

NATIONAL SOCIAL COHESION CONFERENCE

FROM 9/11 TO BREIVIK: RESPONDING NATIONALLY AND TRANSNATIONALLY TO THE CHALLENGE OF DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL COHESION

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INTRODUCTION

The new millennium began auspiciously for Australia with the very successful staging of the Sydney Olympic Games, and having just returned from Athens, we remain the lucky country as a deep economic depression hangs over the badly governed Greek nation. Last month, the world remembered the 9/11 attacks upon New York and Washington, including their very messy aftermath of wars and more terrorist attacks in which 225,000 people have been killed, half a million seriously injured and well over seven million refugees. It surely has been a lost decade in which more important human security issues such as poverty, malnutrition and disease, have been sidelined (Rogers 2011).

The 9/11 attacks remind us that we live in a world of greater risk, unpredictability and limited controllability (Beck 1999) with skyscrapers now the symbols of this vulnerability. Did the global community of economists predict the global financial crisis? Did the academic experts of the Arab world predict the so-called Arab spring whose outcomes are still very uncertain? 9/11 was an act of intellectual and moral bankruptcy, reflecting legitimate Arab frustrations. Both 9/11 and the Arab uprisings spring partly from the failure of almost all Arab states to bring economic prosperity and social justice to their citizens (Osman in Hayes 2011). The Arab uprisings, led by the 185+ million of the Arab world under the age of 30, are driven by the same failures but they have chosen a more peaceful path.

Religious and ethnic extremism has rightly come under the spotlight at a time when we have entered a religiously more competitive, if not conflictual, world. At the same time, religious and ethnic community leaders have come under greater scrutiny and accountability. Overseas and internal extremism has the potential to destroy the fabric of any civil, pluralist and democratic society, including Australia's social cohesion. And we are still reflecting on the Norwegian killings reminding us yet again that religion is very much at world centre stage. Yet it is significant that the Australian press has paid little attention to Anton Breivik.

The Case of Anton Breivik

The case of Anton Breivik gives us much to reflect upon. Markha Valenta asks, "How should we understand Breivik's violence? Is it the act of a madman, of a sexually frustrated social loser, of a self-radicalized lone wolf?" (Valenta: 2011: 1). Described quickly and wrongly as a Christian fundamentalist, he does not fit the accepted description. He was raised in an upper middle class home, the son of a nurse and a Norwegian diplomat who deserted the family when Anton was one. He seems to have been raised in a religiously vacuous house before

having himself baptised into the Norwegian Lutheran Church at the age of 15. In fact, he became more of a cultural than a practising Christian because he does not seem to have had an inner prayer life and his behaviour (e.g. visiting prostitutes) was not Christian. He is a cultural Christian.

He viciously hated all Muslims and the Islamic religion. But he equally hated the left, the young left, whom he slaughtered in great numbers on the island of Utøya. And in his 1500-page manifesto “he complains bitterly that he was raised in a matriarchal setting that feminized him within a society that no longer privileges its men, masculine sexuality, feminine baby-making” (Valenta: 2001: 2). As a warrior he is hoping to rescue Europe from feminism, multiculturalism and Muslims.

More significantly, his killings have raised the issue of websites pouring out vicious e-blasts of hatred (as examples, see The World Church of the Creator, now known as the Creativity Movement, as a white Christian supremacist website or for a Hindu site, www.hinduunity.org). We need to recognize that his ideas were the vicious spawn of a rhetoric that flows freely in cyberspace that becomes a net of hatred (Hylland Erikson 2011).

All these trends are impinging upon and identifiable in Australian society (e.g. The Creativity Movement is led down around the Geelong area by one Patrick O’Sullivan). But, alongside the hatred for gays, it is the reservoir of hatred against Muslims that is very present in Australia as my research colleagues and I uncovered in our recent report to the Australian Human Rights Commission on *Freedom of Religion and Belief in 21st Century Australia* (Bouma, Cahill, Dellal & Zwartz 2011). The Breivik tragedy gives us cause to reflect on the power not just of ideas, but of dangerous ideas.

The Good Australian Outcomes of 9/11

In the aftermath of 9/11, there have been five good outcomes in Australia. Firstly, the Muslim communities came out of their cocoons to interact much more with mainstream Australia, opening their many mosques and 37 schools to the general public and initiating and/or participating in various interactive programs. Ultimately the task of Islamic leaders, as that of all religious leaders, has been to support religious moderation in a struggle that goes to the very heart of global Islam.

As the second outcome, since 9/11 we have seen the cooperation between the multicultural and interfaith movements in Australia in support of each other. Its main expression has been the formation of APRO (the Australian Partnership for Religious Organizations) in 2003 as the peak-of-peak interfaith body. Thirdly, as one part of the repositioning of the relationship between religion and state, the Australian and state governments have become involved – in fact, have had to become involved – in the interfaith agenda, especially through the Living-in-Harmony program of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, now called the Diversity Australia Program. Its support for APRO has been significant and it is to be hoped that APRO will evolve into an Australian Multifaith Council with a well-funded secretariat.

The fourth positive outcome from 9/11 has been the emergence of the local multifaith networks, most particularly in Melbourne and now growing across Australia. These have been supported by the Australian chapter of the World Conference of Religions for Peace, the interfaith community body with the biggest coverage across Australia. Through its many activities, almost all at the grassroots level, the interfaith movement is gaining legitimacy in many parts of Australia. Interfaith activity has mushroomed, especially in the larger cities. And the Commonwealth and State governments have been very supportive, if not with as many resources as might be appropriate.

As the last outcome, Australia's links with the two major and complementary international interfaith organizations, namely Religions for Peace International (formerly WCRP, World Conference of Religions and Peace) headquartered in the UN Plaza in New York, and including its partner organization, the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace headquartered in Seoul in Korea, and, secondly, the Parliament of the World's Religions (PWR), headquartered in Chicago, have been immeasurably strengthened since 9/11. These links have culminated in Melbourne being chosen over Delhi and Singapore as the city that staged the Parliament of the World's Religions (PWR) in December 2009 in the most important interreligious event ever held in Australia.

In multicultural and multi-faith Australia, the challenge is to create a climate where ethnic and religious extremism cannot thrive and where incoming or homegrown terrorists do not have the social oxygen to carry out their deadly work. Or, if they do carry out their deadly work and there is a provocative terrorist event, then there is sufficient accumulated social capital to defuse any equally deadly reaction and backlash.

AUSTRALIA – AN IMMIGRANT, MULTICULTURAL AND MULTIFAITH NATION

By most indices, Australia's migration and settlement policy and practice has been successful though this is not to deny some failures (e.g. the initial introduction of the business migration program). Policy and its implementation has been underpinned by the three principles of gradualism, accommodation and consultation as well as by the emphasis on family migration and family reunion and on equality of pay for migrants and non-migrants.

The principle of gradualism refers to the refined social engineering process that moved away from the introduction of European immigrant groups to later more culturally and racially diverse groups from Asia and Africa. If migration policy has been gradualist in approach, it has been monumentally self-centred, if not selfish. Australia did not take refugees from Idi Amin's Uganda in the 1970s because it was felt that refugees from Africa at the time might affect the fragile social consensus that supported the program.

In tandem with gradualism has been the accommodation mechanism, which implies the change in program or law to accommodate a particular custom. Cemetery regulations have been changed to accommodate Islamic burial practice; criminal justice laws have been adjusted to accommodate the Sikh wearing of turbans rather than helmets and the carrying of the ritual *kirpan* or dagger in contravention of the laws on offensive weapons. Periodic and systematic consultation has been also part of the overall strategy though in recent times there has been a decline because of DIAC's preoccupation with the asylum seeker issue. Associated with consultation is evaluation and there has been a decline e.g. the response of the 9000+ Australian schools to the immigrant and multicultural presence has not been independently assessed since 1996.

Social Cohesion in Australia

In the aftermath of 9/11 and given our emerging multifaith Australia, it was inevitable that focus switched to social cohesion. Since the London bombings of 7th and 21st July, 2005, the social cohesion and religious extremism debate has focussed very much on homegrown terrorism. The issue is important for religious groups because freedom of religion and belief operates best in a socially cohesive society and also it is incumbent upon religious groups and their leaders to work for a socially cohesive society through the creation of social capital or social wealth. Our 2004 monograph was built around the notion of social capital and we showed empirically that religion does contribute to Australia's social capital.

The Scanlon Foundation in association with the Australian Multicultural Foundation and Monash University have published a collection of papers on social cohesion in Australia (Jupp, Nieuwenhuysen & Dawson 2007) and funded a major research project (Markus 2009). There is no agreed definition of social cohesion but generally descriptions revolve around a shared vision held by a well-functioning core group or community that acts in a continuous and interminable process of achieving social harmony. Markus (2009) for his work based his notion of social cohesion on the five domains:

- (1) **sense of belonging** incorporating shared values, trust and identification with Australia.
- (2) **social justice and equity** in terms of access to government services and funding
- (3) **participation** with regard to voluntary work and political and cooperative involvement
- (4) **acceptance** regarding newcomers and minorities and the lack of racism and discrimination
- (5) **worth** incorporating people's general happiness, life satisfaction and future expectations.

Australia has made citizenship relatively easy to obtain though the return to four years' residency period before becoming eligible to have naturalization was a step backwards. In the Scanlon study (Markus 2009), the overwhelming majority of respondents (95%) expressed a strong sense of belonging to Australia as did a similar number (92%) in having pride in the Australian way of life, a figure consistent with surveys over the past two decades. In other results, 89 per cent of the respondents indicated they were happy with their lives and 82 per cent agreed with the statement that "Australia is a land of economic opportunity where in the long run hard work brings a better life". Some ten per cent of overseas-born respondents reported a discrimination experience at least once a month.

Markus' key finding is that the level of disaffection and the threat to social cohesion is at historically low levels in contemporary Australia". But other results warned against complacency. In a series of targeted surveys in high migrant density urban areas, a minority of mainstream Australians, like Anton Breivik, harboured negative attitudes towards migration policy.

The Coming Challenges

It seems to me that there are eleven challenges confronting us a nation over the coming decades:

1. **The intellectual challenge**
2. **The population challenge**
3. **The economic challenge**
4. **The public relations challenge**
5. **The digital challenge**
6. **The housing affordability challenge**
7. **The youth challenge**
8. **The educational challenge**
9. **The workplace challenge**
10. **The interfaith challenge**
11. **The legal challenge**
12. **The reciprocity challenge**

1. The intellectual and public relations challenges: The major intellectual challenge of the next two decades is to develop a new vision for the Australian nation. For more than 30 years

since its introduction, we have had problems with the image and definition of a diverse, multicultural Australia though I have always been attracted to the 1989 definition. Some attempts were made early on with other terms such as polyethnic Australia to replace multicultural. Many politicians, journalists and commentators have never fully understood it. However, despite the opposition, even from a Prime Minister like John Howard whose autobiography has revealed him as an old-fashioned assimilationist, the word “multicultural” has been sufficiently accepted and certainly resonates amongst the immigrant population and their immediate descendents who represent over 40 per cent of the population. This emerging vision will deal with the population and environmental challenges we face, our interface with Asia as we are drawn more and more into the complex Asian world and our precise role in the global, especially Asia-Pacific economy. Academics have a special role to play, a role they have not played in countries like France and Greece, and they should take a more public role in disseminating it..

2. The population and diversity challenge: For the vastness of our ancient continent, our population is relatively small, and there is a very strong case to expand our population sensibly, especially in the northern and western parts of the continent and not around Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. This would assume the careful management of our environment and the deployment of renewable resources. Another aspect of this challenge is our increasing diversity. In 1976, the eight largest birthplace countries made up 76.6 per cent of the overseas-born population and there were 33 countries with more than 2,000 permanently in Australia whereas in 2006, the equivalent figures were 51.75 per cent and 64 countries. This has had implications for service delivery and for the cohesiveness of the ethnic community movement.

3. The economic challenge: Economic growth and stability is the foundation rock of social cohesion. With Greece as the warning signal, the international economy was likely go through a significant downturn in the next year or so, though Australia’s long-term prospects are very bright. However, for real challenge is the distribution of Australia’s new wealth across all the Australian people. The equal distribution index is not as good as it should be and is not comparable with some of those other countries that we normally rank ourselves ourselves with. Another aspect is the notion of productive diversity, in particular how we can use the knowledge and skills of incoming refugees and immigrants. Our record here is patchy, and we need to do better.

4. The digital challenge: as the Breivik case has shown, the potential of the internet to disseminate dangerous ideas is immense. Not only are there the religiously prejudiced websites, but there are the virtual museums with their very skewed versions of ethnic and religious history. This is the dark side of the internet, and the international community has to learn how to regulate and monitor its use.

5. The housing affordability challenge: Home ownership has been at the centre of the Australian dream, and a mechanism for the distribution of wealth. However, for more than twenty years, housing affordability has been an issue not only for young people but also for immigrant families not gifted by parental inheritance. The international housing index of The Economist has suggested for some years that Australian houses are overpriced by 50 per cent. Subsidies have been a useful mechanism but the reality is that many immigrants will never be able to afford a new house, and will rent for the rest of their lives.

6. The youth challenge: Another aspect of the housing affordability challenge is the broader youth challenge, especially immigrant and refugee young people, including unaccompanied minors and young people in depressed areas of Australia such as north-west Tasmania. In the educational race to achieve success at high school and in post-secondary education, such people have done reasonably well and this has been a key component of our multicultural and social cohesion success. But there is a problem with a downward skew in the lowest quartile

of the CALD cohort where our efforts have been insufficient. There is a particular problem in high schools of Sydney whose government high schools are both some of the best, but also some of the worst performing in Australia. Then there is the difficulty despite some strenuous efforts since the 1970s to care for unaccompanied minors. At the moment in Victorian prisons, more than one of 200 Vietnam-born men is in prison – most of them are unaccompanied minors.

7. The educational challenge: But there are other educational challenges. We are in the process of formulating a new national curriculum under the ACARA process. To what extent will the cultural, linguistic and religious profile of the Australia be reflected in the outcome? Australia has not been very good at LOTE studies in schools and in universities. Despite the hundreds of documents produced over the past 35 years, the proportion graduating in Year 12 in a LOTE has improved only by a few percent. Secondly, information about the world's major religions must be included in any national curriculum, otherwise young Australian school graduates will not understand those living outside Australia. The REENA group are correctly suggesting that religion could be included within the history and geography subjects but especially within the proposed Civics and Citizenship subject.

8. The workplace challenge: The workplace is an important element of intercultural relations. There are two challenges here worth noting. Racism in the workplace remains very much a reality even though the discrimination laws have been working in our favour, supported by the strong stances that the various football authorities have taken against racism, in particular Aboriginal sportspeople. Secondly, there is the increasingly multicultural nature of our workteams where management must be conscious of the need to appropriately supervise staff.

9. The interfaith challenge: In the past two decades, Australia has become both a more secularized society and a more religious society; a more religious society especially through the increase in the non-Christian religions such as Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism. As we have indicated, the interfaith movement has made much progress in the past decade. Yet, it has to be accepted that presently in Australia it is organizationally weak though on the ground there are many enthusiasts. And it is a movement based totally on volunteerism. If the movement is to prosper, it must transform itself into a well-funded and self-funded organization with capable leadership.

10. The legal challenges: It seems to me that the legal challenges will come mainly in the religious area. In our report to the Australian Human Rights Commission, *Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century*, we found that it was becoming more difficult to resolve contentious issues, given the different approaches within the Australian community whether (i) Christian (ii) secularist and (iii) multifaith. There is a lack of agreement over religious vilification laws, over exemptions given under the equal opportunity laws and so on. *To what extent should religious and civil and criminal law intersect in the Australian context*, including in quasi judicial settings such as dispute resolution contexts? It seems to me that there can be room in Australia for parallel systems of law. For example, would Muslims like to have imposed on them Catholic Canon Law? Would Catholics like to have Islamic Law imposed on them? The other major issue is: what are the limitations to be placed on 'reasonable accommodation' under equal opportunity and human rights legislation? These are difficult issues and it will not be easy to get the balance right.

11. The transnational challenge: The last challenge regards transnational reciprocity. Each of us is a member of some ethnic, religious or other transnational organization. The reciprocal element implies that if we are well-treated in this country as minorities, then we have the reciprocal obligation to work for the freedom and appropriate treatment of ethnic, religious or gendered minorities in the original lands?

The managing and regulating of ethnic and religious diversity has taken on a new urgency but we have an enviable record in the healing of ancient and less ancient hatreds and animosities. A core measure of social cohesion that is usually neglected is intermarriage, intercultural marriages and interfaith marriages, where families are forced in their diversity to confront the other. Usually in this area, we have done well. Always there must be respect for the other; ultimately it is about relationships and belonging and worth and acceptance and justice. How do Catholics treat and respect Jews in Australia? How do Tamils treat and respect Buddhists? How do Muslims treat and respect and accept Jews in this country? How do South African blacks and white accept each other after they have emigrated to the Land Down Under.

In Australia over the past 65 years, we have together constructed a society admired around the world and to which many people aspire to emigrate. It has always been a process and it will continue to be a process. But it must always be a process through which we ringfence our own society from being impacted by overseas events and dangerous imported ideologies.?

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