

## 5 Multiculturalism and the proximity of strangers

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 difference and appreciate a variety of lifestyles rather than expect everyone to fit a standardised pattern. Most of all it requires that we each can be 'a real Australian', without necessarily being 'a typical Australian'.

(Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs 1982)

How does multiculturalism reinvent 'the nation' over the bodies of strangers? How does the act of 'welcoming the stranger' serve to constitute the nation? How is the 'we' of the nation affirmed through the difference of the 'stranger cultures', rather than against it?

In the above definition, the proximity of different ethnic groups becomes integral to the definition of the nation space. Multiculturalism is defined, not as providing services for 'specific ethnic groups', but as a way of imagining the nation itself, a way of 'living' in the nation, and a way of living *with* difference. Significantly, the role of difference in allowing or even establishing a national imaginary presupposes the proximity of those who are already recognisable as strangers as well as the permanence of their presence: living together is here simply a matter of being aware of cultural diversity. The strangers become incorporated into the 'we' of the nation, at the same time as that 'we' emerges as the one who has to live with it (cultural diversity) and by implication with 'them' (those 'specific ethnic groups'). By suggesting that multiculturalism is *not* about the provision of services to specific ethnic groups, and then defining multiculturalism in terms of cultural diversity, this statement powerfully evokes and then erases particular histories of racial differentiation: racial difference, already construed as ethnic difference, is redefined in terms of cultural diversity, that is, in terms that erase any distinctions between groups. The 'acceptance' of difference actually serves to conceal those differences which cannot be reduced to 'cultural diversity'. In such a story of 'multicultural Australia', the differences and antagonism between white settler groups, Asian immigrants and Indigenous peoples are hidden from sight.

The tension between the incorporation and refusal of that which is different is clear in the final two sentences. Difference is immediately 'our difference': it is a difference that belongs to the inclusive 'we' of the nation. The claiming of difference as that which 'we' have involves the erasure of differences that cannot be absorbed into this 'we'. Furthermore, differences become immediately defined in terms of 'lifestyles', ways of being in the world that find easy commodification in terms of an aesthetics of appearance (appearing as different might make no difference to the difference that is ours: in such a fantasy, we might seek to glimpse almost white skin or an almost human heart beating underneath the stranger's dress).

The acceptance of a variety of lifestyles is defined against the expectation that everyone fits into a 'standardised pattern'. Is such an acceptance, an acceptance of those who don't fit? Or does the welcoming of the strange culture's difference itself require that culture *fit into this model of cultural diversity as a normative model of who 'we' already are?* To accept that which is different from the 'standard' is already, in some sense, to accept difference into the standard. Those who do not fit into a standardised pattern must still fit into the nation: they fit, not by being the standard, but by being defined in terms of their difference. The nation still constructs itself as a 'we', not by requiring that 'they' fit into a 'standardised pattern', but by the very requirement that they 'be' culturally different (that they 'not be' typical Australians). The strangers who do not fit such a pattern are still fitting into

such a nation space: they fit into the nation precisely because they allow the nation to imagine *itself as* heterogeneous (to claim their differences as 'our difference').

The final sentence in this statement maintains this critical tension around the question of difference: 'we each can be "a real Australian", without necessarily being "a typical Australian"'. In the first instance, the use of the inclusive pronoun — 'we each can be' — works to conceal further the differences that the first sentence of this statement had set up (however precariously through reference to 'specific ethnic minorities'). This 'we' is both the 'we' of each individual Australian as it alludes to the 'we' of Australia. The double possibility of the 'we' relates to the distinction set up between real and typical Australians. The implication is that any-body in Australia can be a real Australian even if they are not typically Australian, even if, that is, they appear to be different. The notion that any-body can be a real Australian is extremely powerful: it imagines a neutral national space in which authenticity itself is inclusive: it is open to all; it *sees no difference*. The failure to see any difference involves a form of individuation: there is a slip from the 'we' of the authentic nation to the 'we' of the abstract individual, the any-body who can *be* a real Australian (the *any-body* who might conceal *some-bodies* who are already recognised as 'typical Australians'). Such a narrative in which anyone can be a real Australian hence fails to take account of social differences at the level of group formation, at the same time as it claims to do justice to (individual) differences by not allowing such differences to define who has the right to be an Australian (a model of justice which erases its own object). It is the collapse between the individual and nation that allows the narrative to imagine the multicultural nation as singular and inclusive in its very difference.

In this chapter, I want to examine how nations become imagined and contested through the recognition of strangers. Much work has been done on how nations define themselves against strange cultures by finding means of keeping strangers out (see Cohen 1994). It has been assumed that strangers are found at the borderlines or 'frontiers' of nation spaces. Certainly, we can consider how nations are invented as familiar spaces, as spaces of belonging, through being defined against others who are recognised, or known again, as strange and hence strangers. In some sense, the stranger appears as a figure, as a way of containing that which the nation is not, and hence as a way of allowing the nation to be. As Michael Dillon argues, 'with the delimitation of any place of dwelling, the constitution of a people, a nation, a state, or a democracy necessarily specifies who is *estranged from* that identity, place or regime' (1999: 119, emphasis added). The stranger appears as a figure through the marking out of the nation as dwelling, as a space of belonging in which some bodies are recognised as out of place.

I want to consider what happens to the construction of nationhood in the context of multiculturalism: what happens to the nation when 'strange cultures' are not only let in, but are redefined as integral to the nation itself? The strangers would not simply be those who, as I argued in Chapter 1, are already recognised as out of place, and as the origin and cause of danger. Rather, in the multicultural nation, the strangers would come to have a place in the nation: this in-place-ness would be made possible given that the strangers, as in the case of immigrants, have already arrived from-another-place (being out-of-place would become, in this framework, its own place). My analysis will examine how multiculturalism involves stranger fetishism: the act of welcoming 'the stranger' as the origin of difference produces the very figure of 'the stranger' as the one who can be taken in. I hence support Ien Ang's argument that othering can take place by acts of *inclusion* within multicultural discourse (1996: 37). I will also suggest that multiculturalism can involve a double and contradictory process of incorporation and expulsion: it may seek to differentiate between those strangers whose appearance of difference can be claimed by the nation, and those stranger strangers who may yet be expelled, whose difference may be dangerous to the well-being of even the most heterogenous of nations.

## Nations and strangers

How are nations invented and imagined? The work of Benedict Anderson is crucial for an understanding of how 'the nation' is imaginary or fantastic. According to Anderson, both nationalism and nationhood are 'cultural artefacts' (1983: 13), with their own particular 'style in which they are imagined' (1983: 15). Such an approach allows us to recognise that the boundaries of nations are not simply geographical or geopolitical (though they take both these forms), but also discursive. The nation does not refer to something that simply exists: nations are produced and constructed as places and communities in which 'a people' might belong. Of course, to say that nations are imagined is not to say that they are not real. The question of nationhood cannot be properly addressed without a recognition of the political economy of modern nation-states. An entity can be imagined and real at the same time: in some sense, the opposition between imaginary and real must be suspended if we are to understand how the nation comes to be *lived* as an 'organic community'. The imagining of the nation as a space in which 'we' belong is not independent of the material deployment of force, and the forms of governmentality which control, not only the boundaries between nation states, and the movements of citizens and aliens within the state, but also the repertoire of images which allows the concept of the nation to come into being in the first place.

To think of the nation as simultaneously imaginary and real (the nation as both fantasy and material effect) is also to think of the processes of identification which allow the nation to be secured as one of the organising assumptions of 'public life' (Goffman 1972: ix). What forms of identification are produced with the nation? How does 'the nation' come to be produced as a form of identification? In other words, we need to examine how the invention of the nation as a bounded space requires the production of a *national identity* which can be *claimed* by the individual ('I am ...') through reference to the apparent transparency and coherence of the nation itself. The *investment* of the individual in being or having a nation suggests that the discourse of nationhood operates at both a psychic and social level. The individual, who encounters others in daily life, comes to identify as not only *having* but *being* a nationality, through referring to public symbols and expressions which themselves tell stories of what it means to be that nationality (the fleshing out of the 'national character'), and also through identifying with other individuals with whom such stories can be shared. The production of the nation involves not only image and myth-making — the telling of 'official' stories of origin — but also the everyday negotiations of what it means 'to be' that nation(ality). The production of the nation involves processes of self-identification in which the nation comes to be realised as belonging to the individual (the construction of the 'we' as utterable by the individual).

Crucially, then, the production of nations constitutes individuals as belonging to the nation: the work of 'the nation' is done as much through the everyday encounters in public life, as it is done through the political machinery of the nation-state. But the production of the nation also involves imagining the nation *space*: it involves the projection of boundaries (nationhood as cartography), and the telling of stories about the authentic landscape (for example, in travel writing and tourism), and the production of interiority (imagining 'the heart of the nation'). The construction of the nation space takes place alongside the production of national character as instances in which 'the nation' itself is fleshed out *as place and person*. The nation becomes imagined as a body in which personhood and place are precariously collapsed. Through a metonymic elision, the individual can claim to embody a nation, or the nation can take the shape of the body of an individual ('bodyscape').

But how do the complex and multiple sites of the production of nationhood involve the reification of the figure of the stranger? As I pointed out in my introduction, the formation of a dwelling or place of residence involves a definition of who or what does not belong (estrangement). At one level, such distinctions between the familiar and the strange take place in everyday encounters. The

self-identification with the nation also involves the recognition of others as belonging to the 'same' community. If we return to my discussion of recognition in Chapter 1, we can consider how the act of hailing or recognising some-body as a shared member of a community serves to produce or flesh out that community through or against the bodies of strangers. For example, the recognition of another as belonging to the same nation when travelling abroad relies on techniques for reading and telling the difference between that which is familiar and strange. The recognition of the other as from a shared nation requires a rehearsal of a public discourse of nationhood (shared memories of the nation space, the use of jokes, reference to sporting events or national achievements). The recognition of others as being from the same nation, or as sharing a nationality, hence involves an everyday and much rehearsed distinction between who does and does not belong within the nation space.

The production of the nation, in such a model, requires some-body or some-where to not-be in order for it to be. This demarcation of spaces of belonging through estrangement is central to Said's now classical theory of Orientalism: the Occident comes into being as a material place through the creation of an ontological distinction between it and the Orient. The Orient comes to embody that which the Occident is not. That is, the Orient creates Europe (or the Occident) as a bounded space in the very event of being positioned as its Other. The fascination with the Orient within Western imperial culture is a fascination which, in Said's terms, creates an idea of Europe, 'a notion collectively identifying "us against the non-Europeans"' (1978: 7). Orientalism creates *an imaginary geographical divide* based on the binarism of Occident/Orient. In this sense, the creation of a space of belonging (the 'we' that remains unspoken, or is spoken only through the claiming of the right to speak) requires that which is strange in order to be.

The nation is one such space of belonging. Robin Cohen's reflection on the discourse of nationhood emphasises how national identity is produced through the differentiation between familiar and strange: 'a complex national and social identity is continuously constructed and reshaped in its (often antipathetic) interaction with outsiders, strangers, foreigners and aliens — the "others". You know who you are, only by knowing who you are not' (1994: 1). In Cohen's model, strangers are not external to the formation of national identity: the nation requires strangers in order to exist. Despite this, the formation of identity is defined in terms of *frontiers*: strangers are the ones who are encountered at the border, and whose proximity threatens the coherence of national identity. Féher and Heller's consideration of nations poses an analogy between 'the nation' and the 'house': 'a country has a certain number of inhabitants who are supposed to close the doors behind them, not to let in any casual stranger without a preliminary agreement; however it can also open its doors' (1994: 143). Here, the question of the stranger in the nation is a question of opening or closing the doors: the stranger can either *be let in or kept out*. What I want to suggest in contrast is that the definition of the nation as a space, body, or house *requires the proximity of 'strangers' within that space*, whether or not that proximity is deemed threatening (monoculturalism) or is welcomed (multiculturalism).

A key problem in this literature on nationhood is the use of the model of 'generalisable other', in which national identity is simply defined through and against an other, as such (Cohen 1994: 1). What is demanded is a much more contextual and nuanced understanding of the role of differentiated others in the demarcation of national identity. In Chapter 2, I examined how bodily integrity is produced, not simply through or against a generalisable other, but by differentiating between others, who have a different function in establishing the permeability of bodily space. The very habits and gestures of marking out bodily space involve differentiating 'others' into familiar (assimilable, touchable) and strange (unassimilable, untouchable). While I would not want to imply that we can make a simple analogy between bodies and nations, I think we can understand how bodily and social spaces leak into each other, or inhabit each other (see also Chapter 4). The nation becomes imagined and embodied as a space, not simply by being defined against other spaces, but by being defined as

close to some others (friends), and further away from other others (strangers). In this sense, only some others are read as strangers within the nation space. The proximity of strangers within the nation space — that is, *the proximity of that which cannot be assimilated into a national body* — is a mechanism for the demarcation of the national body, a way of defining borders within it, rather than just between it and an imagined and exterior other.

As Christine Inglis demonstrates, the encountering of cultural difference within the fantastic nation space allows the work of nation formation to be sustained: strangers, those who are not recognised as ‘typical’ of a nation, might allow the question of what it means to be a nation to be posed (again and again). Inglis argues that, ‘Many nations are having to confront the issue of how they respond to these “strangers” in their midst and how they incorporate them within their existing society and institutions. In so doing, the issue of national identity as a symbolic and legal issue inevitably comes to the fore’ (1997: 204). The proximity of strangers requires the nation to respond: there is a constant process of adjustment and transformation. The nation is not secured in the process of keeping strangers out: the stranger’s proximity is required if the stranger is to be known as the limit of ‘the nation’. National identity emerges as a site of social conflict: there is a constant redefinition of who ‘we’ are through the very necessity of encountering strangers within the nation space. As Zygmunt Bauman puts it, the question is not, ‘how to get rid of strangers and the strange, but how to live with them — daily and permanently’ (1997: 55). National identity is unstable, and emerges through multiple encounters between those who assume themselves to be natives and those recognised as strangers, as out of place, in this place. The response to strangeness in the discourse of nationhood is hence built around the question of what it means to be ‘in place’.

The assumption that strangers only populate the borders of the nation is in danger of reifying those borders: rather we need to understand the process of negotiation between identity and strangeness as ongoing, and as moving across different spatial formations (the body, home, the neighbourhood, the city, the country, the region, the nation, the globe). Immigration policy and border controls are not the only places in which the question of ‘the stranger’ is posed for and by the nation. National identity is metonymically related to other sites of identity formation: through marking out spaces of dwelling, spaces which are familiar and inhabitable, subjects are interpellated into multiple regimes. Like other forms of identity, nationhood is constantly renegotiated, and that negotiation is crucially dependent on encountering those who are recognisable as strangers, and who demand a response from the citizen: who are they? do they belong here? who am I? who are we? The distinction between native and stranger within a nation is not simply enforced at the border: rather, that distinction determines different ways in which subjects inhabit — which involves both dwelling and movement (see Chapter 1) — the space of the nation. The figure of the stranger is also constructed at the level of governmentality as the ‘origin’ of the very question of national identity: how do we live together, as one or many (= the strategic question of monocultural or multicultural government policy)? Or even, who is the ‘we’ of the nation if ‘they’ are here to stay?

### **Inventing the multicultural nation**

Thinking about multiculturalism must begin, therefore, with an understanding that the coherence of the ‘we’ of the nation is always imaginary and that, given this, such a ‘we’ does not abolish cultural difference, but emerges through it. Multiculturalism is always contested, whether at the level of government policy, or whether in critical scholarship and resistant political activity. Multiculturalism is one of many historically specific negotiations of ‘the nation’. There are key national and regional differences in how a discourse of multiculturalism emerges and is contested (see Rystad 1997). As Theo Goldberg argues, ‘Multiculturalism and commitments to cultural diversity emerged out of the conflictual history of resistance, accommodation, integration and transformation’ (1994: 7).

Multiculturalism can name a range of activities in education, as well as in grass roots political campaigns, which are based on the revaluing of minority cultures, and hence on the promotion of differences that are not accommodated within the official discourses of nationhood (Gunew 1994: 5). But, in other instances, multiculturalism works as an 'official' discourse: that is, it involves the setting of governmental agendas on what it should mean to be 'a nation'.

In this section, I will avoid speculating about what multiculturalism is, as it can clearly refer to contradictory forms of political mobilisation. As I am interested in *how* nations get constructed, I will analyse an example of 'official multiculturalism'. I will examine how multiculturalism works as a set of official 'responses' to cultural diversity in Australia. I will concentrate on Australia as an example, partly as this is where I first came to think about the implications of identifying a nation as multicultural, but also because Australia is an interesting example of how nationhood can be redefined through rather than against difference. In order to do this, I will read the *National Agenda for Multicultural Australia*, a policy framework document produced by the office of Multicultural Affairs when Paul Keating's Labor Government was still in office in 1989 (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs 1989). This document is very much about setting an agenda, rather than making specific commitments to policy. It was widely circulated within the public domain and is still available on the Internet. I will also consider the more recent *Multicultural Australia: The Way Forward* (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs 1997), which is an issues paper prepared by the National Multicultural Advisory Council since the election of John Howard's Liberal government, and is also available on the Internet. Although the former has received a lot of critical responses from academics in Australia, there has not been much close attention given to how the document is written. I want to read this document closely *as a text*, that is, *as a construction of multiculturalism, rather than as a response to it*. Such political documents are important instances in the forming of the national imaginary: as they describe the nation, they actively produce it. Rather than discuss the politics of multiculturalism at a general level, we need to look at the very 'grammar' of multiculturalism, in specific instances, in order to consider how it constructs the nation through mobilising a rhetoric of difference.

The *National Agenda* begins by assuming the descriptive power of the term, multiculturalism. It opens with the question, 'what is multiculturalism?', to which it answers, 'multicultural is simply a term which describes the cultural and ethnic diversity of contemporary Australia. We are, and will remain, a multicultural society.' As a descriptive term, multiculturalism refers to that fact that there are many cultures in the nation space. As such, multiculturalism is defined as an accurate description of what Australia *already is*. Australia is defined as a multicultural nation: 'we' are and will be so. Immediately, the use of the term, 'multiculturalism', to describe the nation allows cultural diversity to reinforce, rather than undo, the fantastic inclusiveness of the nation: what 'we' are is not 'one', but 'many'. What binds Australia together as a 'we' is the fact of our differences: differences that belong to us, and that allow Australia 'to be' as a nation.

The second response to the opening question, 'what is multicultural Australia?', is as follows: 'As a public policy, multiculturalism encompasses government measures designed to respond to that diversity. It is a policy for managing the consequences of cultural diversity in the interests of the individual and society as a whole.' Multiculturalism comes to stand for a set of official responses to cultural diversity. Multiculturalism is both a name for cultural diversity and a name for government responses to cultural diversity. In the second sense, multiculturalism refers to a response to itself; it responds to itself. By using the same term to describe diversity and particular government approaches to diversity, the *National Agenda* closes a gap between description and prescription. The effect of this closure is to give the prescription — the response to difference — the status of description: the response to difference hence comes to refer to the 'real' of Australia.

The response to difference is defined in terms of the management of the consequences of difference. The term 'management' implies that differences themselves need to be contained and given a shape or coherence by government policy, and that without such policy, differences would be unmanageable (they would have problematic and unpredictable consequences for 'the individual and society as a whole'). The emphasis on the *consequences* of differences posits differences as originary: they simply and already exist. Such a positing of originary difference works to fetishise difference: what is concealed is precisely the histories of determination in which differences come to mark out terrains, subjects and bodies. Rather than 'differences' themselves being the 'consequences' of social processes, the document posits 'differences' as only *having* consequences. The detachment of differences from the social relations in which they are embedded allows the *National Agenda* to define itself as an agenda for dealing with differences, as such. Such an agenda then immediately becomes a question of 'interests'. Differences will be dealt with 'in the interests of' the individual and the undifferentiated nation. As a result, dealing with differences becomes a matter of concealing any differences that cannot be contained within the discourses of individualism and nationhood. That is, dealing with differences is a matter of refusing any differences that cannot be recognised as in the interests of the disembodied individual or the unified nation.

The *National Agenda* then defines three dimensions of multicultural policy. They are: cultural identity, social justice and economic efficiency. Cultural identity is defined in terms of 'the right of all Australians, within carefully defined limits, to express and share their individual cultural heritage, including their language and history'. Noticeably, cultural identity is defined as an *individual right* available to 'all Australians'. Later in the document, the term 'all Australians' is repeated, and the policies of multiculturalism are defined as applying 'equally to all Australians'. What is noticeable, then, is that the right to cultural identity is both individuated (it is something an individual owns, possesses or has) at the same time as it is universalised, such that it does not recognise any differences between social groups within Australia, but instead establishes what is 'common' to 'all Australians'. The *National Agenda* concludes, 'Fundamentally, multiculturalism is about the rights of the individual — the right to equality of treatment; *to be able to express one's identity*' to be accepted as an Australian without having to assimilate to some stereotypical model of behaviour' (emphasis added). The right to express 'one's cultural heritage' becomes a mechanism for re-establishing the 'we' of the nation as commonality, made up of individual Australians, whose differences are neutralised under the banner of 'equality' and under the assumption that being (accepted as) an Australian is the proper telos of different forms of cultural expression.

What is at stake here is a certain definition of culture as something that one simply has, and something one seeks to express. Not only is culture defined as possessive and expressive, but it is immediately associated with 'heritage', that is, with a fixed notion of 'the past'. The mixing of different cultures is here given an awkward temporality: the here and now of the nation space does not clash with the individual expressions of cultural difference. Such expressions of difference can be contained within the temporality of the nation insofar as they can only return 'us' into a static and uncontested past which belongs elsewhere (not only to another time, but to another place). In this sense, 'cultural differences' are assumed to be static and fixed, something that can be displayed in the present, but that do not present difficulties for the cultural imaginary of 'all Australians'.

These 'stranger cultures' are not only to be fixed in the past *as heritage*, but they are also presented as objects that are self-contained, free from contradiction and difference. Those cultures that are different are hence assumed to be self-identical, as lacking any differences within. As Jon Stratton and Ien Ang argue, 'the very validation of cultural diversity tends to hypostatise and even fetishise "culture", which suppresses the heterogeneities existing within each "culture"' (1994: 153). To some extent, the coherence of multicultural Australia is made possible by defining difference purely

in terms of the difference between self-identical cultures that inhabit the national landscape and the culture of Australia itself: these stranger cultures are a 'gift' to all Australians, something to be 'expressed' and 'shared', and I would add, consumed (see Chapter 6).

The way in which official versions of multiculturalism define culture has been one of the most contentious issues in the critical literature on multiculturalism, in Australia and elsewhere. For example, Laksiri Jayasuriya (1997) discusses how the expressive definition of culture implicit in this version of multiculturalism restricts culture to the private domain.

The emphasis on culture over and above issues of political economy — or at least the refusal to understand culture as a site of a struggle that is also political and economic — means that multiculturalism neutralises the differences that it apparently celebrates: 'the social accommodation afforded through cultural pluralism avoided the potential of social disharmony by channelling the social and economic strivings of migrants into the private domains of their cultural needs' (Jayasuriya 1997: 23). This restriction imposed by such a definition of culture can be related to my earlier point about how national identity can be claimed through turning 'their' differences into 'our' difference: those who are 'culturally different' from the 'typical Australians' can display their difference, but only in such a way that it supplements *what is already assumed to be the coherence of culture itself*. As John Frow and Meaghin Morris conclude in their introduction to *Australian Cultural Studies*:

it is always possible for the category of culture with which it operates to remain at the decorative level of folklore ethnic markers detached from substructures of real and agonistic difference; conversely it tends to reproduce imaginary identities at the level of the ethnic 'community' and thereby to screen differentiations and contradictions within the community. (1993: x)

The *National Agenda* later comments:

Multiculturalism is concerned to encourage all Australians, including those from non Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, to share their diversity of culture, rather than excluding one another or being forced into separate enclaves. It seeks to make it clear that colour or language, style of dress or mode of worship, are no indication of the degree of personal commitment to the future of our nation. Being an Australian has nothing to do with outward appearance.

In this extraordinary statement, the right to cultural identity is again about sharing diversity amongst all Australians: it is a difference that not only belongs to, but must *return to*, 'the nation'. Cultural identity is defined in terms of 'outward appearance': one can appear culturally different, but still 'be' an Australian. The narrative works through the displacement of a binary opposition: cultural difference is set up against being 'Australian' through an opposition between appearance and being. Such a narrative reduces 'culture', understood in terms of 'cultural difference', to an outward appearance that actually conceals an Australian being. Here, multiculturalism is about accepting differences at the level of appearance in the assumption that they conceal a unified core or 'Australian being'. Being an Australian — and being committed to Australia — is hence 'nothing to do with outward appearance', nothing to do, that is, with the expression of one's cultural identity. As long as one is truly Australian underneath one's dress one can appear as different. Culture is reduced to a matter of style or dress and any cultural differences that question what it means 'to be' Australian are excluded from the concept of cultural identity altogether.

As Gillian Bottomley puts it, 'Australia's official policy of multiculturalism advances a kind of repressive tolerance towards cultural practices of the large immigrant population. But some cultural

forms are more acceptable than others' (1992: 49). Those cultural forms that are 'more acceptable' are precisely those that may look different, *but are in fact the same underneath*. As a result, this multicultural nation accepts those differences that do not threaten the 'we' of an Australian being: the differences that cannot be reduced to mere appearance become *the unassimilable*. Those others who are (like) natives underneath their dress are assimilated into the 'we' of the nation (they do not have to *be culturally assimilated*, but must assimilate at the level of being), while those others who are strange beings define the limits to what or who can be assimilated (the unassimilable would be evoked by a figure of a stranger who refuses to be 'a real Australian' underneath).

The implicit differentiation between others who are more and less familiar and strange functions as a way of defining the potential and limits of the multicultural nation. The 'we' of the nation can expand by incorporating some others, thus providing the appearance of difference, while at the same time, defining other others, who are not natives underneath, as a betrayal of the multicultural nation itself (such other others may yet be expelled from the national body). Alternatively, what we have in operation in this multicultural discourse is two figures of 'the stranger' who are constructed through their different degrees of proximity to the white Australian 'native'. In one figure, the stranger appears different, but is the same underneath; this stranger can be assimilated, and even welcomed, insofar as it enables *the nation itself to appear as different*. In the other figure, the stranger's dress can reveal only a strange being; this *stranger stranger* cannot be assimilated. The stranger stranger, however, cannot simply be understood as the unassimilable other: rather, such strangers are assimilated precisely *as* the unassimilable and hence they allow us to *face* the 'limit' of the multicultural nation ('we' are open to some strangers, but not stranger strangers, who refuse to be 'native' underneath).

Multiculturalism as an official discourse hence involves narratives of partial assimilation or incorporation (through which the 'we' of the nation can appear different) as well as narratives of partial expulsion (through which the 'we' of the nation defines the limits of what it 'can be'). Both the narratives of incorporation and expulsion involve differentiating *between* others, which produces simultaneously, two figures of 'the stranger', including the one who can be taken in (the other who *appears* as a stranger), and the one who might yet be expelled (the other who is a stranger). This double construction of the 'we' of the nation in relation to the figures of the stranger reminds me of Ghassan Hage's consideration of the difference between 'being' and 'having' difference within multiculturalism (1998: 140). Hage suggests that Australian multiculturalism tends to define 'difference' as something that the 'we' of the nation 'has' rather than 'is': such a narrative still keeps in place the difference between that 'we' and those different others whom the nation 'has'. I am suggesting that the 'we' of the nation has a more complex and ambivalent relationship to difference, precisely because the multicultural nation remains predicated on a prior act of *differentiating between differences*. The multicultural nation claims 'to be' different, insofar as it incorporates those others whose difference is a matter of appearance. It hence takes on their difference (becomes different) by requiring that they *appear* different. At the same time, the multicultural nation claims to 'have' difference, insofar as the 'we' that becomes 'different' is still differentiated from those that simply *are* different. Hence, in the very same moment, the multicultural nation can claim *to be* and *to have* difference. The figure of the familiar stranger *appears* as that which allows us to be(come) different and to have difference, while the figure of the stranger stranger (who is nevertheless still familiar in its very strangeness), *disappears* as that which the 'we' cannot 'be' or 'have'.

The second key aspect of multiculturalism in the *National Agenda* is social justice, defined as, 'the right of all Australians to equality of treatment and opportunity, and the removal of barriers of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, gender or place of birth'. Here, we have a clear statement of multicultural justice within the liberal framework of equality of opportunity (with its negative model

of freedom) and individualism. The markers of difference are defined as *barriers* that restrict the movements and capacities of essentially disembodied individuals. The commitment to social justice is defined through a neo-liberal discourse: multiculturalism can be just in this framework, *only insofar as it refuses to recognise the differences that it supposedly not only describes but also manages*. Again, such differences are not only managed, but erased under the signifier of individual freedom, the individual who embodies the justice of Australian 'multiculturalism for all'.

The final key aspect of multiculturalism is economic efficiency, 'the need to maintain, develop and utilize effectively the skills and talents of all Australians *regardless of their background*' (emphasis added). Later, in the section on human resources, the following statement is offered:

People, as much as machines, are a crucial input to economic performance and growth. Effective and efficient development and utilisation of our human resources is essential if Australia's economic potential is to be realised fully. ... Multicultural policies seek to maximise the contribution — the experience, job skills and entrepreneurial talents of all Australians to the economic life of the community.

The term 'all Australians' is qualified by the phrase, 'regardless of their background'. This suggests that the goal of economic efficiency in multicultural Australia is partly about making the most of the resources and skills offered by those 'real' but not 'typical' Australians (despite the sustained emphasis on the blanket term, 'all Australians').

We can refer back to my discussion of global nomads in Chapter 4, where I argued that they become highly commodifiable as skilled workers in a global or transnational economy of difference. Likewise, within the modern late capitalist nation-state, multiculturalism can also be about the production of a better workforce who can deal with the multiple networks and forms of exchange in global capitalism. This is what makes most sense of Paul Keating's declaration, 'I am Asian', and his description of Australia as a 'multicultural nation in Asia'. Here, multiculturalism is about achieving a workforce that is better equipped to trade with nearby Asian countries: it is about the maximisation of profit in the interest of 'the Australian economy'. Such a discourse of economic efficiency, at the very same time, conceals the class and racial stratification of the Australian workforce: it conceals, for example, how migrant workers tend to occupy lower paid and unskilled positions. This narrative defines multiculturalism as a better form of management and use of 'the resources' of those from a non-English speaking background, at the very same time as it conceals *the historical determination of difference as profit* (by explicitly defining multiculturalism in terms of *human* resources). Lisa Lowe's comments on multiculturalism in the United States have a clear resonance here: 'the production of multiculturalism at once "forgets" history, and in this forgetting, exacerbates a contradiction between the concentration of capital within a dominant class group and the unattended conditions of a working class increasingly made up of heterogeneous immigrant, racial, and ethnic groups' (1996: 86)

The *National Agenda* also attempts to define 'the limits to Australian multiculturalism'. In the first instance, the limits are that all Australians should have an 'overriding and unifying commitment to Australia, to its interests first and foremost'. Here, there is a clear assumption of the importance of a 'common culture' to a 'multicultural nation': while other Australians do not have to assimilate fully (to become 'typical Australians'), their difference cannot be a justification for not 'being Australian', that is, for not being committed to 'Australia' as such. The nation is clearly imagined as a singular and unified space: those untypical Australians must 'fit in' by expressing their difference only given a prior attachment and loyalty to the 'future of the nation'.

The second defined limit is even more important: 'multicultural policies require all Australians to accept the basic structures and principles of Australian society — the Constitution and the rule of law, tolerance and equality, Parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech and religion, English as the

national language and equality of the sexes'. Here, the institutions, language and discourse of Australia, as a Western nation state, provide the framework in which all differences must be negotiated. As Jayasuriya argues, 'all statements of Australian multiculturalism from the Whitlam to the Keating era ... sought to accommodate difference and plurality strictly within a uniform and monistic political and social framework' (1997: 5). What is not acknowledged in the *National Agenda* is how these institutions themselves require an assimilation to a set of values that have historically been linked to colonialism and other forms of domination. There is an organising assumption that these institutions are themselves neutral and can not only accommodate differences, *but can become a mechanism for their advancement*.

The inclusion of 'the equality of the sexes' as a 'limit of multiculturalism' is hence extremely important. In this first instance, one can consider how a version of liberal feminism is easily accommodated into the universalist premises of 'the common culture'. Such a feminism can be accommodated precisely insofar as it is set up as *beyond difference*. However, the relationship between the limits of multiculturalism and feminism is more complex than this precisely because of the failure of gender to appear elsewhere (as an explicit category). The abstract individual who is privileged as the true subject of multicultural Australia (the *body* which is *any-body*) is clearly gendered: its lack of a gender is a mark of its masculinity. The incorporation of a version of liberal feminism functions to conceal the privileged relationship between the masculine subject and the multicultural nation. Such a nation is imagined as gender neutral, and then supplemented through reference to the discourse of liberal feminism as that which 'transcends' the limits of cultural difference. In this sense, feminism can be incorporated into the multicultural nation only *through a double concealment*: first, the already gendered nature of the multicultural subject is concealed, and second, by *reducing* feminism to a liberal discourse of equality that is our 'common culture', the cultural differences which cannot be reconciled into liberalism are concealed (which then allows feminism to be constructed *simultaneously* as a limit of multiculturalism and as advanced by multiculturalism).

The way in which multiculturalism assumes the inherent neutrality of that which is marked by differences is clear in the case of the law. The discussion paper from the Australian Law Commission on multiculturalism and the criminal law suggests that: 'The fact that Australia is a multicultural society does not mean that different standards of criminal behaviour should be applied to different groups. Communities within Australia have distinctive religious or cultural values which may influence what is right or wrong and what should be punished. However, while people are free to follow their own beliefs and have their own values, the imposition of standards by the power of the state should apply equally to all' (ALRC 1991: 4). What is noticeable here is that law can accommodate only some differences given the assumption that its standards must apply equally to all. Any element of another culture which contradicts the assumed neutrality of the legal standard, despite the recognition of points of difference, is hence outlawed within multicultural Australia.<sup>2</sup> The reliance on the uniformity of standards and institutions that have historically been linked to forms of domination, suggests that multiculturalism can only allow those differences that can be neutralised and accommodated within 'one' culture: *it sets up unassimilable differences as a failure or betrayal, not just of the Australian nation, but of the discourse of multiculturalism itself*.

Any real conflicts of value are mediated by a framework that presents its values as neutral. John Horton suggests that, 'multiculturalism becomes a problem when conflicts between groups about values or their interpretation cannot be comfortably accommodated within a particular social structure' (Horton 1993: 3). In contrast, I would suggest that multiculturalism is the solution to conflicts that cannot be accommodated: by presupposing that differences must be reconciled within a common culture, multiculturalism *excludes any differences that challenge the supposedly universal values upon*

*which that culture is predicated.* Or, to put it more strongly, the official discourse of multiculturalism implies that differences can be reconciled through the very legislative framework which has historically defined Western values as neutral and universal. This use of difference as a form of reconciliation is possible because 'differences' have already been set up as simply expressive, private or a matter of appearance; they are not defined in terms of difference in values or ways of being. What we have then is a *disavowal of differences that are incommensurable*: a fantasy that, through the very legislative mechanisms of law, language and the polity, differences can be reconciled into a unified being-with-strangers-for-the-nation.

### **Multiculturalism and common culture**

The *National Agenda* has been followed by other official documents defining Australia's commitment to multiculturalism. The National Multicultural Advisory Council produced an issues paper, *Multicultural Australia: The Way Forward* in 1997. This document endorses the principles of the National Agenda, but provides a different history of the coming-into-being of 'multicultural Australia' and a different — or perhaps more explicit — narrative of the proper goals of multiculturalism (there is also a list of more specific policy shifts which I do not have the space to discuss here). In the first instance, the narrative is prefaced with a message from the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Philip Ruddock, who begins the story of multiculturalism with a display of patriotism (sustained throughout the document). He suggests, 'We have been able to build upon the richness and strengths of many cultures to create a nation of which we can justifiably be proud.' Here, multiculturalism is an achievement of the 'nation': 'we' were able to combine the best of 'many cultures' to create a superior *multiculture* that remains ours. The 'we' is asserted as heroic, as being able to combine and build on others to create a better culture. Noticeably, such a 'we' is located outside culture, defined in terms of cultural difference. The 'we' is the subject of history that authorises itself as a subject precisely by telling the story of how it came to be through the appropriation or 'mixing' of those who are culturally different. In this sense, the 'we' *claims hybridity*, by assigning others to the category of pure difference, which 'it' alone can mix into something that is not one or the other.

The story of multiculturalism as 'our' national achievement is sustained throughout the report. Indeed, the ability to build upon 'many cultures' is linked to a peculiarly 'Australian' set of values: 'As a community we have and support core values, principles and institutions which, while shared with many countries, have a special Australian quality. These include a "fair go".' The emphasis on 'fair go' as a core value throughout the report is extremely important: 'fair go' has historically been the utterance of the *typical Aussie battler*, the ordinary bloke, upon which the myth of an egalitarian society rests. Importantly, then multiculturalism is defined as the outcome of a core value which confirms the place of the typical (white, male) Australian in the origin of 'the nation'. According to such a narrative, multiculturalism exists, not as a way of breaking the relationship between Australian national identity and the typical Australian, *but as an outcome of that very relationship*: it is the ordinary values of typical Australians that have allowed 'us' to become a 'multicultural nation'. In this sense, the document makes explicit that the any-body who can be a real Australian in multicultural Australia still takes the shape of the body of the ordinary bloke, the white masculine hero of Australian settler history.

By evoking the figure of the ordinary Australian, *Multicultural Australia* actually prefigures the monocultural narratives offered by the extreme right-wing party One Nation, led by Pauline Hanson. In *Multicultural Australia* the ordinary or typical Australian is represented as a hero for his ability to welcome and incorporate others. In One Nation rhetoric, the figure of the 'ordinary Australian' who embodies the values of 'mainstream Australia' is also central (see Stratton 1998: 76–84; Hanson 1997). However, in the narratives offered by One Nation, *'the ordinary Australian' is transformed from hero*

to *victim* (or rather his heroism made him a victim of those incoming others he once welcomed). One Nation represents the figure of the ordinary Australian as the victim of multiculturalism itself, which they represent as privileging those who are marginal at the expense of the mainstream (Hanson 1997). Both One Nation and *Multicultural Australia* hence evoke the figure of the ordinary Australian in order to call for a politics in which difference should not threaten the common culture and 'ordinary values' of the nation.

The identification of core values with the figure of the typical Australian does an enormous amount of historical work in the report, *Multicultural Australia*. Throughout, the emphasis is on taking pride in 'our' history of tolerance and openness to newcomers: 'we should build upon our proud record of compassion and concern which has made ours a welcoming and caring society'. This writing of the history of the Australian nation as predicated on openness, tolerance and a 'fair go' could be considered a direct attempt to overcome the national discourse of shame about the historical dispossession of Indigenous peoples. Ironically, the diversity of Indigenous peoples is mentioned, or indeed claimed, as part of 'our' history of cultural diversity, alongside the diversity of migrant cultures: 'Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have many cultures and languages and our migrants have come from all parts of the globe'.<sup>6</sup> The use of the term 'our' is quite astonishing in its violence. As 'our' possessions, these natives and strangers have allowed 'us' to be 'culturally diverse'. Such a narrative not only overlooks histories of violence, but it also performs its own violence: it signals another appropriation of 'strangers' into the achievement of multiculturalism itself ('they' have allowed us 'to be').

Not surprisingly, then, in the account of the goals of multiculturalism more emphasis is placed on unity: throughout the document, the aim of multiculturalism is defined as 'ensuring that cultural diversity is a unifying force'. The document asks us to question any impression 'that multicultural policy has been primarily concerned with migrants': 'We believe that multicultural policy must become more inclusive by embracing and being relevant to all Australians.' The term 'all Australians' erases any differences between white settler groups, migrants and Indigenous groups: the celebration of difference must bring us together. Such a story of multiculturalism is a story of an *inclusive multiplicity*: a multiculturalism that includes all of us, that unites us together as 'fellow' natives. In this story, multiculturalism is not even about unity-in-diversity — which is how we could read the narrative offered in the *National Agenda* (see Stratton and Ang 1994). Rather, it is about unity-from-diversity. The definition of a multicultural nation takes place through the use of a monocultural framework: multiculturalism can be described as a cultural diversity that, at least to some extent, must be overcome or, to put it better, must be transformed into a unifying force. In this framework, differences that cannot be assimilated into the white, masculine core of the Australian being (the typical Australian who calls for a 'fair go') are defined as a betrayal of the multicultural nation. At the same time, cultural differences that have historically been sites of struggle and antagonism are appropriated and neutralised as a sign of 'our' history. ,

In such multicultural constructions of the nation space, strangers become a means of defining 'who' we are, not by being represented as 'outside' that we (although some strangers are known in this way), but by being incorporated as elements in the 'making' of the 'we' that can be uttered by the national subject. I hence broadly support Ghassan Hage's argument that multicultural tolerance and monocultural intolerance are structured around a similar fantasy of the national subject who alone is afforded the will to define who should and should not inhabit the nation space (1998: 17). However, unlike Hage, my argument is not simply that both multiculturalism and monoculturalism involve white supremacy (1998: 232). My argument has attended to the grammatical specificity of the construction of the multicultural nation by considering how the 'we' of the nation is established by an act of differentiating *between* those stranger others who have already entered the nation space.

Multiculturalism, by defining difference purely in terms of appearance, can only value the differences that, beyond the level of culture, can be incorporated into the 'ordinary values' of 'fair go', or the institutional and political frameworks of neo-liberalism itself. Indeed, in some multicultural constructions of the nation, the 'we' itself emerges through the very *gesture of claiming difference*. Those who appear as different are incorporated as difference — a process that allows the nation to imagine *itself* as heterogeneous (to claim their differences as 'our difference'). This process of incorporation also involves acts of differentiation. While some strangers can be assimilated, as their strangeness is 'seen' as only a matter of appearance, other strangers can only be assimilated as the unassimilable. Their strangeness is represented as a matter of being, and hence betrays the very *appearance* of difference within the discourse of multiculturalism itself. These strangers hence disappear and reappear as embodying the danger of the one *who does not want to become 'a real native' underneath the appearance of difference*. The strangers who refuse to receive the gift of multiculturalism by being natives, in the very act of appearing as different, hence function to define the limits of multicultural hospitality. We can only welcome those others who allow us to be ourselves and be different, at one and the same time.

At one level, it might be assumed that the emergence of new (or not-so-new) forms of right-wing populism that organise their narratives through constructing strangers as phobic objects, might lead us to endorse multiculturalism as a way of opening ourselves to strangers, or as a way of imagining a more heterogeneous sociality. But for me, the emergence of extreme monocultural agendas, in Australia as well as elsewhere (most notably, in the United States and France), calls for a different response. It calls me to ask how we can turn an opposition to monoculturalism into a mobilisation of a different politics of multiculturalism, and a better form of hospitality towards others (see Chapter 7). Such a politics would refuse to celebrate the figure of the stranger as the origin of difference: it would also be concerned with how the 'we' of the nation can violently reproduce itself in the name of liberal inclusion. Such a politics would attend to how incorporation and expulsion can both work *simultaneously* to fetishise the stranger as the origin of difference. Such an oppositional politics may hence find 'a place' for that *which refuses to be assimilated into the heterogeneous 'we' of the nation*.

Ahmed, Sara, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. New York, Routledge, 2000, pp. 95-113.