

Swamped by outdated multicultural model

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So the Asians didn't swamp us as Pauline Hanson feared they might.

But we did face a deluge of soft-headed compassion-mongers who managed to talk Kevin Rudd into relaxing the asylum rules, thus boosting Indonesia's black market economy and depleting its supply of unseaworthy boats.

For our part we received 50,000 or so self-selected new Australians, chiefly from the Middle East and north and sub-Saharan Africa, who have struggled with barriers of language and culture and fitted in less well than the skilled and educated migrants from Asia and Europe.

That much is evident from a data-rich Productivity Commission report released last week that, taken seriously, would prompt a fundamental rethink of immigration policy.

The broad conclusions will give the Kumbaya crowd goose bumps: immigration is a driver of the economy; skilled and semi-skilled migrants integrate well; only a third of the population believe immigration levels are too high; discontent in many European nations is at more than twice that level.

When we get to the detail, however, the rose tint begins to lose its hue. Humanitarian migrants have miserable prospects; the likelihood they will be earning their keep in the labour market, even five years after arrival, is far lower than the general population.

Participation in the labour market is the best measure of integration, a word that fell out of favour for a while among the multicultural elite. Fortunately, the commission rejects the dreamy narrative of cultural diversity, recommending integration at the heart of government policy.

"A deterioration in the integration of immigrants would be of detriment to Australia," the commission argues.

"Government policies should seek cost-effective ways to promote integration and inclusion."

It's not for nothing, however, that the commission's initials are PC. The report stops short of examining the pertinent question of whether a migrant's country of birth may influence integration.

The effective ban on discussing these matters in polite company has consequences.

The arrival in the Senate of a basket of deplorables — among them Hanson and three of her chums — shows that when decent people are told not to say the unsayable, they take their votes to politicians who will.

Hanson's dread of being "swamped by Muslims" prompted predictable scolding from the usual well-spoken arbiters of good taste.

Jonathan Green on ABC Radio National's *Sunday Extra* — our weekly reminder of how the modern Left habitually misses the point — thought Hanson's anti-Islam comments were "actually a proxy for more immediate welfare concerns about my job, my future — that sort of thing — and I'm looking for someone on whom to blame that sense of unease".

Panellist Eleanor Jackson agreed.

“I think it’s sad that she often wants to look down the power hierarchy to understand her feelings of insecurity rather than look more broadly in our community,” Jackson said. “Is it neoliberalism, is it globalisation?”

Well, no, actually. It’s Islam. And, whether the ABC taste police want us to talk about it or not, Hanson’s anxiety is not uncommon in much of the Western world.

The reasons aren’t that hard to fathom given the unrelenting threat of terror from some of Islam’s politicised followers, compounded by the noticeable reluctance of some Muslim immigrants to integrate.

Never before in Australia’s happy and successful history of migration has the threat of separatism seemed so acute or so visible on the streets of our capital cities.

Once migrants would have felt uncomfortable going about their daily business in national dress. Yet parts of Sydney and Melbourne have become lands of the long white robe, not to mention the even more confronting burka.

These are the outward signs of a diaspora that feels no obligation to fit in without fuss and instead transports its own conventions to a distant corner of the globe and wears them as a badge of identity.

Thanks to the internet and satellite television they remain part of the community they left behind, relying less on friendship and cultural ties in Australia.

This is not immigration as we know it but transnationalism, in which the new arrival draws support from a self-contained cultural community that strongly asserts its own identity and would, if it could, operate under its own laws.

It is an existence with a conflicted sense of belonging and place, in which citizenship serves as a flag of convenience rather than a pledge of loyalty.

Humanitarian category migrants who arrived by boat are different from other migrants in important respects: 24 per cent of men and 67 per cent of women had never been in paid employment; 33 per cent of men and 44 per cent of women had never spoken English; 17 per cent of men and 23 per cent of women were illiterate in their own language. Unsurprisingly, they have struggled to find a job, to access government services or to make small talk with their Australian neighbours.

It is their good fortune to arrive in a country that grants not just shelter but a fair go. Yet, held back by limited capacity, it’s hardly surprising if they seek the comfort of a cultural enclave from which they need never emerge.

Is this a problem? The commission thinks so.

“To the extent that immigrants’ intent to integrate is decreasing, it raises an important issue about whether this provides scope for separatism that conflicts with, and/or has the ability to undermine, key norms and longstanding understandings that are important to the functioning of Australian society and that are valued by many,” it concludes.

A nervous government would leave this bombshell of a report hidden in the bottom drawer, call community leaders in for a cup of tea and exchange pleasantries.

A wiser course would be to think again about a model of multiculturalism that badly shows its age; one that predates the internet, the mass arrival of asylum-seekers on our shores and the rise of an assertive religious ideology.

Hanson is justified in sensing the vulnerability of the Australian way of life. But the threat is not a surfeit of Islam, it's the failure of integration.

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