Jon Stratton and Ien Ang, 'Multicultural imagined communities: cultural difference and national identity in Australia and the USA'

In the last few years, the question of national identity has become an intense site of concern, debate and struggle throughout the world. Emerging from this problematisation is a growing awareness of what Homi Bhabha calls 'the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force' (1). The nation can assume symbolic force precisely in so far as it is represented as a unity; yet national unity is always ultimately impossible precisely because it can only be represented as such through a supression and repression, symbolic or otherwise, of difference. It is in this context that "multiculturalism" has become such a controversial issue. As a discourse, multiculturalism can broadly - and without, for the moment, further specification - be understood as the recognition of co-existence of a plurality of cultures within the nation. Celebrated by some and rejected by others, multiculturalism is controversial precisely because of its real and perceived (in)compatibility with national unity.

Critics of "multiculturalism" generally consider it as a centrifugal movement, it is described with much concern by commentators as a threat to national unity. As *Time* magazine recently warned, '[the] growing emphasis on the US's "multicultural" heritage exalts racial and ethnic pride at the expense of social cohesion' (20). Historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr., author of a book called *The Disuniting of America*, expressed his critique of multiculturalism this way:

The US escaped the divisiveness of a multiethnic society by a brillant solution: the creation of a brandnew national identity. The point of America was not to preserve old cultures but to forge a new, *American* culture. (...) The growing diversity of the American population makes the quest for unifying ideals and a common culture all the more urgent. In a world savagely rent by ethnic and racial antagonisms, the US must continue as an example of how a highly differentiated society holds itself together. (*Cult* 26)

Here, then, multiculturalism is constructed as inherently destructive of a unified and cohesive national identity. In his book, Schlesinger discusses how 'the cult of ethnicity' currently raging across university campuses in the United States culminates in an 'attack on the common American identity' (*Disuniting* 119). Schlesinger is particularly scathing about Afrocentricity, a radical philosophical and educational movement that emphasises and glorifies the African roots of African-Americans, and thus represents a symbolic self-Africanisation and de-Americanisation of this group of Americans. This example supports Schlesinger's view that multiculturalism inevitably contains a 'separatist impulse' which amounts to nothing other than multinationalism, leading to a 'decomposition of America'.

Schlesinger represents the mainstream stance on multiculturalism in the US. Schlesinger's political biography highlights the important shift in the American experience of itself. In the early 1960s, he was a liberal and a member of President Kennedy's personal staff. By the 1980s, however, his views - which have remained consistent - had begun to sound rather conservative. Anthony Woodiwiss argues that from the mid-1960s onwards there was an increasing disillusion with America as the Johnsonian "Great Society", which was, in Woodiwiss's words, 'simply corporate liberal society writ large' (61), failed to keep its ideological promises. This account provides an historical context for the new American debate over multiculturalism, where this term is closely connected with the moral panic around "identity politics" and "political correctness". As we will see, Schlesinger's criticism highlights the importance of a shared ideological belief as both the foundation of American national identity and the basis for a capitalist corporate liberalism which, from an American point of view, is the "natural" economic expression of the nation-state. Multiculturalism presumably subverts this unified vision of "America".

Coming from a more radical political background well to the left of Schlesinger, indeed located in the critiques of American society that accompanied the disillusion described by Woodiwiss, Lawrence Grossberg is equally critical of the presumably divisive multiculturalist programme: identity politics, he says, leads to a 'seemingly endless fragmentation of the Left into different subordinate identities and groups' (368). The similarity in position between Schlesinger and Grossberg is not surprising since, in spite of their significant political differences, both of them ultimately share a commitment to the Enlightment originated ideology privileging a shared moral universe which permeates the American experience of society - and of national identity. This illustrates that there is, from an Australian point of view, a surprising degree of agreement among US commentators of all political persuasions that multiculturalism is inimical to national unity, or, in Grossberg's case, national radical politics.

This American rejection sheds an interesting light on the very different situation in Australia. Here, as is wellknown, multiculturalism has virtually become a household term in public discourse. Although no less controversial, multiculturalism has generally been accepted in this country as integral to Australian national culture and identity. Recent ethnic clashes between Australian residents of Greek and Macedonian origin around the Government's recognition of the FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia),

have generally been seen as giving multiculturalism a bad name, but they have not been used as grounds to challenge the acceptance of multiculturalism as such, so much as an opportunity to examine the political consequences of its practice.

To be sure, there are great differences in the discursive formation of multiculturalism in these two national contexts, both in terms of substance and in terms of institutional status. In the US, the discourse of multiculturalism has mostly been associated with the intellectual promotion of non-Western cultures in the face of Western or Eurocentric cultural hegemony (as in Afrocentricity), while in Australia it is related more directly to the social position and interests of ethnic minority groups, predominantly of Southern and East European origin. It is not our intention in this article to elaborate on these important subtantial differences in the connotations surrounding the term multiculturalism. 1 This would need a detailed historical comparison which is not the purpose of this article. Rather, we want to focus our attention on a more *structural* difference: the fact that in the US, the politicisation of multiculturalism has been largely from the bottom up, its stances advanced by minority groups (African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans and so on) who regard themselves as *excluded* from the American mainstream (and for whom the multiculturalist idea, *pace* Schlesinger, acts as an affirmation of that exclusion), while in Australia multiculturalism is a centre piece of *official government policy*, that is, a top-bottom political strategy implemented by those in power precisely to improve the *inclusion* of ethnic minorities within national Australian culture.

Australia and the United States have two things in common. First, they are both products of British colonialism. Second, they are both settler societies; that is, they are to a very large extent populated by people whose ancestors travelled to these countries from elsewhere during and after the colonial period. As we shall see, it is the combination - in varied forms - of these two conditions which frames the distinctive ways in which the problematic of national identity and national culture has been dealt with in these two nation-states, and specifies the differential ways in which multiculturalism is conceived in the two national contexts. To put it concretely, we want to suggest that the reason why multiculturalism can be a nation-wide government policy in Australia in a way unimaginable in the USA, has to do with the fundamentally different ways in which national identity is constructed in the two contexts. Multiculturalism is official culture in Australia in a way it can never be in the US. That is to say, while Prime Minister Paul Keating can enunciate the idea that Australia is a "multicultural nation in Asia", thereby signalling multiculturalism as an integral and essential characteristic of contemporary Australian national identity, President Clinton would be challenging fundamental aspects of American self-perception were he to make an analogous remark. Yes, the US is a pluralist society, but America is America: it has a unified national identity. That is, while everyday US social reality is so clearly multicultural, multicultural*ism* is alien to the way American national identity is imagined. Below, we will elaborate this difference and try to explain why it is the case. We will also reflect on some of the consequences of this difference for the different ways in which cultural difference can be negotiated in the two national contexts.

Settler Societies and National Identity

We want to begin by saying a little more about the term "multiculturalism". The word has a short history. According to the *Longer Oxford English Dictionary* (which of course only provides us with the term's genealogy in the English language and gives us a nominalistic history only), multiculturalism developed from multicultural. Apart from one previous usage in a book review in the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1941, multicultural came into general usage in the late 1950s in Canada. The *OED* provides a sentence from the *Times* of Montreal in June, 1959 which describes Montreal as 'This multi-cultural, multi-lingual society.' The use of a hyphen indicates the novelty of both compounds. Again according to the *OED*, the first use of multiculturalism was in a Canadian government report, the *Preliminary Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism* which came out in 1965. Just what the definition of multiculturalism is, is obscure. The reason for this is clear from its historical usage. From its inception, or very shortly after, multiculturalism became a part of the rhetoric of the (Canadian) state. It is primarily a political term associated with government policy. Put simply (and we will return to this later in discussing the Australian adoption of multiculturalism, which owes much to the Canadian) the term is associated with an official recognition of the existence of different ethnic groups within the state's borders, and evidences concerns about disadvantage and equity which the state recognises as its responsibility to address. This brief genealogy makes it clear that multiculturalism needs to be distinguished from, say, the description of a society as multicultural. Multiculturalism as a state policy is not necessarily present in societies which can be described as de facto multicultural (as is the case in the United States).

In an historical context, one understanding of multiculturalism would situate it as the consequence of the failure of the modern project of the nation-state which emphasised unity and sameness - a trope of identity - over difference and diversity. This reading makes use of the same ideological assumptions as those on which the classic notion of the nation-state was based, but it reverses their value. For example, multiculturalism valorises diversity where the classic modern nation-state valorised homogeneity. When a government adopts an active policy of multiculturalism, it does so with the explicit assumption that cultural diversity is a good thing for the nation and needs to be actively promoted. Migrants are encouraged - and to a certain extent, forced by the logic of the discourse - to preserve their cultural heritage and the government provides support and facilities for them to do so; as a result, their place in the new society is sanctioned by their officially recognised ethnic identities. This interventionist model of dealing with cultural pluralism is to be found in Australia. On the other hand, where no such government policy is present, migrants are left to themselves to find a place in the new society, under the assumption that they will quickly be absorbed into and by the established cultural order (or, when this doesn't happen, end up in underclass or ethnic ghettos). This describes the *laissez-faire* approach of the United States. There are, of course, many historically specific and contingent reasons for these very different philosophies, but here we want to connect them with the construction of national identity in the two contexts.

Discussions of multiculturalism have generally taken the entity of the nation-state for granted. But in order to understand the global historical significance of multiculturalism, we must recognize that policies of multiculturalism both develop out of, and highlight, the particular assumptions of the nation-state, the most important of which is the fantasmatic moment of "national unity". The political world of modernity was and is composed of individual states. The reification of the state reached its philosophical apogee in Hegel's work. Nevertheless, the state is not identical with the people living in the state. It is a structure of government and, whilst the structure itself might involve representation, the idea of the state is not, itself, representational. To put it bluntly, the modern individual cannot identify with the state. Instead s/he identifies with the nation. Where the term "state" refers to the legal, financial, in short, bureaucratic aspects of an administrative unit, the term "nation" refers to the experience of the people within the state as unified by a common language, culture and tradition. How is this twinning of "state" and "nation" in the singular concept of the nation-state achieved?

Ernest Gellner argues succinctly that '[i]t is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way round' (55). He goes on to note that 'nationalism uses the pre-existing, historically inherited proliferation of cultures or cultural wealth, though it uses them very selectively, and it most often transforms them radically'. A 'high culture' is created which is imposed on the population through a 'generalised diffusion of a school-mediated, academy-supervised idiom, codified for the requirements of reasonably precise bureaucratic and technological communication' (57). The problem with this formulation is that it implies a natural correspondence between the (homogenised) nation and the (centralised) state. It seems to presume that, to a large extent, nationalism - the movement toward a unified nation - is an inevitable effect of the (unspecified) needs of the state.

Although Gellner's theory is useful in so far as it emphasises the centrality of cultural homogeneity as founding ideological principle of the modern nation-state, a crucial problem with his book is that it is completely, and unselfconsciously, Eurocentric. Gellner's nation-states emerge on the particular territories where there was previously 'a complex structure of local groups, sustained by folk cultures reproduced locally and idiosyncratically by the micro-groups themselves' (57). We have here a theorisation of the nation-state which does not recognise the specificity of European history, where the twinning of nation and state took place organically, as it were. The theory is especially problematic with regard to settler societies such as the USA and Australia, where there is no 'previous complex structure of local groups' which can form the "natural" basis for the construction of a homogeneous national culture.

In this respect, Benedict Anderson's description of the nation as an "imagined community" is useful because it emphasises the symbolic artificiality of national identity. Anderson defines the nation as 'an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' (6). It is significant that in the title of the book the term "political" gets left out. This is an important omission because it leaves the way clear for an account which does not problematise the political relations between nation and state. In particular, it means that the diverse local cultures whose differences are suppressed in the creation of a national imagined community are left out of Anderson's consideration,

along with the requirements of a national ideology and, in the last resort, force, used by the state to assure its continued existence and to deny the cultural divisions which, in so many cases, remained and remain a disruptive and excessive feature in any national imagined community.

Anderson's concern is with the specificity of nations which gives meaning to the difference between independent states. European nations have definitionally thought of themselves as essentially distinct from each other. Modern settler societies however represent a very special case of imagined communities, as the construction of a distinctive "nation" is complicated here by the fact that the settlers who have colonised the new territory have migrated from another place. Thus, the experience of the colonial settler society involves the transference, through migration, of a particular national culture, generally that of the coloniser. The transference of the Mother Country's national culture will not necessarily be a deliberate and self-conscious act, unlike the attempts to impose the national culture to the indigenous peoples of the colonies. Often the transference was so obvious and naturalised as to be unthought. The ambiguities involved in such transfers from one space to another, compounded for people born in the new space (i.e. the second or third or futher generation migrants), do not become crucial until the administrative unit, to use Anderson's term, is transformed into an independent state. When this happens the problem of the national is foregrounded. How can the settler society become a sovereign and autonomous imagined community, a nation-state, when those inhabiting and running the state have come from somewhere else and, to a certain extent, have retained a sense of "ethnic" identity, and since the end of the eighteenth century, a national identity, related to that other place, the Mother Country? Here, for example, is how Richard White describes the situation in pre-Federation Australia:

The question of Australian identity has usually been seen as a tug-of-war between Australianness and Britishness, between the impulse to be distinctively Australian and the lingering sense of a British heritage. However this attitude to the development of an Australian identity only became common towards the end of the nineteenth century, when self-conscious nationalists began to exaggerate what was distinctive about Australia. (47)

As we will see, this double bind of sameness/difference in relation to the British parent culture dominated the problematic of national identity in Australia until well into the sixties. The ambivalence of what has been called "colonial nationalism" was a central characteristic in the transformation of this settler colony into a new nation; colonial nationalism - which was characterised by a desire for autonomy and independence without severing the ties with the imperial power - 'acted as the ideological force in state-making in [this] new societ[y]' (Eddy and Schreuder 2). The contradictory manner in which the problem of articulating nation and state into a unitary nation-state was originally cast in Australia, meant that the question of national identity was resolved in terms of 'the living and enduring connections to their European beginnings' (Eddy and Schreuder 7).

By contrast, the history of the United States was from the beginning characterised by the leading role of the state in defining American distinctiveness from the Old World and, as a consequence, exemplifies a rather more explicit ideological strategy of constructing a national identity. Here, as we will elaborate below, the state articulates the ideological foundation for its existence and derives its legitimacy from the claim that, were everybody within the state to live by the principles and values of this ideology - in other words, were its ideological foundations to become cultural - the state would have realised its promise as a nation. We want to argue that this is how the American problematic of national identity can be understood. As we shall see, this is also one reason why multiculturalism as a government policy - i.e. a policy that actively *promotes* cultural diversity - is ideologically incompatible with American national identity.

In Australia, however, it is only the adoption of the policy of multiculturalism in the early seventies which marked a crucial moment at which the state took on a more interventionist role in defining the national identity away from the imperial connection with Britain. A closer look at these different historical trajectories will help us understand how in Australia, in contrast with the United States, the discourse of multiculturalism has not come to be positioned as *antagonistic* to the national imagined community, but, rather, as one of its very distinctive characteristics. With the introduction of official multiculturalism, the emphasis on a homogeneous imagined community was shifted from the level of the national to the level of the ethnic: now, the national is conceived as the space within which many (ethnically defined) imagined communities live and interact.

To summarise, as settler societies both the United States and Australia were faced with the problem of how to create a distinctive national identity without having recourse to a pre-existing distinctive common culture as raw material. They are, to use Anthony Smith's term, 'nations by design' (40). But while the United States designed its national identity through *ideological* means, Australia did it through *cultural* means. This had fundamental consequences for the different ways in which new waves of immigrants from different parts of the world - whose settlement was seen as logistically essential for the future well-being of these countries - were assumed to fit into these new nations.

American National Identity: Ideological Universalism

In her discussion of the creation of American identity, Heidi Tarver notes that '[i]t has been argued by some scholars that national identity preceded and was a significant factor in the political unification of the states under the Constitution' (63). She goes on to demonstrate that, in spite of this contention, '[l]ikeness in the pre-revolutionary period was constituted (...) in relation to the British rather than the American nation' (64). Moreover, she notes that 'A few years after the Glorious Revolution, Cotton Mather declared: "It is no Little Blessing of God, that we are a part of the English Nation"'(64), and that, sixty years later, 'Benjamin Franklin clearly expressed the sense of colonial/British identity when he wrote to Lord Kames: "No one can more sincerely rejoice than I do, on the reduction of Canada; and this is not merely as I am a colonist, but as I am a Briton..."'(64). What we have here is a good illustration of the transference of British national identity to the New World, and its preservation despite political

independence. It suggests a perception of nationality as arising out of a shared cultural experience and, therefore, as being more "natural" than artificially constructed political divisions. It shows that, even though the Americans had fought and won a war against the British, winning their independence in the process, Britishness remained their primary point of identification. Still, as Smith remarks, by the late eighteenth century what he calls a 'vernacular ancestralism' had developed that 'looked back to the Americanized forefathers against the "wicked British step-mother" and proclaimed a unique destiny for the new 'chosen people' in the New Jerusalem' (149-50).

Referring to the war of independence, Tarver relates how:

As the war progressed (...) the violence which it imposed on daily life began to reshape American perceptions of both themselves and their British opponents.

For one thing, lamentations over the loss of affective ties to the mother country were replaced with vitriolic verbal attacks and bitter recriminations. American Whigs accused Britain of tyrannical and oppressive policies toward the colonies, of conspiracy, corruption and degeneracy. (69)

Disregarding Tarver's reductive causality, it is clear that the American war of independence produced an occasion for a much more fraught relation between the American settlers and the Mother Country than was ever the case between the Australian settlers and the British national culture. In Australia, there was never any fundamental political disagreement with Britain, and never a strong perceived need (until recently) to define Australian national identity in terms of political independence from Britain. By contrast, Tarver argues that in America the revolutionary war itself 'provided intense common experience and the raw material for national myth-making' (64) and a little further on asserts that 'if the war operated as a metaphor for separation from Britain, the bloodshed and suffering it inflicted on Americans also held powerful symbolic potential with respect to new visions of communitas' (70). While this may have been the case, the complexities around the American settler experience and their struggle for independence had a fundamental effect on the way the emerging national community was to be imagined. It led to a shift away from a concern with "natural" (British) national culture as the site for identification, and towards a messianic espousal of ideology as the basis for forging an identity for the new nation.

This is a crucial point. The choice between ideology and culture was made possible by the discursive ordering of the Enlightment principles which underlie modernity. It came hard on the heels of the French Revolution's attempt to impose a *political* ideology as the basis for a new state in a situation where a unified national identity was already being forged out of pre-existing cultural components. However, as a settler society the American situation was quite different, particularly as it needed to *invent* a focus for a new national identity. This need can explain why ideology itself was resorted to as the basis for an entirely new national identity. This is most clearly expressed in the rhetoric to be found in the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence which begins with the sentence that virtually every American still knows by heart:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

It is a commonplace to note that this paragraph derives from Enlightenment philosophy and that, in particular, it owes much to the political thinking of John Locke. His political theory was being used self-consciously here as the foundation for the identifying features of a modern nation-state. In the Declaration we find no assertion of a separate American *cultural* identity. Rather, coming out of the tension with the continued experience of Britishness (as testified in Benjamin Franklin's remark quoted above) was not a rejection of British culture, but a claim to create a new nation on the basis of universal ideological principles which supposedly transcended cultural and ethnic specificity. The implications of this are complex. While providing a claim to national uniqueness, it also laid the basis for a secular political universalism, paving the way for the twentieth century American belief in the portability of "the American way of life" (founded in ideological principles as the basis of culture) to other national sites around the world. Within the US itself, this logic can help explain why the multiple cultures and peoples that have gone to make up the United States are always to be subsumed under the overarching ideals which make America "the promised land" (see Stratton for a cultural history of this theme).

This emphasis is repeated in mainstream American sociology, which privileges a functionalist consensus theory where society is viewed as held together by shared moral precepts (norms, values and attitudes) rather than shared cultural experience and practice. 2 American discussions of immigration tend to follow the assumptions of functionalist sociology, where the problem of "social integration" is "solved" through assimilation into what Talcott Parsons called 'the central value system'. Assimilation is defined here primarily at the level of ideology, as the acceptance of universal moral values, whereas the failure of assimilation is equated with social disintegration (i.e. the fragmentation or lack of shared moral values). The specifically American idea of the melting pot is based on the concept of assimilation and it has been thought of as essential for American national identity: it is the metaphor for the construction of a unified people out of a wide variety of ethnic and racial groups. America, says Schlesinger, is 'a severing of roots, a liberation from the stifling past, an entry into a new life, an interweaving of separate ethnic strands into a new national design' (*Disuniting* 23). What unifies Americans in this scheme of things is a universal dedication to a set of abstract ideals and principles. Franklin D. Roosevelt expressed this clearly when he stated in 1943 that 'Americanism is a matter of the mind and the heart; Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race and ancestry. A good American is one who is loyal to this country and to our creed of liberty and democracy' (in Schlesinger *Disuniting* 37).

Two things follow from this construction of American identity. First of all, being an American is not primarily defined in terms of specific cultural practices and symbols (say, love for baseball or hotdogs), but in more abstract, idealist terms. Thus, Mary Waters found that the Americans she interviewed, when asked about their identity as Americans, understood that identity unequivocally in terms of loyalty and patriotism; 'American' is experienced 'as a political or national category rather than as an ethnic or

cultural category' (57). This means that ethnic identity or ethnicity - the source of cultural distinctiveness - is defined *outside* the general paradigm of a universal all-Americanness. The phenomenon of the hyphenated American - African-American, Asian-American, Italian-American, and so on - should be understood in this way: as the coupling of two separate identities, one culturally particular, the other presumably ideologically universal.

But the very existence of the hyphenated American points to another characteristic of American national identity: its fundamental future-orientedness, its orientation towards an idealised social destiny. Because all-American identity is situated in the realm of ideals, American nationhood is always experienced as something which will only have been fully achieved when the United States has become the perfect lived realisation of these ideals. Schlesinger voices this sentiment clearly:

What has held the American people together in the absence of a common ethnic origin has been precisely a common adherence to ideals of democracy and human rights that, *too often transgressed in practice*, forever goad us to narrow the gap between practice and principle. (*Disuniting* 118, emphasis added)

But it is precisely this vision of American reality as a gap between principle and practice which makes it impossible for someone like Schlesinger, a liberal now repositioned as conservative in the new context of identity politics, to acknowledge that the transgression of these ideals may be structurally *constitutive* of the US social formation rather than a practical shortcoming to be teleologically overcome in the future. For Schlesinger, the persisting (and, alarmingly for him, strengthening) cultural and ethnic differences and divisions which characterise the American social fabric can only be conceptualised negatively, as a residue of the melting process - that which fails to be successfully "Americanised". In this sense, the hyphenated American poses a potential danger: the danger that the particular would overwhelm the universal. Schlesinger prefers to see American history as a steady movement from exclusion to inclusion of all people living within the territory into an ever more inclusive, idealised America. But the rise of the unmeltable ethnics' (Novak, see also Glazer and Moynihan), and more importantly the increasingly forceful self-assertion of Blacks and other Americans of non-white, non-European ancestry (Native Americans, Chicanos, Asians) disrupts this imagined ideal history. No wonder then that Schlesinger sees multiculturalism - which provides the terrain for these ethnic and racial self-assertions - as the culmination of a betrayal of the American ideal.

The problem with multiculturalism, Schlesinger says, is that it gives rise to:

the conception of the US as a nation composed not of individuals making their own choices but of inviolable ethnic and racial groups. It rejects the historic American goals of assimilation and integration. And, in an excess of zeal, well-intentioned people seek to transform our system of education from a means of creating "one people" into a means of promoting, celebrating and perpetuating separate ethnic origins and identities. The balance is shifting from *unum* to *pluribus*. (*Cult*)

However, what remains unexplained in such an account is why, if the American ideals of the melting pot were so wonderfully attractive and promising, assimilation and integration were only partially successful, and what reinforced the separatist impulse among radical multiculturalists. One answer is that the universalist myth of opportunity for all into which the American Creed was translated for the individual failed to materialise, leading to a sense of disillusion with official providential Americanism. This answer is implied in Woodiwiss's discussion of the post-1960s American experience of the failure of the ideology of social modernism to deliver on its promises to the American people. As Schlesinger himself concedes, 'the rising cult of ethnicity was a symptom of decreasing confidence in the American future' (*Disuniting* 41). Another answer could point to the fact that the abstract and basically culturally empty nature of the lofty principles on which American identity is based (eg. "democracy", "liberty", "human rights") may have prevented them from becoming concrete anchors for the experience of a meaningful and distinctive common national culture. As Hugh Seton-Watson observed, '[m]any 'ethnics' had lost their old values without gaining anything new except the materialist hedonism of the mass media' (219). That is, in the absence of specific cultural content inscribed in the definition of what it means to be American, the assimilation of immigrants into "the American way of life" ended up being defined by their absorption into a pervasive and homogenised "mass culture" of consumerism (see Ewen and Ewen).

Most important, however, is the fact that the very universalist representation of America as the promised land for all, and of Americanness as a potentially universal identity, involves a radical disavowal of the fundamental historical exclusions which undergirded the foundation of the United States. But, as Pierre Bourdieu has remarked, the universal is never power neutral, and its defenders always have a certain *interest* in it (31). Thus, when Schlesinger states dismissively that '[m]ulticultural zealots reject as hegemonic the notion of a shared commitment to common ideals' (*Disuniting* 117), he either denies the very existence of a hegemonic condition which, far from being universally accessible, structurally favours some categories over others, or trivialises the cost of that hegemonic condition for those marginalised by it. To put it differently, the gap between Americanist principles and US social reality is not an unfortunate historical aberration to be corrected in the future, as Schlesinger would have it, but the very *effect* of that hegemonic universalism, which denies the structural centrality of policies of exclusion to the formation of the United States.

In US history, the key exclusionary category is that of "race" - a category which, as Omi and Winant have argued, is a central organising principle in US social relationships at all levels of life. From the beginning, US society has been structured by a racial order which 'has linked the system of political rule to the racial classification of individuals and groups' (72). While culture - and therefore ethnicity - were elided from the discourse of American national identity, race was not. Race, not ethnicity, has been understood by Americans as the fundamental site of difference within the US nation-state. Omi and Winant characterise the US state as a racial state, in which the category "white" remains the undisputed hegemonic centre. Historically, the category "white" (with which the European settlers identified themselves) emerged simultaneously with the category "black", which evolved as a result of the consolidation of racial slavery towards the end

of the seventeenth century (Omi and Winant 64). This resulted in a racial logic - the establishment and maintenance of a "colour line" - whose effects still permeate contemporary US society. In a Derridian sense, race can be understood as the supplement to American national identity. It both asserts the transcendental unifying possibilities of a universalist ideology - and thus the ultimate unity of the American nation *in spite of* race - and provides the always-already existent and irreducible site for its failure.

Since the 1960s racially based social movements have moved from a largely integrationist stance (eg. the civil rights movement), which struggled for the breaking down of the colour barrier, to a more self-assertive black nationalist stance (eg. black power), which signalled a loss of faith in the possibility of turning the US into a "raceless society" (see Omi and Winant). In other words, rather than a gradual inclusion of racial minority groups into the American melting pot - presumably achieved by granting them "equal rights" and "social justice" - these groups have engendered a range of political cultures which have moved beyond these quasi-universalist principles and embraced particularist ideals of "self-determination", a "politics of identity" relying on the symbolic and cultural assertion of "blackness".

Racial self-identification represents a deliberate distancing from, rather than an assimilation into the WASP mainstream. As a consequence, the discourse of race has become a way of talking about and locating cultural difference, in a way much more divisive than the discourse of ethnicity which, in the American context, is mainly reserved for "whites" (see Waters). In this sense, the hyphenated label "African-American" signifies a much more radical fracture in American identity than, say, "Italian-American". It is this separatist impulse (signified by "multiculturalism") which Schlesinger sees as a threat to American unity. By the same token, however, we could suggest that it is precisely the persistent invocation of the colour-blind universalism of American principles, which has no room for a serious recognition of its own particularist WASP roots and the historically real exclusions brought about in its name, which might have fuelled that very separatist impulse. What we can now see is why and how, in the American context, multiculturalism is bound up with both identity politics and race. While the former operates as a critique of and response to the ideology of American universalism, the latter has become positioned as the structural signifier of difference fundamentally excessive to, and subversive of, a unified American imagined community. The connection between identity politics and multiculturalism is complex and, in some ways, distinctively American, growing out of the American privileging of ideology. The politicisation of a set of subcultural practices into an exclusive collective "identity" suggests the ideological foundation of identity politics. In this context, universalism and particularism, assimilation and separateness, unity and disunity, are constructed as mutually exclusive, oppositional ideological forces, with no in-between zone. As we will see, the policy of multiculturalism in Australia can be interpreted precisely as an attempt to create such an in-between zone.

Australian National Identity: Race and Cultural Particularism

Unlike the United States, Australia separated from Great Britain gradually, and over a lengthy period of time. Made up of separate colonies, the continental nation-state of Australia came into existence on January 1st, 1901. This was enabled by the passing of a bill in the British House of Commons sanctioning Federation in May 1900. There was no Australian War of Independence and no establishment of a new republic, although some radical colonials did imagine such a revolutionary separation from the Mother Country on the basis of the American example, generally considered in the nineteenth century as the most advanced "new society" (White 52-3).

As with the United States, what was first established in Australia was a transplantation of British culture. Of course this culture evolved away from its British source but the primary identification remained with "British" culture. Manning Clark has observed that '[w]hat the English or the European observed in the Australians was their Britishness' (184). He goes on to quote Francis Adams, 'an English man of letters who lived in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane between 1884 and 1889' who wrote in 1886 that '[t]he first thing that struck me on walking about Sydney one afternoon...was the appalling strength of the British civilization' (184). And even though comparisons were regularly made throughout the century with America, the ultimate similarity was considered to be with Britain. Australian democracy, for example, was commonly seen by the colonial bourgeoisie as inspired by British democracy, not something built on the model of American democracy, whose "excesses" (e.g. of mob rule and popular government) were criticised by Alexis de Toqueville in his influential book *Democracy in America* (White 56).

In short, for most of the nineteenth century, according to Richard White, there was no strong evidence of a distinctively Australian identity: 'Australians saw themselves, and were seen by others, as part of a group of new, transplanted, predominantly Anglo-Saxon emigrant societies' (47). It is significant that a sense of national distinctiveness only grew stronger towards the end of the century, and that this was accompanied by 'a more explicitly racial element', based on being Anglo-Saxon or, as confidence in the new society grew, 'on being the most vigorous branch of Anglo-Saxondom' (47). The latter formed the basis for a belief in the emergence of an Australian "national type", which was given not only physical and racial characteristics, but also a moral, social and psychological identity (White 64). The Australian type - sometimes spoken of as 'the Anglo-Australian race' - was believed to be a new product of the multiplying British stock, the "race" which, in the heyday of British imperialism and legitimated by the then immensely influential ideology of Social Darwinism, saw itself as superior to all other "races" and therefore posessing the duty and destiny to populate and "civilise" the rest of the world. It is this racialist concern with a distinctively Australian type which undergirded the so-called White Australia Policy, which was sanctioned by the adoption of the Immigration Restriction Bill in 1901. This bill prohibited the immigration into Australia by 'non-Europeans' or 'the coloured races'. The fact that this bill was the first major legislative issue dealt with by the parliament of the newly-created Commonwealth of Australia, suggests the perceived importance of "racial purity" as the symbolic cement for the imagined community of the fledgling nation (see Markus). Other than the United States, then, the discourse of race was used to mark the *limits* of the Australian imagined

community, not distinctions within it. This is a point to which we will return when discussing the Australian policy and practice of multiculturalism.

It is important to point to the historical specificity of the racism inscribed in this policy of exclusion. We want to suggest that its motivation was not primarily a negative one, in the sense of being directed against other races (although in practice it was mostly targeted at the Chinese and the Japanese while spanning, of course, all the "non-white" races). Rather, the policy was implemented at a critical moment in the positive development of a distinctive national identity. If we ally Anderson's notion of the imagined community with the acknowledgement that settler societies begin their struggle for a separate identity with the raw material of the national culture brought by the settlers, then we can understand that the White Australia policy was, in the first instance, a *nationalist* policy and reflects the new nation-state's search for a national identity in a European culture and a British-based racial homogeneity (which inevitably implies the exclusion of racial/cultural Others). In Markus' words:

The non-Europeans of the "near north" were seen as posing a threat to the social and political life of the community, to its higher aspirations. The perception of this threat was heightened by a consciousness of race, a consciousness that innate and immutable physical characteristics of certain human groups were associated with non-physical attributes which precluded their assimilation into the Australian nation. (256)

The Australian preoccupation with racial/cultural purity as conditional for the construction of a unified national identity is an example of how the modern idea that a nation should be homogeneous could be translated into a state policy which collapses race and culture. It can be argued that it is because the nation-state used the reductive quality of race (defined by physical appearance) as the final arbiter of membership rather than ethnicity - a complex of nationalised cultural characteristics - that it could later embrace multiculturalism based on the more culturally oriented discourse of ethnicity (see below).

While the social reality throughout the continent was probably much more culturally diverse than officially recognised, the *rhetoric* of racial and cultural homogenity was constantly rehearsed in speeches and editorials surrounding the birth of the new nation. As White observes, '[i]t could be proclaimed that the new nation was 98 per cent British, more British than any other dominion, some said more British than Britain itself' (112). In an Antipodean transformation of the meaning of Britishness, the Irish were included as part of the British or, as the neologism would have it, the "Anglo-Celtic race". According to the 1901 census, the largest non-British migrant groups were the Germans (1 per cent) and the Chinese (.8 per cent). This emphasis on racial/cultural homogeneity was uniformly represented as promising to the future of the new nation-state. In 1903, the first Australian attorney-general, Alfred Deakin, who later became Prime Minister, said in the House of Representatives that the most powerful force impelling the colonies towards federation had been 'the desire that we should be one people, and remain one people, without the admixture of other races' (in Markus xxi).

In other words, the White Australia policy implied the official racialisation of Australian national identity in a concerted and consensual manner which never took place in the United States. 3 In this way, in contrast to the United States where race was historically always-already an internal national issue, in Australia the salience of race was elided in everyday life. Instead, it became primarily a policy issue which marked the conceptual limits of the imagined community - the point where nation and state met to exclude - or, in the case of the Aborigines, to extinguish - the racially undesirable. Markus quotes from the Mebourne *Age* in 1896 to signal the "luck" experienced by Australians in this respect:

The problem of Negro citizenship in the United States is given up by the philosopher as unsolvable... In Australia, fortunately, we are free from this race problem. The aboriginals were of too low a stamp of intelligence and too few in number to be seriously considered. If there had been any difficulty, it would have been obviated by the gradual dying out of the native race. (in Markus 259)

The fundamental difference between on the one hand the American conception of national identity, based on an ideology inscribed in the foundation of the state, and on the other hand the Australian conception, based on the European idea of a homogeneous national culture, should be clear by now. In both cases, the transformation of the settler colony into a nation-state necessitated the construction of a national imagined community in which all the inhabitants could be unified into "one people". Yet whereas the one-ness of the American people was sought in a shared ideology (i.e. the messianic principles enshrined in the Declaration of Independence), the one-ness of the Australian people was initially sought in a shared race/culture.

It should be said that the construction of the external limits of US national identity was also, in practice, associated with race-based discrimination. Thus, the naturalisation statute of 1790 stated that only 'white persons' were eligible for American citizenship, an act amended in 1870 by adding 'persons of African descent', necessitated by the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment which abolished slavery. What this amendment signalled, is that from then on the category of race was located *within* the imagined community, and not at its limits as in the Australian case. As we have suggested above, this is why American discourse has included race as an always-already fracturing element *within* the national identity.

Furthermore, just like in Australia, Chinese immigration was restricted in the US and Chinese residents were not eligible for citizenship for decades, 4 but while one can find many similarities in the arguments put forward by anti-Chinese lobbyists in both countries, the final decision to implement restriction in the US did not seem to have been accompanied by a discourse of nation-building but mainly by economic and moralistic rhetoric. The many politicians who were against discrimination generally couched their arguments in terms of the universalist humanist principles of the Declaration of Independence, arguing, as Senator Sumner of Massachusetts did, that 'the greatest peril [of anti-Chinese discrimination] to this republic is from disloyalty to its great ideas' (in Daniels 43). Even pro-restriction voices often referred to these principles. Markus

summarises the American national stance against Chinese immigration in the following way, clearly echoing the importance of American ideology in its legitimation:

The American nation wanted immigrants, but immigrants who believed in republican institutions, who believed in public schools to raise their children to become good citizens, who worshipped at the shrine of freedom and who could assimilate into the mainstream of American life. (xix)

By contrast, Australian anti-Chinese discourse was not only much more overtly racialist, but also, especially towards the end of the nineteenth century, much more explicitly connected with the cause of nation-building. The Chinese, categorised as a coloured, non-European "race", could not belong to an Australian nation which officially defined itself as "white". The construction of a new, Australian national imagined community was premised on an exclusionary racial/cultural *particularism*, a binary oppositioning which included some and excluded others. To be sure, the category "white" itself was a term of amassment generally referring to "Europeans", although both categories proved to be more ambiguous and arbitrary than assumed. It was this racial exclusionary particularism which was to be overturned with the introduction of multiculturalism in the early seventies - a policy which could be characterised as the establishment of an *inclusionary* ethnic particularism.

Towards a Multicultural Imagined Community

As a settler society, Australia depended, just like the United States, on sustained immigration for its economic development and national security. In the post-Second World War period, Australia embarked on a programme to build up its population rapidly. Recovering from the Second World War and in the face of an increasingly strong Asian "near north", Australia, in the words of its first Minister for Immigration, Arthur Calwell, felt it needed to 'populate or perish'. One consequence of the desire to increase immigration was a liberalisation of the White Australia policy. As there was not enough supply of immigrants from Britain, 'New Australians' were recruited first in Northen Europe (Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Germany), and later Southern Europe (Italy, Greece, Croatia, Macedonia and so on). It is important to point not only to the hierarchy implicit in this declining preference for different subcategories of "white" Europeans, but also that this liberation did not overturn the racially based two-tiered structure which distinguished Europeans from non-Europeans. It did, however, introduce an element of diversity within the category "white", which needed to be dealt with. That is, with the admission of non-British European migrants, "whiteness" could no longer be related directly to the (British-derived) racial purity of the "Australian type". Racial homogeneity and cultural homogenity could not longer be assumed to be one and the same thing. As a result, emphasis was now shifted to the discursive construct of 'the Australian way of life' as the basis of government policy to assimilate migrants and Aborigines alike (White 159-60).

The official rhetoric of cultural assimilationism can be defined as 'the doctrine that immigrants could be culturally and socially absorbed and rapidly become

indistinguishable from the existing Anglo-Australian population' (Castles 184-5). Castles *et al.* have summed up the politics of assimilation in the Australian context like this:

The assimilationist/White Australia package had three essential ingredients, relating to the question of national identity:

- Australia was a culturally homogeneous society based on British values and institutions.

- This homogeneity would not be disturbed by mass European immigration.

- It could not survive any Asian migration. (*Mistaken* 46)

They argue that assimilationism was 'a covert racism based on the proposed incompatibility of certain cultures; and it drew the limiting line at which this incompatibility began, namely where a culture ceased to be "European"' (*Mistaken* 45). That is, the desire to keep Australia "white" was based on *cultural* considerations: white ethnics were thought to be assimilationable into the national culture, while coloured races were not. At this point it is useful to point to the different emphases in American and Australian conceptions of assimilation. In contrast with American assimilationalism, which as we have seen is thought of as a melting process of many different "cultures" into a universal set of ideological principles and values (of which the "American way of life" was the supreme embodiment), Australian assimilationism was aimed at the preservation of one *particular* "culture", "the Australian way of life", by excluding all other "cultures" which were considered incompatible and could not be assimilated. This post-Second World War assimilation policy can be interpreted as a response to the perceived need to sustain a homogeneous national *culture* which, as the European model showed, was the necessary precondition of a nation-state. Thus, in constrast with American assimilationism, which tends to be concerned with the immigrants' adoption of "American values", Australian assimilationism tended to be concerned with immigrants' adoption of everyday cultural *practices*: As Ellie Vasta noted:

New Australians, amounting to a ninth of the whole Australian population in 1956, were settling down to understand, if not share, old Australian predilections for drinking tea, rather than coffee, beer rather than the good wine of the country;...Newcomers had to puzzle over the old Australian disrespect for civil order and good government, bewilderingly joined with a general observance of the peace... And, new Australians had to try to understand old Australian speech. (in Castles et al. *Mistaken* 113)

Castles *et al.* write that '[i]n terms of dominant forms of identity and official state policy, the assimilation of the post-1945 decades (...) is the first historically significant nationalism in Australian history' (110). That is, bearing in mind that the White Australia policy was an exclusionary and therefore restrictive nationalist policy, there was no policy for deliberately producing, or actively reproducing, an Australian national identity until the range of cultural differences allowed into the country led to an assertive policy of assimilation meant to ensure the homogeneity perceived to be necessary for the maintenance of a unified imagined community. Assimilationism can therefore be

understood as a cultural nationalism which had the consequence of freeing Australia from colonial shackles and, in the end, forcing it to distinguish itself from British racial/cultural identity. This was done through the promotion and celebration of a distinctive "Australian way of life", a discursive construct which replaced the older, more British-related "national type". In other words, the discourse of assimilationism destabilised the symbiotic relationship between race and culture. That the distinction between British and Australian culture was still difficult to draw, however, is revealed in the above quote. After all, tea and beer drinking are very British cultural practices transplanted to Australia. Australian nationalism, therefore, could not logically focus on such cultural features to mark the Australian imagined community off from other ones. As a result, as Castles *et al.* remark, the cultural homogeneity sought after in the policy of assimilation:

seems to rely less on the language of kin and the ideology of folk than is commonly the case for nationalisms, principally because of the ambiguities and tensions of the English-imperial connection and independent Australian nationalism. In the case of the former, the colonial link was a less than plausible basis for an identity that would purport to capture the essence of the people who lived within the boundaries of the Australian nation-state. And, in the case of the latter, no claims to peculiarly local folk primordiality were possible for the European settlers. Preeminently, instead, the language of nationalism, celebrating the imagined communal "us", was about standards of living and domestic progress. This is an unusually "modern" celebration for nationalism, perhaps, but, linked nevertheless with an explicit ideal of cultural assimilation. (114)

This 'modern' Australian nationalism, then, is not only un-ideological (i.e. it isn't predicated on lofty universal ideals and principles as is American nationalism), but in its desire to decolonise itself - which is, it should be said, by no means a completed process even to this day - it also lacked the cultural resources to imagine itself as 'looming out of an immemorial past', to use Benedict Anderson's description of the nation again. 5 "The Australian way of life" was a vague discursive construct which lacked historical and cultural density, often boiling down to not much more than the suburban myth of 'the car, the family, the garden and a uniformly middle-class lifestyle' (White 166). We want to suggest that it is this relative underdetermination of Australian national identity by either ideology or culture that provided the symbolic space for the Australian nation-state to develop and implement an official policy of multiculturalism as the foundation for a reconstruction of national self-perception.

The official end of the White Australia policy occurred some years before the transformation of government policy in the direction of multiculturalism. As Castles *et al.* put it, '[i]n the mid-1960s, the White Australia Policy was officially abandoned by both major parties and assimilation was effectively abandoned also, at least in name' (51). Multiculturalism surfaced as a new government policy in 1973 when Al Grassby, the flamboyant then Minister for Immigration under the Whitlam Labor Government, issued a statement titled *A Multi-Cultural Society for the Future*. 6

It has rapidly become orthodoxy to describe the advent of official multiculturalism in Australia as the effect of a failure of the earlier ethic of assimilationism. And indeed, the fact was that non-British European migrants - Italians, Greeks, and so on - were simply not divesting themselves of the cultural practices which they took with them from their national "homelands" (e.g. drinking coffee and wine and speaking their "national" language) and cloning themselves into the "Australian way of life" as the assimilation policy required. But this only tells half the story. We want to suggest that official multiculturalism in Australia was not just a pragmatic response to problems encountered with the absorption of migrants, but can also be analysed as the sign of a more general transformation in the thinking about the very constitution of the national culture. In a pamphlet put out by the Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs in 1982 and entitled *Multiculturalism for all Australians*, we are told that:

Multiculturalism is (...) much more than the provision of special services to minority ethnic groups. It is a way of looking at Australian society, and involves living together with an awareness of cultural diversity. We accept our differences and appreciate a variety of lifestyles rather than expect everyone to fit into a standardised pattern.

Most of all, multiculturalism requires us to recognise that we each can be "a real Australian," without necessarily being "a typical Australian". (17)

Given the subtitle of the pamphlet, 'Our developing nationhood', the emphasis on cultural diversity can best be understood here as a complex turning away from the desire for a homogeneous Australian national culture. What the subtitle suggests is that Australian national identity is itself a new thing *still in development*, and a consequence of the juxtapositioning of different cultures and ethnicities within the territory of the nation-state.

The distinctiveness of the formulation of a multicultural national identity in Australia does not reside in the recognition of cultural pluralism as such (which happened in many other Western countries as well, including the United States), but is located in the (politically self-conscious) shift away from an imagining of the national community in terms of a homogeneous "way of life". The key to this shift lies in the new emphasis on the productivity of cultural difference - located in ethnicity - rather than in the old emphasis of race as the marker of national cultural limits. In this new understanding of national identity as a process of continual reinvention through the interaction of a plurality of ethnically defined imagined communities, the state takes on a new role as the guarantor of historical continuity.

The theoretical underpinnings of this political shift are illuminated in the *Review of Post-Arrival Programmes and Services to Migrants* (the so-called Galbally Report), tabled in Parliament in 1978. Significantly, this report took Edward Tylor's 1871 anthropological definition of culture as its starting point. The Report announces that '[w]e believe [culture to be] a way of life, that 'complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man [*sic*] as a member of Society"' (in Castles et al. 69). The take up of this anthropological definition of culture in

the development of multiculturalism indicates the continued importance given to *cultural practices* (rather than ideological principles) for the construction of Australian national identity. The use of an anthropological - rather than a sociological - definition of culture also reinforces the holistic notion of cultures as being both integrated and bounded. What Australian multiculturalism does, is to locate the "ethnic community" as the site of a particular "culture", so that, logically, Australian national culture now consists of many "cultures". As we will see, this conceptualisation lies at the basis of the idea of multicultural Australia as a "unity-in-diversity".

In other words, while it might have been a pragmatic solution to the perceived failure of assimilation, multiculturalism needs also to be understood as an attempt to reconstruct the definition of Australian national identity, with the, likely unintended, effect of fundamentally reworking the dynamic relation of nation and state. Multiculturalism can be seen first of all as a response to a crisis of identity in a settler society which, for a variety of reasons, could no longer sustain a national identity dependent on the myth of a British origin. This is not to deny that the proliferating cultural diversity in the country as a result of post-Second World War immigration had not created all sorts of social problems which the multicultural policies were designed to address. We want to suggest however that the comprehensive manner in which successive Australian governments (both conservative and Labor) have been concerned with it, was related to something quite different - the settler society's problem with national identity. In other words, multiculturalism here is not just a new policy for how to deal with immigrants, but is, in effect, a new national cultural policy.

We noted earlier that whereas the United States sought American identity through the state's assertion of normative ideological values, Australia had sought to emulate the European idea of a homogeneous race/culture as the basis of the imagined community of the nation. This way of thinking legitimated the state's implementation of a White Australia policy. We have also seen, however, how what constitutes the nation in a settler society always remains ambiguous and tenuous in its myth of origin and distinctiveness. This highlights the problematic nature of the articulation of "state" and "nation" which, in Gellner's theory, was considered a natural, organic linkage. And in a sense it is because the very "artificialness" of the nation/state articulation in this settler society context is so easily exposed (in contrast with the old European nation-states) that the very terms of that articulation could be more easily modified and worked upon. This helps us to understand why multiculturalism as *a policy to redefine national culture* could happen in Australia: such a redefinition involves a *disarticulation* of "nation" and "state" - a process which arguably can take place much more easily in a new settler society than in old nations where myths of primordial origins are much more historically entrenched and culturally sedimented.

The policy of multiculturalism has provided a new status for the state as the site where the overarching ideological principles are formulated which legitimise and vindicate the diversity of cultural practices in Australian territorial space. The state prrovides an ideological context for the production of the nation but, unlike the United States, the nation is not thought as a cultural expression of the universal ideological principles

represented by the state. Rather, the state acts as an institutional container of principles which are instrumental to the encouragement and management of cultural diversity. Thus, "awareness of cultural diversity" itself, together with related values such as tolerance, are now foregrounded as principles on which the Australian imagined community rests. In 1989, the Australian federal government launched the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia. The very phrase "multicultural Australia" suggests that multiculturality has now been enshrined as a recognised essence of Australian national identity. That is, the idea of a "multicultural Australia" can be seen as a state-underwritten blueprint for the ideal Australian national identity as a unity-in-diversity. It is in this sense that we want to describe the society constructed by multiculturalism in Australia as an *inclusive* particularism: ethnic minority cultures are now welcomed and celebrated as *enriching* Australian national culture rather than threatening it.

Along a very different historical path, then, Australia has reached a point which was taken up by the United States from its very inception: the formulation of national identity as an ideal cultural future sanctioned by the state rather than as something emerging organically from a particular racial/cultural heritage. In contrast with the United States, however, this ideal cultural future is not defined in terms of a singular set of ideological principles which all individuals should ideally make their own, but in terms of the creation of a symbolic *space* in which different cultures live harmoniously side by side, in which all Australians not only have the right, but are encouraged, 'within carefully defined limits, to express and share their individual cultural heritage, including their language and religion' (Castles 190). 7 This difference explains why in the US multiculturalism can only be conceived as *subverting* the national, while the Australian national can be represented as *constituted by* multiculturalism. This results in two very different conceptions of future-orientedness. Whereas the American national identity can ultimately only be conceived as a utopian ideal (when the melting pot will finally have Americanised everyone), a multicultural national identity, as the Australian one is now designed to be, is more pragmatically conceived as a potential reality, characterized by a managed unity-in-diversity (where different cultural communities co-exist as distinct pieces of a national mosaic - to use the Canadian metaphor - in a presumably "appropriate" balance). In short, Australian multiculturalism signals both a different understanding of national identity and a different formulation of the relation between nation and state. It also entails a quite distinct set of problems.

Beyond Multiculturalism?

Because multiculturalism is part of official discourse, the term circulates very differently in Australia as compared to the United States. The mainstreaming of multiculturalism in Australia - in the sense that the idea of Australia as a cultural mosaic has been commonly accepted - poses very peculiar challenges to critical debate. First of all, like the White Australia policy and the policy of assimilation before it, official multiculturalism - as a discourse - does not either represent or create the multifarious concrete experiences of the people living in Australia (although the particular policy measures implemented in the name of the rhetoric do, of course). It is, in the first instance, a discourse which constructs a particular *account* of those experiences. What it does is present to the people of

Australia a *public fantasy* - a collective narrative fiction - of the diverse character of Australia as a nation. 8 The legitimacy of this narrative fiction is important enough, and derives from an acceptance of this account. It is precisely within the narrative space of this fiction, institutionalised, for example, in SBS television (see O'Regan and Kolar-Panov), that opportunities are created for the active public *exploration* of cultural difference which were not available in times when a more assimilationary ethic was predominant.

In this sense, the assertion often enunciated these days that "Australia has always been a multicultural society" is both trite and historically misleading. The point is not so much that popular cultural practices were never as homogeneous as generally thought - arguably this is a truism applicable to *all* modern societies - but that the ideological *representation* of Australian nationhood as racially and culturally homogeneous (as in the heyday of the White Australia policy) did have real effects on both the expression and the experience of racial, ethnic and cultural difference - they went both unacknowledged and unaccepted as part of *Australian* life. The discourse of multiculturalism has made a real difference in this respect, it has constituted a zone for dealing with identity and difference which is neither separatist nor assimilationist. That is, because Australian multiculturalism expressly incorporates ethnic difference *within* the space of the national, it provides a framework for a politics of *negotiation* over the very content of the national culture, which is no longer imagined as something fixed and historically given but as something in the process of becoming. An apparently trivial but actually profound example - because it relates to a cardinal cultural practice - is Australian cuisine, which is now commonly represented as an eclectic hybrid of Mediterranean, Asian and other culinary traditions, including Anglo and Celtic ones. Thus, it is now possible to think about the distinctiveness of Australian national culture not in terms of an exclusive, pregiven racial/cultural particularity, but as an open-ended and provisional formation, as permanently unfinished business. As John Docker would have it, what distinguishes Australia is its "post-nationality", based on a 'decoupling of an Enlightment polity from any notion of a congruent necessary single culture' and on 'an acceptance and fostering of unpredictable cultural difference' (41). Or as Ramesh Thakur puts it, '[m]ulticulturalism is a fluid set of identities for the individual as well as the nation' (132).

But this might be too rosy a formulation. The problem with official multiculturalism is that it tends precisely to freeze the fluidity of identity by the very fact that it is concerned with the synthesising of unruly and unpredictable cultural identities and differences into a harmonious unity-in-diversity. So the metaphor of the mosaic, of unity-in-diversity, is based on another kind of disavowal, on a suppression of the potential *incommensurability* of juxtaposed cultural differences. Here we are faced with the limits of state multiculturalism. Against the background of the state's concern with the construction of (national) unity, multiculturalism can be seen not as a policy to *foster* cultural differences but, on the contrary, to direct them into safe channels. Thus, Homi Bhabha made the cautionary observation that policies of multiculturalism represent 'an attempt both to respond to and to control the dynamic process of the articulation of cultural difference, administering a *consensus* based on a norm that propagates cultural diversity' ("Third Space" 208). In this sense, the national community can only be imagined as a "unity in

diversity" by a *containment* of cultural difference. Seen this way, the idea(l) of unity-in-diversity is itself an ultimately exclusionary ideological construct. One constant source of tension is between the principle of "tolerance" enunciated by the multicultural state and the particular ethnic/cultural practices. The more "deviant" an ethnic community is, the more tensions there are likely to be between it and the state, at which point the state has the power to put limits to "tolerance" (Hage). In this sense, the politics of multiculturalism can be understood as coming out of the same modernist ideological assumptions on which the notion of the homogeneous nation-state was based. The ultimate rational remains national unity; tolerance of diversity is just another means of guaranteeing that unity.

As we have seen, the very validation of cultural diversity embodied in official multiculturalism tends to hypostatise and even fetishise "culture", which suppresses the heterogeneities existing within each "culture", constructed as coterminous with "ethnicity". This is a conservative effect, underpinned by traditional anthropology, which, ironically enough, only reproduces the binary oppositioning, common in the US context, between the particular and the universal. According to Docker, this is what the so-called multicultural orthodoxy does: constructs a binary relation between "ethnic communities" and "Australian society", as if the two were mutually exclusive, homogeneous entities. Such a representation not only constructs the latter as 'always devaluing, hierarchising, othering' the former (41), but also pigeonholes "the migrant" as permanently marginalised, forever ethnicised. It is not coincidental that "Anglo-Celtic" Australians are not viewed as an ethnic community, while the government and senior echelons of the public service are still made up of a predominance of people, mostly male, from this dominant demographic group. In this image of the nation the ethnicisation of minority cultures depends on the prior existence of a non-ethnicised Australian cultural centre (of "Anglo-Celtic" origin, born out of the cultural reductions of assimilationism and expressed as "the Australian way of life"). This central "Australian culture" is the ex-nominated ground on which other cultures are not only ethnicised, but also are enabled to, quite literally, speak to each other or, as exemplified in the row over Macedonia between Greeks and (Slav) Macedonians, fight each other. In short, official multiculturalism suppresses the continued hegemony of Anglo-Celtic Australian culture by making it invisible.

However, while official multiculturalism operates through the fixation of "culture" in ethnic boxes, the proliferation of cultural difference in the practice of everyday life can never be completely contained in a static unity-in-diversity. Indeed, to reiterate Bhabha's comment with which we started this article, the unity of the nation is an *impossible* one. Let us clarify this by returning, finally, to the crucial issue of race. In the Australian context, the question of race imposes itself most urgently in relation to two groups: "Aborigines" and "Asians". It is significant that in debates about multiculturalism Aboriginal people are generally left out, not least because Aborigines themselves rightly do not want to be treated as "another ethnic minority". In this sense, the framing of the Aboriginal problematic in terms of the discourse of race - eg. in relation of black/white reconciliation - serves as an important reminder of the colonial, Eurocentric racialist exclusivism which is intrinsically bound up with the history of Australia as a settler

society. Nevertheless, it is sometimes contended that the persistence in viewing Aboriginal people as a racial group rather than an ethnic group is itself racist. Hence, the representation of Aboriginal culture on SBS can be seen as either the belated recognition of Aborigines as an integral part of the mosaic of Australian multicultural society, or as the continuation of "white" devaluation of the special status of Aboriginal people as the indigenous inhabitants of the land which provides the territory of the Australian nation-state. The politics of Aboriginality, then, signals one of the political limits of multiculturalism: its silence about the issue of race which was formative to the historical constitution of Australia. In short, it is impossible to include Aborigines in the image of a consensual unity-in-diversity without erasing the memory of colonial dispossesion, genocide and cultural loss and its continued impact on Aboriginal life. In this sense, the category of "race" is the sign of a fracture inherent in Australian national identity, in a manner similar to the United States, which Australians have only just begun to come to terms with.

The situation is different for "Asians" - as we have noted also excluded from the Australian nation-state on racial grounds until the abolition of the White Australia policy and the adoption of a non-discriminatory immigration policy. While the Australian state now shamelessly flirts, for economic reasons, with the idea of "enmeshment with Asia", the cultural status of Australians of varieties of Asian descent in "multicultural Australia" is still a fragile one. While Chinese, Vietnamese, Malaysian, Singaporean and other migrants from the Asian region are now considered an integral part of Australia's ethnic mix, these groups are still collectively *racialised* whenever a wave of moral panic about Asian immigration flares up. At such moments, the old collusion of race and culture is reinstated. In other words, the "Asian" presence in Australia provides us with a testcase for examining the difficulty faced by the multiculturalist imagination in accommodating racial - rather than just ethnic - difference. In its emphasis on culture and ethnicity, race still signals the limits for the imagining of the (now ethnically diverse) national community.

In different ways, then, race is central to both the American and Australian problematics of national identity. It was race, not ethnicity, which finally delimited access to national belonging or, in the American case, fractured the idealised homogeneity of the nation-state. If, in an important sense, race has been crucial to the American articulation of multiculturalism (represented most dramatically by the idea of Afrocentricity), in Australia multiculturalism has thrived through an eclipse of race into the more flexible concept of ethnicity. In both cases then, the discourse of race exposes the fact that the idea of an unfractured and unified national imagined community is an impossible fiction. But whereas in the American context racial difference has become absolutised, in the Australian context the discourse of multiculturalism has the potential to create a symbolic space in which racial difference can be turned into ethnic/cultural difference, without, however, being able to make the traces of "race" disappear completely. In this sense, we want to suggest that the category of race should be seen as the symbolic marker of unabsorbable cultural difference, the range of heterogeneous cultural differences which cannot be harmonised into multiculturalism's conservative vision of a unity-in-diversity. To seize on multiculturalism's more radical potential is to give up the ideal of national

unity itself without doing away with the promise of a flexible, porous, and open-ended national culture.

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Notes

1. It is worth remarking however that the category of "race" has hardly entered the Australian discourse of multiculturalism as a result of the historical dominance of European, non-Anglo ethnicity in shaping the discourse. We will have more to say about the issue of "race" in the Australian context at the end of this article.

2. Given what has already been said about the political context, it is not surprising that American functionalism should derive from a French idealist tradition located in Comte and Durkheim's post-Revolutionary reworking of the Enlightenment tradition characterised by eg., Rousseau.

3. Castles et al. reproduce the conventional argument that the White Australia policy was in the first instance racist, but they do so within a sophisticated theoretical framework which makes their position worth quoting:

British colonialism was racist, but not nationalist in any of the modern senses of that term. First, and most obviously, Australia was not a nation in the 18th and 19th centuries, but a number of separate English colonies. Second, the ideology of the state was not nationalist (drawing on imagined kin-identity as coterminous with the boundaries of the state), but clearly colonial, harking back to the culture of the mother country and the authority of the imperial monarch. Third, no attempts were made to include "others" culturally (such as the Aborigines and the Irish) as is the classical assimilative, unificatory project of the emerging nation-state. (109)

We want to suggest that the adoption of the White Australia policy after federation *was*, in an important sense, a nationalist policy, a policy based on the rhetoric and the problematic of nation-building.

4. This statutory discrimination at both federal and state levels lasted until 1952 when naturalisation laws were changed. See Daniels 43-4.

5. Significantly, Australian Aboriginal nationalism does often resort to such primordial rhetoric.

6. It is also important to note that, while there are many similarities in the national problematics of Canada and Australia, which led to a similarity of political usage of the term multiculturalism, there are also significant differences, of which the politics associated with French Canada is an important aspect.

7. The qualification 'within carefully defined limits' signals some of the tensions and limits of the multicultural model of national identity itself. Unfortunately, we do not have the space to explore these limits further here.

8. In this sense, the fantasy is more hegemonic - and therefore more mythical - than in Canada where the multicultural fantasy is more contentiously restricted to so-called English Canada.

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