

The Jewel In the Crown

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Australia is a sovereign state with a unique national character that it is entitled to preserve, not just because it is ours, but because it is good. The Australian character, rooted in a profound respect for individuals and their freedoms and duties, is a particular expression of the English-speaking variant of Western Civilisation and its values, which are responsible for unparalleled human flourishing and excellence. In Australia, these values are institutionalised in the basic facts of our shared social life, like our dominant culture, laws, way of life, social norms, and rights. We should aim to preserve our Australian character for two reasons: first, so that future generations can be provided the same freedoms and opportunities that earlier generations of Australians have been fortunate enough to enjoy; second, because the survival of the Australian character is pivotal to the cause of human advancement.

In recent decades, the civilisation of which our country is a part has developed an acute crisis of confidence. Since the end of World War Two, the nations of the West, under sustained hostility



from the opinion making class (including academics, policymakers, politicians, and journalists), have come to doubt their own characters and right to self-preservation. Australia has not been exempt from this critique, and the intellectual leadership of our country has often gone out of its way to promote rhetoric and policies which, if taken to their logical fulfilment, would result in the gradual erosion of Australia's unique identity, heritage, and way of life.

Most Australians would not like to see this happen – myself included. We must defend Australia's right to national self-preservation against this critique and maintain what it is and what it means to be Australian.

## **THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN OF WESTERN CIVILISATION**

To begin to understand why Australia's unique national character ought to be preserved, it is necessary to place Australia in its proper civilisational context. Australia belongs to the wider family of the English-speaking Western world. The Anglosphere, as it is known, is made up of Britain, Ireland, Canada, the United States, New Zealand, and Australia. Although some other Commonwealth countries also list English as an official language, they are not part of the core group due to their complex histories, which often place the evolution of their identities and associated characters on their own distinct trajectories. Nations of this core group are connected by their shared heritage in the British Isles, broadly similar civic institutions, and cultural mindsets. Australia cannot be understood in isolation from the civilisational blueprint upon which its national character is based.

The Anglosphere is the jewel in the crown that is Western Civilisation. This group is, in my view, the world's pre-eminent civilisational bloc. It has a consistent track record of producing the most stable and prosperous societies. Its cultural, political, economic, industrial, technological, and military pre-eminence is unparalleled in world history. These nations have achieved this status, in part, due to the triumph of their national characters and, in part, due to serendipity. Led by the United States, this group has made incomparable contributions towards the cause of human advancement. As things stand, it continues to wield enormous influence over global affairs.

The pre-eminence of the Anglosphere began with the rise of the British Empire, which reached the peak of its dominance over global commerce and trade during the 1800s. An indelible consequence of which has been the emergence of the English language as the lingua franca of the world. Then, following its reluctant participation and victory in World War One (1914-1918) and World War Two (1939-1945), the United States emerged as the new world leader. The value of commodities in global trade began to be measured against the value of the American dollar, as established under the Bretton Woods system in 1944. The spread of English makes it easier for American pop culture, slang terms, social norms, and fashion trends to be exported to the rest of the world. And of course, the United States remains the world's foremost military superpower. At

present, it hosts 800 military bases across 70 different countries. This affords the United States unparalleled capacity to influence global affairs and advance its strategic interests through a combination of direct and indirect intervention as it sees fit. Australia's own position in the globe has been strengthened by its military alliance with the United States, enshrined in the ANZUS Treaty of 1951.

Over the course of these centuries of influence, the Anglosphere has become the world's greatest producer of science and culture. The Anglosphere is home to some of the world's leading universities, Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, MIT, Berkeley, and Stanford to name a few. Unsurprisingly, discoveries and innovations in medical science and other technical fields primarily come from the Anglosphere, as does the world's high technology. The world's largest and most easily recognisable technology brands such as Intel, Microsoft, IBM, Apple, Facebook, YouTube, Google, Wikipedia, and Twitter stand as proof of this. At the same time, most of the major sports that are played around the world originated within the Anglosphere – soccer, cricket, baseball, basketball, and tennis – and English language (particularly American) film and television is watched all over the world. This continues to make the United States the country with the largest number of recognisable celebrities outside its own borders.

This culture of innovation is also a culture of excellence. High achievers from the Anglosphere have often boldly gone where no one had gone before. New Zealander Sir Edmund Hillary became the first person to reach the highest peak in the world at Mount Everest in 1953. Americans Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin were the first persons to reach the surface of the moon in 1969. American Victor Viscovo became the first person to reach the deepest point at sea in the world by diving to the bottom of the Mariana Trench in 2019. Not all societies tend to produce such ambitious outliers.

The Anglosphere has also come to dominate political philosophy, as it has sought to explain, to itself and to others, the secrets of its success. From Thomas Hobbes and John Locke to David Hume and John Stuart Mill, the civic ideas that have emerged as the result of the English and Scottish Enlightenment have since gone on to form the basis for free, just, and prosperous societies. Examples of such ideas include concepts we too often take for granted, among them rule by popular consent, social contract, separation of powers, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, equality before the law, private property rights and individual liberty. While these ideas have not always travelled well outside the West, this only reinforces the exceptional nature of the civilisation that produced them and has made them work to the benefit of ordinary people.

The wide-ranging success of the Anglosphere countries can be credited to their shared values and institutions, inherited from the nations of the British Isles. If these contributions were limited to a single aspect of human endeavour, it would be tempting to attribute them to sheer happenstance, but it is self-evident that these contributions are exceptional, sizable, and widespread across a diverse range of fields, suggesting a deeper cause. In their seminal publication *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress* political scientists Samuel P. Huntington and Lawrence Harrison argued that a society's progress and stability were determined

by the dominant culture that shaped its values and public attitudes. The most visible proof of the validity of this hypothesis can be seen in cases where a single population demographic with identical ancestry is split up across two different territorial units and left with different national mindsets, the contrast in economic and political stability after the initial few decades ends up proving to be immense. East and West Germany, North and South Korea, and some might argue, Pakistan and India are cases in point. The Anglosphere is the inverse case, with nations sharing common institutional structures and thus common success, despite being spread across the world.

It follows that if this core group of nations, of which Australia is a part, is to continue to provide the world leadership in human advancement, their national characters, which include these institutions and the values that support them, must be preserved. If their settings were tinkered with, we would be left with societies that turn into a mishmash of conflicting values and internal power struggles based on competing identities. Through major demographic shifts due to mass migration, Anglosphere nations including Australia, run the risk of ending up resembling some of the social and political circumstances often found in the developing world. For Australians, this means preserving the distinct mindset which makes us who we are.

## THE AUSTRALIAN CHARACTER

As Australian society has gone through rapid changes in recent decades, it has become fashionable for some to claim that we do not even have a distinct culture or set of values. But not only is it clear that Australia is part of a uniquely successful civilisational bloc, it is equally clear that within this bloc and among the nations of the world, Australia has a unique character which, in light of that success, it is reasonable for us to want to preserve. Far from the claims of the critics, the Australian character is readily identifiable, and while no culture can be reduced exactly to a few bullet points, our culture can be summarised in a way that most reasonable people will find recognisably Australian. The point is not that no other countries have any characteristics like these – indeed, as we have seen, the case for them rests in part on their being shared in some sense across our civilisation – but rather that they exist here in unique fashion, emphasis, and combination.

When we claim that the unique Australian character should be preserved, our reference is to something like the following ethos:

- Individualism: Australians try to treat one another as individuals, without deference to rank or title. Rather than assessing people on markers of pedigree, status, or class, Australians generally try to judge one another on matters of substance, like integrity and reliability, as embodied in the concept of the ‘good bloke’.
- Modesty: Australians do not try to lord over one another by touting our achievements and

using them to belittle others. Open boasting tends to alienate Australians because it obscures rather than reveals a person's integrity.

- **Scepticism:** Australians are not possessed of fanatical convictions that lead us to meddle in the lives of others. There is a willingness among Australians to accept that others know their own minds better than we do. We are dubious of over-the-top and lofty language, which we recognise as manipulation, and we are capable of a profound and benign indifference, being genuinely unmoved by matters that do not concern us directly.
- **Personal space:** Australians are willing to give each other space to live (after all, we have a lot of it to give), and we generally expect a lot of space to be given to us. This is true in a physical sense – Australians have a much greater expectation of personal space than many other peoples have – but also metaphorically. Australians do not like pushy people or the undue imposition of personal authority, and, reciprocally, try to be conciliatory and respectful.
- **Rules:** Australians, it has been noted, are more deferential to institutions than people, and we tend to be sticklers for rules. This deference comes from the proposition that everyone is equal under the rules, and that the rules should work to everyone's benefit. As such, our commitment to rules-based order manifests as a belief that the rule-makers should be chosen on their merits, the better to deliver for us, and that following the rules should be encouraged rather than forced (though, as we have seen during the Covid-19 pandemic, we are not shy of using the stick as well as the carrot if that is required to assure faith in, and adherence to, the rules).

The most striking feature of Australia is that our country is basically individualistic but that our framing of individualism is centred on how each of us should treat others, and not just how we can express ourselves. This unusual commitment has a direct connection to Australia's success as one of the most stable, free, and desirable countries. Whereas in some societies around the world, it is acceptable to be somewhat boastful of social status and pomp, in Australia the kind of modest individualism described here helps us ensure that we remain socially egalitarian. And while in some societies it is acceptable to be somewhat coercive – parents, for instance, often push their children on what to study, who to marry, who not to befriend or what political opinion to hold – in Australia, the same idea, expressed as scepticism and belief in space and tolerance, ensures that we choose our own pathways in life. And whereas in some societies, people tend to rely heavily on favours through networking with powerful people to get ahead in life, in Australia, our character ensures that we keep nepotism, corruption and bribery out.



Our unique character is our own way of expressing the deepest values of our civilisation. The Anglosphere generally and our own experience specifically together demonstrate that societies built upon these kinds of values make extraordinary contributions to humanity. We should want to preserve this character – indeed, it seems absurd to even ask why we would ever contemplate the alternative. And yet, that is more and more what we are expected to do.

## WESTERN CULTURAL ANXIETY

Since the end of World War Two, Western Civilisation, the Anglosphere, and Australia have been beset by self-doubt, as though none of the above successes were real, or, even if they were, unequivocally outstripped by failures that, just as surely, have deep roots in our culture and character.

To put the point simply, World War Two changed the way that the West's intellectuals view our civilisation. Never before in world history had humanity experienced, not one but two, large scale global conflicts using modern industrialised weapons that caused unprecedented violence and bloodshed. In response, many Western academics began to develop philosophical modes of thinking to account for this mass carnage. Examples of these schools of thought are critical theory, postcolonialism, poststructuralism and postmodernism. They connected the history of Western colonialism, drawing references to various colonised natives like the Zulus of South Africa, the Aborigines of Australia, the Maoris of New Zealand, the native tribes of the United States and Canada, and the various Mesoamerican cultures overhauled by the Spanish conquistadors, to the violence of the early and middle 20th century, and concluded that the nascent post-World War Two 'rules-based' global order, ostensibly a promise to avoid further outbreaks of globalised violence, was merely a continuation of European imperialism under another guise – an impression bolstered by the proxy wars in Korea and Vietnam. In 1978, Palestinian American theorist Edward Said published his seminal work *Orientalism*, the core argument of which was that for centuries European thinkers had portrayed the Oriental world as exotic, barbaric and backward in Western literature, art and philosophy. In his view, this was done to justify colonising the world and extending European civilisation far beyond Europe as a civilising mission. This hypothesis gained immense traction in academia and it has since revolutionised the way Europeans think of their own culture, as well as of other cultures.

As a result, there is a sense of anxiety on the part of Western scholars who study fields like sociology, cultural anthropology, world religions, history, international relations, political science, philosophy, literature, art and even architecture. Researchers now avoid ‘judging’ other cultures in the name of showing empathy. Following in this tradition, some academic elites from prestigious institutes like Harvard professor Noel Ignatiev go so far as to call for the abolition of the very idea of the ‘white race’.

Most Australians would not have even heard of this individual, yet these ideas permeate the highest levels of academic thought – and this matters. It does not just stay in the faculty lounge. The ideas that become popular among the thinkers in any given society are the ones that end up shaping the direction of the culture, which in turn, influences the direction of politics and public policy. This is because academics and intellectuals are the ones with the final say on how students are taught at our schools and universities. This in turn shapes the character of future generations. They are the ones who decide how to interpret history, who started which war, whose fault it was, who owes what compensation and the like. Academic institutions are the platforms to essentially influence the future teachers, politicians, journalists and professionals who drive the nation forwards.

This is the mindset that began to influence Western governments to pull back on out-bound military engagement with other developing countries while dismantling heavy restrictions on in-bound immigration. In a sense, this was meant to demonstrate that the West was ready to be more inclusive towards ‘others’. But note the contradiction: while promoting decolonisation means allowing non-European cultures to exercise their rights to self-preservation, that same right is denied to the West itself. What started as a project for the avoidance of war became, over time, a rolling, virulent critique of the values, institutions, and indeed nations of the West – a project of deconstruction.

## **HOW AUSTRALIANS LOST THEIR SELF-CONFIDENCE**

In Australia, the policies giving effect to this new project of Western intellectuals have come to be known as ‘multiculturalism’. While promoted on the basis of racial equality, inclusion, and diversity, it has been observed that multiculturalism can have the effect of diluting the host nation’s majority culture, character, values, and way of life.

Take one recent example of this post-national mindset, as applied to Australia. Last year, the University of Western Australia published a collection of essays from prominent politicians from across the political spectrum. The thrust of the book is that over time the state’s demography has changed due to immigration, and it goes on to prescribe that its cultural character and power dynamics must also change. In his essay, Professor Shamit Saggat claims that:

Until two generations ago, Australia practised a policy of racial exclusion. The country's nation-builders placed a straitjacket on the ethnic character of Australia's future, reflecting the values of racial hierarchy of the post-Victorian age.

This sentiment, that Australia is compromised at its foundation, has become widely held among Australian intellectuals. For decades, Australian students have been taught that Europeans have been conquering other people's lands through violent war and the British colonisers of Australia 'stole' this land from a 60,000-year-old culture. This is, of course, a narrow interpretation of history – the fact is that Australia was settled and conquered by the rules of engagement under an older world order, not the one that now prevails – yet this conception of Australia as 'land theft' has gained such momentum that even elected parliamentarians often invoke it to promote their own agendas. It is no doubt the case that acts of violence and dispossession were perpetrated by the colonial settlers of Australia, but Senator for New South Wales Dr Mehreen Faruqi opening her inaugural speech by proclaiming "We are gathered here today on stolen land" is based more on ideological point-scoring than fidelity to Australian history.

Each new generation of Australians has become more self-conscious about colonial guilt. The end result is a lack of confidence in our own identity, a lack of awareness and appreciation for the civilisational achievements of past generations, and a predisposition towards wanting to overcompensate for this guilt by embracing more diversity for diversity's sake, more multiculturalism and uncontrolled immigration.

This trend can be readily seen by considering briefly how Australia's attitudes to immigration and multiculturalism have changed over time.

In an earlier era, Australia had been committed to a particular cultural identity, namely the British one that came with settlement. In the decade before federation in 1901, Australia's founding fathers made no secret of the fact that they had aspired for the nation to retain its 'Britishness'; a sentiment which endured with widespread support until the mid-20th century.

Following World War Two it was held that Australia needed to 'populate or perish', and immigration was gradually expanded.

By 1973, Australia had lifted its so-called White Australia Policy and begun to embrace 'multiculturalism' as a policy. Through most of the 1980s, as large numbers of migrants from different parts of Asia began coming to Australia, the political establishment responded to these shifts in demography in one of several ways. Of course, there was widespread agreement among the political class as to the economic utility of immigration: that Australia had too much land and not enough people, and that apparently, in order to move the economy forwards, we needed to bring more people, which would mean more buying, more selling, more investment, and the like.

But a divide emerged as to how to deal with the immigrants as people, and not merely as widgets. One camp argued that migrants were welcome so long as they were prepared to assimilate into Australian society. The other camp argued that migrants maintaining their foreign cultures would enrich the national tapestry of Australian society. The latter view has largely prevailed.

John Howard was probably the last mainstream Australian political leader to disavow multiculturalism. During the 1990s, the debate about immigration turned divisive. By this stage, the media landscape, under the influence of the postmodern intellectual project, had begun to turn hostile towards those who wished to reduce immigration. Pauline Hanson called to restrict Asian immigration and her views, although not dissimilar from Howard's own views in the 1980s, became the reason for her being disendorsed as the Liberal candidate for the Queensland seat of Oxley. She went on to win that seat as an independent at the 1996 election. Howard, realising that Hanson was taking votes away from the Liberal Party's conservative support base, undertook a series of reforms by focussing on a skills and literacy based immigration program, rather than family reunion. He also had references to the word 'multicultural' removed from government communication, including the names of government departments. Howard emphasised national unity and encouraged new arrivals in Australia to embrace the Australian way of life.

Yet while Howard's reforms had the optics right, his reforms, if anything, only increased the trend towards permanently high levels of immigration. In the decade since Howard's loss to Kevin Rudd in the 2007 federal election, the discussion on multiculturalism has shifted further away from the expectations of the conservative support base that would normally back the Liberal Party. These days, both the policies and the optics seem to be headed towards emphasis on diversity for its own sake, rather than cultural self-preservation.

So, on the one hand we have a political class committed to bringing more people in through mass immigration and promoting multiculturalism as a policy, and on the other hand, we have an education system that focuses more greatly on lamenting the supposedly ill aspects of our history than celebrating the good aspects. These concurrent problems spell bad news for the nation's future.

## **THE CHALLENGE OF MULTICULTURALISM**

The great challenge of multiculturalism, and this Western crisis of confidence generally, is that it cuts across the kind of modest individualism characteristic of Australia, and the functioning of the institutions that give expression to those values and that have been so beneficial for us and for the world.

According to the new way of thinking, instead of people being taken as individuals they should be put into a box based on their perceived or actual group identity. This then turns into a question of how much perceived or actual political influence they have in the society, with the goal of multiculturalism being the amelioration of any perceived difference in results between groups in

society. Proponents of this mode of thinking venture to suggest that the most powerful classification in Anglosphere nations, including Australia, tends to be males of British Isles ancestry. In their minds, it becomes a moral duty to fight back against this so-perceived 'privilege'. This essentially becomes a class struggle that pitches supposedly 'powerless' social classifications (minorities, women, gays and lesbians, and so on) against the supposedly 'powerful' male Christian Anglo-Celtic patriarchy. Writer Tarang Chawla said on an episode of the ABC's Q&A:

We also need to have a conversation about what we mean by multiculturalism. And that's to look at the dynamics of power and control and what diversity actually means. You know, we're seeing a push towards, say, for example, closing the gender pay gap and disparities in gender or other parts of diversity. You know ... migrants who are coming to Australia and taking on entry-level positions then working their way up, but they face, often, a ceiling.

Here, we can see the relationship between group identity and power. It is often assumed that multiculturalism simply means people from multiple cultures all coming together to coexist in the same country. This sounds noble in theory but is not how it plays out in reality. Culture affects politics. When we allow large numbers of migrants from distinct backgrounds to resettle in Australia, they naturally tend to congregate around certain suburbs and, at some point, start operating community organisations (often at the expense of the taxpayer) which act as a vehicle to gain more political influence and representation. In their minds, this acts as an on-going political struggle between supposedly 'weak' non-European minorities and a supposedly 'strong' European majority, with the ultimate goal being a redistribution of decision-making power from the so-called privileged white man. As Professor Sagar goes on to say, "It is frankly embarrassing that in modern-day Australia, almost all senior roles in government or business are held by middle-aged white men ..."

It seems obvious that this attitude is incompatible with the Australian character as traditionally understood. Whereas Australians have generally tried to treat one another respectfully as individuals, the new identity politics eschews the kind of deference and reciprocity on which Australia is founded and is instead predicated on making demands. Australians instinctively try to avoid conflict by leaving others be, but identity politics is based on the claim that everyone of a particular racial or cultural background is implicated in injustice, and so cannot be let alone. This demand violates every basic concern of the Australian character: it rejects individualism, is immodest, all-knowing, invasive and coercive, and, perhaps worst of all, it is unruly, in that it strikes at the bedrock belief that everyone benefits from rules that are administered impartially.

In response, proponents of identity politics insist that their concern is with representation; that those they perceive to be the weak and the powerless have little input into and influence upon

those supposedly impartial rules. But political representation has nothing to do with ancestry or physical appearance. Representation means that if a citizen has a specific concern (such as housing affordability, employment, community safety, cost of living, transport, health, or something similar) that they have the confidence that they can contact their local member of parliament to seek the maximum level of assistance lawfully possible in their respective jurisdiction. That is representation in a nutshell: the right to petition authority for redress of harm. It does not depend on parliamentarians sharing the phenotype of their constituents. Moreover, by undermining the values on which our democracy operates, multiculturalism is ultimately self-defeating. As a matter of fact, it is Western, and especially Anglosphere, nations like Australia that have relatively open societies, which afford minorities the chance of representation. Indeed, it is this quality that makes these countries so attractive to immigrants in the first place.

## RESTORING OUR SELF-CONFIDENCE

If multiculturalism is a mistake, we ought to consider what an alternative policy might look like. There are two aspects to emphasise: the goodness of our civilisation and the uniqueness of our Australian character.

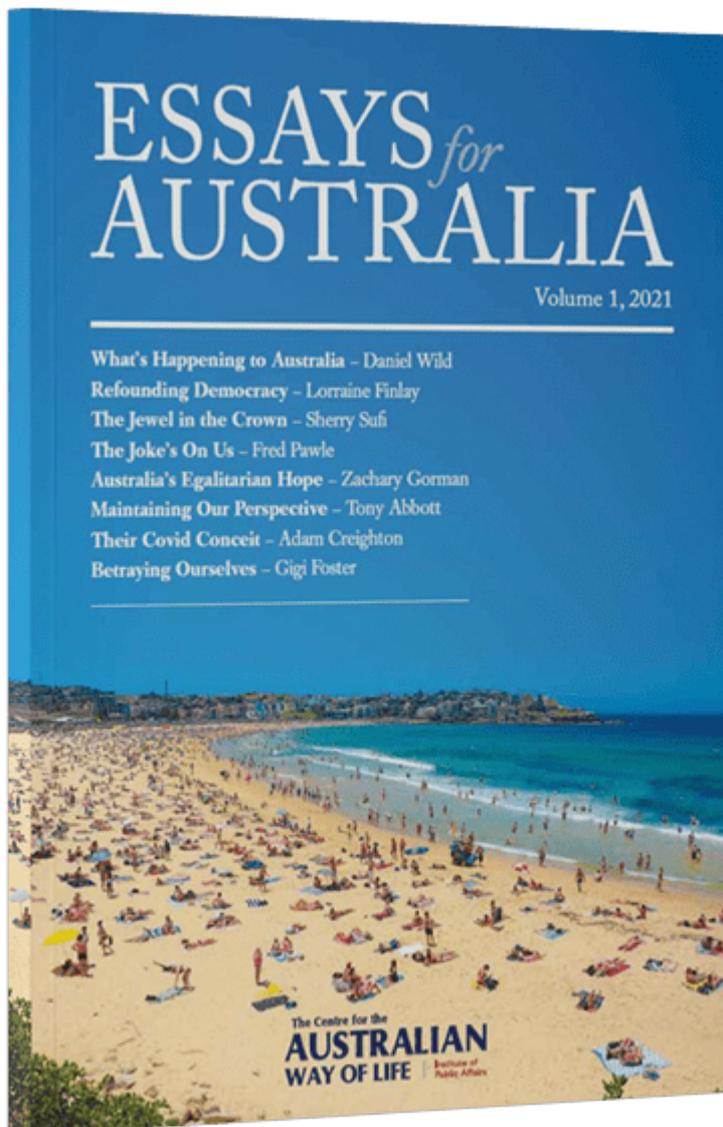
As to the first, it is worth noting that, to the extent the critics of the West have a point, it is also true that our civilisation has shown repeatedly that it contains within itself the resources to meet the perceived and actual expectations of minority populations. The United States' path from the abolition of slavery to the election of Barack Obama, the United Kingdom going from colonial rule in India and Pakistan to seeing Sadiq Khan elected Mayor of London, and Australia voting, with 91 per cent in favour, for the enfranchisement of Indigenous Australians, later followed by the recognition of Indigenous land rights, all suggest an institutional order receptive to the various interests of people from across our wide-ranging demographics. Curiously, the intellectual deconstruction movement seems committed to fighting imaginary structural racism in Western countries where cultural reforms have already taken place, and spends almost no time even acknowledging, let alone fighting, the much more real and pronounced racism that remains prevalent in almost all non-Western countries.

Mainstream politicians from the traditional centre-right must take a stand against the institutionalisation of Western self-doubt. When mainstream conservatives abandon their responsibility, fringe groups begin to tap into the policy space that otherwise belongs to the centre-right. This is when we weaken our capacity to effectively neutralise the problem. Instead, our political and intellectual class should focus on teaching and celebrating the many virtues and positive contributions of the Anglosphere. Its cultural, political, economic, industrial, technological and military pre-eminence remains unparalleled in world history. There needs to be a stronger focus on a civic education that stresses the importance of rule by popular consent, social contract, separation of powers, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, equality before the law, private property rights and individual liberty.

Secondly, the inculcation of these civilisational values is inseparable from renewing our commitment to defending and passing on our unique Australian character. We must accept that all sovereign states have a national culture. That culture reflects the demographic majority of the population. That is the culture represented on the flag, the coat of arms, in the lyrics of the national anthem, the national holidays, the constitution, the official language and other symbols that are part of the state's identity. In particular, we should accept that every nation-state on earth practices some form of exclusion from whoever it perceives to be outsiders. Not doing so would undermine the whole point of its existence. All cultures that have nationalistic characteristics are based on differentiating themselves from others, even where differences are only subtle. Look at Serbia and Croatia, Macedonia and Greece, Czech Republic and Slovakia, Portugal and Spain, Pakistan and India. In our own times, almost all non-Western countries continue to practice exclusionary policies. Similarly, Australia is a sovereign state with a unique national character, which is based on a particular adaptation of working-class British Isles culture.

The great cultural and political question before us as a nation is: can the policy of multiculturalism be maintained in the context of the foundational character of our country, and our connection to the values that have produced the many achievements of the English-speaking Western world?

*This article is from Volume 1 of Essays for Australia and is written by Dr Sherry Sufi, Senior Fellow at the Institute of Public Affairs. To find out more, head to [ipa.org.au/essays](http://ipa.org.au/essays).*



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