook on life in Australia, and how connected they feel to it.

Australia is known for being one of the world's most successful liberal democratic and multicultural nations, with Australians coming from every single country around the world and speaking over 300 languages in their homes.

This success is built on our inclusive national identity and shared Australian values of freedom and dignity of the individual, equality, mutual respect, and compassion. It is the reason we are considered a welcoming nation with 'a fair go' central to our way of life. It is the reason people choose Australia as their home.

For some, a sense of belonging in Australia is also based on the services made available to them. The Australian Government recognises the positive social and economic impacts of these services, particularly for our migrant and refugee community. The recent and ongoing reforms to the Adult Migrant English Program are a reflection of this with a greater shift in focus towards the learning needs of individuals.

Our social cohesion, which at its simplest is what brings and keeps us together as Australians, is central to ensuring all Australians feel included. It has kept us resilient and encouraged us to empathise with one another through the unprecedented challenges of recent years, particularly throughout the bushfires, floods and now, the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have seen this in the way Australians, regardless of their background, have helped one another and the impact of these actions. The compassion and willingness to help has been exhibited by members of the Sikh and Muslim communities who donated grocery hampers and cooked meals to those in isolation; by African community organisations that organised online information sessions on mental health; and by members of the Chinese community who distributed facemasks to frontline workers and vulnerable groups. These are just a few of the many examples of inspiring community action I have had the privilege to witness and these actions are social cohesion in action.

While these actions have enriched the lives of many, research tells us that there is more work to be done. While the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute's 2020 Mapping Social Cohesion report recorded

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84 per cent of respondents as agreeing that multiculturalism has been good for Australia, there are still relatively high levels of negative sentiment towards Australians of African, Asian and Middle Eastern backgrounds.

In recognition of this sentiment, we have seen the Race Discrimination Commissioner Chin Tan put forward a proposal for a National Anti-Racism Framework. I have welcomed this proposal and will continue to work with the Australia Human Rights Commission and Attorney-General's office in its development. The Australian Human Rights Commission's release of the 'Sharing the Stories of Australian Muslims' report also provides us with critical insights that will contribute to the conversation of how we tackle the issues of discrimination and a lack of belonging by members of our community.

Alongside these efforts, the Government has committed to strengthening our social cohesion by investing $29.3 million in migrant and refugee women's safety, social inclusion and economic participation in the 2021-22 Budget. This is in addition to a $63 million five year commitment in the 2020-21 Budget which funds initiatives that continue to reinforce our Australian values, promote citizenship and encourage individuals to grasp the opportunities in Australia with both hands.

As part of this, the Government is also developing an inaugural Social Cohesion Statement, which will build on and complement Australia's Multicultural Statement. The Social Cohesion Statement will set out a blueprint for how we can work together to maintain and strengthen our relationships with one another whilst highlighting our inclusive national identity and shared values – essential to a strong sense of belonging for all members of our community. I thank FECCA and the many community organisations that have contributed to the development of this Statement.

Australia's world-leading achievements as a vibrant and prosperous liberal democratic and multicultural society reflect the contributions of each and every one of us and how we support one another. The Government recognises the work ahead and will be there, shoulder to shoulder, with communities as we work together to maintain a cohesive national identity in which everyone belongs.

OUR SOCIAL COHESION, WHICH AT ITS SIMPLEST IS WHAT BRINGS AND KEEPS US TOGETHER AS AUSTRALIANS, IS CENTRAL TO ENSURING ALL AUSTRALIANS FEEL INCLUDED.

VOICE GIVES NEW MEANING TO BELONGING

PROFESSOR MEGAN DAVIS

Professor Megan Davis is Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous and Professor of Law at UNSW. She was recently appointed the Balnaves Chair in Constitutional Law and she is Acting Commissioner of the NSW Land and Environment Court. She was a member of the Referendum Council and the Expert Panel on the Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Peoples in the Constitution; was an expert member of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (2011-2016); and is the Chair of the United Nations Human Rights Council's Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous peoples. Professor Davis is also a Commissioner on the Australian Rugby League Commission and, like any good Queenslander, she supports the North Queensland Cowboys and the Queensland Maroons.

Four years ago, under the shadow of Uluru – the sacred and ancient site of the Anangu – First Nations people from all points of the southern sky read an invitation to all Australians. The invitation was to walk with us in a movement of all Australians; to do what politicians have not been able to do – address the unfinished business that lays unresolved at the heart of the nation.

This unfinished business starts with the dispossession of the First Nations peoples. While other countries entered into peace treaties, Australia did not. As a consequence of this, there has been no resolution of the basis of 'settlement' in Australia. Mabo did not satisfactorily address this problem.

Australia has been on its pathway to constitutional recognition for a decade. We are now in the eleventh year of the journey to constitutional recognition, following five Commonwealth parliamentary and prime ministerial processes and nine reports from 2010 to today.

The first process set up by Julia Gillard in 2011 sought legal advice from one of Australia's most eminent silks who said the legal status of First Nations peoples is as follows:

> *'The sovereignty of the Commonwealth of Australia and its constituent and subordinate polities, the States and Territories, like that of their predecessors, the Imperial British Crown and its Australian colonies, does not depend on any act of original or confirmatory acquiescence by or on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.'*

This is the original grievance. In the absence of treaties, the Uluru Statement from the Heart – the result of 13 Regional Dialogues across Australia with First Nations peoples – articulated a vision for a new Australia. An Australia anchored by a relationship with its First Peoples. A relationship that has not yet been achieved since the invasion.

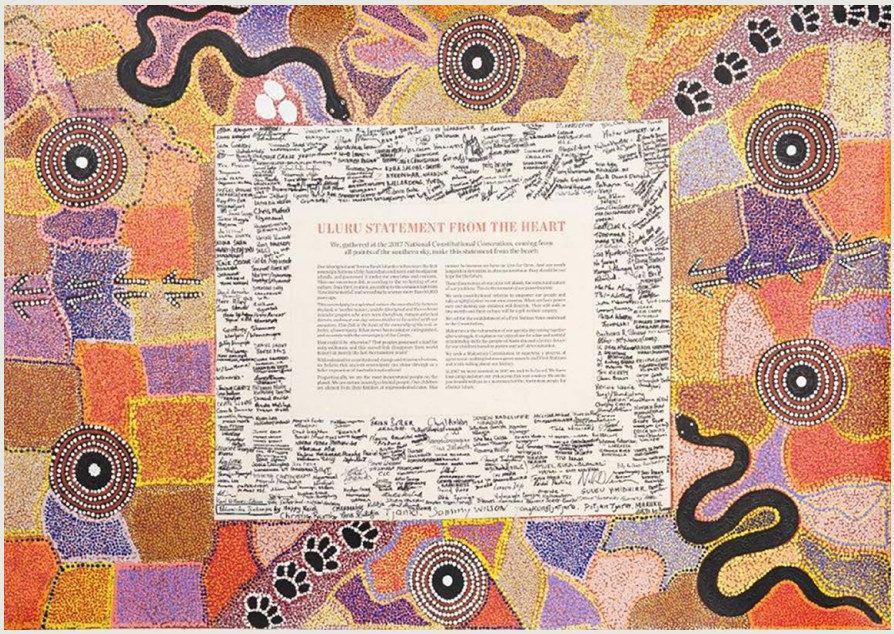
Through its words, the Uluru Statement offers a new meaning to belonging and place for all people across the nation. A meaning built on respect, empowerment, justice and truth.

The Uluru Statement is a roadmap toward peace and a way to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples through the establishment of a First Nations Voice, enshrined in Australia's founding document – the Constitution.

When the Australian Constitution was written, First Nations people were not at the table. Instead, the colonists – fuelled by race ideology – deemed us a 'dying race'. A problem to be fixed. It would be one of the first acts of the Federal Parliament, under this constitution, that the White Australia policy was written into law.

This history shows the power of the Constitution and its institutions to oppress through law. Yet, it is with the very same Constitution, that transformative once-in-a-blue-moon reform can also be achieved.

A moment that changes a nation forever. It is this transformative change that the Uluru Statement seeks.



Find the Uluru Statement from the Heart here: https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement

Find the Uluru Statement from the Heart in different languages here: https://ulurustatement.org/translations


THE ULURU STATEMENT OFFERS A NEW MEANING TO BELONGING AND PLACE FOR ALL PEOPLE ACROSS THE NATION

Makarrata, a Yolngu word meaning *'the coming together after a struggle'*, is the culmination of the Uluru Statement's agenda. A process that would oversee agreement-making or treaty, and truth-telling – guided by a constitutionally protected First Nations Voice to Parliament.

This path towards a better future, by definition, is tied to belonging – of a coming together, through justice and truth.

Belonging is what defines us as First Nations people. Belonging ties us to Country, kin, and culture. It is at the heart of our sovereignty and our generosity.

That is why the Uluru Statement is addressed to the Australian people and not to politicians. It is with the people – from across Australia, in all communities, that speak all different languages, and practice different religions and cultures – that the new story of a nation can be told.

It is the public that has the power to change a nation through constitutional change.

Establishing a First Nations Voice in the Australian Constitution through a referendum not only empowers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have a say in the laws that impact us – but it is a line drawn in the sand by all Australian people. A mandate for meaningful lasting change that alters the course of the nation. It is all of us, walking together and shaping a new future.

Over the last four years, Australians have accepted this invitation in powerful and meaningful ways.

Popular support for a First Nations Voice to Parliament, enshrined in the Constitution, is overwhelming. 90% of submissions to the Australian Government's current 'co-design' process – to see what an Indigenous Voice might look like – support a First Nations Voice in the Constitution.

Polls show significant and growing support as more Australians engage with the Uluru Statement's message and call to action.

As the Uluru Statement is an invitation to all Australian people, everyone needs to be empowered to be a part of this movement.

SBS, in consultation with the UNSW Indigenous Law Centre, translated the Uluru Statement into over 60 different languages. From Arabic and Punjabi to Mandarin and Tamil, you can listen to the words of the Uluru Statement from the Heart in your native tongue.

First Nations people know well the power of language. Language is our Country, stories, law, and art. To hear the words of the Uluru Statement in your first language is to hear its message for the first time.

Peace and justice do not know only one language after all.

The time for action is now. We are at the dawn of achieving lasting change – a mechanism by which the meaning of how we belong in this nation is renewed based on self-determination and justice.

As First Nations people we cannot wait for this change to arrive in some distant future. We have been fighting for a meaningful place in our own lands for hundreds of years.

Without a voice and recognition, our people and our Country suffer.

As the Uluru Statement says:

> ***Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.***
>
> ***These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is the torment of our powerlessness.***
>
> ***We do not need to bound by this reality.***
>
> ***Before us is the opportunity to change a nation. But we need you. We need you, your family, and your community.***
>
> ***Walk with us. It's time.***

PEACE AND JUSTICE DO NOT KNOW ONLY ONE LANGUAGE AFTER ALL

MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA:
MORE THAN A THEORY

DR. BULENT (HASS) DELLAL AO

Dr Bulent (Hass) Dellal AO is the Executive Director of the Australian Multicultural Foundation and the former Chair of SBS (Special Broadcasting Service). He has over 30 years of experience in multicultural affairs and serves on a number of committees and boards. He also introduced the biannual Diversity Matters Conferences for Commonwealth nations and has promoted the Australian multicultural experience internationally on many occasions. He has also organised and co-hosted numerous conferences including: The National Muslim Youth Summits, the National Conference of Imams on behalf of the Commonwealth Government which informed the National Action Plan, the 2007 Metropolis Conference with Monash University and the 2018 Metropolis Conference with Multicultural NSW and Settlement Services International. He was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in the General Division for services to Multicultural Organisations, the Arts, and the Community on the Queen's Birthday Honours List 1997 and awarded the Centenary of Federation Medal in 2003. He was conferred with an Honorary Doctorate in Social Sciences by RMIT University on the 13 December 2006. In 2015, he was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia for distinguished service to the multicultural community through leadership and advisory roles, to the advancement of inclusiveness and social harmony, to youth, and to the broadcast media. Dr Dellal was appointed as Adjunct Professor, Alfred Deakin Institutes, faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University on 13th May 2020.

Australia's multicultural society is an undeniably rich resource, beneficial to the social, economic and political advancement of Australia and as a channel for the global exchange of skills, knowledge and technology. Our diversity also has important implications for global climate, economics, politics and security and can play a role in peacebuilding.

Australia's functional and productive multiculturalism is due, in large part, to the diligent application of policies, programs and systems that reinforce in all members of society the principle, *with rights come responsibilities*. The goals and principles underpinning Australia's multicultural policy arise from Australian democracy. It is our democracy which enables diversity in our society to flourish by guaranteeing our civil freedoms, our fundamental rights and our equality. It is important to highlight that Australian multiculturalism had been built on the evolving values of Australian democracy and citizenship, whilst ensuring that it adequately reflects the balance of rights and obligations expected of all citizens. And I stress the word 'obligation', which is loyalty to Australia, whose laws, institutions, and traditions guarantee our basic human rights.

THE REALITY OF SOCIAL COHESION DOES NOT EXIST ACROSS THE WHOLE OF SOCIETY; SO MUCH AS IT IS LIVED IN THE MYRIAD OF COMMUNITIES, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LOCALES ACROSS A NATION.

Diversity presents unique challenges for leaders and policy makers in the areas of social cohesion, welfare, development and education. It poses new questions on cultural and national identity and the impact of globalisation on social cohesion and human capital. Identity politics, played out on the political arena, encourage an ethnocentric and anti-immigrant agenda and blame multiculturalism for destroying host cultures. On the flipside, the concept of multiple cultural identities resulting in fractured allegiances where individuals play out their homeland conflicts in their adopted countries is a formidable challenge. Achieving bipartisanship and unity amongst our political leaders on Australia's multicultural future is key to strengthening policies that actively and genuinely promote the positive aspects of diversity and encourage inclusion and participation at all levels of society. True collaboration requires trust and trust takes time to build. It is an important feature that Government work collaboratively with communities from inception through to completion. Dedicated and dynamic leadership from government, social and private institutions and the media are required in promoting and supporting the benefits of diversity through unity and trust and dispelling notions of 'us' versus 'them' to ensure that all Australians engage with confidence and without fear of discrimination.

Multicultural Australia's continued and future success is contingent on a socially cohesive society. Social cohesion incorporates dimensions of belonging, shared values, participation and connectedness. The reality of social cohesion does not exist across the whole of society; so much as it is lived in the myriad of communities, neighbourhoods and locales across a nation. To succeed holistically, the work must start at the roots and move up with greater engagement into political and social areas and potentially moving into participation. Participation involves the understanding that, in democratic nations, a person's voice, their perspective, their contribution, is valuable, simply because it's theirs. To understand and actively participate requires confidence and experience and forms a natural progression from engagement. It is through the dual processes of engagement and participation that individuals and communities can develop a sense of belonging and connectedness. Engagement and participation also promote a sense that the individual is investing in society, and reciprocally, they become perceived as an investment by society[1].

As multiculturalism evolves, second and third-generation diaspora will play a vital role as change agents and builders of social capital in Australia. They are a key source for building social cohesion, creating understanding and developing cultural and educational links between the country of origin of their ancestors and country of birth. With links to the homeland, the diaspora in Australia provides an exchange of both intellectual and material wealth that could not have been achieved as efficiently by the host country alone. These Australians have

I WOULD LIKE TO SEE A TIME WHEN WE NO LONGER NEED LABELS TO DESCRIBE WHO WE ARE OTHER THAN AUSTRALIANS

an advantage of diverse cultural and linguistic knowledge to successfully navigate in a new world of trade and technology. Empowering and giving voice to these up and coming generations is imperative to harnessing the tremendous skills and knowledge that a diverse population offers.

The idea of the common good does not have to stop at our borders. These same opportunities can connect and foster understanding between people across the globe. There are many Australians who appreciate that being a loyal Australian and a global citizen are not antithetical concepts. In fact, it will be our many deeper ties to the rest of the world that may create greater chances of ensuring security and prosperity.

The success of multiculturalism in Australia owes much to the foresight and vision of both past and present Governments and the Australian community, actively championing the benefits of our cultural diversity. The 2020 Mapping Social Cohesion Survey - Scanlon Foundation, in response to the statement that multiculturalism has been good for Australia, 84% of people surveyed indicated agreement, higher than 77% in 2018 and 80% in 2019.

As Australians we have the capacity and the resourcefulness to meet challenges by finding new and better ways, working together and sharing our knowledge and insights. The courage and generosity of people coming together in their communities is a common theme in the Australian story, as we witnessed during the recent fires and the COVID-19 pandemic. Everything we do to build our communities and to make everyone a vital element of that community plays a part in making us a strong, democratic country.

I would like to see a time when we no longer need labels to describe who we are other than Australians – one people drawn from many cultures joined to our First Nations People through land and spirit, committed to promoting harmony, respect and understanding.

[1] Social Cohesion: Beyond the Theory – Dellal, B. & Zwartz, A. 2013

’CREATING AN INCLUSIVE NARRATIVE‘: CONVERSATIONS ON SOCIAL COHESION MOVE ACROSS AUSTRALIA

IDA WALKER

Ida Walker serves as the National Director of Public Discourse at the Baha'i Office of External Affairs and represents the Baha'i community in its engagement with the Australian Government, religious communities and civil society organisations on matters which have a bearing on the betterment of Australian society. This involves promoting and collaborating to address issues of social importance including social cohesion, the equality of women and men, the role of religion in society, inter-faith harmony, and the role of youth in society, amongst others. She attends the Commission on the Status of Women each year as part of the official Baha'i International Community delegation to the United Nations Headquarters in New York. Ida has also spent several years coordinating empowerment projects and educational programs for the Australian Baha'i Community – addressing the material, social and spiritual empowerment of people at the grassroots. Ida Walker has a background in clinical and counselling psychology, also working with SMEs and NGOs such as Lifeline & YWCA in implementing leadership and development programs.

How can a society with diverse views on history, culture, and values – some seemingly at odds with each other – forge a common identity that transcends differences and does not privilege some groups or diminish the worth of others?

The Bahá'í Community of Australia embarked on a two-year project to explore this and related questions with hundreds of participants – including government officials, social actors, journalists, faith communities and organizations of civil society – across all states and territories.

This initiative emerged from a groundswell of conversations and voices from across the country who were saying we need a narrative which describes who we are as a country and unites us. We knew that the process had to involve diverse voices from different realities – east west, rural and urban, from the grassroots to the national level. We also knew we needed to bring these voices together in unifying spaces where people could explore this issue,

FAITH HAS THE CAPACITY TO BE A POWERFUL UNITING FORCE BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER IN A SPIRIT OF BELONGING AND HARMONY




free of limitations – to have enough time, without dominating voices, where people could listen and be heard.

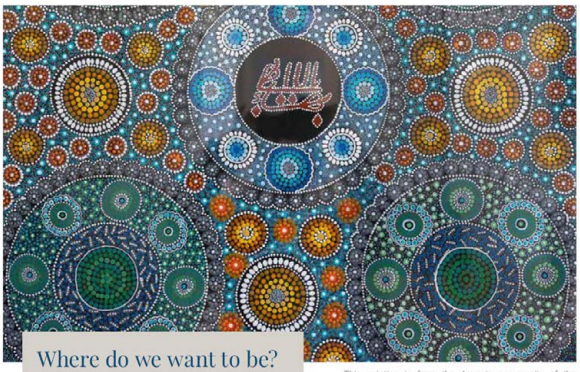
In the many consultations across the nation, we heard people say the stories of our Indigenous peoples, European settlers and recent migrant populations were running alongside one another but not woven together. This project has allowed different segments of society to discover a narrative that would allow all the people of our country to see themselves on a common journey.

A new publication titled *Creating an Inclusive Narrative*, launched in November 2020, is the fruit of these discussions and in the span of just a few months has continued to stimulate profound discussions in gatherings across Australia.

The publication includes discussions on questions such as: Where have we been? Where are we now? Where do we want to be? We then list pathways where focused action can lead to significant advances to strengthen social cohesion. These pathways include:

1) building resilient communities
2) focusing on neighbourhoods as settings for intense learning
3) ensuring meaningful participation of indigenous peoples
4) rethinking the role of media
5) redefining the purpose for education
6) drawing on the true purpose of religion
7) fostering new models of leadership.

The report has received positive feedback. Member of Parliament, Jason Falinski, spoke at a gathering in Sydney and on behalf of the Prime Minister noted how 'Safeguarding our cohesion is not just a matter for government. It is something that belongs to all of us. ... Faith has the capacity to be a powerful uniting force bringing people together in a spirit of belonging and harmony. ... It is a source of comfort, of solace, and of resilience for so many Australians.'



This painting is from the Arremte community of the Northern Territory. It illustrates through the use of symbols representative of the Arrente community and Baha'i symbols, bush flowers from different lands – signifying the coming together of different lands.

Where do we want to be?

VISION, HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING SOCIAL COHESION

A sign of a healthy multicultural and socially cohesive country is the recognition that we are one people, sharing a common homeland. This does not imply that everyone is the same, uniform or homogeneous, but rather, all people, in their diverse forms and functions, play a part in maintaining a socially and economically healthy society. In fact, the more diverse we are, the more conscious strengthening our social cohesion and capacity to work in a collective and unified way. Seeing ourselves as relational beings assists us to overcome social isolation and achieve well-being by building connections between all of us. Take the analogy of a family. In a family, the well-being of each member is a common concern for all. If one member of the family prospered at the

Creating an Inclusive Narrative

PROLOGUE

From July 2019 to September 2020, the Australian Baha'i Community sought to identify what Australians understand about who we are as a people, the values that unite us, and how we can work towards a more socially cohesive society. Fifty roundtable discussions in all states and territories brought together Australians from a wide array of shift in the functioning of Australian society. Strengthening social cohesion was viewed as a goal in and of itself, but also as a means for creating a better future for all people. Participants observed that our capacity to become a more cohesive country and also respond positively and constructively to social, environmental and structural challenges

At a launch of the report in South Australia, the Hon Jing Lee MLC, the Assistant Minister to the Premier of South Australia, highlighted that the publication shows how individuals, the community, and even institutions 'come together to promote oneness in humanity, that men and women are equal, that we all have a joint responsibility... to a collaborative framework.' She also noted how this publication 'challenges us, collectively with all the research behind it, to think a little bit further... and not just talk about it, but work towards common goals.'

Philippa Rowland, president of the Multifaith Association of South Australia, noted how this publication 'manages to combine individual perspectives within the larger picture of how our [society] operates. More importantly, it draws a practical arc from learning where we have come, to understanding our present situation and having the collective courage to imagine that we can bring into being a better future for all.' Ms Rowland also noted how 'this dialogue on how we can create an inclusive society is at the heart of an important journey that speaks strongly to interfaith harmony and peaceful mutually rewarding coexistence in a multicultural society.'

We in the Bahá'í Community of Australia see this publication as a call for urgent action and courage to safeguard and reach greater degrees

A CALL FOR URGENT ACTION AND COURAGE TO SAFEGUARD AND REACH GREATER DEGREES OF UNITY AND COHESION IN OUR COUNTRY

of unity and cohesion in our country. One of the most important considerations is how the people of Australia will apply and implement its insights to generate further learning in their own spheres of influence – in government policy, our organisations and institutions, the media, community projects and with people and families in every neighbourhood.

To read more about this project and to access the report, please see here: https://dbe00f78-2b63-4e86-9c6a-ccc91c888fb7.ilesusr.com/ugd/361673_5df1efac1c61412cb600d883e68851ab.pdf?index=true

THE ART OF IDENTITY AND BELONGING

This article is based on a speech presented at the Welcoming Cities Symposium on 22 April 2021 at the National Maritime Museum Sydney.

LENA NAHLOUS

Lena Nahlous is an experienced CEO, producer, curator, artistic director and facilitator with a long-term commitment to equity in the arts and creative sector. She is currently the Executive Director of Diversity Arts Australia and host of The Colour Cycle podcast. Diversity Arts Australia (DARTS) is Australia's national voice for ethno-cultural and migrant racial equity in the arts, cultural and creative industries. Their work is underpinned by a human-rights ethic, social justice principles, and the belief that a truly diverse spectrum of creative expression and participation is fundamental to a democratic, inclusive and sustainable creative sector, and society.

What is the place of the arts in engendering cultural identity and belonging?

At Diversity Arts Australia, we approach concepts of 'belonging' and 'inclusion' with critical questions. What does 'belonging' mean for non-Anglo migrants in Australia? What are we inviting people to belong to? What does it mean to 'belong' while living on land that was never ceded?

Concepts of belonging and inclusion should not be about bringing people into systems that were not designed for them. Rather, we should be focussing on building new systems and structures from the ground up that are designed to be inclusive and reflective of Australia's diversity.

We know the stories told on our screens, on our stages, in our books, in our museums and galleries, and the music we listen to, are important. They matter. This has been codified by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, where article 27 states that 'Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.' Creative expression is a fundamental human right that we are all entitled to. It is not a privilege. It is as necessary to our wellbeing as shelter, safety and food.

While everyone has the right to be enriched by and reflected in the arts, research tells us that this is currently not the reality. Across all levels of the arts and creative sectors in Australia, culturally diverse creatives and communities are significantly underrepresented.

Encouragement, nourishment, acknowledgment

The books, music, and films that sustained so many of us through a traumatic Covid year, can provide encouragement, nourishment, and acknowledgement. But what happens when certain groups' cultural and creative practices are privileged over others, while those of ethnic minority artists and communities are rendered invisible?

What is the social impact when the diversity of multilingual creative expression is absent from the stories of a nation?

As former Australian Human Rights Race Commissioner Tim Soutphommasane said during his opening address at Diversity Arts' Beyond Tick Boxes Symposium, '... if you're someone who can see yourself, or someone like you, on screen or in our media, you've never had to ask questions about why people like you were left out. You've never known the feeling of looking into society's mirror without seeing yourself reflected.'

The experience of culturally diverse artists and their work being marginalised or erased within the Australian cultural landscape is one that thousands across Australia have consistently articulated to us at Diversity Arts, via our research, projects and events, providing evidence of systemic failures which are restricting sector growth. Evidence of this in the media and entertainment industries has been identified in PriceWaterhouseCoopers' 2016-2020 annual Media and Entertainment Outlook, which states

that a lack of racial and gender diversity hinders the future growth of media and entertainment industries in Australia.

These limitations also have global repercussions, limiting opportunities, participation and markets for Australian work in a context where the rest of the world is increasingly taking action. One such example is the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) historic changes to its operations, membership and voting processes aimed at embedding diversity and equity. Another example is Netflix's increased commitment to diversity within the company and to commissioning diverse content. Making the connection between belonging and how people are reflected, their inaugural Inclusion Takes Root at Netflix report states, 'We want employees to feel like they have a home here. That they belong. And that's possible when they feel reflected at work'.

A global reckoning with racism

The brutal killing of George Floyd has had a profound effect on millions of people across the globe, giving rise to global consciousness about the Black Lives Matter movement. However, community-led racial justice campaigns are not new to Australia – the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody movement has been voicing that Black Lives Matter for decades. Justice for First Nations peoples is foundational for the work of racial equity in the immigrant settler space for our social movements and advocacy to have integrity.

The BLM movement has highlighted the need for radical change across all sections of society and sparked public conversations about systemic racism and a lack of social and cultural diversity in Australia's arts, screen, and media sectors.

The calling-out of major arts institutions through open letters, statements and blog posts, the removal of TV shows such as Chris Lilley's 'blackface' Jonah series on Netflix, and the public calling out of the selection of all-white recipients of the Sydney Morning Herald/Age arts criticism fellowship program exemplify this.

As a peak organisation, over the years we have drawn on campaigns such as #OscarsSoWhite and #LogiesSoWhite that highlight inequity and exclusion within the entertainment industry and resonate with the experiences and realities of migrant communities of colour in Australia. At the grassroots level, activists have seeded campaigns such as the #JustNotThatMany Twitter campaign started by theatre and performance makers to highlight the rhetorical shields put up to excuse the systemic exclusion of people of colour within the industry.

Diversity Arts has also seeded campaigns, such as our current #IAmNotAVirus campaign, which has commissioned 68 artists from Asian communities across Australia to make new works in response to the rise in anti-Asian racism since COVID's arrival. While Asian communities and artists have had to absorb the impacts of increased racism, ironically, creative projects are one of our most powerful weapons against ignorance and racist narratives, which is why we developed the 'I am Not a Virus' project. From films, music and dance, to comics, sculpture and writing, the works provide counter-narratives and act as forms of resistance, while also creating connections and dialogue between the artists and broader communities.

NASIR JEBEILLE

COVID CLEAN, 2021 © ANDREA SRISURAPON

Just not contemporary Australian excellence

Structural exclusion continues to occur in an Australian context. At Diversity Arts, we have gathered many stories of migrants who are unable to access support for their extensive and established practices. One such example is that of an Indian dancer and dance teacher who has lived in Australia for over a decade. This dancer was awarded a Distinguished Talent Visa, which the Australian Government gives on the basis of '[having] an internationally recognised record of exceptional and outstanding achievement' in one's field. Despite coming to Australia on this visa classification, the Artist has never been successful in receiving State or Federal arts funding for their work. They believe this is due to their artform being viewed as 'traditional', and not being viewed as 'contemporary Australian excellence' or 'innovative', which have all been key defining criteria for most arts funding bodies over the last decade. However, she argues, with each new work she creates, the form expands, extends, develops.

As writer Roanna Gonsalves says, 'One of the ways in which artistic excellence is maintained as a white possession is by the continuing denial of artistic excellence in relation to non-white arts practitioners, and the denial of opportunities to achieve excellence through sustained financial support, in relation to non-white arts practitioners'. Roanna goes on to say, 'Let's begin to disentangle artistic excellence from the sole possession of whiteness. Let's recognise excellence in the work of non-white arts practitioners too. Let's understand that the terms 'multicultural' and 'artistic excellence' are not incompatible but can and do form a productive coupling.' Much of our work at Diversity Arts is calling long-held, institutional beliefs into question, including notions such as 'excellence' as a universal measure for art and the false separation of categories such as 'traditional' and 'contemporary' art. In the BAFTA example above, one of the elements of the changes they have made to their membership and voting processes is to introduce 'conscious voter training' which includes unpacking what excellence means in their context. This kind of training would greatly benefit those on judging and grants panels in Australia.

Despite the hurdles and lack of 'official' arts industry support, the dancer and teacher mentioned above established their own school of dance, which contributes to a small part of their income, and they continue to create and perform new work. Their practice is now Australian, and their work engages significant audiences, despite it not receiving recognition or support from the arts and dance establishment.

Case studies like these inform the work of Diversity Arts and how we advocate for equity within the sector and across government. How can a sense of belonging be cultivated when mid-career and established creatives of colour remain at the threshold, and are not invited in? Or when immigrant established artists are not provided with acknowledgement and recognition?

Systemic Issues and Shifting the Balance

Many Australian-born culturally diverse creatives have the experience of constantly being viewed as emerging, even after a decade of solid work in creative fields. Australian arts companies are comfortable with the idea of mentorships, fellowships, placements and internships geared towards emerging creatives of colour, but oftentimes these programs are structured in a way that is not about exchange and collaboration. Nor are they about changing the cultures and systems within companies that are responsible for the underrepresentation of culturally diverse creatives and communities.

Research across all areas of the creative sectors reveals significant under-representation of people from culturally diverse communities in most areas of Australia's creative sector.

In 2019, Diversity Arts released the Shifting the Balance report measuring cultural and linguistically diverse (CALD) leadership in 200 leading arts, screen and creative organisations – 1,980 board members, CEOs, senior executives, award panel judges. More than half of the organisations surveyed had NO people from CALD backgrounds in any leadership positions, and only 9% of nearly 2,000 leaders were CALD Australians despite comprising 39% of the population.

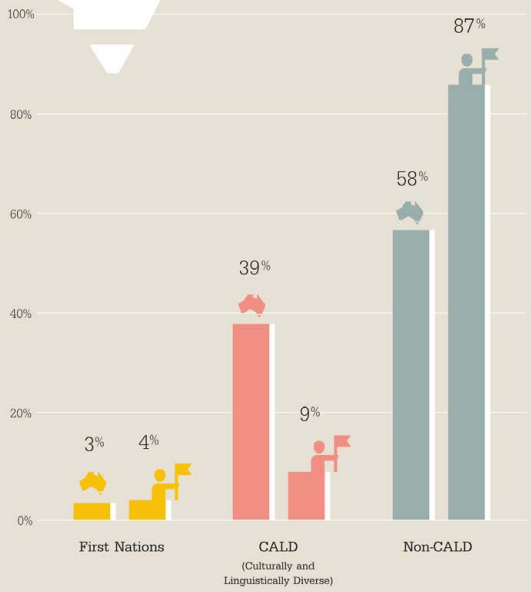
The research focused on leadership because leaders have power – to make decisions, to set priorities and agendas, to employ and promote, and to act as gatekeepers. Often, the lack of diversity in leadership is reflected in an organisation's programming, employment, casting and ultimately, audiences and participants.

Systems change

Can one or two initiatives, or a 'diversity special edition', really change the structures of power? Or allow for genuine inclusion? While it is undeniable that shifts and changes have occurred and short-term diversity initiatives have been implemented, the structures of power have not changed. Diversity initiatives as add-ons do not address the systemic monocultural and monolingual dominance of the cultural landscape. At Diversity Arts we seek to address this issue at the individual, institutional and structural levels, by building programs and structures that support sustainable and transformative change.

Projects like *StoryCasters* and *Stories* from the Future demonstrate the importance of purpose-designed, safe, collaborative spaces for creatives of colour. These spaces are necessary in a sector that was not built with them in mind. Other projects, such as Fair Play and Creative Equity Toolkit help build capacities for organisations and companies.

How much does our arts leadership reflect Australia's cultural diversity?



Let's compare

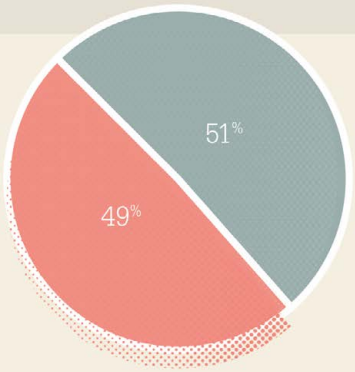
the proportion of people of a particular background in the Australian population

with

the proportion of people of that background represented in arts leadership positions

1/2 of Australia's major arts organisations have **NO** CALD* representation within their leadership.

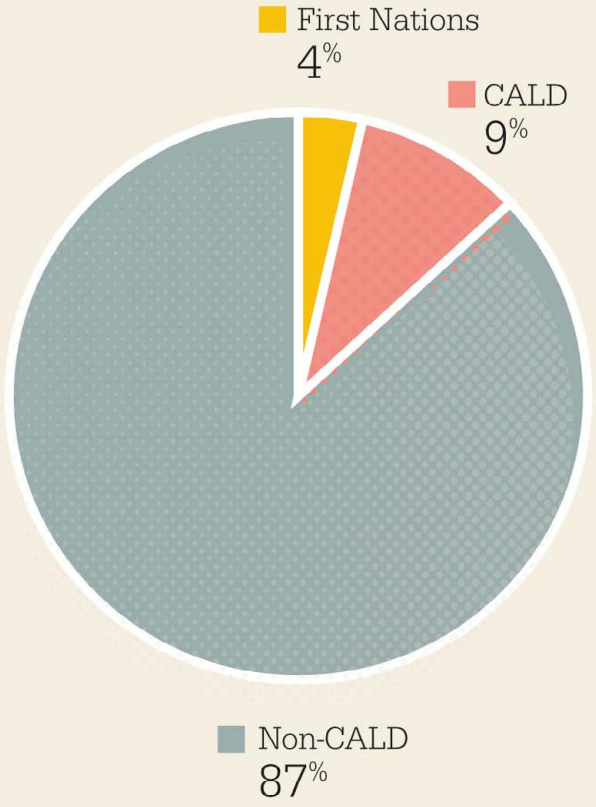
*Culturally and Linguistically Diverse



No CALD leaders present

CALD representation exists

This is a percentage of 200 leading arts organisations surveyed across Australia. In 51% of these, cultural and linguistic diversity has no representation at any senior level.



Less than

1 in every 10

Australian arts leaders is from a CALD background*

*Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

SHIFTING THE BALANCE Diversity Arts Australia

STORYCASTERS: building platforms and reshaping narratives

In response to the exclusion of culturally diverse content creators, citizen journalists and arts reviewers in Australia, Diversity Arts developed StoryCasters, a capacity-building program for 65 young creatives. In addition to participating in structured training and work experience, the podcasters, writers, music composers and filmmakers who comprise the StoryCasters, also collaborated with one another, creating communities of practice that extended beyond the project. Many in the StoryCasters cohort expressed that the project exposed them to creatives who shared similar experiences and interests to them for the first time.

As a result of this project, all of the participants have created new works, and many have secured paid work in the sector.

STORYCASTERS © DIVERSITY ARTS AUSTRALIA (NASIR JABEILE)

STORIES FROM THE FUTURE: imagining alternative realities

Designed as an alternative approach to consultation and research, Stories from the Future workshops invite participants to imagine the cultural and creative landscape of the future that they want to inhabit in 2050 and to chart a course of action for the change that is needed to arrive there. The workshops use a participatory action research model, which centres artists and creative workers in the process. The project has produced published articles, videos, comics and the After Australia anthology. Over 230 creatives have participated to date. The workshops were designed to bring together creatives to co-design a future decolonised arts sector. As one artist noted, 'It was great to see the solidarity and sense of community. It's so rare to meet creatives and workers in other aspects of the arts industry and to see commonalities and similarities. To hear that I'm not alone is so invaluable.'

STORIES FROM THE FUTURE © DIVERSITY ARTS AUSTRALIA (PHOENIX EYE FILMS)

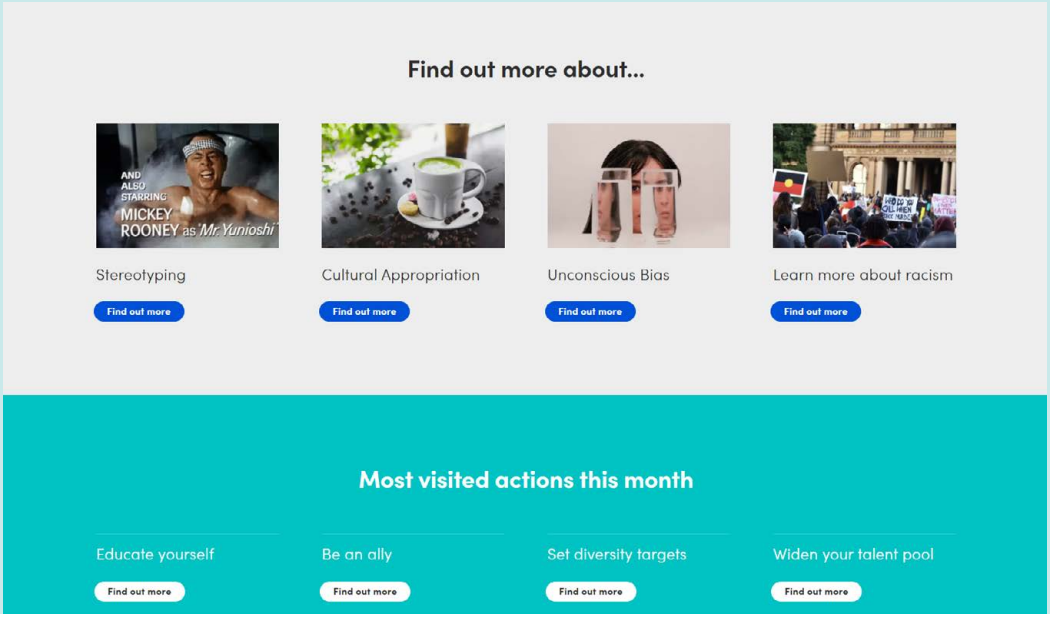
FAIR PLAY: equity, inclusion and the creative sector in Victoria

Core-funded by Creative Victoria, Fair Play is an equity and inclusion capacity building program designed to change organisational cultures and systems within the creative industries. Designed to be delivered to 20 creative industry organisations in Victoria, the program has since expanded, with over 30 organisations and businesses participating. Fair Play addresses barriers to participation by underrepresented groups in Victoria's creative industries, with a focus on developing each organisation's skills and capacity to work with First Nations people, people with disability and people from underrepresented culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Delivered in partnership with First Nations and disability organisations and individuals, the program embeds mentorship, training and frameworks (such as Equity Action Plans) over an intensive 4-6-month period to support organisations to make systemic change.

CREATIVE EQUITY TOOLKIT

How do we share leading ideas, practices and research in racial equity with organisations in ways that both support organisations to make change and don't put the burden of labour on culturally diverse communities? In partnership with the British Council, Diversity Arts developed the Creative Equity Toolkit, a website to share leading practice in cultural and racial equity in the creative sectors between Australia and the UK. The Toolkit is actionable and practical, with worksheets, templates, how-to guides and self-reflection tools. The outcome of the site since its launch in July 2020 has been overwhelmingly positive, with over 1200 dedicated subscribers and thousands more accessing the site.

CREATIVE EQUITY TOOLKIT © DIVERSITY ARTS AUSTRALIA AND BRITISH COUNCIL



Conclusion

If Covid has taught us anything, it is how interconnected we all are and how global events can have very local impacts. A virus that emerges in Italy may have consequences in remote parts of Hawaii with the free movement of people. Likewise, issues of human rights, climate change and sustainability are the shared responsibility of every country and community.

Australia's creative sector is one of the hardest hit industries by COVID and artists of colour, who were already underrepresented, have suffered disproportionately. If we are committed to a creative sector that reflects and represents the diversity of the nation, we must do the foundational work of building a sector in which social and racial diversity is central.

AUSTRALIAN SOUTH SUDANESE SEEKING THE LARAPINTA TRAIL:
A STORY OF SUCCESS AND BELONGING IN ALICE SPRINGS

DR DEVAKI MONANI

Dr Devaki Monani is a lecturer in Social Work, College of Health and Human Sciences, Charles Darwin University. Dr Devaki Monani has taught Leadership in Social Policy in the discipline of Social Work. Her research interests include Multicultural Policy, Comparative Social Policy, Immigrant Settlement and Multicultural Communities in Australia.[1]

MS JAYA SRINIVAS OAM

Ms Jaya Srinivas is the ministerial advisor to Minister Kate Worden, Minister of Multicultural Affairs, Northern Territory, on matters of multicultural affairs. She has been instrumental in bridging the policy conversation between multicultural communities and the minister in the Northern Territory.

Introduction

The Australian South Sudanese community members have often had to overcome stigma and racist media coverage.[2] Also, the South Sudanese experience of settlement and belonging have often been fraught with trauma and distrust.[3] This is, however, not the case in the city of Alice Springs. This short reflective article highlights the presence of South Sudanese Australians in Alice Springs.

Multicultural communities in Alice Springs

Alice Springs is a remote town in Australia's Northern Territory, halfway between Darwin and Adelaide. Across the world, Alice is known for its proximity to Uluru, a deeply spiritual site for First Nations people.

In Alice Springs, there are currently at least 15 active multicultural associations. Some of these are African Association of Central Australia, Islamic Society, Fijian Association, Indian Association, Kenyan association, Indonesian, South Sudanese, Sri Lankan, Filipino, and Susumama multicultural women's playgroup facilitated by the Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia.

Alice Springs as a choice for immigrant settlement can be considered an anomaly. The most obvious reason for this is the immediate employment opportunities that Alice Springs offers. Research has suggested that, in Alice Springs, it is generally difficult to attract and retain Australian born employees, particularly because of the lack of family networks, the distance from other cities in Australia and the cost of moving considered by Australian born community workers. Those of immigrant backgrounds are less likely to have familial legacies in the bigger cities, even though they may have stronger friendship networks. Ultimately, the lure of ongoing employment within one's field is a better option for many immigrants compared to low paying jobs in big cities.

Prior to delving into the new and emerging South Sudanese community, it is critical to demonstrate the inherent resilience of a city like Alice Springs to absorb members of the African community. As early as 2008, amongst several others from the African backgrounds, a husband-and-wife couple talk about their early settlement. The below quote is shared by African-Kenyan Muslim couple.

1 Dr Devaki Monani accompanied Ms Jaya Srinivas Multicultural Advisor to Multicultural Affairs NT Minister Kate Worden in the capacity of an academic observer as part of a ministerial delegation. The aim of the ministerial delegation was to asset map strengths, and opportunities for immigrant communities in Alice Springs.

2 Birch, P. (2021). Abuse by the Powerful? Exploring the role of media narratives and political discourse in the immigration-crime nexus. Abuse: An International Impact Journal, 2(1), 49-59.

3 Nolan, D., Burgin, A., Farquharson, K., & Marjoribanks, T. (2016). Media and the politics of belonging: Sudanese Australians, letters to the editor and the new integrationism. Patterns of Prejudice, 50(3), 253-275.

We were living in Melbourne, Victoria, it was the year 2008. We are African-Kenyan Muslims.

My wife was working for a small tax firm, she had qualifications in commerce and accounting, a job came up in Deloitte, Alice Springs. My wife was not that confident that she would ever get hired in a such a reputed firm as an .African Muslim female migrant, as it had been nearly impossible in Melbourne to get a job with a reputed firm. She had her qualms. She could not believe it when they rang her within half an hour of applying for the job. My wife had landed a job with Deloitte!!, one of the best firms in the country. Since then, she has moved on, taking up better positions and completed her CPA whilst living in Alice Springs, all these years we are raising a family here.

I am very lucky to be working with a Federal Government agency in Alice Springs, they have supported me in undertaking a Diploma qualification in contract management and also supported a PhD scholarship in Marketing at the University of Western Australia. My job now is to also inspire new arrivals. I volunteer with the Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia as their Chairperson.

Ali Wako and Buke Ali
Alice Springs residents since 2008

South Sudanese in Alice Springs

Research has often pointed toward the clear and established links between employment, belonging and health and well-being[4] as critical to successful settlement.

Studies in the UK have demonstrated that education is seen by a majority of refugee and migrants as a means for meaningful employment. However, higher levels of education can have an adverse effect in terms of migrants. For instance, a recent study of over 2,000 refugees in Australia showed that pre-immigration education is negatively correlated with employment outcomes. In the UK research demonstrated that refugees with 'managerial professions' and 'higher-educational backgrounds', such as 'postgraduate qualifications', took longer to find suitable employment, due to difficulties converting their 'qualifications', the paucity of 'bridging courses and the need for further local education experience[5].

In the case of the South Sudanese in Alice Springs, the stigma that emerged in the media from states like Victoria and NSW, particularly on the issue of youth gangs, impacted on their ability as a community to gain employment in those states. The incidents triggered trauma, fear, and ultimately impacting community well-being.[6] This has been to the contrary in Alice Springs. In Alice Springs, several of the Sudanese arrivals had previously resided in Melbourne, however the opportunities of ongoing employment as disability carers, security guards, chefs have given this community renewed zest to life as migrants in Alice Springs.

Some of these professions do not require a particularly high proficiency in English. However, several of the Sudanese in Alice Springs are keen to enroll with the STEPS Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) to learn English and support their children with homework.

4 Baker, S., Due, C., & Rose, M. (2021). Transitions from education to employment for culturally and linguistically diverse migrants and refugees in settlement contexts: what do we know?. Studies in Continuing Education, 43(1), 1-15.
5 Lee, E. S., Szkudlarek, B., Nguyen, D. C., & Nardon, L. (2020). Unveiling the Canvas Ceiling: A multidisciplinary literature review of refugee employment and workforce integration. International Journal of Management Reviews, 22(2), 193-216.
6 Burford-Rice, R., Augoustinos, M., & Due, C. (2020). 'That's what they say in our language: one onion, all smell': the impact of racism on the resettlement experiences of South Sudanese women in Australia. Language and Intercultural Communication, 20(2), 95-109.

As a community, the South Sudanese can get jobs in Alice Springs. Several of our people are employed here. They like Alice Springs, they would like to plan to live here for a longer period. We have access to engage with members from our tribes, we also have jobs in our field, we know that this is likely to be far more competitive in other states and cities.

Apajok Biar[7]

Completed undergraduate qualifications in social work, previously resided in Sydney, however, has landed a job in Alice Springs, Apajok is raising a family alongside undertaking post graduate studies.

Research has proven several times that employment is the number one factor in drawing migrants to regional areas. Financial security offers pathways to immigrants towards raising families and strengthening communities. A recent study sheds light on the extent of high-level skills the Afro-diasporic communities in Australia now possess. However, certain issues of systemic racism remain in place as a significant barrier towards mainstream acceptance[8]. So far, racism toward African migrants has not been captured in academic research in the case of Alice Springs. Here we need to acknowledge that Alice Springs has a had a longer history of the presence of First Nations Peoples and the acceptance of institutional diversity. Here, we build on a similar narrative shared in 2018 by SBS on the extent to which South Sudanese have 'swapped' Melbourne for the outback[9]. In 2018, SBS reported that around 400 members of the South Sudanese community were residing in Alice Springs. The ABS 2021 census will reveal the exact figures of South Sudanese residing in Alice Springs and that will provide some definite indicators for policy makers.

Media reports have confirmed our recent observations that employment is the number one 'pull' factor for South Sudanese in Alice Springs. Families shared experiences of how several Australian born Sudanese children are now attending school in Alice Springs, revealing the longer-term goals of Sudanese Australians to call Alice Springs their home.

There needs to be a recognition of the South Sudanese community in Alice Springs, through a positive lens that may enable belonging, particularly to be identified as an engaged, involved, and contributing newly settled community in Alice Springs. Alongside this, there needs to be a strong positive recognition of Alice Springs as a city of deeply rooted cultural heritage for First Nations Australians[10] and a welcoming place for multicultural groups.[11]

MINISTER KATE WORDEN WITH SOUTH SUDANESE WOMEN IN ALICE SPRINGS

MS SRINIVAS WITH DEVAKI MONANI AND SOUTH SUDANESE WOMEN IN ALICE SPRINGS

7 SBS (2018) https://www.sbs.com.au/language/english/audio/success-story-of-young-apajok-biar
8 Gatwiri, K., Mwanri, L., & McPherson, L. (2021). Afro-diasporic experiences of highly skilled Black African immigrants in Australia. Australian Social Work, 1-12.
9 SBS (2018)https://www.sbs.com.au/news/the-south-sudanese-migrants-swapping-the-city-for-the-outback
10 Harmon, S. (2021) Pure joy: how Parrtjima festival is bringing ancient culture into the future, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/apr/13/pure-joy-how-parrtjima-festival-is-bringing-ancient-culture-into-the-future
11 Some general concerns do remain around access to affordable housing as a critical issue as identified by the South Sudanese community. It needs to be noted that housing across the Northern Territory is expensive and unaffordable. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed systemic housing challenges across Australia. There is considerable policy opportunity to enhance the conversation around affordable housing for multicultural community groups in remote and regional NT and beyond, settlement policies particularly targeting regional areas need to prioritise housing accessibility alongside employment opportunities.

PERSONAL STORIES ON BELONGING

Belonging in a multicultural society develops in a myriad of ways and at different times – mostly it is an ongoing process where people take time to completely feel at home and have a sense of belonging in a new place. There are many factors that impact on this – **all specific to each person**. Whether people arrive in a new country as a refugee, as a skilled migrant, as asylum seekers, for family reunion, they will have their own way of coping, their own way of settling and different experiences of welcome.

As the stories below demonstrate, the importance of being able to live in an environment free of racism as well as the opportunity to contribute in positive ways to a cohesive society is in the first story very important for a sense of belonging. The other story speaks of the difficulties dealing with the waiting time for permanent residency and the challenges involved with this, such as feeling excluded from mainstream Australia.

Story 1

I arrived in Australia as a refugee in 2016. I arrived on a Women at Risk Visa (204). I was recently divorced and had been through a lot of trauma during the separation from my then husband and from war experiences in my own country.

It was a great relief to arrive in Australia and from the first day I felt a sense of welcoming and belonging. I was met at the airport by Navitas staff, given accommodation, money and food. I was very surprised by how welcomed I was. There were so many small things they gave me access to. Things I hadn't even thought about as being important, such as for example a phone.

After I arrived in Australia, I studied English at TAFE. I reached level 3 when I decided to join a volunteer group so that I could meet more people. I felt very alone in Wollongong as I didn't know anyone. Through the volunteer program I was connected with another person as part of a friending program. There were conversation groups and through these I was linked with many people who live in the area. Through meeting new people, I was encouraged to tell my story and to share my experiences before I arrived in Australia. People seemed to really appreciate me telling my story and welcomed my experience. This made me feel better and I got more confident when people encouraged me to keep telling my story. I felt very happy and special after my time with the volunteer group.

There were of course times when I felt less welcome and less part of Australia. For example, at one stage I had some neighbours who did not like me. They made complaints about me and broke my rubbish bins. I tried to connect with them, I gave them food and so on, but nothing helped. They were still nice to my other neighbours, so I really felt like an outsider. This was, so far, the only time I really felt like I did not belong to Australia.

What did help me develop a very strong sense of belonging here was when I had the opportunity to start my own business. I started a business in family day care, and it felt fantastic to be able to make my own money. Being able to look after myself meant I felt more like an Australian, independent and able to participate in the Australian way of life. Last year I even met my husband and got married so I have an even stronger connection to this country. I am now working helping refugees with their recovery journeys, so I am happy to share my knowledge and strengths.

Story 2

I arrived in Australia in 2014 on a tourist visa as I was looking for new beginnings in a new country. I ended up in a regional area where I found a safe place and much less crime than what I was used to in my home country.

I did not speak any English when I arrived, so I travelled to a major city to join classes and here I met someone, also from my home country, who ended up becoming a very close friend. My new friend helped me find a place to live and taught me where to look for jobs, even driving me around while applying for employment. I transferred my tourist visa to a student visa 500.

My qualifications were finally recognised and when I started to pay tax in Australia I felt more part of this new country. Having a job made me feel happy and part of Australia. I could speak to people at work and help others – I felt that I belonged. My new fried also introduced me to other people, often from same backgrounds as myself, but also other local people – this also helped me feeling that I belonged to this new place.

I fell in love and married an Australian. We were happy, I was happy with work, travel and living in Australia. I was on a spouse visa (820). Unfortunately, the marriage ended, and I wanted to get my son over to Australia to support me and live with me. He arrived in Australia on a student visa. We both find it quite stressful that he is now in Australia as an international student (Visa 500), and he is desperate to have the same opportunities as other students in Australia. He completed study in Aged Care and due to restrictions relating to work hours he was not able to get a job, so he is studying to be a nurse.

I dream of becoming a citizen of Australia but currently I am unable to get my permanent residency. This makes me sad, and I feel that I am not really part of Australia.

The COVID pandemic and the restrictions that followed were hard. For the first time in Australia, I felt excluded. When wearing a mask and walking in the street or on public transport, people would spit on me.

I also very much feel like an outsider, and it is very hard to keep waiting for a response on my permanent residency application. To get a positive response on my application would mean that I would be able to take up a loan and buy a house. My dream is that my son finishes his education and gets a full-time job and has same opportunities as other people his age. We want to work and contribute to Australian society as it is safe here.

WE WANT TO WORK AND CONTRIBUTE TO AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY AS IT IS SAFE HERE.

WHAT TENNANT CREEK TAUGHT ME

BRIAN OBIRI-ASARE

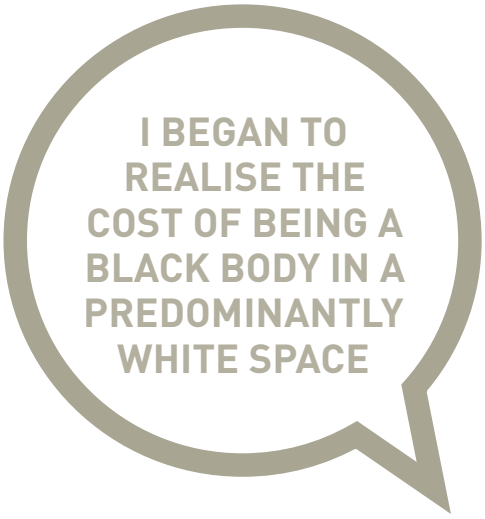
Brian Obiri-Asare is a writer of Ghanaian descent based in central Australia. His work reflects on the complexities and contradictions of a multi-racial society. Recently, he was awarded an ArtsNT Varuna Fellowship, was shortlisted for the 2020 Judith Wright Poetry Prize, and received a meritorious mention in the 2021 Cloncurry Prize. He is currently at work on a poetry manuscript exploring (post)colonial space with support from the NT government

I can't pinpoint the exact reasons why, gripped with the desire to dwell with difference, to share a way of life outside the straitjacket of middle-class respectability, I lunged at the silhouette of an imagined world and moved to Tennant Creek.

People aren't normally drawn to the terra incognita of Australia's vast interior. Not many willingly venture that far off the map. They are normally drawn to cities, to places tantalising with possibilities of self-making and self-construction, where the manic 'busyness' and bright lights offer ample opportunities to get away from certain things. In my case, the prospect of rekindling the embers of a smouldering romance went some way in explaining the move to Tennant Creek. But so too did the pull of the Australia of colour, of difference, that was never invisible to me. It always troubled me, made claims on my soul that I still am yet to fully grasp. Perhaps it soothed my sense of dislocation. Maybe I was always drawn to the stifled shriek of the psyche in a contradictory and scattered world.

Whatever the case, growing up I witnessed my parents' harried scramble for the Australian dream and this left an indelible mark. Clutching the totems of wealth and good taste, their anger, their comfort, their fear, their striving, their decades of trudging through the bitter pleasures and dreary consolations of corporate life was a sad, tragic fate I thought I could escape. Their delusions and their disappointments showed me how deep and blurry the wounds of racism and intolerance cut.

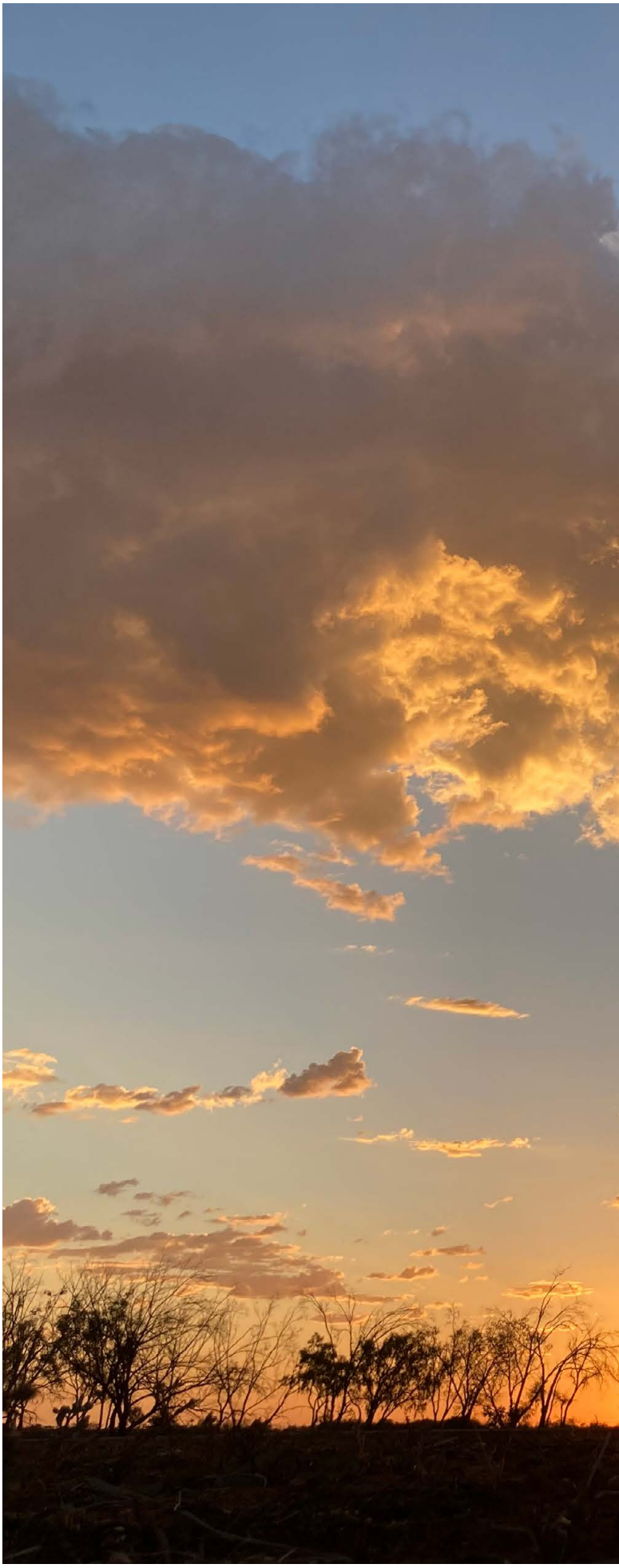
What's more, over the years, but especially after returning to Sydney after a stint living in a Disneyland-like slice of Singapore, I began to realise the cost of being a black body in a predominantly white space. And soon I succumbed to the gnawing recognition something was throttling my conscience, stretching it into grotesque shapes. That's also part of the reason why I slung my sensibilities over my shoulder and struck out to Tennant Creek.



A TANGIBLE FORM OF SOLIDARITY TOOK SHAPE, AN ACUTE AWARENESS OF NOT ONLY HOW RACISM COLOURS RELATIONSHIPS, BUT ALSO HOW IT EXISTS PERNICIOUSLY IN UNCONSCIOUS AND INSTITUTIONAL FORM

I arrived in 2018, shortly after tragedy struck the town. A baby had been raped. There was a hint of a disturbance in the air, as if a disaster had taken place, at once distant and removed. It was disorientating. My initial impression was of a place with a chip on its shoulder, left to melt in a searing, desolate outback. After a few weeks this impression shifted. I came to see Tennant Creek as being pulled in two directions at once – on the one hand, the weight of history, of a civilising mission shrouded in brutality, and on the other, its present-day incarnation in the form of the tug of state control and neglect – a bipolar, punitive abandonment expressed in a seemingly endless cycle of despair, chronic illness, depression, and suicide. This was the lens through which I grappled with blackness, with incompleteness. Tennant Creek became my guide, my map to this beautiful country, a pivotal landscape in an ongoing inquiry into what it means to be African in Australia.

I was in a world outside my own, a stranger forced to try and understand and listen. In a town where more than half the population was Indigenous, I was thrown in the deep end. Working with the local Indigenous council, I was forced to live with difference. I had to stand through the absurd ceremony of lining up before a policewoman, of being interrogated as to where and who I was drinking with, as I watched white customers saunter into the bottle shop with unimpeded privilege. A tangible form of solidarity took shape, an acute awareness of not only how racism colours relationships, but also how it exists perniciously in unconscious and institutional form. Racism touched not only me, but also the Indigenous people I worked and hung out with.



THIS IS WHERE I FEEL AS IF I BELONG

And the Warumungu language and culture lessons were a window into my ignorance. They squirted complexity into my brain and baffled me. The fact that kinship crossed all boundaries threw me, but also kind of didn't. Like Sven Lindqvist in his clipped ruminations in Terra Nullius, I was left wondering, in appreciation of a system where the relationships of family were metaphorically extended to every fellow man or woman and everything in between.

There was plenty of time for wondering in Tennant Creek. It's fragmented and stratified, filled with cultures, histories, and people, from all around the world in the same place, at the same time. It's imbued with meaning I can barely articulate, coloured with feeling couched in half-remembered conversations around a fire, in friends thrashed by circumstance, in the stunning sunsets, in the smell after a storm, in memories as clear as day, like the time when rocks and bottles sailed at the police station in reaction to the shooting of Kumanjayi Walker by a white police officer. And after living there for three years, I don't think I'll ever be done thinking about it.

It's given me a spell of the blues. In the words of Ralph Ellison, it's given me *'an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of brutal experience alive in (my) aching conscience, to finger its jagged grain'*. I try and write steeped in this song. I can't pinpoint the exact reasons why, but after living here, in the postcolonial swirl, this is where I feel as if I belong.

ROMEL MONTEMAYOR LALATA

Romel Montemayor Lalata was a multi-media journalist and professional comedy writer for television in a previous life. He had also always had a foot in civil society organisations even as he pursued mainstream careers in different media corporations. He is still picking up bits and pieces of himself after squeezing through the sieve of the immigration process, hoping his sense of humour made it through with him. He joined FECCA recently as Communication Officer.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR WELCOMES WHEN I NEEDED THEM MOST

MY SENSE OF BELONGING IN AUSTRALIA COMES AND GOES

Whenever I sleep, all my dreams take me to country and home. But country and home is not Australia even though I have been living here for close to six years. It still feels like a different place. Even that familiarity with myself is gone. I am someone who is not only physically displaced but also feels disembodied.

I made the big move when I was 46 years old and, like many immigrants, walked right smack into culture shock even though I had thought myself prepared. For some strange reason, I found it hard to wrap my head around Australian coins and for many weeks I was terrified of doing cash transactions, for fear of holding up the line and embarrassing myself while I tried to decipher which coins to use.

Then came the chocolates, along with the crisps and chips. I couldn't get enough of them. In three months, I feared I was close to breaking the bathroom scale.

Landing a job related to my old career back in the Philippines was hopeless. Which wasn't too bad as I was warned by many friends of this. I quickly accepted that reality and stuck to the advice making the rounds of migrant Filipino circles: 'People like us can't afford to waste any time on personal drama. Suck it up and move on'. And move on I did. I stopped reflecting on what was happening to me, or what was going to happen in the future. I welcomed any job I was able to find, focused only on making my stay in Australia sustainable from payday to payday while chipping away bits and pieces of the huge amount of debt that kept piling up.

Quite the classic case of an unforeseen outcome, all the cleaning jobs I was picking up were making me healthier physically. My weight went down. I had to punch holes in my belt to keep my pants up. The relentless scourge of gout which

had been punishing me since I turned 30 years old simply walked out the door one day and hasn't come back since. But the monotony and mindlessness of eternally vacuuming floors and scrubbing toilets was taking a mental toll. The same thoughts kept bouncing around my head: regrets, inadequacies, envy, resentment, anger, despair, fears and, worst of all, knowing that I was turning more stupid by the day. Audiobooks saved me. Hour after hour, day after day, I would escape into the worlds of science fiction, fantasy, and whodunits. I must have gone through close to a thousand books over the years.

I first felt community the strongest in Mt. Druitt when I went there for the very first time. Finally, people of all colours, accents, shapes and smells mingling with one another at their loudest and most unapologetic. I felt a keen familiarity with it all. 'This almost feels like home!' I thought. But, of course, that too was fleeting.

I tried to watch television. I could not relate with many of the shows. I am heavily Westernised but to mainstream white American culture. White Australia is not white America. I was totally clueless when it came to contexts and cultural references. The politics was all wrong too. Way too British. And the atrocious Australian accents! They aren't even speaking English! The teenagers were even worse. I would hear them chatting energetically on the trains and never understand a single word.

I started donating blood. I thought that doing something for others would make me connect. It didn't. But the Australian Red Cross is always quite happy to let me know that my blood helped others. I still donate blood regularly.

One day, making my way to the gym on a pushbike, a magpie swooped down and attacked me several times, leaving me with a bloodied ear. A dangerous encounter with wildlife, what could be more Australian than that? But my best takeaway from that experience was to be mindful of magpies. I became mindful of kangaroos too when I was almost trampled by three of them as I was playing Pokemon Go in an unlighted section of a public park. I became mindful of brown snakes when I almost stepped on a long one while messaging someone on the phone while walking. Then one evening I spotted a dead possum on the road. It had been struck by a car, but her joey was still alive. I contacted the local wildlife rescue organisation, and we were able to pull the joey from the pouch. A few months later, the rescuers sent me a cute picture of the joey all grown up and ready for release into the bush. Now that gave me a spark of connection.

I began making friends, but exclusively with the people I work with, all of them immigrants. Ungrammatical English is a lovely way to communicate with people who can barely understand a word of it, with heaps of gestures and emotions paired with the simplest words. But connections are made, camaraderie established. We bond like people who share the ordeal of keeping our heads above water in a storm. We are all not sure who will make it to shore but we swim on, thankful for the occasional lulls in wind and rain, watching fearfully for waves that will drag us to the bottom, powerless that we cannot support each other because we barely have enough strength to keep afloat ourselves. We just encourage each other with our broken words of English. And with these same broken words, we celebrate each one who makes it onto the promised land. With this group, I know and feel I belong.

Then there was this job I took in a contact/call centre. It was brimming with young people from culturally diverse backgrounds with probably most of them speaking English as a first language. Many of them have lost the language of their migrant parents but all of them have these unique, rich accents that are clearly Australian but so diverse. Suddenly, my accent did not sound so outsider anymore and I was enjoying 'borrowing' some. Belonging didn't feel as difficult. I started to suspect I had a place here.

But the most powerful instances of feeling welcomed and being validated came to me on three different occasions. Three women belonging to Australia's First Nations People were kind enough to stop and really see me – this nobody that the sea of uncertainty threw up. In separate encounters, each one drew me purposefully into a real conversation, asked with unmistakable interest where I came from originally, and then spontaneously embraced me and said, 'Welcome to My Country' with such warmth and sincerity that I was always speechless a few seconds afterwards. One of them even called me, ahem, a 'handsome, handsome man' which was really pure icing on the cake but, full disclosure: I startled her when she was coming out of the women's toilet as I was stepping out of the cleaner's room and almost colliding with her. However, I will take whatever I can and run with it.

Thank you for your welcomes when I needed them most. An immigrant can still drown even though they may have made it onto land. Your embraces saved me in more ways than one.

My sense of belonging still comes and goes but you women will always be my anchors.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NAVIGATING BELONGING AND IDENTITY

SOWAIBAH HANIFIE

Sowaibah Hanifie is an award-winning journalist with the ABC and one of few Muslim women reporters who wear a headscarf on mainstream TV. She was born in Australia to a family of Afghan refugees who migrated to Adelaide around 30 years ago. On top of reporting, Sowaibah is passionate about mentoring young culturally and linguistically diverse youth to build their confidence and achieve their potential.

My current Instagram bio is, 'Aussie journalist with the headgear'. In a few weeks, it might be different. I might remove the word 'Aussie' from the description, hoping no one will notice.

This indecisiveness of how to describe myself to the online world explains my internal battle with finding a sense of belonging in Australian society.

My parents raised me to affirm, 'I'm Australian', whenever asked 'where are you from?' because I am a first generation Australian.

But I grew up in a time post 9/11, when politicians and other Australian leaders have questioned whether I can be Australian and Muslim at the same time and whether my religious ideals clash with my Australian values.

Being born with the rights of citizenship has not given me a feeling of inclusiveness.

I've had people yell at me to take the nappy off my head and asked if my parents were extremists.

Going to the pub is described as a popular Australian pastime, but I can count on one hand the number of times I've been to a tavern for a social event, and every single time felt awkward; completely sober, no drink in hand and having the bar regulars glare at me.

I didn't grow up hearing common Australian phrases. The first time a supervisor told to me take a 'brolly' out, I tried to act like I knew exactly what he meant.

There are also voices within our ethnic and religious communities that scoff when you call yourself Australian.

You've suddenly declared you're ashamed of your heritage and that you've 'gone off the rails', as they would see it, forgetting all the values of your culture.

Calling myself an Aussie, for these reasons, doesn't always feel genuine because I can't say it with complete confidence.

It's this feeling of uncertainty that's held me back in my work and social life. In fact, I've diagnosed myself with social anxiety as a result.

The comments and glares run through my mind every time I meet a group of new people and every time I have to speak publicly.

I wonder what people are thinking of me, if they think I'm good enough, if they're judging my knowledge or intentions.

A thousand thoughts run through my head when going out with new Australian friends. I'm worried I might say something to offend them, anxious that I won't be able to relate to them.

Journalism is a tough industry, you are constantly being judged on your performance by your peers, by the industry and the wider public.

IF WE ARE TO CLAIM TO BE A SUCCESSFUL MULTICULTURAL COUNTRY, WE HAVE TO MOVE AWAY FROM TRAPPING PEOPLE IN THESE STEREOTYPES OF WHAT 'AUSTRALIAN' MEANS

It's a race to come out on top. You have to be prepared for the egos, the patronising politicians, editors and media advisors.

Despite its challenges, journalism has taught me to believe in myself, to embrace difficult situations and fake confidence until you gain it.

Those people who've challenged me to prove myself just because I didn't walk into the office a white reporter, have helped me to find self-confidence without needing external justification.

I am Australian because I was born in this country, because I appreciate the life it's given me and my family of Afghan refugees and because I respect and abide by its laws.

If we are to claim to be a successful multicultural country, we have to move away from trapping people in these stereotypes of what 'Australian' means.

We have to encourage our culturally and linguistically diverse youth to say they are Australian, without batting an eyelid, and reassure them they can hold two identities.

So, for now, and hopefully forever, I will confidentially call myself an 'Aussie Journalist'.

DEAR SELF,

TAHIRA ASKARI

Tahira Askari is a fourth-year bachelor of physiotherapy student from a Muslim migrant/refugee background. Tahira's current tasks are focusing on reducing physical activity barriers in CALD women and promoting active lifestyle particularly for elderly people. She is a strong believer in kindness and empathy.

You are again upset about how you cannot get involved in this culture and are forced to feel that you don't belong here. You are drained, exhausted, and maybe depressed as to what happened on your placement. I understand that you worked very hard in that unsupportive environment while facing discrimination due to your language and religious beliefs. I know that the words, tone, and body language used for you throughout the placement, especially towards the end, tore you. I understand that you have been mistreated, and you faced unjust marking. The worst part was that no one believed you, and there was no other student to witness. I understand that this made things worse for you. I am proud that you reached people to raise a voice against injustice and discrimination. I remember that you presented your concerns to the placement coordinator, but unfortunately, you received no response. This affecteded your mental health severely and, consequently, affected all other aspects of your life.

BUT. You are stronger than this. My dear, remember what you have gone through from the time when you came to Australia. Remember all your struggles. Remember the hard work, day and night at TAFE, to get into a bachelor of physiotherapy course. I remember that even at that time, you said that you do not feel connected to this culture and would not be able to achieve significant results, considering all the struggles. I understand that the cultural shock and Islam based judgements you received, made you think you are odd. I remember you were having issues making new friends. The cultural and religious differences made you feel disconnected from the friends you made. I remember you having problems conveying your message due to language barriers. You felt like a newborn who needed to learn to survive in a society where you could not speak, understand, and interpret things correctly. Do you remember the first time you used a word document for your assignment at TAFE? It was a complete shift from a paper-based educational system to a computer-based. You were struggling badly with your typing speed and navigating different software. I remember you had no job to support yourself financially. Do you remember your struggles?

YOU WORKED VERY HARD IN THAT UNSUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT AND FACED DISCRIMINATION DUE TO YOUR LANGUAGE AND RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

How can you forget the struggle of university? Remember those language and accent barriers while taking lectures and attending the tutorial. Those difficult English words which you learned the hard way in the oral and written exams. Those assignments on which you worked for weeks but just got an average mark due to your language restrictions. I remember you used to write the subtitles of all the lectures upload

them to YouTube and spent hours or even days writing the lecturer's wordings, then finding meanings from the dictionary to understand the content.

I understand that all the discrimination you received made you feel that you don't have a solid connection, and you must work hard to be connected to Australia. But remember all the good things that made you feel great and helped you get through all these struggles. Remember all the great friends you made who stick by your side in all the hard times. Remember the friends who helped you get involved in this culture and help you get through all the odds. Remember their free proofreading services. How can you forget all the assistance provided by your friends to apply for your job applications? You are currently about to complete your degree, have different casual jobs, doing multiple volunteering works and received a continuous three-year scholarship through your effort and resilience.

I understand that some experiences made you feel odd and that you can never blend with this culture while preserving your identity. But, if you think of Australia, it is a country in which people are from different nationalities. We are all so diverse and we all make Australia unique. As far as the concern about struggles, almost everyone from different ethnic backgrounds has similar challenges but to different levels. This diversity makes all Australians uniform. Some of us experience more significant challenges, but we should respect each other's differences and help each other. I understand that some people would radiate hatred and negativity against specific groups, but all they need is love. Our role should be to treat them with love and compassion because that's what they lack.

I understand that you worked very hard to get here, and you are almost at the end. Don't give up! You are just a few months away from graduation. Yes, you belong to Australia and those who say you don't, are the ones who don't because Australia is a kind country, and whoever belongs to Australia should be kind.

Much Love
Self
Xoxo

EXPERIENCES IN AUSTRALIA

NOFOVALEANE MAPUSUA

Mr Mapusua (Leane) is a true leader in the disability movement in his native country (Samoa) and in the Pacific region. His leadership in extensive disability approaches locally has earned recognition and respect of his cultural communities and government. He persistently lobbied for social cohesion and justice afforded to all people with disabilities nationwide. Leane is one of the founding members of the first-ever established organisation of/for people with disabilities in Samoa (Nuanua O Le Alofa Inc. – NOLA) and was elected President/Chairman for over a decade since its inception in 2000. He eventually was appointed and represented NOLA on the National Disability Taskforce in 2004-2010 (government endorsed group) and later appointed to the Advisory Council of the National Human Rights Institution (NHRI), Samoa in 2013 -2016. The highlight of his selfless dedication and service to Samoa disability inclusivity was in being instrumental in driving the bilateral agreement (Samoa Disability Program, SDP) between the Samoan and Australian Governments under the auspices of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). As a former SDP Program Manager and employee of the Australian High Commission (Apia, Samoa), Leane brought with him the aspirations and knowledge needed for his position as Policy and Project Officer with FECCA. Working with the CALD Communities outreach program, National Community Connector Project (NCCP), Leane primarily deals with the sub-contractors in allocated states to deliver and promote the NCCP to the CALD communities. He is a resourceful staff of FECCA, and his significant lived disability experiences will be crucial in Disability Policy design and future evaluation of the NCCP-NDIS.

At the age of 22, I was working as a radio technician at the National Radio Broadcasting in Samoa. An unpredictable work vehicle accident caused life changing spinal injury which changed me – both mentally and physically. I accepted and endured this traumatic new life experience and, now using a wheelchair, I have entered an exciting new path in my life. Promoting and advocating for fundamental human rights and inclusion of people with disabilities in Samoa and the Pacific became my new passion and role in life.

A visit to see my wife (then fiancé) in 2017 was a window of opportunity for a better future in Australia. Fortunately, many of my family members, including my mother and brother, already lived in Canberra, and offered me accommodation and living support. While on this short visit, many wonderful events unfolded. My fiancé and I got married and we started thinking about the possibility of applying for residency in Australia. We lodged an application for Permanent Residency (PR). I was issued a Temporary Visa, I was granted a Medicare Card and had working rights, which were crucial at this stage. I was also able to access medical support for my chronic illness. After few GP appointments, I immediately underwent a series of treatments at both Canberra and Sydney healthcare services. Later in the year, I moved with my wife to Sydney and resumed further health checks with specialists in various Sydney hospitals and I have attained a miraculous health recovery.

I'm grateful that the Medicare card provides me access to top treatment and assists immensely with my medical costs. The process of engaging with a team of social workers and rehab nurses during and after treatments was an amazing experience. With this efficient and responsive healthcare coordination, I was given a new wheelchair purchased under the 'Enable NSW' support scheme for new migrants who required mobility devices, including homecare equipment. Also, the community transport services (Community Wheels) subsidised the cost of accessible taxis within Sydney, a huge relief from the burden of excessive transport costs I dreaded. Constant follow-up visits and reviews of my health progress at various medical clinics were encouraging and hopeful. The In-Voc Outreach Services (Royal Rehab, Ryde) consistently set me on course for short and long-term future employment and career path and connected me with organisations for people with spinal injuries. Further assistance they provided was developing my Resume and identifying potential employers and allies of people with spinal injuries. This led to my first casual job at Acusensus Pty. and, subsequently, to full-time employment with FECCA.

I am grateful for these successes. However, there still were challenges and obstacles. These were quite discouraging due to significant adverse impacts on my mental health. The uncertainty of securing a prospective better life in Australia was impacting on my sense of belonging in this country. Although my temporary visa gives me legal rights to stay and work here, the prolonged and overdue decision on my PR has proven costly and emotionally frustrating. The high costs associated with accessing support services available for people with disabilities is a tremendous financial strain as I am not a resident yet. I often feel it is unfair to not be getting the entitlements to disability services considering I am now a legitimate tax contributor and actively contribute in CALD communities, and most importantly, am a law-abiding new migrant. I feel the mounting pressures of anxious feelings over whether my PR will be approved or declined. One terrible PR requirement for me is to frequently provide further evidence of proof whether our marriage is legitimate and genuine. I find this requirement disgraceful and irrelevant. The processes of accessing other vital disability services (Concession Transport Card, Disability Housing, etc) are very difficult, even impossible as I am not qualified under my Temporary Visa status. As of today, it is hard to imagine that a decision will ever be made soon by the Immigration Department regarding my PR application lodged in Oct 2019.

Many of the unfavourable and unjust conditions that prevent one's genuine intentions for a better future and a sense of belonging in this great nation should be removed. Nevertheless, I remain committed to serving this country to the best of my abilities and with good-will and making the most of it while being a decent interim resident despite the PR and social services hardships that I confront.

PROMOTING AND ADVOCATING FOR FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS AND INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN SAMOA AND THE PACIFIC BECAME MY NEW PASSION AND ROLE IN LIFE.

LEANE BACK HOME IN SAMOA.

CITIZENSHIP STORY

ANONYMOUS

I was born in Chin State in Western Burma, which borders Rakhine State. It's a state made up of nine townships, consisting of many smaller tribes, where people speak more than 53 dialects. Life for us was both good and bad. At that time, we didn't know or understand that our human rights were neglected by our own government.

There were many human rights violations. Although we are Christians, the government prohibited the building of churches. They built only pagodas in the state even though most of the population is Christian. We knew that we should have the right to practise what we believe, but we were not free to. If we worshipped, they threatened the villagers and the pastors.

There was always a strong presence of military in Chin State, and they sometimes bribed people to become Buddhist. We lived in fear of the military. We had to do what they said. They felt they could use us as they wanted to, and often we were taken as porters and used as forced labour to carry their rice and equipment. Many people experienced this.

Their presence cast a shadow over our lives. They would enter people's houses without permission and take what they wanted. They arrested young women – raped and sometimes killed them. And if young women were at home, soldiers would come and do what they wanted. They used guns against us. So, we lived in a constant state of fear, with no freedom to do as we wanted, no human rights and at risk of arrest, torture and rape at any time.

We were also not allowed to speak and use our ethnic languages. Our parents and grandparents encouraged us to maintain our own language, and so we spoke the dialect within our own homes and families, but we were not allowed to speak it in public – instead were forced to speak Burmese. At school, we would have loved to speak and study our own dialect, but this was not allowed. The churches were very important in helping to maintain our dialects, and this was the one place our dialects were encouraged and taught. The churches played an important part in our lives and assisted in maintaining our culture and language.

Economically, it was very bad. Chin State is very mountainous, as it's in the foothills of the Himalayas, and there was no transportation available. To travel between villages, we often had to build our own roads – to cut a road through to reach the next village, and travel on foot, as people did not have cars and the terrain was so steep.

Our living standards were low. We received no health support from the government and little government support for education. Some villages had no school, which meant some students had to walk more than 23 miles to attend primary school at the next village. We lived from day to day, surviving on what we grew through farming and hunting. Often soldiers would come to the farms and take all the crops that had been grown, sometimes burning the farms. The military terrorised the population.

PHOTO CREDIT: DAVID

Life was hard and we were taught by our families that we could not talk openly about politics. We knew that if we did, we could be arrested, even at home. Our parents didn't allow us to talk, because of fear that there were spies amongst us and amongst the villagers – something that happened a lot under the military.

The precious moments for us, the ones that I most remember, are of having family meals together. Even though we lived in fear, there was also a lot of joy for our families in being together.

Leaving Burma

One day, soldiers came to the house looking for my father. He had already fled, but they were seeking to arrest him because he had allowed somebody to preach in our village. We told the soldiers that we didn't know where he had gone, but they threatened my mother that if we didn't give information about his whereabouts, they would arrest someone from the family in his place. At the time, I was at home with my mother and younger siblings, and as the oldest child, he pointed at me. I was 16.

The same night, my mother met with the village leader to tell him what had happened. Together, without my knowledge, they arranged for me to leave Chin state the next day for my own protection and safety.

I left the next day for Rangoon, accompanied by someone from my village. Looking back, I think I didn't realise at the time exactly why it was happening, or what it all meant.

I left my family without understanding that it was the last time that we would all be together, and I was only 16.

At first it had seemed like an adventure, but in Rangoon, I met with others who also needed to leave Chin State for their own protection. And suddenly I understood how enormous it was! What I had originally thought was going to be a small adventure was a situation where we were unable to return to our homes and families in Chin state.

I felt hopeless. I had thought I'd be able to go back to my family at any time and was suddenly confronted with the reality that I couldn't. It was also extremely difficult to have any contact with my family as there were no phones in our village, which meant my family had to travel to another village to use a phone. This meant that we had to give a month's notice if I was planning to make contact. So, I had no contact!

After some time in Rangoon, I joined a group of other Chin in travelling to Malaysia. They were all needing to leave Chin state for similar reasons as myself and were travelling for their own protection and safety. This was an extremely frightening journey, which took us two weeks in all, travelling at night on foot and by boat. Led

by an agent to whom we paid a lot of money, we walked at night, often through cane fields which were very sharp, and we suffered many cuts.

The group was of mixed age including several small babies. I learned a lot on the way. In our group, we were fortunate that nobody died, but in many of the groups who travelled this way, people often died en route. The Thai government shot at the boats, and we had only one meal per day, so it was very tough and difficult.

In Malaysia, in 2008, I reconnected with my uncle, and for the first time, was with family again.

But again, we were faced with no safety and no protection. I shared a room with many people from my village and everyone was very afraid. The Malaysian authorities frequently rounded people up and we could be put in jail because we were illegal. It was often very frightening being there.

We were unable to move around openly as we could be stopped by the police at any time. Robbery by the locals was also common with them demanding money and mobile phones, and often threatening us. Again, we were living in constant fear. After I'd been there of a couple of months, I met up with my father, which was wonderful!

I was fortunate in Malaysia as I had some opportunities. I learned English through the Catholic Church and was eventually able to work as an interpreter, which allowed me to help my community. I also had a job in a stationery shop. Both were good jobs and much more protected and privileged than the work many of the other Chin did. I was in Malaysia for five years. During that time, I learnt, through limited contact with my mother back in Chin State, that the police and soldiers continued to harass my family.

Coming to Australia

Shortly after arriving in Malaysia, both my father and I applied for refugee resettlement.

In total, the process took five years. I had many hopes when I applied to come to Australia.

I hoped for a better future for myself and my family. I also hoped to have an opportunity to study, and I hoped to become a citizen with protection from a country which valued human rights.

I applied for protection together with my father. Being together with him was important because I knew I could count on him. The sad thing was that my father's application for protection was rejected, whilst mine was accepted. While I was joyful at my own acceptance, I was sad he was unable to accompany me. We were given no reason for his rejection. He applied several times, but they kept rejecting his application.

In the end I had to leave my father behind and come to Australia alone.

He eventually went back to Chin state in 2015.

By the time I arrived in Australia, my younger brother who had left Chin state earlier for the same reasons as myself, had also arrived here. It was a happy reunion to be able to reconnect with family again. I am very grateful to the government for giving me the chance to study and the right to work and receive health care and security and I've taken advantage of every opportunity that's been afforded me here. I've been able to study and I'm also now able to work and so I've been able to achieve some of the dreams and hopes that that I had before my arrival here.

My Citizenship Journey

I arrived in Australia in 2013 as a refugee and one of the first questions I had was 'when can I apply for citizenship'. I was told that I had to wait for four years.

I applied as soon as I was eligible, in 2017, for the cost of $285. I received a letter of receipt from the government saying they had received my application and advising me to await notification of an appointment. I waited and waited but received no appointment.

CITIZENSHIP FOR ME WOULD MEAN A SENSE OF BELONGING AND FREEDOM FROM THE FEAR I'VE FELT DURING MY LIFE

Eventually, I phoned the department of Home Affairs. The response I received was 'Thank you for your patience, your application is in process'. Since then, I have phoned several times, and emailed twice, and continue to receive this same response, thanking me for my patience, informing me my application is in process and to keep waiting.

This waiting has now continued for four years!

The same thing has happened for many people from my community. They are asked to resubmit their applications with documents from Burma. This is almost impossible because in fleeing from Burma, it's difficult to seek official documents. In some of the rural areas, such as Chin state, those documents are difficult to obtain. For example, I, like many other Chin, never received a birth certificate as I was born at home. This is the case for a lot of people in my community. As a result, many community members are waiting for citizenship in Australia.

In one example I know, where a couple applied, the wife was granted citizenship, but the husband is still waiting. It seems to be very random. It means that the waiting is endless with no explanation and no communication – endless waiting.

In the four years I've been waiting so far, there are a number of hopes that I have not been able to fulfill.

Citizenship would mean a lot to me!

It would mean the right to vote; it would mean I would be able to visit my family; it would mean the possibility of family reunion in the future. During the time I've been waiting, I've lost my grandmother, my grandfather. My uncle and I couldn't go back. My parents are old now, and suffering, especially during this time when there is trouble in the country. I also fear that without citizenship, I can be deported back to my country at any time.

Citizenship for me would mean a sense of belonging and freedom from the fear I've felt during my life. I also feel that some opportunities have been lost – such as the opportunity/ right to bring my parents here, and the chance to get a loan if I wanted to buy a house.

From a Chin community perspective, requiring English of people who have not had the right to education in their first language is a very difficult requirement for citizenship. So too is the request for official documents from Burma, which can put family members there at risk of further persecution.

So, for me, the waiting is endless! My daily hope is that I will receive a reply and gain citizenship. Then I will no longer live with fear and be able to follow my hopes. But for now, I continue to wait.

WHERE IS HOME?

REIHANEH ATTARAN

Dr Reihaneh Attaran is passionate about women and gender studies and how migrant women can be empowered in multicultural societies. She received her PhD degree from University Science Malaysia and her thesis focused on women's agency and empowerment. She Joined FECCA in February 2021 as volunteer and is recently working at FECCA as Project & Policy Assistant. Before working at FECCA Reihaneh was a Teaching Fellow at University Science Malaysia and working as Graduate Assistant while she was a student. She has experience working in the government sector back in her country. Before she migrated to Malaysia in 2010, she was working in the Ministry of Education of Iran.

The question of where home is, was always challenging for me since I first migrated in 2010. I believe this may happen to every migrant who lives in a place different than their place of origin. Yet, I learned my feelings and understanding may differ from my friends who were migrating at the same time.

Unlike me, my friends who migrated to Australia from their hometown have different sense of belonging and feelings of home. They have left their secure and stable position in their home country and migrated to Australia to begin a new life. While they considered everything and were prepared for change, it took them long time to feel safe and secure in their new situation.

I have migrated twice within two different contexts. And now after 12 years since leaving my country the first time, I finally have a sense of belonging to somewhere.

Belonging is hard to define and measure. I believe it depends on our experiences and how we socialise in a society. Belonging cannot be granted to anyone or taken away. Earlier, during my first years of migration, I was thinking that a sense of belonging is merely based on my own feelings and how I try to make a place home, but now I can say it is multi-dimensional. There are several legal, social and economic settings which form it.

BELONGING CANNOT BE GRANTED TO ANYONE OR TAKEN AWAY

My first migration happened in 2010. My family and I left Iran in February 2010. We had been married for 10 years when we decided to migrate. We had built our life from scratch with no help. We had to put all that aside and 10 years of life was packed in three suitcases.

Our destination was Malaysia. We were planning on living there with my husband doing distance working and I was going to study. I had a part time job at university and my husband was working and earning money in Iranian Rial. Our expenses and income were adequate. However, after four years the crisis happened. The value of the Iranian Rial dropped and we could no longer afford living expenses.

My husband's income dropped to half in one night and my income from my part-time job was not sufficient to cover our life. I can still remember those moments of frustration. He decided to find a job within the country. That was the time when the boundary between 'us' and 'them' became clearer. These boundaries were not geographical it was rather the concept of being foreigner and categorised as others in the country.

Every job application was rejected. Employers did not want a foreigner in their company as they had to invest in foreign employees. For a foreigner to be eligible to work, they had to apply for a working permit and visa and no one could work on a student dependent visa. Life was not easy those days and it looked like problems were endless. Aside from financial problems, we also struggled with visa issues. While we were in Malaysia legally and on student visa, a rapid change of rules and regulations as well as the need to renew visas every year meant that we did not feel stable during our life in the country. These complications brought instability into our life. When our Permanent Visa for Australia was granted, even before arriving here in Australia, we felt secure and stable. We were committed to live and work in Canberra for two years. As soon as the visa was granted, we received a letter from the ACT government asking us to be in contact and inform them of our arrival. It was the first sign for us being welcomed in the country. But I still was asking myself, 'Can we ever really be at home in the new place?' At

that time, my sense of belonging was affected by experiences of exclusion in Malaysia. Though later I found that home is not simply about a place, it is about my senses and how I feel welcome where I live.

We arrived in Canberra on Christmas day, when all offices were closed. After the holidays and before the New Year we went to Centrelink to register as permanent residents in Australia. I cannot describe how excited we were to receive Medicare and be respected as official residents of Australia. Later, enrolling my son at school, looking for a job, renting a house, getting a driver license, buying a car, etc., were ordinary issues which made us feel we are at home and being treated like other residents. During our first months of arrival my husband and I tried working as volunteers to socialise and get connected to community. I realised that a sense of belonging to a society is crucial on how you get integrated into the society. I also now understand that my personal experience will differ from everyone else's experience of belonging – there is not one pattern to follow, we are all unique in the way we feel a sense of home in a new place.

SHARED JOURNEYS

SONIA DI MEZZA

Sonia Di Mezza is the daughter of Italian immigrants, who migrated to Australia in the 1950s. She is the CEO of Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services, is a solicitor and human rights lawyer. Sonia holds a Master of International Law, majoring in human rights. She has set up and managed human rights projects in Sudan and Pakistan, worked for the UNHCR in Lebanon, worked for a child rights NGO in India and as a refugee lawyer. She is dedicated and committed to promoting the human rights of people from multicultural backgrounds both in Australia and internationally.

Two years ago, my father, Guido Di Mezza, passed away. My father migrated to Australia in the 50s via the Australian Assisted Passenger Scheme, with other migrants from European countries. The deal was that they had to commit to stay for at least two years after arrival or refund the cost of their assisted passage.

In Sydney, my father met my mother. They both came from the Campania region of Italy, from the countryside surrounding the city of Naples. Thus, there was a familiarity where they shared a similar culture and spoke the same Neapolitan dialect.

They settled in the inner-city Sydney suburb of Annandale. What is now a gentrified, expensive Sydney suburb was then the chosen domicile of blue-collar, working-class immigrant families. My brother Joe, sister Anna and I would grow up in a townhouse, with a garden filled with fruit trees, and an outhouse located in the backyard. We had many happy times living in that house. When I was seven the family moved to the dream house which my father built, in Sydney's Northern Beaches. Dad was a plasterer, installing ceilings in houses and buildings all over Sydney while Mum worked from home, sewing together cushion pieces for a factory.

We were a happy, loud, fun-loving Italian family. Arguing one minute, hugging each other, and laughing the next.

Growing up in the 70s in Australia in an Italian family presented its own special challenges. Although my parents came to learn a functional level of English it was by no means perfect. They were not able to check that our homework was done and didn't feel comfortable attending parent/teacher interviews. But my parents were passionate about ensuring that their children were educated and able to experience the best schooling that they could afford. Dad would work seven days a week, to ensure that they could send all three of us to private Catholic schools. Mum told me when I was five that 'your dad would like one of you to attend university'. In every way they possibly could, my parents helped me gain admission into law school. My sister studied art at college and became an accomplished artist. My brother Joe chose to work with dad in his plastering business.

Growing up, Italians were seen as different from Anglo Australians. Some of the food we would eat was considered strange. Eating something as strange as an octopus was not understood or accepted back then. Of course, with time comes acceptance and understanding, and every fish and chip shop in Australia, not to mention most pubs, now serve their patrons calamari.

One day Dad was driving on the road when he was involved in a car accident. The other person got out of his car and finding Dad at fault began hurling abuse at him. 'Why don't you go back to your own country?' Dad in turn angrily retorted 'You see this road? I helped build this road. While I help build the roads I get to stay!'. Of course, Dad had never helped lay roads in this country: he was using it as a metaphor to represent all the building work he done over the years in Australia. His message was clear: I have as much right to live in this country and I belong as you do, because I have made my contribution.

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THE WELL SETTLED MIGRANTS ARE PART OF THE SOLUTION, NOT THE PROBLEM

Time has a way of healing wounds and helping people to feel familiar and at ease, and over time the sense of belonging begins to permeate, until you feel like you truly are part of the society where you find yourself. Looking back, I think that's what happened to my parents, and to other migrants who trod a similar path. Everyone got used to the Italian immigrants and were happy with how they made life that much more interesting and colourful for everyone. Today I go to coffee shops and Italian restaurants and reflect on the contribution that the Italians made to the gastronomy of this country.

Of course, with familiarity can come a sense of superiority and contempt towards other, more recently arrived immigrants. I have heard Italo/Australians make some derogatory comments about newly arrived immigrants from diverse cultures and belief systems, who are struggling themselves to find their own sense of belonging in Australia. When I have heard these comments a sense of anger and injustice swells up in me. On more than one occasion when I have heard the negative comments I have replied 'Don't you dare have such a short memory! Don't ever forget what we went through when we grew up here!' It is important that the well settled migrants are part of the solution, not the problem.

PHOTO BY SONIA DI MEZZA

WHEN THAT TIME COMES, YOU TOO WILL FEEL LIKE YOU BELONG

Over the past 25 years I have experienced a fulfilling and rich professional career as a human rights lawyer. I have travelled the world, working in conflict and humanitarian zones around the world. Living in a dual cultural context, like the one I grew up with in my family was the best cross-cultural competency training I could ever have hoped for. Helping my family navigate two cultures, the Australian as well as the Italian culture, helped me to develop communication skills for working with clients from diverse backgrounds.

A few months ago, I moved to Bendigo, in Central Victoria to commence a new role as the Chief Executive Officer of Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services. Our organisation works hard to provide supports to people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Recently, in a meeting with a stakeholder, I was asked 'I'm not sure Sonia why you have moved from Canberra to Bendigo. Why have you come here?'

A good question. I took some time to reflect on my answer. Moving interstate for this role was a big move. I myself have become a migrant, in some ways. But reflecting on my father's life and his influence on my own path, I think I have the answer to my colleague's question.

I believe it is incumbent upon every person from a migrant and refugee background, who feels like they are settled in this wonderful country, to turn to the recently arrived people and say to them:

'One day you too will feel like you belong. You might feel now like a fish out of water, where you are not understood, where your beliefs and way of living may seem strange to others, where your food might seem weird to people who have never eaten it before and where you might look a little different from everyone else. You may feel like you are not part of Australia at all when people say awful things to you, words that can be cruel and unkind. But the day will come when your culture will not only be understood but will be celebrated and enjoyed, and you too will be accepted with open arms and feel like you truly are an Australian. You will be like us, able to come to towns like Bendigo and point to the Catholic cathedral and say 'look at that magnificent building! Did you know that the Italians helped build that cathedral?' You will make your own contribution and you will feel happy and proud. Our journey is a shared one.'

When that time comes, you too will feel like you belong'.

AUGUSTINO MOEDU:
BUILDING A STRONG COMMUNITY

In 1988 a military takeover had resulted in a democracy uprising with thousands being imprisoned and killed. Many fled to the Thai-Burma borders to take refuge, including Augustino Moedu.

There was a military coup during that time. There had been a multi-power system, but the military stopped all democratic parties and set up a single party. They crushed all political parties and so we became the least democratic country.

The people became very poor, the military took all of the natural resources and did not want to share the economic gains. Students were not permitted to go to learn in other countries and we were not allowed to teach about other cultures in our schools.

This led to a democracy uprising and student-led protests. The military came and crushed the demonstrations and arrested the student organisers. Many were killed and put in prison and the people ran to the Thai-Burma border to seek refuge, especially young people and students.

Whilst in the refugee camp, and with the help of the Thai government and UNHCR, Mr. Moedu applied to go to a host nation. His application was granted and the process of resettlement to Australia commenced.

The Australian Government had asked me whether I had any relatives or friends in Australia. I had friends in Sydney, but they could only send me to Geelong.

At the time we were the first Karen people in Geelong. There were only a few families and the only person we knew was the case worker. This was difficult as I had nobody, but I was lucky because compared to the other families at least I spoke English.

VANESSA RADICEVSKI AND AUGUSTINO MOEDU

Vanessa Radicevski is part of the Marketing and Communications department at Diversitat. A key focus of her role is to help people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities share their stories. Vanessa works alongside Karenni community leader Augustino Modeu at the Diversitat headquarters in Geelong.

Augustino Moedu, a former high school mathematics and physics teacher in his native Myanmar (Burma), arrived in Australia together with his wife and three children in 2009.

He had spent the 15 years prior in a refugee camp in Thailand fleeing from the civil war happening in Myanmar during that time and which is once again affecting the nation of 54 million.

AUSTRALIA'S ETHNIC COMMUNITIES ARE ALSO ENCOURAGED BY GOVERNMENT AND PEAK BODIES TO PRESERVE AND CELEBRATE THEIR CULTURE

Many of the people and families that arrived did not speak the language and they were alone, no family or friends. They would attend their appointment with the case worker and then go home. They would cry, I would cry. I was happy because I was able to help those families because I knew English.

This experience shaped Moedu's desire to create and be part of a strong Karenni community in Geelong.

He commenced work as a gardener at Diversitat and was able to meet other new arrivals from Myanmar at the English classes he was attending.

There are now over 1,000 Karenni people living in Geelong, Bendigo and Western Melbourne. Mr. Moedu is one of the eight Karenni community leaders in Geelong, the Chair of the Geelong Karenni Committee and a member of the Karenni Victorian Committee.

For every 10 families we have one leader. When we want to pass information to the community or collect information, we call the section leaders. We pass the information to them and then the leader passes the information to the eight families. We help police and government to speak to our community.

Mr. Moedu is also a member of the Geelong Ethnic Communities Council which has allowed him to develop relationships with the other ethnic communities in Geelong and further enhance their sense of belonging and connection to their new place.

Michael Martinez who was the CEO of Diversitat and Geelong Ethnic Communities Council invited us to become a member of the GECC.

Through Diversitat we also became close with the Afghan, Congolese and Sudanese communities. We would host an information session for new arrivals, and this would enable all of us to come together.

These relationships further developed when the Karenni community hosted their annual Kae Htoe Boe festival. Through sharing and collaboration, the Karenni community could tell their story in an approachable and meaningful way, fostering inclusion and resilience.

Kay Htoe Boe is the remarkable icon of the land, the place we live, (symbolising) unity, reconciliation and respect (for) the environment.

Diversitat, Victoria Police, CFA, the Geelong council and Anglican Care helped us to make this event happen and we invited all of the other communities to attend.

It's important to keep in touch with the other communities so not to be alone, we work together to support each other, to build each other up. If we are weak, we can then get help from the other communities and if they're weak we can help them.

When it was time to put the Kae Htoe Boe pole in the Diversitat garden, we had help from Victoria Police and also CFA. They gave us the materials and came to help us because we didn't have many members at the time. And the other communities came to help too.

KARENNI COMMUNITY LEADER AUGUSTINO MOEDU STANDS IN FRONT OF THE KAY HTOE BOE AT THE DIVERSITAT SITE IN GEELONG WEARING A TRADITIONAL KARENNI GARMENT. THE ICON SYMBOLISES UNITY, RECONCILIATION AND RESPECT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT.

WE HAVE TO KEEP OUR COMMUNITY STRONG OR ONE DAY YOU WILL LOSE YOUR CULTURE AND YOUR IDENTITY

Australia's ethnic communities are also encouraged by government and peak bodies to preserve and celebrate their culture.

They tell us you have to continue. You have to bring your culture. You have to bring your story. Continue it with your children. The Victorian Multicultural Commission encourage us... so they say if you want your own language school, this is good and you can do that. Because Australia also feels a responsibility to help us keep our culture alive and continuing.

It's like a garden – if you have many flowers, it looks good, but if you only have one type of flower and the other flowers died, it doesn't look good. Why go out into the garden?

We have to keep our community strong or one day you will lose your culture and your identity. We will lose our Karenni traditional food and language and festival. It's important for there to be a system where this is fostered, and community leaders need to play a part.

What's good now is the multicultural day where the students come dressed in their traditional clothes and talk about their culture. These days help to build acceptance and celebration in schools.

There's not much conflict now but at the beginning the young people experienced some fighting. When you're young and a new ethnic group comes in, there can be some conflict and bullying.

But they play together now, and everything is good.

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Ethnic Council of Shepparton & District
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Alton Budd
Deputy Chair/ECCQ Co-Chair

Miriam Cocking
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Eddie Micallef
Deputy Chair/ECCV Chair

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New and Emerging Communities Chair

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Mr Wadim (Bill) Jegorow AM MBE
(Inaugural Chaiperson 1979–1983)

Mr W. Georg Wojak AO MBA
(1984–1988)

Mr Carl Harbaum MBE
(1988–1992)

Mr Victor Rebikoff OAM
(1992–1996)

Mr Randolph Alwish AM
(1996–2000)

Professor Nick Xynias AO BEM
(2000–2002)

Mr Abd-Elmasih Malak AM
(2002–2005)

Ms Voula Messimeri AM
(2005–2009)

Mr Pino Migliorino AM
(2010–2013)

Mr Joe Caputo OAM
(2014–2017)

Ms Mary Patetsos
(2017–Present)

ABOUT FECCA

FECCA is the national peak body representing Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. We provide advocacy, develop policy and promote issues on behalf of our constituency to government and the broader community. FECCA supports multiculturalism, community harmony, social justice and the rejection of all forms of discrimination and racism. FECCA's membership comprises state, territory and regional multicultural and ethnic councils. FECCA has an elected executive committee and a professional national secretariat implementing policies and work programs on behalf of its membership and stakeholders.
For more information and to read more about FECCA's policies and program, please visit our website: www.fecca.org.au. Alternatively, please contact the FECCA office on (02) 6282 5755, or email: admin@fecca.org.au.

BECOME INVOLVED

VISIT OUR WEBSITE
WWW.FECCA.ORG.AU

COMMENT ON OUR POLICY
RECOMMENDATIONS

FIND OUT WHAT WE DO, READ OUR
SUBMISSIONS, LET US KNOW ABOUT
ISSUES THAT CONCERN YOU

SHARE INFORMATION ON YOUR OWN
ORGANISATION'S WORK RELEVANT TO
CALD COMMUNITIES

JOIN OUR MAILING LIST TO RECEIVE FECCA UPDATES, ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTERS
AND INFORMATION ON UPCOMING EVENTS

FIND US ON TWITTER AND FACEBOOK AND KNOW MORE
ABOUT OUR ACTIVITIES, TOPICAL ISSUES, COMMUNITY INITIATIVES,
CURRENT GOVERNMENT INQUIRIES, LEARN ABOUT THE WORK OF
OUR POLICY COMMITTEES, FIND OUT ABOUT CONFERENCES
THAT ARE COMING AND SHARE TO THE COMMUNITY!

FECCA

ADVERTISING IN AUSTRALIAN *Mosaic*

Advertising in *Australian Mosaic* enables broad reach to an influential audience and the ability to effectively spread the message about your organisation's work with CALD communities. Advertising costs as little as $350 + GST for a quarter page full colour placement or up to $1000 + GST for a full page colour placement.

Advertising in *Australian Mosaic* supports the work of FECCA in promoting the interests of CALD communities, strengthening Australian society as a whole.

Size	Full colour advertisement
Full page (A4)	$1000 +GST
Half page (A5)	$650 +GST
Quarter page	$350 +GST

THE MAGAZINE OF THE FEDERATION OF ETHNIC COMMUNITIES' COUNCILS OF AUSTRALIA

FECCA