“Our shared values”: The Liberal Coalition Government’s framing of Australia’s national identity and multiculturalism

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Abstract

Social work values call for the profession to engage in issues of social justice. One such issue is Australian multicultural policy and the ideology that underpins it, which to date has largely been absent in social work research. This paper uses a post-colonial framework to explore themes of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ in the Liberal Coalition Government’s citizenship and multicultural policy statements. The analysis found the Liberal Coalition Government’s perspective on multiculturalism is conservative based on their promotion of a colonial national identity while presenting an Islamic threat narrative. This paper contends that the promotion of this national identity functions to maintain colonial Australia as its core and argues this is problematic due to the challenges and exclusions this places on non-white Australians. The implications this has for the social work profession will also be discussed.

Introduction

There have been many iterations of multicultural policy since it was first introduced into Australian discourse in the 1960s. Following the abolition of what is commonly referred to as the ‘White Australia Policy’ in 1973, initial iterations of multicultural policy were analysed as progressive due to their focus on integration in response to post-war social and cultural changes and a need to address disadvantage experienced by migrant populations (Ho, 2014; van Krieken, 2012). Over the next four decades this approach shifted to a more conservative ideology, re-focusing on social cohesion through assimilation (Ho, 2014; van Krieken, 2012). Central to this shift was the framing of multiculturalism as divisive and a promotion of threat narratives about particular immigrant groups (Akbarzadeh, 2016; Dunn, Klocker, & Salabay, 2007; van Krieken, 2012; Mansouri & Leach, 2009).

Threat narratives have long been associated with migration and multiculturalism. Throughout Australia’s non-European immigration history various cultures, ethnicities, religions, and modes of arrival have been the target of these narratives at various times. For example, One Nation’s Pauline Hanson’s claim of the threat of an ‘Asian invasion’, which past Prime Minister John Howard modified to the threat of being ‘swamped by boat people’, referring to people seeking asylum who arrive by boat (Mansouri & Leach, 2009; Papastergiadis, 2004). While those from an Asian background, for the most part, have been re-framed as positive and successful migrants, those from the Middle East, Arab Muslims and African Australians remain in the ‘othering’ spotlight (Akbarzadeh, 2016; Dunn, Klocker, & Salabay, 2007; Jakubowicz, 2016; MacDonald, 2017; Udah, 2018). These groups have been criticised by conservative politicians (for example Pauline Hanson, John Howard, and Peter Dutton), who claim the various groups have failed to integrate and are a threat to Australia (Akbarzadeh, 2016; Dunn, Klocker, & Salabay, 2007; Jakubowicz, 2016; Udah, 2018).

Parallels have been drawn between the experiences of the immigrant ‘other’, and Australia’s Indigenous populations in framing and exclusion. Immigrant groups, in particular those of

refugee background, and Indigenous Australians, have a shared experience of colonialism and displacement. Both groups also have the shared experience of 'othering' within political discourse (Tasćon, 2004; Tsoulis, 2014), and as Tsoulis (2014) argues, both share the experience of desiring acceptance, belonging and full participation. Core to these experiences and social positioning is the continuation of colonialism and a white national imagery (Morton-Robinson, 2015; Tasćon, 2004). While immigrant threat narratives and 'othering' exist throughout Australian society, this study will be situated in the political sphere, focusing specifically on immigration policy.

The Australian social work profession has, for the most part, been silent on such issues (Devaki, 2018; Yochay, 2017) (some exceptions include Nipperess & Williams, 2019a; Nipperess & Williams, 2019b). Engaging in ideology and policy regarding multiculturalism has largely been left to other disciplines. Critical social work brings with it a unique lens and set of values that can contribute positively to the multicultural discourse. Further, social workers are positioned to have direct contact with those who live the outcomes of these ideologies and policies. Therefore, it is important for the profession to place the individual in their political context, and as such, to engage with the macro structures.

This article reports on a small-scale study that was undertaken as part of an honours thesis, exploring how the Turnbull Liberal Coalition Government (TLCG) constructs national identity, and the implications for this on multiculturalism in Australia. At the time the study took place Malcom Turnbull was the Liberal Coalition Government's leader, portrayed as a progressive politician within the liberal party, who advocated for a type of multicultural Australia. Since then, Turnbull has been replaced by Scott Morrison as leader, a conservative politician who in his first few months as Prime Minister made statements intending to cut back on immigration to control population growth (Murphy, 2018), and has an extensive history of punitive and paternal immigration policy, such as Operation Sovereign Borders during his time as Minister for Immigration and Border Protection in 2013/14 (Davis, 2018; Whyte, 2014). Morrison's history of conservative and punitive policy approaches in regard to immigrants, in particular people seeking asylum, could suggest the findings of the Turnbull lead Liberal Coalition Government are still applicable to a Morrison lead government. The next section provides an overview of multicultural discourse and related concepts of ethnic and civic nationalism, citizenship, allegiance, and threat narratives. The method section is presented, followed by a discussion of the three key findings from the study. Finally, acknowledging the relationship between policy and practice, the implications for social work are discussed.

Literature Review

Multiculturalism is a multifaceted concept (Goldberg, 1994; Lopez, 2000). It is both a quantifiable representation of the population, and an ideology of how society is, should, or could be structured (Lopez, 2000). Different variants of multiculturalism exist, placed on a spectrum of Anglo assimilation to cultural pluralism (Gordon, 1964; cited in Jakubowicz, 1981; Lopez, 2000). Cultural pluralism has been described as the existence and positive interaction of distinct cultural and religious expressions and institutional arrangements (Martin, n.d; cited in Lopez, 2000). However, Anglo assimilation involves multiple immigrant groups living in one society, replacing their ethno-cultural expressions for Anglo culture (Gordan, 1964; cited in Jakubowicz, 1981). Key theorists in multiculturalism's infancy advocated for cultural pluralism, postulating that the social, political and economic control of one ethnic group would cause inequality (Gordan, 1964; cited in Jakubowicz,

1981; Lopez, 2000). Contemporary framing of Australian multiculturalism includes three components: as a description of Australia's colonial history combined with diverse national and ethnic groups; as a policy to control the migration and settlement of people; and as a practice of numerous ethno-cultural and religious communities collaborating and attempts for said groups to maintain traditional cultural differences (Brown 2006; Jakubowicz, 2015).

These concepts and framing are reflected in Australian multicultural political discourse (Ho, 2014). While, as Morton-Robinson (2015) notes, Australia was a multicultural society long before colonisation, with over five hundred language groups holding title, the concept was first introduced to Australian political discourse during the 1960s, and then later into policy in 1973 (Lopez, 2000). The introduction of multiculturalism developed out of a social justice perspective; concern for migrant welfare and an acknowledgement of the myth that Australian society is homogenous contributed to the shift away from the previous paradigm of assimilation (Ho, 2014; Lopez, 2000). While delivered differently, equality in access to services and provisions for migrant groups were central to both the Whitlam and Fraser governments (Ho, 2014). The 1980s and 1990s saw this shift to what Ho (2014) frames as productive diversity. Ho (2014) discusses how neoliberal principles influenced multicultural policy to focus on the economic benefits of ethnic diversity for all Australians. Multiculturalism was promoted as a means to develop global business opportunities and offered a competitive advantage in services that require cultural and language skills (Ho, 2014). A new agenda was introduced in 1999 by the Howard Liberal Coalition Government. The emphasis was then on social cohesion, national identity, community harmony, and obligations rather than rights or opportunity (Ho, 2014). Howard rejected the concept of multiculturalism, instead reverting back to a discourse of assimilation. Jakubowicz (2017) states that this discourse remains, arguing that current multicultural policies are conservative due to their emphasis on assimilation into existing social order and to allegiance. These policies have also been critiqued as representing Australia as culturally homogenous, more concerned with containing difference than fostering it (Briskman, 2018; Strattan, 1998; as cited in Babacan, 2010).

Despite multicultural ideology and policy being present, scholars have argued Australia still operates under the ideology of colonisation with the desire for a white homogenous nation (Briskman, 2018; Elder, Ellis, & Pratt, 2004; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Searle & Mulholland, 2018). While a unique Australian identity conjures up notions of mateship and egalitarianism, derived from archetypes such as the bushranger and the pioneer farmer, this identity draws on Anglocentric and hetero-masculine representations that privilege white colonial history (Austin & Fozdar, 2018; Bromfield & Page, 2019). Such representations are found in the State and state mechanisms (Moreton-Robinson, 2009; Searle & Mulholland, 2018). The Howard Coalition Government was particularly prominent in re-centering whiteness after a period of more progressive multiculturalism. Asylum seekers were assigned the 'queue jumper' label and placed in detention, while Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory experienced military interventions. Within the ministerial cabinet, changes were made to amalgamate Indigenous and foreign affairs into one ministership. The Howard Government's ministerial reshuffle in 2000 saw the portfolio for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, and for Reconciliation all assigned to the one minister, Phillip Ruddock (Elder, Ellis, & Pratt, 2004). Elder, Ellis, and Pratt (2004) argue that by combining all non-white portfolios to one ministerial appointment suggests that all three combined require the same allocation of resource as that of one mainstream, or white, portfolio. They contend this asserted both the lack of importance placed on non-white people and reasserted the central place of whiteness in the nation. Further, both Fozdar &

Spittles (2009) and Tate (2009) discuss how Howard's introduction of a citizenship test on history and values moved away for a multicultural identity and reaffirmed 'white' Australia based on Anglo-European and Judeo-Christian values. These acts all worked to maintain settler-colonial Australia at the political core. Current research continues to report on the persistence of colonial foundations within governments (Bromfield & Page, 2019; Chou & Busbridge, 2019; Searle & Mulholland, 2018).

Contributing to the maintenance of this colonial foundation is the revival of nationalism, and its call for assimilation and the exclusion of non-conformists (Briskman, 2018). The literature distinguishes between ethnic and civic forms of nationalism (Jakubowicz, 2016; Pehrson & Green, 2010; Tranter & Donoghue, 2007). Ethnic nationalism is a national in-group identity based on ethnicity involving criteria such as ancestry or cultural homogeneity, while civic nationalism is based on common citizenship and participation in public life (Pehrson & Green, 2010; Tranter & Donoghue, 2007). Nationalism serves as a political doctrine that divides people into nation states and is an individual's primary place of belonging (Babacan, 2010). While contemporary Western nation states have adopted a pluralist approach, the ideology behind nationalism eliminates difference and creates structures of power inequities (Babacan, 2010). Within an Australian context, Tascón (2004) postulates nationalism is an attempt to protect itself from uncertainty of the 'other', and an attempt to retain colonial power. Tascón (2004) illustrates this by discussing how behind immigration discourses are dimensions of colonial power, drawing comparisons between Indigenous Australian and refugee groups. Tascón (2004) details how colonial power has subjected both groups to mandatory detention and racialized treatment.

Intersecting with the ideology of nationalism is the concepts of citizenship and allegiance. A naturalising citizen refers to an immigrant applying for citizenship in the country they have migrated to, as opposed to natural-born citizens who were born in the country in which they hold citizenship (Orgad, 2014; Rubenstein, 2007; Vasanthakumar, 2014). Citizenship and allegiance are commonly discussed together within academic writing (Vasanthakumar, 2014; Rubenstein, 2007). While citizenship is regarded as a legal process of rights and responsibilities, of obligation to obey the law, allegiance is an attitude toward the nation state believed to foster contribution to common society and civic integrity (Orgad, 2014; Vasanthakumar, 2014). Given the association of allegiance with citizenship and nationalism, it is worth critiquing the proposed purpose of pledging allegiance. According to Vasanthakumar (2014) having naturalised citizens' pledge allegiance reduces the threat to national security and encourages public contribution. Vasanthakumar (2014) postulates pledging allegiance benefits those who do not share the dominant culture, allowing them to instead share the political attitude with the state and fellow citizens. In contrast, Orgad's (2014) analysis found allegiance is implemented when there is a perceived threat to power and is used for nation building. However, there is no actual evidence this happens, or that natural-born citizens are more loyal than naturalised ones (Ograd, 2014). This is significant given how pledging allegiance discriminates against naturalised citizens. While natural-born citizens are free to hold whatever belief, political or otherwise, they choose, naturalised citizens must align and pledge loyalty with the dominant belief system (Orgad, 2014). Pledging allegiance holds greater expectation than civic duty, limits freedom of conscience, and potentially subordination and exclusion of private interest in favour of allegiance to the nation state, while such things are not imposed on native-born citizens (Orgad, 2014).

Over the last decade, analysis in the field of nationalism and multiculturalism has focused on the 'othering' of Muslims in Australia and the normalisation of associating terrorism and

Islam. Research has demonstrated the increasing acceptability of anti-Islamic narrative in political debate, and a growing Islamophobic discourse within politics, whereby Muslims are scrutinized as potential threats to national identity and security (Akbarzadeh, 2016; Dunn, Klocker, & Salabay, 2007). Conservative Parliamentary members, Cory Bernardi and Josh Frydenburg, have both been quoted making anti-Islamic statements, such as Muslims seek special accommodations and to change Australian laws, and that terrorism reflects a problem with Islam (Akbarzadeh, 2016). Dunn, Klocker, & Salabay (2007) reveal similar findings in their analysis of government statements that promoted a discourse reinforcing stereotypes of alien, threatening and violent Muslims. They also describe the negative impact this has had on Muslim people; it has delayed and prevented the building of new mosques hindering Muslims' ability to practice religion, it has resulted in restrictive asylum seeker policies, and subverts the sense of belonging and citizenship of Muslim Australians. This anti-Muslim sentiment results in Muslims being framed with incivility, inferiority and incompatibility (Dunn, Klocker, & Salabay, 2007). Tascón (2004) assigns this anxiety to colonial white privilege, allowing those who possess this power to define and exclude those they deem undesirable, who, Tascón notes happen to be non-white and Muslim.

While there has been analysis of the way the previous Howard Liberal Coalition Government implemented a conservative concept of multiculturalism, less explored is a review of contemporary policy, particularly within social work scholarship. This study seeks to provide this by analysing policy statements on citizenship and multiculturalism, exploring how the ongoing presence of colonialism expressed through ethnic nationalism in Australia intersects with concepts of multiculturalism.

Method

This research is positioned within a post-colonial theoretical paradigm, informed by theorist Edward Said's contributions of 'othering'. Said's *orientalism* (1978; in Gandhi, 1998) is commonly regarded as the reference point for post-colonialism. Said (1978; in Moreton-Robinson, 2004) argues the West has interpreted and created understandings of the Orient, producing knowledge and representations that have been presented as reality. The West is defined as the norm and the Orient the 'other', allowing the West to see fictitious deficiency and abnormality (Montag, 1997, cited in Moreton-Robinson, 2004). This framework has been applied to this research by analysing representations of the normal 'self', and the deficient and abnormal 'other'.

This study analysed two of the TLCG's discussion papers. Firstly, TLCG's Multicultural discussion paper 'Multicultural Australia: United, Strong, Successful', retrievable from the Australian Government's Department of Home Affairs (2018) webpage. Turnbull's (2017) media release stated this paper outlines the "strategic direction and priorities of multicultural policy in Australia" (para. 1), and it's release coincided with the commencement of the senate committee inquiry 'Ways of protecting and strengthening multiculturalism and social inclusion (Parliament of Australia, n.d.a). Secondly, 'Strengthening the Test for Australian Citizenship', also retrievable from the Australian Government's Department of Home Affairs (2019) webpage. Informed by the National Consultation (2015) report titled 'Australian Citizenship: Your right, your responsibility', the paper was premised as being in response to the then recent terrorist attacks in other parts of the globe, to reaffirm the government's commitment to democracy, opportunity, and shared values, and to highlight the importance of citizenship (Department of Home Affairs, 2019). The paper was released in conjunction with the *Australian Citizenship Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Requirements for*

Australian Citizenship and Other Measures) Bill 2017 (Cth), introduced into Parliament on 15 June, 2017. The bill was subsequently discharged from the senate in October, 2017 (Parliament of Australia, n.d.b). At the time of writing, both discussion papers remain the current statements from the government on citizenship and multiculturalism (Department of Home Affairs, 2018; 2019).

The two discussion papers were used to answer the following three research questions:

1. How does the Turnbull Liberal Coalition Government describe national identity?
2. In what ways does this description include and/ or exclude Muslims?
3. What are the implications for multiculturalism in Australia, and for the social work profession?

The two discussion papers are considered most relevant for addressing the research questions as they both detail the TLCG's interpretation of Australian values and culture, and expectations on residing in Australia and being an Australian citizen. Widening the scope to include the above-mentioned national consultation and senate inquiry reports was not practical for this research project but could be an avenue for future research to extend the analysis, and to investigate the extent to which the government's framing of national identity and multiculturalism is influenced by the findings and recommendations detailed in the reports.

A thematic content analysis (Carey, 2013) was applied to code and analyse the secondary data. Deductive analysis was used to identify *a priori* themes in the policy documents, established from the literature review (O'Leary, 2014). Inductive analysis was then used to further explore the data within these themes, and to explore data sitting outside of *a priori* themes.

Discussion

In answering the research questions three themes were identified. Firstly, it was found that the TLCG presents a colonial national identity. While Anglocentric or Anglo-European identity could describe this first theme, this study applies the term 'colonial national identity' in acknowledgement of existing research that identifies the dominance of Anglocentrism in Australia as a derivative of colonialism (Elder, Ellis, & Pratt, 2004, 2018; Morton-Robinson, 2015). Secondly, when exploring how this identity includes or excludes Muslim, an Islamic threat narrative was identified. From this, a conservative form of multiculturalism and associated inequality and marginalisation was found.

Colonial national identity

A colonial national identity is found in what is characterised as Australian, and what is excluded. The TLCG explicitly embraces immigration and multiculturalism and associates it with a civic nationalism by referencing civic systems and participation in public life.

> *Australia is a proud immigration nation. We are the most successful multicultural society in the world. (TLCG: Citizenship)*

> *The Australian community expects that aspiring citizens demonstrate their allegiance to Australia, their commitment to live in accordance with Australian values, and their willingness and ability to integrate into and become contributing members of the Australian community. (TLCG: Citizenship)*

The TLCG has an emphasis on values, with this being repeated 39 times in the two documents. These values include:

> *(We are defined by) shared values of democracy, freedom, the rule of law and equality of opportunity – a 'fair go' for all. (TLCG: Multicultural)*

However, the TLCG presents a national identity that aligns with colonial Australia: Free and prosperous, English speaking, and embracing of law and values implemented through the process of colonialism. While the TLCG acknowledge the presence of Australia's Indigenous peoples pre-invasion, the story and impact of colonialism has been silenced, along with alternative stories such as those from immigrants and people seeking asylum.

> *For more than 50,000 years First Australians have lived, learned, adapted and survived on the lands we now call Australia. Living side by side, they consisted of over 250 different language groups or 'nations' across the continent, each with distinctive cultures, beliefs, and dialects. The story continued with the foundation of modern Australia, through British and Irish settlement and the establishment of our parliamentary democracy, institutions and law. (TLCG: Multicultural)*

> *Today, Australians welcome those who have migrated here to be part of our free and open society, to build their lives and make a contribution to our nation. (TLCG: Multiculturalism)*

The TLCG have implicitly referred to colonialism within their framing of national identity. Descriptions of Australia are of a dominant white Australia, while non-white Australia is absent. The TLCG state the Constitution, rule of law, parliamentary democracy, and the English language as foundations to the nation, all of which were introduced through colonialism. This finding is consistent with that of Elder, Ellis and Pratt (2004) and Moreton-Robinson (2015) who discuss the desire for a white homogenous nation is still apparent in Australia. TLCG present these colonial foundations as being right to remain as the dominant institutions, also supporting the ideas of McLeod (2000) and Moreton-Robinson (2015) that the ideology and products of colonialism remains within Australia.

This presents what can be understood as ethnic nationalism, promoting a national identity based on cultural homogeneity. This is exampled through the TLCG application of multiculturalism, and through the perspectives voiced and silenced. While TLCG acknowledge the population is culturally and ethnically diverse, the shared values and equal opportunities that are proposed as uniting the nation is indicative of a dominant white Australia and assumes all Australians identify with the values listed. This concept of multiculturalism is recognised as Anglo assimilation (Gordon, 1964; cited in Jakubowicz, 1981) and supports Strattan's (1998; as cited in Babacan, 2010) analysis who critiques Australian multicultural polices as culturally homogenous, acting to contain difference.

The findings show the TLCG present a white Australia as the dominant perspective, and in doing so have silenced experiences of non-white Australia. The TLCG describe Australian society as free, safe and cohesive. This description is representative of a white Australia that has enjoyed the safety that comes with being positioned within the dominant, while ignoring the truth of many Australians outside of this. For example, Indigenous Australians whose disproportionate rate of incarceration (making up 26 per cent of the prison population but only 2.5 per cent of the population) (NIDAC, 2016) raises questions about their freedom or safety (Anthony, 2017). The TLCG states Australia welcomes migrants to join this free society. The TLCG fail to note this welcome is contingent on the migrant's mode of arrival, with many who seek to be part of this society being detained offshore or forced to live on the margins of Australian society as a result of government policy (Kenny & Procter, 2016). The TLCG include Indigenous Australians and non-white immigrants in the nation's history, however the history told still has colonial undertones. While the presence of Indigenous Australians' is included, excluded is the story of survival from colonialism by Indigenous populations, silencing a significant part of Australia's history. Likewise, the TLCG illustrate a colonial society founded on liberal-democratic traditions while excluding the society and its law pre-colonialism. The TLCG also speak of a modern and prosperous Australia that many people, both Indigenous and other population groups, are excluded from. The findings of Elder, Ellis and Pratt (2004) can be reflected on here. By only presenting the stories of a dominant white Australia, white Australia remains positioned at the core, and maintains non-white Australia on the periphery. It is therefore no surprise that when presenting Australia's values concerning equality, only gender was specified. Absent is equality between race, ethnicity, sexuality, or any other kind of difference where inequality exists.

Islamic threat narrative

The TLCG's placement of terrorism warnings in the multicultural and citizenship reports intrinsically link terrorism with non-citizenship and multiculturalism. TLCG acknowledges the threat of terrorism globally, the fear this has created locally, and is explicit that practices and behaviours that undermine Australian values are not welcome in Australia, including racism and discrimination.

> *Practices and behaviours that undermine our values have no place in Australia. (TLCG: Citizenship)*

> *In an age where many people have grown anxious about the increase of terrorism and extremism, there is no better time to reaffirm our steadfast commitment to democracy, opportunity, and our shared values. The Australian Government is committed to the security of our nation and the freedom of our people. (TLCG: Multiculturalism)*

The TLCG proposed numerous changes to the requirements to become an Australian citizen, such as increased English language requirement, a longer wait time before applying for citizenship, and understanding of the Australian constitution. Pledging allegiance to Australia and its values and demonstrating integration was emphasized by TLCG. The TLCG premise that the changes are in response to threats of terrorism.

> *We define ourselves and our nation by our commitment to the fundamental principles of allegiance to Australia. (TLCG: Citizenship)*

> *Strengthening the Australian Values Statement in application forms for visas and citizenship to include reference to allegiance to Australia. (TLCG: Citizenship)*
>
> *In the face of these threats [terrorism], there is no better time to reaffirm our steadfast commitment to democracy, opportunity and our shared values. (TLCG: Citizenship)*

While the TLCG does not explicitly exclude Muslims, the association of terrorism with non-citizenship and multiculturalism supports an anti-Islamic narrative and in doing so, implicitly excludes Muslims from national identity. The TLCG imply terrorism is a considerable threat to inclusion, freedom and safety in Australia. This finding supports that of Briskman (2015); not only is terrorism and multiculturalism linked, white Australia is also associated with a terrorism-free Australia. These associations further support the acceptability of the anti-Islamic narrative in the political sphere detailed by Akbarzadeh (2016), and reinforces that governments are promoting a stereotype of a threatening and violent Muslim identified by Dunn, Klocker, and Salabay (2007). The TLCG include Muslims through embracing multiculturalism, and by stating racism and discrimination have no place in Australia. Despite this, the TLCG have excluded racial equality from their stated values and have not denounced the racism and discrimination exhibited by other parties, or from within their own party.

The Islamic threat narrative is reinforced in the TLCG emphasis on new citizens pledging allegiance to Australia in the belief that this will reduce the threat of terrorism. This belief aligns with that described by Vasanthakumar (2014), who postulates that having naturalised citizen's pledge allegiance reduces the threat to national security. Ograd (2014) argues that this application of allegiance could be understood as reducing the threat of terrorism through nation building, attempting to unify the nation. Ograd's (2014) analysis of this form of nation building details that there is no evidence to support that this happens. Rather, it mandates naturalising citizens to pledge to align with the dominant belief systems, pledges natural-born citizens are not required to make (Ograd, 2014). These findings suggest that linking terrorism with non-citizenship and multiculturalism, in addition to the other proposed changes, function to strengthen a dominant white Australia while marginalising those outside it.

Conservative multicultural policy, marginalisation and inequality

The findings suggest that TLCG's conservative multicultural policy is formed on the basis of an ethnic nationalism, underpinned by a colonial identity, and the promotion of an Islam threat narrative. This raises concerns for how this conservative policy can create inequalities between natural-born and naturalising citizens, marginalising those that sit outside the dominant white Australian identity. This is evident in proposed changes of increasing the standard of English, a longer wait time before applying for citizenship, and testing integration into community. The TLCG support increasing the standard of English required from basic to competent. While the measurement of competence is not stated, government discussions have suggested the requirement will be level six standard of the International English Language Testing System (ABC, 2017; Adoniou, 2017; Australian Multicultural Council (AMC), 2017). This has been critiqued as disadvantaging vulnerable migrant and refugee groups who in addition to adjusting to a new culture and the stressors associated with pre and post migration, may have limited or disrupted education and lack literacy skills in their first language, presenting greater challenges in learning English (Adoniou, 2017; AMC, 2017). This shows how vulnerable migrant groups will be disadvantaged compared with lesser or

non-vulnerable migrant groups, potentially creating two-tiers of permanent residents, those with citizenship and those without. The TLCG does not detail why a 'competent' rather than 'basic' level of English is required. However, how this change could prevent vulnerable migrant and refugee groups becoming citizens fits within the cultural threat narrative detailed by Hogan and Haltinner (2015). It frames a 'basic' or below level of English as being at odds with social cohesion and promotes an ethnic nationalism through cultural homogeneity expressed through language (Pehrson & Green, 2010; Tranter & Donoghue, 2007).

There is potential for marginalisation in the proposed changes to extend the wait time for citizenship and in the need for naturalising citizens to demonstrate integration. The TLCG proposes extending the wait time before immigrants can apply for citizenship to four years. Again, the TLCG do not provide an explanation as to why a longer wait time is considered desirable. However, if citizenship and allegiance functions to reduce the threat to national security and promotes social cohesion (Vasanthakumar, 2014; Rubenstein, 2007) it seems counter intuitive to delay this process. In doing so, those who require citizenship for a passport and the attached security will now have to wait longer for this, delaying associated financial and social participation. The TLCG also propose new tests for measuring immigrant's integration into community, such as evidence of employment and membership to community organisations. While this aligns with civic nationalism through participation in public life (Pehrson & Green, 2010; Tranter & Donoghue, 2007), the expectations of public participation are far greater for naturalising than those natural-born citizens, whose civic duties are limited to acts such as paying taxes and voting in government elections (Ograd, 2014). In addition, disparity could exist between vulnerable migrants and non-vulnerable migrants in their capacity for employment and social participation. Having citizenship tied to this again contributes to two-tiers of permanent residents. Moreover, these examples illustrate a conservative, exclusionary multiculturalism, concerned not only with those positioned outside the dominant group integrating into an existing social order, but increasing the requirements in order to do this.

The act of pledging allegiance in order to become a citizen is another example of conservative multiculturalism by desiring those outside the dominant culture to integrate into the existing one (Jakubowicz, 2017). This requirement has the potential to limit the naturalising citizen's freedom of conscience. For example, some may feel uncomfortable with pledging allegiance to white Australia, contributing to its dominance and maintaining non-white Australia at the periphery. However, naturalising citizens ability to experience the rights that come with citizenship could now be tied to pledging this allegiance. For those who have experienced forced migration, citizenship offers a passport and the security and mobility attached to it (Nunn, McMichael, Gifford, & Correa-Velez, 2016). By gaining this, naturalised citizens are able to participate in financial and social activities globally, such as travel for employment and reconnect with family living abroad (Nunn, McMichael, Gifford, & Correa-Velez, 2016). Having citizenship dependent on pledging allegiance places naturalising citizens in a position to choose between freedom of conscience and the freedom of participation. In addition to not being required to align with the dominant belief system, choosing between these two freedoms is another thing natural-born citizens are not required to do. By making the pledge of allegiance a requirement for citizenship, an expectation is placed on naturalising citizens to align with the dominant social order, and potentially contributes to the inequality that derives from this.

Implications for social work

This small-scale study has identified that the TLCG present a colonial national identity, supported by the promotion of an Islamic threat narrative. This paper has discussed how these two factors contribute to a conservative multicultural policy, enabling those living in Australia who fall outside the dominant white image to be marginalised. This section will discuss how these finding contribute to advancing social work research by adhering to the AASW *Code of ethics* (2010) in two ways, before going on to outline implications for social work practice.

Firstly, this study has adhered to the principles of human rights and social justice by applying a critical human rights-based approach (Nipperess, 2016). Human rights are the recognition of the inherent value of each person, regardless of any difference, and are based on the principles of dignity, equality, and mutual respect (Australian Human Rights Commission, n.d.). They are about fair treatment and being able to make genuine choices in everyday life (Australian Human Rights Commission, n.d.). Applying a critical human rights-based approach analyses how power contributes to the oppression of vulnerable groups and interrogates dominant assumptions about human rights (Nipperess, 2016). This study has applied this by interrogating dominant assumptions through a post-colonial theoretical framework, showing Australia has dominant colonial foundations, found in, for examples, its stated values. This is assumed rightly so by the TLCG, who have incorrectly generalised these as 'values' to all Australians. This study has shown the conservative concept of multiculturalism aligns with Anglo assimilation, failing to recognize those outside this description.

Secondly, this research advocates for change in structures that preserve injustice. Briskman (2010) urges social work research to investigate the issues facing the nation state, and to contribute to structural change by substantiating how harmful the status quo is to vulnerable population groups. Social work has a responsibility to engage in transformative change, uphold human rights, and to challenge policies that violate these (AASW, 2010). In order to do this, social work needs to delve into ideological devices that allow policies that deny human rights and social justice to remain (Briskman & Latham, 2017). One such issue is the increase in nationalist ideology. Social work promotes diversity, progressive multiculturalism, and acceptance. However, nationalism contradicts these through its dominant meaning of identity and belonging (Briskman, 2010). This study has contributed to this by drawing attention to how the concept and application of a colonial identity by the TLCG has worked to diminish multiculturalism, diversity and inclusion.

The findings from this study also provide a number of considerations for social work practice and for further research.

Firstly, this study presents cause for deliberation on the way government policies impact on social work practice. Policy frameworks provide the context that social work practice operates within (Clifford, 2011). Anti-oppressive practice theory emphasizes how policy and practice shape each other (Baines, Tseris & Waugh, 2017), with the social work role often situated as mediator between the macro policy environment and the social, cultural, and economic participation of individuals (Clifford, 2011). This study as an example of this; social workers employed in organisations that are dependent on federal government funding may consider how this strategic plan for multiculturalism and citizenship inform the type and focus of service provision. Further research in this area could investigate the ways in which government positions, such as the ones presented in this article, influence or maintain the boundaries in which social workers are required to practice.

Secondly, social work practitioners are tasked with disrupting whiteness within their own practice, within a profession that has its foundations in the Anglosphere (Dittfeld, 2020; Tascón & Gatwiri, 2020). This is an expanding area of scholarship (see, for example, Bennett & Green, 2019; Dittfeld, 2020; Nylund, 2006; Tascón & Gatwiri, 2020; Tascón & Ife, 2019). This study contributes to this discussion by providing learnings for reflexive and culturally humble practice. Reflexive practice is core to practicing anti-oppressive social work, reflecting equally on the social position and power held by the practitioner, their workplace, and those they work with (Baines, 2017). Similarly, culturally humble practice has a particular focus on the self and other, where practitioners recognize their own prejudice and misrepresentations (Denso, 2018). Briskman (2018) argues practitioners deny that social work operates within colonial structures and implicitly believe Australia functions within a post-colonial era. The findings from this study may contribute towards changing this, providing consideration for practitioners, such as ways in which policies and practices within organisations reinforce colonial structures and/ or 'other' particular population groups or knowledge forms.

Thirdly, in addition to disrupting whiteness within their own practice, social workers are also tasked with advocating for de-centering whiteness within mainstream organisations, where funding providers are by and large from the dominant colonial mindset. Dan Laws (2017) provides an example of this, with Aboriginal agencies such as Ngwala Willumbong Specialist Homelessness Service not having a direct allocation of housing brokerage for clients. Laws (2017) argues Aboriginal service users are dependent on both a mainstream service and the relationship between the mainstream and Aboriginal service. This demonstrates how a mainstream service has power over the Aboriginal service user and control of the work the Aboriginal service can do with their people. Laws (2017) argues that while there is justification in streamlining funding resources, it should be noted this has predominately been inclusive of mainstream services only. Reflexive and culturally humble practice provide scope for anti-oppressive social workers to reflect on possessions of power such as these, and to then challenge this and other dominant assumptions held within an organization, and advocate for change. Fisher-Borne et al. (2015) provide a set of questions that can be used for reflexive institutional accountability (for example, *"Does our staff reflect the communities we serve?" p*. 176), and when addressing power imbalances (for example, *"How do we actively address inequalities both internally and externally?"* p. 176). However, less known is how this translates for practitioner who hold limited institutional power. Future research that explores how social work practitioners are disrupting structural whiteness within mainstream services could further this discussion.

Fourthly, there are implications for social work practice working with immigrant and diverse cultural groups. Social work has a responsibility to uphold culturally competent, safe and sensitive practice (AASW, 2010), and to challenge policies and practices that are oppressive (Baines, Tseris & Waugh, 2017). This research has provided a greater understanding of the barriers immigrant groups face and how this contributes towards experiences of exclusion, inequality and discrimination, with a particular focus on how Muslim people are discriminated against at a macro level. This allows practitioners to be aware of, and to challenge how the individual may internalise these dominant assumptions. Such findings can be considered when working with immigrant population groups who may be applying for citizenship. For example, the barriers they may face in obtaining the required level of English and community integration, and how this fuels inequality between them and natural-born citizens. Further, there is the potential moral dilemmas faced in pledging allegiance to values

that may not be theirs. Similarly, when working with Muslim clients, practitioners may deliberate on how Muslim people are portrayed at a macro level as threatening and incompatible to Australia. Social workers supporting immigrant and culturally diverse groups to navigate systems and environments that hold prejudice and oppressive assumptions have a responsibility to challenge this within their practice. In line with culturally humble practice, it should not be assumed that this is a homogenous experience. Rather, when working with immigrant and culturally diverse groups a social worker should listen to if and how the individual perceives and experiences the consequences of such policy, holding what Tascón and Gatwiri (2020) describe as a position of the cultural non-expert, and engaging in a deep listening and deep learning.

Finally, social workers have a central role in policy analysis and advocating for structural reform (Bliss & Ginn, 2019; Mendes, 2007; Mendes et al., 2015). Although social workers and social work peak bodies, such as the AASW, are involved in advocacy at a national level, much of the social work literature in this area has been concentrated within the individual or micro level (Bliss & Ginn, 2019; Mendes et al., 2015). In comparison, there is scant social work literature that has focused on the macro or national level (exceptions include, for example, Briskman, 2019; Mendes et al., 2019; Zufferey, 2014) (Bliss & Ginn, 2019; Mendes et al., 2015). This study contributes to this gap, and in doing so provides policy analysis to support social work advocacy in the field of multiculturalism and citizenship.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that whiteness is central to Australia's national identity. This identity has been constructed on two ways; firstly, through the positive promotion of a colonial national imagery, its systems, structures and values, and secondly, through the negative promotion of non-white Australia, in particular the Muslim 'other'. These factors have contributed to the continuation of a conservative version of multiculturalism, that functions to contain difference rather than fostering it. The paper has discussed the potential negative impacts this has on Australians that fall outside the national imagine, and the inequalities these harbour between natural born and naturalising citizens, and between differing migrant groups. This article concludes by suggesting without de-centring whiteness from the national image, threat narratives and their associated conservative and exclusionary policies are likely to continue. Social work has an important role to play in challenging and advocating for ideological and structural change to support this de-centring. One possible way is through further research that explores how the colonial core manifests within other realms of government and policy, as well as within the social work profession.

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