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Psychological Sense of Community in Australia and the Challenges of Change

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Psychological Sense of Community in Australia and the Challenges of Change

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Abstract

Social change is a phenomenon experienced in all societies, whether from gradual passages and time and interaction with other groups, or through the more immediate impacts as war, invasion or physical catastrophe. How societies manage change indicates much about their abilities to survive and the type of social cohesion that will be evidenced.

In this paper, the authors investigate the use of common symbols and shared history as ways of either maintaining social identity and moving with change, or using them in negative ways in order to resist change. The case study of immigration to Australia is used to demonstrate that members of the community are able to identify a series of salient identity markers – whether they wish to accept all of them or not – as the types of knowledge that all members share.

Many of the markers reflect decades of passed history, but are seen as foundational to Australia today. While they are core to identity, they are the types of symbols that are grasped as a lifestyle under threat by those who are newcomers. Often the markers are there as more unconscious constructions, to be evoked at times of high emotion to indicate what must be “saved” in order for current ideas to survive.

The authors discuss the meanings of these markers as ways in which the identity of members of the community has been established. But these are seen as reminders, or glorifications, of the past, and how such markers are able to be captured and (mis)used by narrow populist and extremist interest groups. The challenge of managing change is how to build forward, maintaining those markers of real social value, and incorporating the new ones that are brought by newcomers, and those that are developed together.

KEYWORDS: Psychological sense of community, Social change, Social identity, Australia, Community narratives

Communities develop around a number of ways. Heller (1989) made the basic distinction between those that are locational (based around place) and those that are relational (formed around some shared idea, experience or interest), but also recognized those which came together for the exercise of shared power. In order to understand the dynamics of communities, McMillan and Chavis (1986) put forward a model that included the aspects of membership boundaries, influence, shared emotional connection and integration and fulfillment of needs. Dunham (1986) saw the McMillan and Chavis approach as providing too static a notion of communities and community membership, not providing a way of understanding development, change, and growth that communities experience.

And a community has a distinctive history that, although it may not seem relevant in a psychological sense, is crucial to understanding some of its present qualities and social, political, religious, or economic characteristics. A community has changed, is changing, and will change again (Sarason, 1974, p. 131).

This paper explores, in the Australian context, the impact of social change and resistance to this change. We contend that the members of the community of “Australians” share a set of images and symbols that they are able to articulate. These symbols can be interpreted as representing some of the shared values common to all members. We will also contend that where there is a perceived threat of changes, that these shared symbols will be used as a form of resistance to change, often in a reactionary manner. That is, those who wish to resist social change will call upon the emotional and psychological content of the symbols and shared history in order to reinforce their social identity and distance themselves from the forces of change.

In addressing the Australian context, the present history of the growth of extreme

conservative political groupings will mirror the rise in areas of more obvious change – particularly through immigration of groups different from the historical preponderance of British immigrants and the stereotypes of homogeneity. It may also provide a lesson for other areas facing real challenge to dominant cultures. Billig (1995) has warned that the capturing of the cultural images and defining the history can have negative serious negative impacts on those defined as outsiders.

Change

Change in societies is one thing that cannot be avoided--whether it is because of the mix of individuals, reflecting changes in the proximal or the distal environments. Wars, catastrophes, invasion -- all represent catalysts and causes for rapid change. For the Australian Aborigines (and many other indigenous groups around the world) change was very fast--and usually catastrophic. The application of new cultures and the undermining, or elimination, of the existing cultures provide the basis for oppressive regimes and the subjugation of peoples. These effects have been highlighted in the responses to oppression (e.g., Bulhan, 1985; Watts, 1994; Wolf, 1987).

Change may be slow and incremental, probably the way in which change in communities generally occurs. Adaption to new environments, changing social mores, technological and transport advances all lend themselves to having long term impacts on a community with subtle changes. It is often so slow that there is little awareness of what is really occurring. Eddy and Schreuder (1988) referred to the "...reformist rather than revolutionary, gradualist rather than confrontationalist..." (p.6)

Changes that have occurred with the development of national identities in colonial Australia, Canada and South Africa reflect the incremental nature of this change (Eddy & Schreuder, 1988). The realisation may come from other factors or other sources. The facing up to major challenges, change that are so different, or changes that are seen

as detracting from the heart of the culture that is held are the changes that can bring about the most negative responses and reactionary views about the change, and the developments of targets for those who wish to stop or reverse the changes.

Common symbols and shared history were seen, by McMillan and Chavis (1986), as two key elements to the building of a sense of community. They contended that these were features that provided a way of belonging and recognition for community members, part of the boundaries that defined who was in and who was out. This view was, to an extent, challenged by others who viewed the model as too static and descriptive of communities in an historical moment. In his critique, Dunham (1986) proposed that communities were characterised by process, and that the study of the fundamental, shared values was a better way of understanding membership.

Whichever approach is taken to community, McMillan and Chavis (1986) have provided a number of areas within their model that can facilitate ways of understanding how and where identity can be formed and the separation from the outgroup can be maintained. In particular, they refer to the importance of the common symbol system as a means of communicating between members--often to the exclusion of non-members--and the shared history of events that help to consolidate the sense of belongingness that members feel because of mutual experience of events. To an extent, it is an issue of how the symbols and history are used or manipulated in the management of change and the ways to which it is accepted or rejected.

Australia

Australia holds a unique geographical place as an island continent set in the southern hemisphere, south of Asia. It has a land area the size of the 48 contiguous states of the USA, but a population of 18-19 million people. The country that was colonised by the British just over 200 years ago; it retains many of the symbols, traditions and images

of that heritage (Clark, 1986). In discussing Australia and other dominions, Eddy (1988, p. 132) indicated that “All had ... Britain (and Ireland) as the ‘mother country’ and chief source of institutions and emigration...” From this, Australia was able, peacefully, to become a prosperous nation “...despite episodes of unrest and the inexcusable treatment of the original inhabitants” (pp. 132-133).

The Australian Aboriginal population was originally seen more as animals rather than people inhabiting the land. The legal dictum of Terra Nullius -- the empty land with no definable form of law--was applied. This meant that there was no recognised population or form of government prior to the arrival of the British, so there was no need for a treaty, consideration, or compensation. This was changed by the High Court in the Mabo case in 1992 that finally established the concept of “native title” which recognised prior occupation and ownership (Mabo and others v State of Queensland [No 2] (1992) 175 CLR 1). Although Chamerette (2000) has indicated that the subsequent legislation, and official rhetoric, resulting from the Mabo case can be seen as removing even more rights while focusing on negative stereotypes and language.

Australia is, in many ways, a European country in the wrong hemisphere. To the north is Asia, the east the islands of the Pacific. Its White Australia immigration policies were a wish to:

.... preserve a predominantly European society in Australia by prohibiting the immigration of Asiatics and Pacific Islanders, deporting the kanaka labourers of the sugar fields of Queensland, and discriminating against Asiatics and Pacific Islanders (including Maoris) resident in Australia... (Clark, 1986, pp 175-176).

In using these policies until the 1970s, Australia had successive waves of British, northern European, and then southern European immigrants, with the British always in the majority. After the policies were replaced, there was a growth in immigration from parts of Asia--greatly augmented by refugees from Indo-China. These people had

different traditions, customs, values, religions, and appearance.

The society has emerged with certain stories and images, with myths and heroes from which to draw strength. Despite the influx of migrants from varying countries and cultures, the society maintained a rather stable direction and culturally dominant membership. Australia was described by Rickard (1988) as being hedonistic and materialistic, not delving too deeply into the intellectual, spiritual, or artistic. He noted that people now show pride, even desire, about having convict ancestors as an emotive symbol of a past focus, without necessarily building an intellectual move towards the future in which the past is analysed and new directions charted.

Patience (1991) proposed that Australia has a “hard culture”, a product of the fragmentation from Britain, with the historical roots in the convict times. He described Australia as characterized by secularism, populism, racism, and a masculine orientation. These, he postulated, have a negative impact on the nation’s ability to transform and readily accept new challenges. More recently, Patience (1996) carried this notion further by indicating that these four characteristics prevented an open debate about the nation’s position in the changing world, especially Australia’s relationship with Asia. Recent populist outcries about the levels of Asian immigration Australia seem to bear some of these ideas out, as does the ongoing debate about the need for a treaty and an apology to Aborigines for the treatment they received in the past. As with Mabo, the official rhetoric and public statements are denials of the issues (Williams, 2000).

Fisher (1995), the first author, came to learn far more about his Australian culture by living and studying in the USA for a number of years. As with so many other sojourners, coming to grips with the, often subtle, differences faced living in a new country led him to reflect on the bases of his own culture. Newcomers face the issues of dealing with differences in historical markers, language (at least accent and slang), food, cultural and civic knowledge, sports, and more. Furnham and Bochner (1986) indicate

that immigrants and sojourners face a culture shock, which can lead to crisis, when interacting with the new host culture. In some ways, the newcomers are faced with threats to their identity, personally and as a member of a group. How they respond and the nature of the resources available to them are crucial to their adjustment and well-being.

Caplan's (1964) crisis theory states that the person calls upon their stores of socio-cultural supplies when faced with a crisis--particularly an accidental, or unplanned, crisis. The socio-cultural supplies being: "....those influences on personality development and functioning which are exerted by the customs and values of the culture and the social structure....This provides him with rewards and external security to supplement his inner strength." (Caplan, 1964, pp.32-33). Some communities have larger supplies as they were better defined and integrated, and some people within those communities have greater access to the supplies.

A number of positive adaptive strategies for immigrants and sojourners have been promoted. Key amongst these are racially and ethnically homogeneous groups in order to promote a sense of self-worth and dignity (Smith, 1992; Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1984), to share resources and support (Cox, 1989) and to act as a haven in the alien environment (Church, 1982; Furnham & Bochner, 1986). In Fisher's (1995) case, the socio-cultural supplies he drew on represent the aspects of primary community that he referred back to -- Australia -- and were supplied through membership of an Australian social club on campus. Those supplies reinforced his identity and raised the problem solving strategies that were seen as appropriate for the situation.

This experience may reflect the grounding in a culture, but grounding that is not evidenced until there is a major challenge or crisis event. It may be considered using the psychoanalytic concepts of fixation and regression (as an heuristic); in such a case, there may be the appearance of resolution of the conflicts that arise at an earlier stage of

development--or in moving to a new location--but the appearance does not cover the real unresolved tensions. At a time of crisis, there is a regression to the fixated earlier stage, in this case, calling upon the themes and stories of the original culture, or the culture that has been imbedded to draw upon the things held there.

Krupinski (1984) has referred to the idea of the “broken clock” amongst immigrants. It is the memory of how things were when they left the home, but it is stuck in time unable to keep up with subsequent changes. Caltabiano and Caltabiano (1989) examined this phenomenon in Italian immigrants to Australia who found that their home country had changed so much during their absence that they no longer felt a part of it. In such cases, people have not recognised that change will, and has, taken place as Saraason (1974) has told us it must. Instead, they relate to the old image and stories of the past, not being able to reconcile their historic view with the new reality.

The work of Krupinski (1984) and Caltabiano and Caltabiano (1989) illustrate the presence of shared schemas, often set in an earlier time. They raise the question of to what extent are the schemas shared by members of the community. As the shared schemas reflect the images, stories, and shared history, the further question is raised as to whether a country can evoke a shared sense of community. The following story is an illustration of the ways in which shared schema can be addressed. We use this as a basis for exploring these questions.

Collecting Stories

At the first or second meeting of the graduate level community psychology class for several years, Fisher asked the students to write down “What it means to you to be an Australian.” The students would sit for about 5 minutes trying to work out what the task meant, then they would start to come up with various ideas of meaning and identity. Many of these reflected pictures, images, stories, legends, historical events, sights and

smells, etc that they felt important.

The instructor compiled a list the topics that were generated and discussed them, their differing meanings, how they were learned, whether they meant the same thing to people from different parts of Australia, etc. Some of the commonly generated topics are shown in Table 1. They represent a mixture of history (e.g., Eureka Stockade; Gallipoli), story (e.g., Ned Kelly), current, and ideal, often with a focus on historical British links (and the ways these shaped educational, social, and legal institutions). Other themes found reflected feelings and ideals – Australia as an egalitarian society; irreverence to authority and formal social structures; freedom; a “fair go” for all; and the laidback nature of Australians: “she’ll be right.”

These are images are reflected in all forms of media and communications. They reflect sets of common symbols shared by the group, or representations of shared historical events that have helped to shape an Australian identity. While they represent a shared schema, there is the issue of how “well” they represent it.

The class discussions contained a number of important points. While there was a common understanding of many of the topics, there were also variations in the subjective meanings of them. The level of salience of the ideas also varied greatly. An interesting part of the discussion came from the realisation by class members that they could identify symbols, events, legends, and myths that formed part of their identities, but which they would prefer to reject.

An example of this was the “white Australia policy”. Members of the class were able to describe this defunct immigration policy, and the lingering racist overtones. It was a part of the shared history that was both an embarrassment of the past, and a fear for the future in the debate about levels and sources of immigrants.

Another topic that caused considerable disquiet was the place of sport as an identifier for Australians. It was recognised as a significant pre-occupation for many;

Australians often define themselves as a nation of sports lovers. But many members of the class asserted that this pre-occupation was a waste of time and energy that should be focused on more important activities.

The students were able, after a period of discussion, to articulate their ideas of what it meant to them to be Australian. Those who had lived abroad, or had travelled for extended periods of time, were able to relate the ways in which groups of Australians would socialise, and the references and slang that they would use to exclude non-Australians. Interestingly, they reported that they socialised with people overseas with whom they would desire to have no contact at home for the sake of being with and talking to other Australians about things of shared background, and in speaking styles more reminiscent of home.

In the stories, myths, and legends used, the students were invoking a number of schemas and stereotypes of Australia. Many of these reflected historical, or supposed historical, ways in which Australia was formed and its people and institutions operated. The students were, however, acutely aware of changes in Australian society and the needs for adaptation to those changes rather than relying on the myth-making to set the future course.

The notion that members of the national community are able to articulate images and symbols that contribute to their shared identity--or the imagined identity (Anderson, 1991) was supported by the student's experiences. This "shared sentiment" (Leighton, 1959) provides the emotional attachment which facilitates the bonds--the extent of personal investment required in PSOC (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

The images and sentiments are reflective of the socio-cultural capital (Caplan, 1964) in the community. As a nation, there has been the development of values, mores, and rules applicable to each member. They provide resources that members of a national community can draw upon. At the same time, there is a similar pool values regional

variations, priorities, and antipathies. Pascoe (1995) noted that the regional differences in football codes in Australia provide surface evidence of regional differences in development, experiences, and priorities.

den Hartog and Alomes (1991) referred to the much more recent ways in which popular culture has been internationalised--with reflections on the change in trends in sport, fashion, music, and the media. These are the types of changes which do not serve to directly oppress the holders of the dominant culture, but which appear to threaten the sanctity of it in the national psyche. Australians have expressed concerns about the Americanisation of their culture, such as basketball competing with traditional sports; baseball caps on backwards; musical changes; loss of colloquial language and replacement by American idiom.

Another source of change in the local culture comes about through the entry of diverse immigrant populations. Where the immigrants are of very different cultural, language, religious, and ethnic backgrounds--especially if they are in relatively large numbers--they can provide an impetus for change. But it is also an impetus for strong resistance to change.

The shared history and common symbol systems take a variety of forms and expressions. One of these can be the stories that are part of the "folklore" of the community (Rappaport, 1995). Peters and Waterman (1982) noted that many corporations used their creation story as the core myth provided operational procedures and core values.

On the broader level, we want to raise the question whether the common symbols systems and shared history, recounted in community narratives, can hold a very large group together. We contend that all people aspire to membership of an overarching community group (Fisher & Sonn, 1999). Cox (1989) examined the idea that the primary group, or community, was one in which society served as a socialising agent and which

was central to members' psychological development. This notion of primary community gives the appearance of a shared set of values, ideals, stories, history, and symbols for members of a certain community. The parallel being with Gemeinschaft/village communities, and how these functions may now be served in the larger communities in which we live – and from which we can exclude others.³

Inclusion and exclusion

A significant feature of the McMillan and Chavis (1986) model is the definition of boundaries to declare who is and is not a member of a given community. Membership accrues certain benefits, as well as obligations; there are positive mental health outcomes associated with many communities; and there can be a strong sense of identity and belonging associated with belonging to a community. For those who are excluded, there can be very negative outcomes associated with the exclusion (Fisher & Sonn, 1999).

As was shown in the discussion of student stories, the respondents were able to identify simple ways in which they could speak with other Australians to the exclusion of others by invoking forms of language and slang, social referents, historical events, etc. While this has a positive aspect if reinforcing the socio-cultural supplies of the members (Caplan, 1968), it can lead to the negative impacts of rejection and exclusion on the targets. While this discussion had taken place at a social level, the extent to which it could be used in a larger, socio-political context to include or exclude certain groups.

The works of Clark (1986), Patience (1991, 1996), and Rickard (1988) have alluded to negative aspects of Australia's past of present. The White Australia policy was a formal way in which non-British and non-Europeans were excluded from coming to the country, for the most part (although there was an ongoing immigration of groups from the Indian sub-continent, as well as an historical presence of Chinese and Pacific Islanders). Patience (1996) makes reference to the current negative views expressed

about levels of immigration from Asia countries. The (mis)uses of symbols and common history to maintain this level of rage and examples of it are instructive.

The ability to capture various images and symbols and to magnify these to personify a national character and identity has been labelled as 'flagging' by Billig (1995). It represents an unquestioning type of nationalism designed to exclude those who do not fit the stereotype. In Australia, the concern over immigration and the place of Aborigines is also suffering from a form of flagging developed by the One Nation Party (to the extent that the party founder is photographed draped in the Australian flag.

The nature of flagging by the One Nation Party reflects a grabbing of shared historical markers, emotional calls, and misinformation. The constituency of the party reflects a disenfranchised group of rural people, especially farmers, who see their export potential diminishing because of lowering of tariffs and globalisation; and some members of the disenfranchised white, working class. Particular rallying cries are the historic links to Britain and opposition to Australia becoming a republic; the retention of the current flag (which includes the British flag in one corner); being "over-run" by Asian immigrants; and the large benefits given to Aborigines (the group with the lowest income, shortest life expectancy, lowest employment levels, and poorest health in Australia). The leader of One Nation Party, Pauline Hanson, is the self-proclaimed representative of the 'battler' -- those who are salt of the earth and face many obstacles everyday to help themselves and their families get by. The battler imagery was one of the themes identified in the student stories.

Drawing on interview data from 15 self-identified supporters of Hanson, Papadopoulos (1997) examined the ways boundaries were constructed using legitimising myths and misinformation that were utilised to exclude groups and maintain oppressive practices. Respondents reported stories of all the "free" things and special privileges that Aborigines received, and they felt they missed out on (e. g., medical and dental services);

and that we were forcing Aborigines to do things like the whites, even though they were unwilling or unsuited to these (live in houses, hold jobs). These are consonant with the symbolic racism findings of Fraser and Islam (2000) with the expression of one group receiving extra benefits at the expense of one's own. A key theme that emerged was fear of Asians taking over parts of the country and setting up their own small countries. Some of this was attributed to Australians being laid back and not able to compete with people with strong cultures. The phenomenon of the One Nation Party is likely to be a rather short one. Its place in opinion polls is rapidly declining, and there is significant fighting within the party. Those who disagree with the leadership are expelled. However, they will hold representation in two state parliaments, and possibly the national Senate for some years to come. More importantly, perhaps, is the effect that the Party has been able to capture the symbols and history and promote them in ways which are exclusionary and reactionary, opposite to the ideas of "a fair go" and the egalitarianism many identify as key, positive Australian characteristics.

What is important to learn from this phenomenon is the ways in which the images and stories of the nation have been able to be captured by this small and extreme group. The appeal has been at an emotional level that has activated the gut instinct as people easily identified with the images used and added this to the level of uncertainty they were experiencing given the amount of change that the community had been experiencing. The appeal was to capture the certainty and identity of an idealised past, ignoring most of the facts.

While the present discussion reflects the ways in which some sectors of the Australian community have responded to change, there are strong parallels faced in other parts of the world. Western Europe, America, etc

Discussion

It is the nature of the dominant cultural images and sentiments, and the exclusionary functions that they serve that becomes far more problematic. Where they are able to be captured by populists, or extremists (Billig, 1995) there is a high probability that they will be used against those who are identified as outsiders. Clark (1986) demonstrated the use of government policies in Australia to maintain the British and European heritage through, for example, the White Australia policy. Such an exclusionary and assimilationist approach is still used by many countries to maintain some ideal form, whether it is real or not, in order to maintain a racial, ethnic, cultural, or religious superiority.

Billig (1995) maintained that for most members of the community, the national symbols and images represent a usually unacknowledged background. They are there through education, socialisation, or indoctrination, but are not given regular, overt attention. Billig's discussion reflects the problems occurring when the membership part of PSOC is taken to the extreme (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The boundaries of the group become rigid and are used to systematically exclude others. Membership in even an imagined nation community (Anderson, 1991) is limited, boundaries are fixed and rights and privileges accrue. In order to maintain the boundaries and the attendant privileges, there must be means of exclusion and ways of dealing with the interaction with other communities. The images and narratives are used to promote the dominant culture and destroy any value that may be in the new cultures.

Bochner (1986) discussed the possibility of combining groups into as Australian multicultural models that could form a new, shared culture. However, he indicated that this would require: "...all groups, including the Anglo-Celt, majority ... abandon some of their first culture 'myths' " (p. 354-355). This position would be opposed by all groups, because of the impact on key aspects of their cultural identity. Indeed, resistance may be the position seen with the rise in anti-immigration, anti-Aboriginal, anti-multicultural

groups in Australia. Those 'anti' groups draw upon the images and myths that all members of the community are so able to identify, but they proceed to develop these into sacred visions that are under challenge by the outsiders and their sympathisers (usually damned as the "politically correct"). The hard culture (Patience, 1991, 1996) is hardened further against those who are seen as threats to the good order and traditions of Australian society and heritage.

The narrowness of such worldviews is ill-informed, and dangerous -- denying the reality of cultural mixing and by imposing threats to the non-elite. When the benefits of community are co-opted and used as the basis for exclusion of particular groups, there are real threats, not to the good order of the past, but to the good order of the present and the future. Calls to community and tradition, even 'traditional family values,' can represent a resistance to change and a limitation of the alternatives that are to be accepted. The provision of easy targets -- Aborigines, immigrants -- destabilises the country by providing a basis for dividing, rather than unifying. Sparks (1991) analysed the Apartheid system in South Africa and the ideological foundations using Herder's notion of Volksgeist (folk-spirit). This demonstrated the divisive and exclusionary effects of community mobilisation on the basis of 'a romanticised what once was.' In this way, the element of shared emotional connection in sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) is manipulated. The shared events of the past are changed to something that is unreal in order to reinforce the boundaries of the community and exclude those who are seen as not worthy of membership.

The idea of psychological sense of community has generated such a level of acceptance that it is, at times, almost a panacea (Bryson & Mowbray, 1981). All the ills that can befall one are prevented or cured, those who are at risk of experiencing alienation, separation, or loss of support are welcomed as part of the community. In many ways in the psychological interpretation, sense of community appears to have

become almost synonymous with Tönnies' (1955) explication of Gemeinschaft -- a term that has become common parlance for community. The village notion is the one that appeals--the family close by, friends, safety, predictability, shared activities, security. However, it really reflects the economics related to kinship relationships, obligations, values, and responsibilities that living in the village meant in the past.

The village also provides the notion of stability. It gives the appearance of the anchor to which one could return and find that things had remained as remembered, the people and stories were still there and predictable. Rappaport (Rappaport, 1993, 1995; Thomas & Rappaport, 1996) has demonstrated the impact of stories, or narratives, as a psychological means of providing a root for the members of a community, as a link between past and future. Howard (1991) discussed narrative approaches to understanding human action and emphasised the role of stories as providing the contexts for meaning and maps for living.

But there is the negative side to the argument, as the village also encompasses a large degree of conformity and restriction on choices, as does the model of psychological sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). In order for the community to function, there are levels of exclusion and inclusion, levels of support, and levels of required behavior. While these may be obvious in the micro world represented by the village, they are also evidenced by the 'flagging' of nationalism (Billig, 1995) that calls to tradition and the past to evoke images and attempts to control change.

Conclusion

The stories collected from the graduate class illustrated the range of shared ideas and images of the students. It also reflected their ability and opportunities to discuss the underpinnings and those images and to reject the values that are inherent in some of them. In contrast, the hard culture represents an uncritical acceptance of the images, a

nationalism without thought or understanding for its consequences. Billig (1995) warned that this is the type of nationalism that is used, and accepted, by the uncritical masses, and by those who wish to dominate an agenda or debate -- as indicated by the rise of such groups as Australia's One Nation Party.

While den Hartog and Alomes (1991) presented an argument about changes in popular cultural, particularly Americanisation through mass media, there are other levels of change and resistance that are more pernicious. Patience (1996) highlighted the rise of anti-Asian sentiments in some elements of the country there are also historical and continuing debates about the place of Aborigines. Aspects of the monarchy, the flag, and assimilationist policies are all parts of the national debate that would seem to place more emphasis on the images and symbols of the past than on the realities of the present and the future.

"A community has changed, is changing, and will change again" (Sarason, 1974, p.131). The recognition that change is inevitable and continuing is a crucial element in the ability to respond to its negative consequences, and to provide opportunities to resist those who seek to use the change to oppress differences. Just as important is the ability and opportunity to study and understand the underpinnings of our own cultures and communities. In this way, we will be better placed to judge the real value of the images, icons, and narratives that form our social identities.

NOTES

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Table I

Selected Class Generated Topics For Australian Images

Beach, sun, and sand	
Outback and stockmen	(The barren countryside and farm workers)
Gallipoli	(World War I battle)
Eureka Stockade	(Uprising by goldminers)
The Melbourne Cup	(A horse race, with a public holiday)
“She’ll be right, Jack!”	(Don’t worry, be happy)
“No worries”	(Not a problem -- usually is)
Sports people	
Battlers	(People who fight the odds to get ahead)
White Australia Policy	(Discriminatory immigration policy)
Royal Family	(The British royals)
Hills Hoist	(A clothes line)
Ayers Rock	(World’s largest monolith rock, in central Australia)
The Dismissal	(Dismissal of the Whitlam government in 1975)
Don Bradman	(A champion cricketer)
Phar Lap	(A race horse during the depression)
The landscape, sun, and smells	
Bodyline	(A negative form of cricket)
Convicts	(Convicts transported from Britain in 18 th and 19 th C)
Masculine country	
