What role for migration, social cohesion and multiculturalism in Australia's post-COVID social recovery?

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Introduction:

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to cause unprecedented disruption and devastation to individuals, societies and the international community at large. For almost two years, the world has been impacted in seismic ways across all domains of life. Alongside health issues, the social, cultural, political and economic effects of the corona-virus have deeply disrupted taken-for- granted modes of living, learning and working. As the impacts of the pandemic continue to unravel in Australia but also globally, the COVID-19 crisis with its impact on social connections and cross- border mobility seems to be changing in more systematic ways the way our social lives are structured and lived. The world that will emerge on the other side of this pandemic is most likely going to be different not only in terms of the manifestations and intensities of our mobility, connections, and interdependencies, but also in relation to how we envisage individual and collective priorities and modes of governance for our lives and or societies.

One of the key outcomes of this pandemic is that in addition to its devastating health impacts, it has also exposed and exacerbated entrenched social inequalities within and across nations. While there are society-wide impacts from the disease, its ramifications are not equally felt. According to Human Rights Watch (2020), those most negatively impacted by the pandemic:

'tend to be marginalized and excluded; depend heavily on the informal economy for earnings; occupy areas prone to shocks; have inadequate access to social services; lack social protection; are denied access to such services on the basis of age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, migrant status or other forms of discrimination; have low levelsof political influence and lack voice and representation; have low incomes and limited opportunities to cope or adapt; and have limited or no access to technologies. And often these vulnerabilities intersect. People living in war-torn societies, where often health systems have collapsed, are particularly vulnerable'.

It is for this reason that both disadvantaged communities and minority groups including those from culturally and linguistically different (CALD) backgrounds have often been the first to feel the impact of crises. In Australia, migrant communities as well as Indigenous Australians are among those disproportionately experiencing the adverse impacts of the pandemic both in relation to public health programs and services provisions, as well as increased social exclusion and discrimination These negative experiences challenge the broad human rights and social justice agenda in more general terms, but also in more specific terms raise important questions about multiculturalism, migration and mobility in post-pandemic Australia that this paper explores.

Impact of the pandemic on migration and multiculturalism in Australia

Australia has long been recognized as a 'successful', super diverse, highly mobile countryshaped by immigration, emigration, and internal mobility for almost of its history (Hugo 2012). Recent crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, crippling droughts, climate change including severe storms of increasing intensity and mega-bushfires, coming at a time of unprecedented geo-strategic shifts (including the challenge of dealing with a rising China), have highlighted Australia's vulnerability to

disrupted flows of mobility, not only for economic stability and social cohesion, but also the maintenance of global supply chains, infrastructure, public health, and regional peacekeeping. The consequences of disrupted mobility have been heightened even further in the context of a confluence of global challenges including climate change, demographic shifts, and tectonic social transformations via new technologies. While the deleterious effects of global crises, such as pandemics and climate change, have been felt in all corners of the globe, Australia's position as a vast continent, largely arid, and unevenly and sparsely populated, located on the edge of Asia, presents particular challenges and opportunities.

Alongside these intersecting global processes, particular challenges pertaining to social cohesion, diversity management, community resilience, digital inclusion and the exacerbation of inequalities have come to the fore during the current pandemic and impacted Australia's multicultural agenda. This is because, at its core, multiculturalism reflects a commitment to normative prerogatives; most notably recognition of collective cultural claims and social justice in relation to political incorporation. It is in relation to these two critical normative orientations that the multicultural agenda in Australia is being most affected. This is clearly illustrated by the increased racial vilification of certain communities, in particular Asia Australians, as well as concerns raised by other CALD communities that government responses to the pandemic are often failing to adequately engage with them or provide culturally and linguistically appropriate messaging for public health directives. Below, I discuss how the broad multicultural agenda has been impacted during the pandemic at the cultural, social, and political levels in Australia.

The cultural impact of the pandemic:

In regard to intercultural relations and diversity governance, as many scholars have noted, there has been an increase in racism and xenophobia in the ongoing global responses to the pandemic, including in Australia (Elias, Mansouri and Paradies 2021; Cheng & Conca-Cheng 2020; Bright 2020). Indeed, it has even been suggested that COVID-19 is causing certain societies and communities to suffer two pandemics (Bright 2020): a health pandemic and a socio-cultural one. Many scholars have noted that the pandemic is occurring in a context of already increasing exclusionary nationalism, leading to the intensification of racism towards minority groups (Bieber 2020; Cheng & Conca-Cheng 2020; Elias, Mansouri and Paradies 2021).

The initial identification of the virus in Wuhan, China is causing Chinese and other Asian communities in Australia to be the target of racial vilification and abuse (Sun 2021; Mansouri 2020; Bieber 2020; Elias, Mansouri and Paradies 2021; Human Rights Watch 2020). Asian Australians, including Chinese Australians and new Chinese migrants, have reported a significant rise in racism during the early months of the pandemic. More than 400 racist attacks were reported between April and June 2020 alone with many detailing how they were accused of having 'brought the virus over here' (SMH 2020; Asian Australian Alliance 2020). Many other Chinese Australians have also reported increasing hostility since the virus outbreak, such as homes being vandalised with racial slurs (Young, 2020; Fang & Yang, 2020). Racialized public discourse, even in an acute crises, does not happen in a vacuum. Many scholars have discussed how anti-Chinese racism in Australia has been driven and shaped by biased media coverage (Sun 2021; All Together Now 2020; Asian Australian Alliance 2020). This is not only a problem of fringe media outlets or social media platforms, but crosses over to even 'credible' media organisations, such as the ABC that produced high levels of unfavourable reporting about China in relation to COVID-19 and played down or left out favourable reporting (Sun 2021). In

the meantime, the tabloid press and shock-jock radio hosts are maintaining a constant thread of fear-mongering 'about the "yellow peril," anxiety about "reds under the bed," and an almost orientalist depiction of the Chinese as an alien and repugnantpeople who eat bats' (Sun 2021: 36). Such racist discourses are often transmitted to the online world as people turn to social media platforms for information amidst isolation, quarantine and lockdowns (Elias, Mansouri and Paradies 2021).

As these spikes in racist attacks show, the multicultural agenda in Australia is one of the casualties of the pandemic (Duckett 2020; Napier-Raman 2020). So far, the first and second waves of the virus elicited different patterns of racism and xenophobia against ethno-cultural minorities. The first wave caused the Chinese Australian community (and other communities who appear Chinese/Asian) to be targeted; the second wave vilified members of other CALD communities, especially residents of suburbs with high proportions of migrant communities in metropolitan Melbourne (Duckett 2020). Indeed, certain communities have been singled out in the fight to contain the outbreak. The Chief Health Officer Professor Brett Sutton, for instance, singled out members of the Afghan community as spreaders of the virus in Melbourne's south-eastern suburbs during Victoria's second lockdown (Mohabbat 2020; Michie 2020). The Afghan Australian Community has expressed "concerns and disappointment", stating that government and health authorities made the accusation without evidence, thus "grossly unfair" to place blame on them (Mohabbat 2020).

Entrenched forms of oppression are often inherently intersectional; in the second wave of the pandemic classism has been entangled with racism. Unlike the first wave, the second wave of the pandemic in Melbourne spotlighted relatively low-income suburbs, often home to recently arrived migrant populations and with high density living conditions (Duckett 2020; Stobart & Duckett 2021). The Victorian government was particularly harsh in managing the virus spread in social housing. During the early phase of the second wave, cases linked to public housing towers resulted in eleven towers – home to thousands of people – being put into strict lockdown by the government. These towers, some 20 to 30 stories high, house almost exclusively migrant communities, and are often over-crowded. Police arrived within hours of the announcement to enforce the lockdown with almost no warning. Residents could not leave their accommodation for five days – not even to go food shopping. An independent ombudsman inquiry found that the lockdown 'did not appear justified and reasonable in the circumstances, nor compatible with the right to humane treatment when deprived of liberty' (Stobart & Duckett 2021). As Mansouri noted, the pandemic has 'generated new forms of ethno-cultural racism, intensified inequalities, and further exposed systemic structural discrimination' (2020: 2).

The spatial politics of the COVID-19 pandemic extends to the gap between those who can work from their homes and those who cannot (Murji & Picker 2020: 9). As a result, those at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum, particularly frontline workers, low-income earners and those already in precarious working conditions have been disproportionately impacted (Duckett 2020; Napier-Raman 2020). Such workers who were frequently deemed expendable pre-pandemic, are now understood as "essential" and more at risk of contracting the virus. This includes low-wage workers and those engaged in precarious work, such as meat processing workers, aged care and hospitality workers, many of which have CALD backgrounds (Bucci, 2020; Boseley, 2020).

The social impact of the pandemic:

The core ethical objective a robust multicultural agenda must commit to is a distributive justice agenda that ensures equitable access to resources to everyone regardless of individual characteristics (Kymlicka 2016). In the context of the pandemic, issues of access to, and equity of, social and health service provisions are being experienced unevenly. CALD communities, especially those more vulnerable groups including temporary migrants and women, are more deeply affected. Reports from the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA 2020) and the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV 2020) highlight some of the pre-existing conditions that reveal a less-than-cohesive multicultural society than the Australian Government regularly promotes in their political rhetoric.

In a survey conducted by the ECCV (see graph below) that sought responses from multicultural organisations in relation to areas of concern, findings show that CALD communities have been most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic across almost all areas of their everyday lives. But the top three reported areas of concern were 'unemployment, financial wellbeing and social isolation', with mental health coming in as a fourth priority (ECC V, 2020: 5).

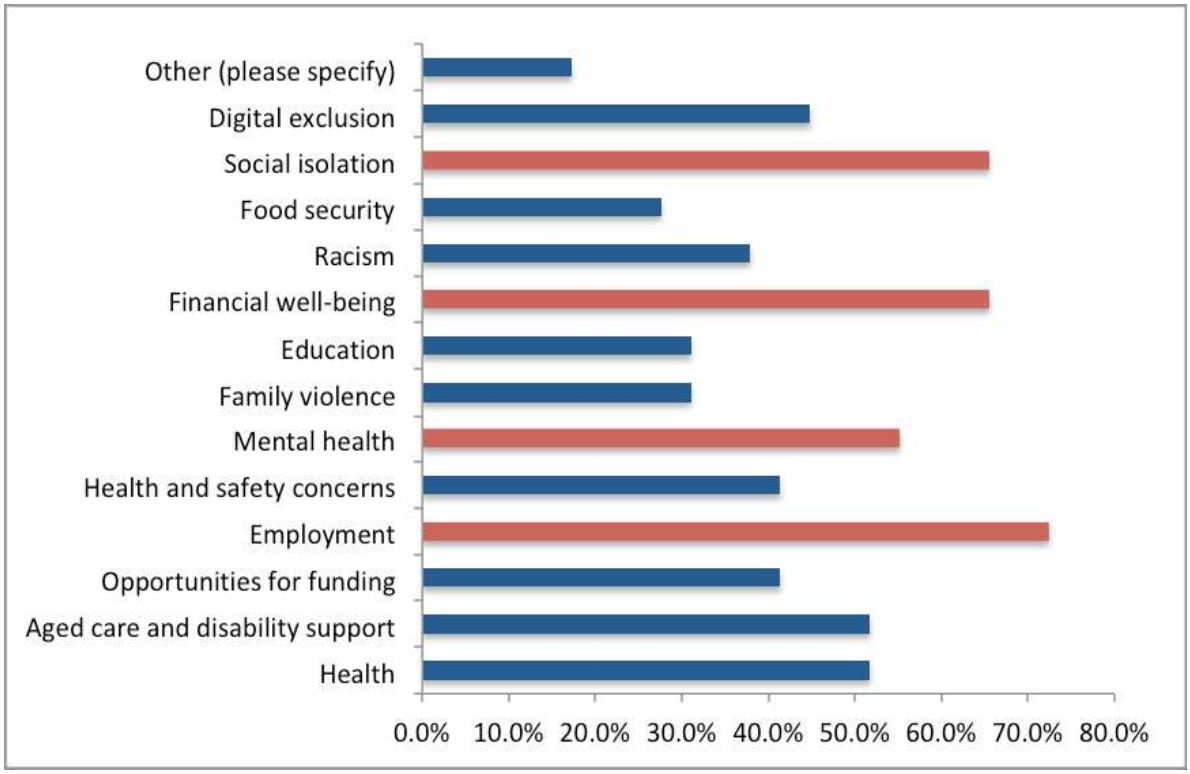


Figure 1: Community concerns during and post pandemic (reported in ECCV 2020:5)

Concerns were also raised about CALD communities' access to certain services and health information during the pandemic .This was reflected in survey respondents' concerns about 'access to information regarding COVID-19 isolation, loss of income, access to Centrelink and myGov, immigration restrictions, funding for cultural and social activities, and the risk of increasing socioeconomic disparities' (ECCV 2020: 5). These intersecting areas of concern affecting CALD communities are intertwined and cannot be considered in isolation.

Temporary migrants

Perhaps one of the weaknesses in so-called liberal, democratic societies is the ways in which certain rights and protections are bestowed upon individuals on the basis of their migration status. In other words, care, solidarity and support are directed towards those deemed to belong formally to the political community via citizenship, while those not formally incorporated, for example asylum seekers, refugees, international students and seasonal workers, are often denied basic rights and protections. In the context of this pandemic, temporary migrants from CALD communities were especially affected by the social and economic devastation wrecked by COVID-19 as they tend to be precariously employed, are more vulnerable to exploitative work practices, and are usually the first to experience job loss in such crises (Berg and Farbenblum, 2020: 6). Temporary visa status excludes people from government benefits such as JobKeeper and JobSeeker even while other comparative countries, such as the UK and Canada, have supported their temporary migrants more during the pandemic (Berg and Farbenblum, 2020: 6).

Nationality	"Harassment/ verbal abuse"	"People avoided or stared at me because of my appearance"	Proportion who experienced at least one of these	Number of respondents who answered question
China	35%	34%	52%	963
Malaysia	25%	41%	52%	161
South Korea	12%	38%	45%	98
Taiwan	26%	33%	45%	78
Vietnam	23%	39%	44%	186
Indonesia	24%	35%	42%	184
Hong Kong (S.A.R.)	21%	35%	41%	95
Nepal	22%	22%	32%	328
Philippines	16%	25%	32%	186
India	17%	19%	27%	855
Bangladesh	16%	20%	27%	81
Pakistan	17%	17%	24%	79
Colombia	19%	8%	22%	243
Sri Lanka	14%	18%	21%	84
Brazil	17%	8%	21%	85

Figure 2: Experiences of overt/covert racism and verbal abuse (table reported in Berg and Farbenblum 2020: 44)

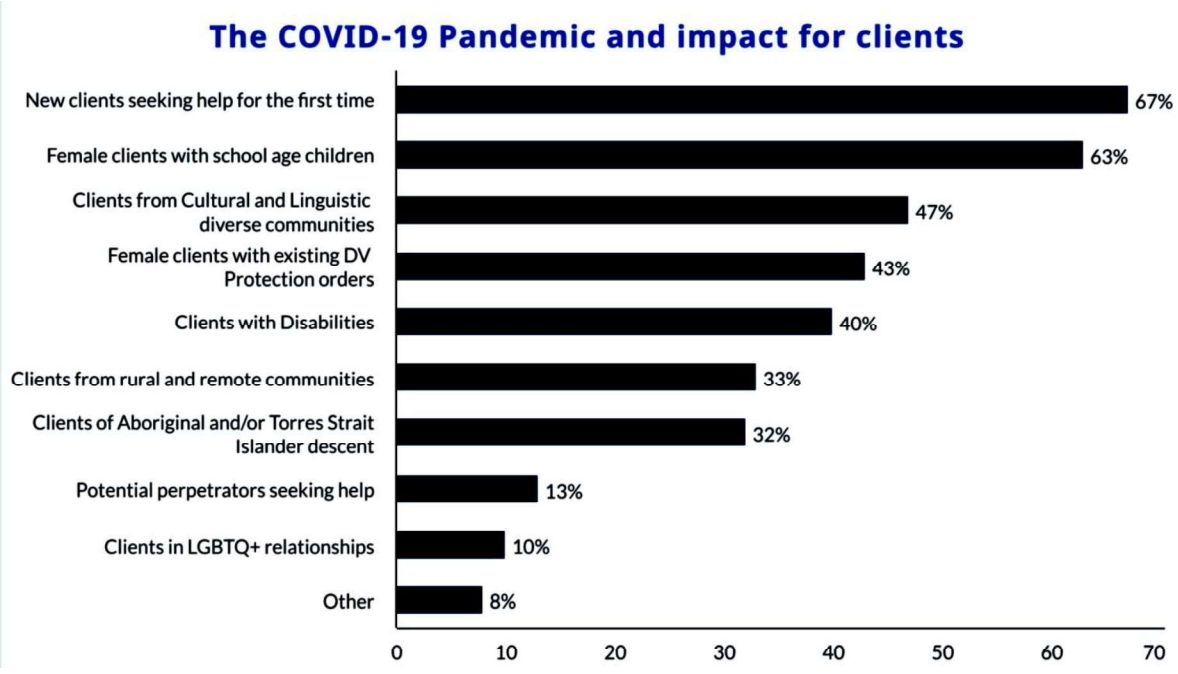
Temporary visa status may further exclude individuals from receiving any form of support from social service providers, including those aiming to alleviate the adverse impacts of the pandemic responses in particular the lack of employment opportunities because of extended lockdowns. The exclusion of temporary migrants from accessing social support services such as the JobKeeper program, have increased concerns that the policy would create structural issues; that 'higher levels of

unemployment, more job seekers on the market, and more employers struggling to maintain their workforces will create even greater incentives for exploitation to be risked' (Houghton 2020: 3). For many temporary migrants, the loss of employment disrupts their pathways to a more secure belonging in Australia, as their applications are usually tied to their permanent residency and progression towards citizenship application. These ''tied' visas' require workers to be dependent on their employers' for the sponsorship of their visas (Houghton 2020: 2). CALD communities already struggle to find employment and face additional barriers compared to white Australians. These can include a limited of competency in the English language; a lack of familiarity with Australian workplace culture and socialisation; being unfamiliar with 'Australian ways' of writing CVs and filling out forms; not having local networks and connections; and the inability to translate their former work experiences into the Australian context (FECCA 2020: 12). A survey (seetable below, Berg and Farbenblum 2020: 44) conducted during the pandemic revealed that racism and discrimination persist for temporary migrants of CALD backgrounds, particularly for those of Asian descent.

As shown in Figure 2, shows both overt and covert forms of racism were experienced by respondents, with the highest levels of discrimination reported by those of Chinese background. Nearly a quarter (23%) of temporary migrants surveyed reported experiences of verbal abuse, and this figure increased if they come from a Chinese and/or East Asian background (52% of Chinese and East Asian respondents reported experiences of racism) (Berg and Farbenblum 2020: 8).

CALD women

If the diversity agenda is framed as an inherently intersectional one, then the lived experiences of CALD women illustrate the devastating ways race, gender and socio-economic status compound to entrench oppression, disempowerment and discrimination. As reported in the literature, this situation is exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic as CALD women already 'have poorer health outcomes than the general population and they experience significant inequities in access to health services' (Multicultural Centre for Women's Health 2021: 11). The main areas of concern for CALD women are 'sexual and reproductive health, mental health and occupational health and safety'; where the latter two present new concerns during the pandemic due to loss of employment and restriction of mobility during lockdowns (Multicultural Centre for Women's Health 2021: 11). Of



particular concern for CALD women during the pandemic were issues of domestic violence. Findings from a survey (see graph below) based on the responses from 362 participants who work in the domestic violence sector, found that 67% of these providers have seen 'new clients seeking help for the first time' and 47% of them reported that their 'clients [come] from cultural and linguistic diverse communities' (Carrington et al. 2020: 7).

Figure 3. Impacts of pandemic on clients reported in Carrington et al. (2020:07)

More critically, 313 of these providers (86.46%) reported having to cope with the 'increased complexity of their clients' needs' (Carrington et al. 2020: 17). One of the challenges in managing domestic violence issues for clients during the pandemic is restrictions placed on formal support services. Not only limited in their access to services, domestic violence victim-survivors find themselves confined at home with their perpetrators, which further increases the level of riskthey face (Carrington et al. 2020: 20). Moreover, there is a gap in the availability of culturally- appropriate services for women and children in domestic violence situations (FECCA 2020: 9). Where these services are provided, they are few in numbers and may not be easily accessible.

The political impact of the pandemic:

One of the most salient impacts of this pandemic is the level of disruptions it is creating for mobility and freedom of movement more generally (Greene 2020). These disruptions are playing out both locallyby constraining forms of social connectedness, as well as nationally in Australia with state border closures, and also transnationally with border closures and increased border securitization. Mobility and border issues have emerged in politically racialized ways during the pandemic. While Australian citizens returning home from countries experiencing large outbreaks such as the U.S., the UK. or Europe were not barred from entry, Australian citizens and permanent residents in India were singled out and banned from entering Australia – threatened with five years imprisonment - prompting criticisms of the policy as "racist" (Time 2021; Khorana 2021; Stobart & Duckett 2021).

But if there was a specific country where the resurging politics of border control was at its zenith, then surely this country is China. Growing tensions between Australia and China are escalating even further during the pandemic with circulating Australian discourses, politically and in media, fuelling speculation that China not only produced the virus, but also handled the COVID-19 pandemic poorly. Such discourses and their related public perceptions are heightening negative sentiments towards Chinese Australian communities and driving incessant debates on how to manage the future mobilities of Chinese visitors and students (Ong 2021; Hull 2020). Recent surveys on Australians' opinions of China similarly indicated increasing negative sentiment towards Chinese nationals. The 2020 Scanlon Foundation (Markus 2020) survey tested attitudes towards ten specified national groups and found that negative responses towards Chinese people had risen enormously (47% - up from 13% in 2013) and was lower only than those toward Iraqi(49%) and Sudanese (49%) people. Similarly, the results of the Lowy Institute Poll 2021 presented another record low for Australians' views of China; even views of China's economic growth — historically a positive for Australians — have now shifted into negative territory. Most Australians (63%) now see China as 'more of a security threat to Australia'. Furthermore, a 2021 poll by the Australia-China Relations Institute and the Centre for Business Intelligence & Data Analytics at the University of Technology Sydney (Collinson and Burke 2021) came to similar conclusions. The poll showed that Australians' views on China have generally become more pessimistic, with many Australians (62 percent) saying that their view 'has become more negative following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic'. The poll also highlighted how

negative views of China are shaping perspectives of Chinese Australians. Approximately 63% of Australians said that '[p]olitical tensions in the Australia-China relationship are negatively impacting Australians of Chinese origin'. 39% of Australians say they believe that 'Australians of Chinese origin can be mobilised by the Chinese government to undermine Australia's interests and social cohesion'. Thirty percent of Australians disagree with this statement, with 31 percent undecided. All this highlights how the politics of ethicised nationalism can imbricate with bio-politics in a way that deepens racialisation of 'othered' groups who become a threat to national security and social cohesion in the public imagination.

International students

Australia's approach towards international students during COVID-19 exemplified a "parochial, neoliberal approach exclusively in line with national interest" (Qi and Ma 2021: 107). The government was unapologetic about its harsh approach, which including telling international students who could support themselves to "make your way home"; requiring them to quarantine in third countries before any possible entry to Australia; and excluding those still in the country from JobKeeper and JobSeeker subsidy. These exclusions of international students have undermined Australia's reputation as a global and regional leader (Qi and Ma 2021). If not for some compensatory measures taken by state and local governments, university support, and general good will, the consequences for international students would be worse still.

A survey of over 6,100 temporary visa holders (Berg and Farbenblum2020) found that hundreds of international student respondents tied a sense of long-lasting distress, anger and dehumanization to the Prime Minister's instruction to "make your way home". The determination to exclude temporary migrants, including international students, from government support packages also contributed to feelings of abandonment, humiliation, and worthlessness. The survey found 59% of respondents indicating that, as a result of their experiences during COVID-19, they were less likely or much less likely to recommend Australia as a place to study or have a working holiday. Particularly so for Chinese students (of whom 76% were now less likely to recommend Australia for study) and Nepalese students (69% were less likely to recommend Australia).

Many Chinese international students were also confused and disappointed by the first travel policy issued by the Australia Federal Government on 1 February 2020 regarding COVID-19 control (Qi and Ma 2021). This policy differentiated Chinese international students from other international students. In early February, the Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) released guidelines through its 'Novel Coronavirus FAQ: Advice for International Students', which explicitly required Chinese international students wishing to return to Australian universities to observe a 14-day quarantine period in a third country, so as to avoid their visas being cancelled: "If you are an international student and travelled to mainland China, you will not be able to enter Australia until 14 days has passed since you left mainland China" (Version 1, DESE 2020: 7). This travel policy misled and confused many Chinese international students (Qi and Ma 2021). However, despite the ban on direct entry from China, 47,000 Chinese citizens entered Australia from China, detouring via Malaysia, Thailand, and Cambodia (Choudhury 2020; Haugen & Lehmann 2020). This travel policy has led to criticisms that Australia is unconscionable: externalizing the risk of infection while profiting from international student mobility (Choudhury 2020; Haugen & Lehmann 2020). While a pilot program to allow some international students to return to Australia was initially going to exclude Chinese nationals due to rules surrounding vaccination status (Ong 2021), the recent

recognition of Sinovac by Australia's Therapeutic Goods Administration Australian means that more than 80,000 Chinese international students are set to be allowed back into Australia when international borders reopen (Bagshaw and Massola 2021).

The data gap around CALD communities during the pandemic:

The pandemic has revealed a significant data collection gap on the experiences of ethnic and religious minoritised groups, which poses a challenge for understanding how different communities respond to public health interventions.

A key gap in the public health response to the pandemic has been the lack of data on CALD communities captured by key government authorities beyond language spoken at home and country of birth (Jakubowicz 2020). The diversity of ethnicity and cultural backgrounds cannot be expressed simply with these two variables, especially since country of birth does not fully reflect ethnicity and cultural heritage, particularly for diaspora communities and refugees who traverse different countries before their final settlement (FECCA 2020: 14). This lack of data impedes effective health communications especially in such times of crisis, where health and government authorities are not able to get accurate, factual (and evolving messages) out to relevant communities faster than, in this case, the spread of the COVID-19 virus. This gap is an inheritor of a long history of inadequate collection of data concerning ethnicity in Australia and has come under more intense scrutiny of late (FECCA 2020), as its impact on health communications is amplified through the current pandemic and will continue to be as communication about the vaccine are rolled out.

The pandemic has revealed that the umbrella term 'CALD' does not fully capture or express the super-diversity of the communities that it is meant to encapsulate, and, consequently, it may even inadvertently make invisible those who are especially prone to social and economic risks. Some of this exclusion and invisibility can manifest in the form of 'individuals with low levels of English, socially isolated migrant seniors, temporary visa holders, those with lower levels of income or in casual work, residents in public housing and high density households, as well as groups experiencing racism' (ECCV 2020: 8). The inability to identify and reach out to CALD communities affected by the pandemic highlights the need for attending to both the software (cross-cultural relations, inter-personal attitudes etc…) and the hardware (institutions and policies) of the diversity agenda (Kymlicka 2017).

New drivers of migration and their implications for Australia's multicultural social fabric

Australia is historically a land of migration and mobility that saw early human migration to the continent commence some 80,000 years ago when the ancestors of the Aboriginal people arrived in the continent via nearby islands in the South East Asia maritime region. More contemporary European settlement started to take place in the early 17th century and as a settler-colonial society, Australia introduced and maintained the controversial migration restriction act (White Australia policy) in 1901 that sought to preserve the European racial composition of the newly federated nation. And this racially exclusionary policy remained active until the early 1970s when policy-makers rejected the race-based imperial principles of the White Australia policy and instituted a more progressive multicultural framework. This important shift drove nation-building andshaped macro-economic policy by attracting skills and resources from a wider range of countries, particularly

within Australia's Asia-Pacific neighbourhood then gradually from other more distant regions (Galbally 1978; Fitzgerald 1988).

But despite the adoption of multiculturalism in the early 1970s, and though patterns of migration began to diversify geographically, overall Australian migration policies remained focussed on attracting highly skilled labour whilst retaining a critical family reunion component and a small humanitarian intake. However, successive reviews of immigration policies have often missed major structural and societal implications of shifts in migration and mobility trends. Addressing these changes and the resulting challenges are crucial for the country's future in order to bolster system integrity and overall sustainability.

As the Australian Treasury noted recently, a recalibrated approach to migration policies will be crucial to Australia's future prosperity and will play a central role in supporting the recovery of the Australian economy from COVID-19 and will help offset the long-term structural problem of an aging population (Treasury 2021; Gamlen 2020). The pandemic has accentuated this demographic challenge with the country experiencing an almost total halt to migration intake programs whilst an unprecedented 500,000 migrant shave left the country during the 2020-21 period (ABC, 2021). This is in sharp contrast to pre-pandemic migration levels where the net migration intake was hovering around the 200,000 (accounting for both people moving in andout of Australia).

These are significant challenges that have been exacerbated by the pandemic, though the structural cracks have developing over at least the last two decades when patterns of migrations globally started to shift to mirror new geo-political shifts, diversification of destination options, and significant advances in information technologies. These changes have been amplified by the pandemic and in particular the manner within which the Australian government approached border closures and strict lockdowns that had severe negative impacts on Australian families with transnational links, international students, temporary workers and other short term visitors. This is at a time where other émigré societies have managed to maintain reasonably flexible and open borders that ensured continuity of movement in and out of jurisdictions in ways that support migration, international education and family connections. And there is no doubt that the way the government manages a post pandemic approach to migration will have critical implications for Australia's population, economy and society more broadly.

Conclusion:

Despite its strategic value to the country, migration has unintended consequences that need to be anticipated and managed. These consequences include for example the more salient transnational ties Australians have today with almost half of all Australians being born either overseas or to a migrant parent (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016). Furthermore, migration has perhaps had its most pronounced impact of Indigenous peoples who firstly have experienced dispossession during European colonial settlement then subsequently have never been consulted about migration policies. And in recent opposition to migration has seen almost 20% of Australians indicating that the country receives too many immigrants (Markus 2020). Such negative attitudes are linked to economic f=fluctuations in particular rates of unemployment and underemployment often leading directly to spikes in racism (Elias, Mansouri and Paradies 2021; Dunn et al 2014).

The COVID-19 pandemic has at once exposed and exacerbated entrenched inequalities within and across societies. As the world continues to come to grips with the new pandemic realities and its many associated challenges, the role of inclusive pro-diversity policies, such as multiculturalism,

become even more needed now than ever before as they offer both the ethical foundations (software) as well as the institutional tools (hardware) required to engage in inclusive, participatory, and respectful deliberations about the post COVID-19 agenda.

There is no doubt that the way governments, industry and communities respond to COVID-19 will have serious, long-term implications for countries such as Australia, as well as globally. The emerging post COVID-19 world will be shaped by new dynamics and complex realities immersed in virtual inter-connectivity and driven by cross-sectoral engagements. To this end, the multicultural ethos of support for cultural diversity and socio-political incorporation can play a significant role in developing a new socio-cultural compact that will contribute to shaping the way we live, work, connect and engage across national, ethnic and cross-cultural lines.

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