

# The historical roots of racism in australia research paper

[Sociology](#), [Racism](#)



This essay considers primary texts by Quan Wei, Ouyang Yu and Merlinda Bobis. Further I considered two secondary texts by Ang and Lo. All the texts provide insight on the issue of racism in Australia. The primary texts, which are categorized as being of the multicultural genre, indicate clearly the identity dilemma faced by Asians due to given wider society definitions or stereotypes.

The secondary texts tackled helped me towards appreciating the issue of identity in a multicultural society. Generally, this essay uncovers the historical roots of racism in Australia and how it continues manifest in society as illustrated by the primary texts.

Racism is when people of one race are looked at as inferior or discriminated against by people of another race (Healey 2003, p15). In itself racism destroys and vilifies humanity. It goes against freedom, equality and fairness which are the pillars on which societal cohesion is built (Healey 2003, p9).

Racism often entails one race lording over others thus going against the democratic principle of equal rights and representation of individuals. Racism is catalyzed by historical, economic, religious, cultural, and social factors (Healey 2003, p23). Racism surfaces in many guises along the mentioned factors; in different social contexts.

Racism is largely influenced and determined by general social or communal or collective thinking (Pung 2008, 45). No matter the given justifications, the underlying reason for racism is belief that people of one race are inferior to others of another race. Such like thinking arises from misconceptions about a

people's culture or way of life. On serious scrutiny, racial discrimination is more as a result of fear of difference than any actual warranting reason.

Fear of different others and economic competition leads to a herd mentality approach that discriminates others on flimsy bases. The major differences that have been used as basis for discrimination are individual customs, physical appearance, religion and general values. Additionally, language use has been basis for racial attitude with those who do not speak fluent foreign languages being seen as inferior.

Racism manifests itself or is expressed in a number of ways. Racial discrimination can be direct or veiled. When an employer refuses to employ someone based on racial considerations; it is direct racism.

Indirect, is in attitudes or practices that appear equitable but discriminating against some group. Indirect racism is normally institutional based. Within our social, political and institutional practices is imbedded a form of racism. For example, some legislation may warranty more vetting for immigrants from a certain region. People have degrading names for people of other races. There abound stereotypes as to what people of other races are or behave.

For example, Pung (2008) describes the many stereotypes Chinese Australians were associated with. She narrates that when she was growing up, the Chinese used to be referred to as power points. PowerPoint was a derogatory term applied to Asians or the Chinese in Australia to illustrate their alien ness. In her book she goes at length to describe the many

stereotypes associated with being Chinese or Asian. Some institutionalized policies are racially discriminating.

This normally happens because the desires of the majority (belonging to one race) are taken for what should apply to all even when they are opposed to desires of the minority (Ghassan 1998, p78). Without considering the views of the minority, imposing the majority race desires on the minority through policy is racially discriminating. The policies formed by majority from given races are more likely to marginalize the minority races. On the extreme are xenophobic attitudes or attacks on people of other races.

In the history of Australia, there are many recorded episodes of racial based violence. When the white settlers went into Australia, they were very violent leading to many aboriginals dying and ultimately being alienated in their own land (Healey 2003, p62). The worst racial violence resulted in the complete wiping out of the Tasmanian aboriginals in an attack organized by white settlers in 1830 (Healey 2003, p65).

Around the 1860s, it is recorded that racial attacks led to massacre of the Chinese in what is known as the New South Wales region (Healey 2003, p81). More recently, it is recorded that in May 2009, Indian students were attacked in Melbourne. This attack is claimed to have racially motivated.

Racism has a long history in Australia. It has close links with colonization and migration patterns of the past. Australia was originally inhabited by the aboriginals (indigenous people).

White settlers came to Australia as colonizers. The white settlers were not very kind to the aborigines and attempted to annihilate them; wiping out the aborigines as a people (Healey 2003, p35). Later, many other people from different parts of the world have migrated to Australia. Much later day racial discrimination is directed towards immigrants who are non- English.

Although the government has been making efforts towards making Australia homely to immigrants, some institutionalized policies discriminated against some people based on race. For example, for a long time, there was a policy or legislation that allowed picking of aboriginal children from their families and denying aborigines full citizenship.

The majority white community has for long advocated for immigration restrictions aimed at barring people from non European countries from entering Australia. As Lo (2000, p152) illustrates, the efforts to make Australia become a homogenous country have not been very successful. These efforts are frustrated by majorities who have not accepted minority groups. However, the minority groups also to some extent contribute towards their own alienation by not fully accepting the Australian identity.

Generally, the Australian society is very diverse. People from almost all culture around the world have immigrated into Australia. In the nineteenth century, racism was at outrageous levels. Although the old obnoxious racism of open racism has waned with passage of time, racism still rears its head in more insidious ways.

Merlinda Bobis through the 'white Turtle' and in the 'An earnest Parable' brings out the dynamics at play in multicultural Australia. Merlinda's writings bring out the basic points or areas of difference in a multicultural society (Bobis 1999, 2). Apart from illustrating the beauty of uniqueness, her works point to the challenges in understanding one another in a multicultural society. Her work is full of imagery and use of language that can only be appreciated unconventionally or when contextualized.

It is argued that more recent expressions of racism revolve around nationhood related connotations or notions, which are openly propagated through media. People tend to define who real Australians are on the basis of majority race as opposed to diversity. In the new forms of racism, people who do not belong to the majority culture are looked at as aliens and treated with some disdain.

In more recent days, the question of nationhood is what alienates some minority Australians. Ang and Stratton (2001) explore this issue in detail and it comes out as a very sticky issue. It seems it is generally accepted that real Australians are the white people of British origin.

The other whites of European origins are generally accepted but other groups are seen more of as alien Australians (Ghassan 1998, p 102). The question of nationhood and thus identity is the challenge the text on Ouyang brings out. In his poems Yu (2005) expresses a lot of disappointment at being who he is and life in general.

The word death and other negative imagery features a lot in his poems. The underlying point in his works is a lack of congruence in living. Given people are keen to define who real Australians are, the immigrant community is an alienated group. They lack a sense of belonging. Ouyang, through his writings, presents the dilemmas by an individual who is different in own country that considers his or her people as aliens or outsiders.

Quen weis's experience as presented by Ommundsen (2003, p201) tells of the shift in interpretation of who is an Australian. The definition of who a real Australian is shifts depending on associated qualities. If one is excellent and famous, he or she is appreciated as Australian than otherwise.

The superior qualities are associated with majority Australians and everything weak or undesirable associated with immigration. As Khoo (2003) discusses, Asian Australian literature captures much suffering that has to do with identity crisis. The Asian immigrants suffer the identity crisis because they continue being looked at as aliens in Australia while they no longer belong to or have strong roots in Asia.

Another indicator of wrong racial attitude is the opposition directed by majority race towards affirmative action for minority groups. Any government effort at social empowerment for the minority groups meets with unequivocal opposition from majority race. People are overly resentful against such like initiatives by the government.

For example, it is widely known that the aborigines were disfranchised from their land. However, land related government initiatives to empower

aborigines meet with enormous resentment or opposition (Healey 2003, p95).

In conclusion, the multicultural writings or pieces of literature are rich in many themes or information. Much of the information points to the racial discrepancies, challenges and benefits accruing from multiculturalism in Australia. Racial discrimination in Australia is a rich topic that has often raised tempers even in parliament.

A research into such a topic is not complete without considering the historical aspect of racism in Australia. In contemporary multicultural writings as well, one finds rich information of the contemporary forms or experiences of racism based alienation.

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