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## OUT-MARRIAGE AND THE SURVIVAL OF ETHNIC COMMUNITIES IN AUSTRALIA

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*Marriage Registry data covering the years 1996 to 1998 for second-generation Australians show that only a small minority choose partners who originate from the same country. This implies that there is little prospect of ethnic communities being reproduced across successive generations. The main exception concerns people from the Middle East. There is not sufficient evidence at this time to judge whether second generation persons of Asian origin will follow the Middle Eastern pattern.*

Australia is distinctive in its high proportion of foreign-born persons (currently around 23 per cent), more than half of whom are from non-Englishspeaking-background countries. There has long been concern about how rapidly (if at all) the overseas born will be integrated into Australian society. Some fear that Australia may become a 'nation of tribes' in which migrant communities reproduce themselves into the second and subsequent generations. Indeed there are some ethnic community leaders who aspire to this outcome. They usually claim that their aspiration is appropriate in a 'multicultural' society.

Whatever one's position on this issue, the reality is that the reproduction of ethnic communities requires members of birthplace groups (subsequently referred to as ethnic communities) to keep to themselves. This is most likely to occur where persons of ethnic background feel that they are not wanted or are disparaged as inferior by their fellow citizens. In such circumstances the attractions of the ethnic community and of an ethnic identity as a haven from a hostile world are evident. In addition, some migrants bring with them a commitment to the maintenance of their ethnic traditions and perhaps community, regardless of the stance of the host

society. Religion is often a crucial factor here, especially as the leaders of the Jewish, Muslim, Greek Orthodox and some other religious groups strongly oppose out-marriage.

The circumstances favouring the maintenance of ethnic communities appear weak in liberal societies like Australia. Disparagement of persons on the basis of ethnic prejudice is regarded as a breach of public morality. Official endorsement of multiculturalism has contributed to this outcome by adding its weight to making public expressions of ethnic prejudice a serious offence. Furthermore, interaction within the mainstream community has been facilitated in Australia through the range of ladders to educational and employment mobility for young persons of ethnic background. Ethnic leaders keen to sustain a vigorous community across the generations face a difficult task convincing younger members that their lives would be more rewarding if confined within the boundaries of their community.

As Lipset and Raab argue in their recent volume on the Jews in America, once opportunity opens out within the host community there is much less need for an ethnic identity to give protection or meaning in life. As they put it: 'When a group no longer serves an important and unique need, it begins to lose its cohesive, if not yet its nostalgic, force'.<sup>1</sup> The American Jewish experience provides a striking indication of the long-term outcome where this situation applies. Despite the efforts of Jewish leaders to maintain their community's solidarity and the emotional strength of the appeal to a distinctive Jewish tradition and experience, the Jewish community in America is in decline. Only a small minority of persons who label themselves as Jews regularly attend Jewish religious ceremonies and, from the point of the view of

community leaders, an alarming proportion of Jews are marrying out. It is estimated that 57 per cent of American Jews who married in the second half of the 1980s married non-Jews, compared with 25 per cent of those marrying in the decade 1965 to 1974. Those who do marry out are in most cases not bringing their children up as Jews.<sup>2</sup>

In making judgements about the degree of social integration of an ethnic group, statistics on intermarriage are usually considered to be one of the best indicators. This is for two reasons. First, if marriage, which is the most intimate of personal relationships, is occurring between members of ethnic groups and the mainstream community then this indicates that there cannot be much prejudice towards the ethnic community in question. Put another way, intermarriage implies that there is no significant social distance between the communities involved. Second, a high level of intermarriage means that there is little prospect of maintaining a separate ethnic community. Marriage between members of two different communities virtually enforces interaction across community borders. By engaging the respective parties in social relations outside their particular community it inevitably diminishes the hold of ethnic community institutions.

The best indicator of intermarriage in this context relates to second-generation persons of overseas origin. If a high proportion of persons born and raised in Australia in families where the parents are born overseas marry into their birthplace community (in-marriage) this is a good indication that intermix is limited. It also implies that ethnic community institutions are still in place and that they continue to shape patterns of social interaction amongst the second generation. Conversely, if members of the second

generation marry outside their community (out-marriage), the implication is that the social distance between ethnic and mainstream community is limited and that, when it comes to a choice of a partner, these people do not feel constrained by ethnic community pressure to limit their choice to a co-ethnic.

Australian data on intermarriage for second-generation residents have been scarce. The best source is marriage registry records, since those marrying in Australia are required to indicate the birthplace of their parents. However, these data should not be used in isolation from other data sources. This is because the marriage registry data do not include marriages conducted overseas where one of the marriage partners is an Australian resident who subsequently brings the other partner to Australia as an immigrant. The last occasion when marriage registry data were made available was in the early 1990s, when Charles Price obtained tables from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) which permitted the calculation of in-marriage rates for the years up to 1991 and 92.<sup>3</sup> At the time Price published his findings it was thought that the ABS intended to discontinue the collection of parent birthplace data. Fortunately, the ABS has since decided to record parent birthplace data for the three calendar years 1996 to 1998. A set of these data were purchased for this report. These data were also the basis for the intermarriage tables published in the recent ABS publication *Australian Social Trends 2000* (AST2000).<sup>4</sup>

The AST2000 provides marriage data for second-generation persons for a limited number of major birthplace groups. The data identify marriages where a second-generation person marries a partner who is also a second-generation person with a parent born in the same over-

seas country, or who marries a partner born in the same overseas country. However, the AST2000 report provides no trend data. To fill this gap we have used the 1991 and 1992 intermarriage rates prepared by Price. His method differed from that used in the AST2000 report. To make the AST2000 comparable with Price's information we computed in-marriage rates in the same manner as Price. As a consequence the rates of in-marriage shown below differ slightly from the ABS publication. The main difference was that when calculating the rate of in-marriages contracted by a bride or groom born in Australia with overseas-born parents Price only included those where the mother was born overseas. Price defined in-marriage as occurring where a bride or groom with a mother born overseas married a partner who was born in the same overseas country or a partner, *either* of whose parents were born in the same overseas country as the bride or groom's mother. The AST2000 tables use a broader definition. They include amongst second-generation marriages those contracted by persons born in Australia where the bride or groom's mother or father was born overseas. Price thus excluded marriages where the bride or groom's mother was born in Australia but the father was born overseas. The 1996, 1997 and 1998 marriage registry data reported follows Price in also excluding these marriages.

The data shown in Table 1 suggests two distinct patterns. The first, which applies to almost all second-generation marriages of persons of European, New Zealand and North American and, it seems to those of Asian descent is of almost complete out-marriage. In the case of second-generation Europeans, for most countries of origin fewer than 10 per cent marry persons who were either born in the same European nation as the bride

or groom's mother groom's mother or whose parents were born in that nation. This conclusion was already clear with the 1991 and 1992 data. It is confirmed by the 1996 to 1998 data. The second pattern, discussed shortly, concerns persons of MiddleEastern background. For these people, in-marriage was high in 1991 and 1992 and is even higher in the years 1996 to 1998. The low Asian second- generation in-marriage pattern may be misleading. When the movement of migrant spouses (that is those married overseas) is taken into account (as shown in Tables 2 and 3), the Asian experience may well have more in common with that of the Middle East pattern than with the European. For a copy of Table One please contact Sue Drummond at [Sue.Drummond@arts.monash.edu.au](mailto:Sue.Drummond@arts.monash.edu.au)

For the great majority of persons whose family origin is Europe, it is reasonable to conclude that the low levels of in-marriage demonstrated in Table 1 indicate that these people are being absorbed seamlessly into the mainstream community. There is no prospect of the reproduction of ethnic communities into the second-generation or beyond amongst people from these European backgrounds.

There are a few important exceptions however. These include people whose origin is Greece, Italy and the former Yugoslavia. Just on half of the second-generation persons from these countries marry in. This is a striking figure given

**Table 2. Annual average of 2nd generation Australian-born brides by origin of groom plus annual average of males entering Australia as spouses 1997 - 1998 and 1998 - 1999**

Country of birth of bride's mother	Origin of Groom			Total	Annual average number of Males entering Australia as spouses, 1997-98 to 1998-99
	Groom born in same overseas country as bride's mother	Groom with one or both parents born same o/s country as bride's mother *	Other Grooms **		
<b>EUROPE</b>					
Greece	130	837	725	1,692	40
Italy	140	1,092	1,469	2,701	49
Former Yugoslavia	125	295	661	1,081	186
<b>MIDDLE EAST</b>					
Lebanon	259	170	150	579	297
Turkey	52	21	39	111	138
<b>ASIA</b>					
Indonesia	1	1	66	67	79
Malaysia	2	0	51	54	62
Philippines	3	1	25	29	289
Vietnam	0	0	7	8	297
China	3	19	109	131	443
Hong Kong	4	2	31	36	87
India	7	4	152	163	119
Sri Lanka	6	1	60	67	56

Source: ABS Marriage Registry Data 1986-1998; Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) 1997-98, 1998-99 Arrivals and Departures data.

\* This column of data means that the groom was born in Australia, but had a parent born in bride's mother's country of birth.

\*\* Other Grooms = Grooms with both parents born in country other than that of the bride's mother.

that second-generation persons from these backgrounds have achieved a high level of educational and job mobility (relative to their parents).<sup>5</sup> They marry in despite the inevitable interaction with the mainstream community which flows from this mobility. The highest in-marriage rates are for Australian-born brides and grooms with Greek-born mothers. This partly reflects the relative isolation of the first generation Greek community in Australia (because of limited English and industrial skills). In addition, most of their children were brought up within a Greek community context, including participation within the Greek Orthodox Church. Australian studies of intermarriage by religion show that the Greek Orthodox Church has been amongst the most successful (along with the Jewish

and Muslim faiths) in limiting marriage to those of the same faith.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, despite these pressures, there is a discernible fall in in-marriage rates over the 1990s for second generation Greeks and Italians. It is also important to note that, as shown in Tables 2 and 3, few of the brides and grooms who in-marry in Australia do so with overseas-born partners from Greece or Italy. Also, the data shown in Table 2 indicate that very few second generation Greeks or Italians return home for a spouse, since the numbers of spouses born in these countries who currently migrate to Australia is tiny.

As indicated above, no analysis of second-generation in-marriage is complete unless it takes into account marriages completed overseas. The great

**Table 3. Annual average of 2nd generation Australian-born grooms by origin of bride plus annual average of females entering as spouses, 1997-98 and 1998-99**

Country of birth of groom's mother	Origin of Bride			Total	Annual average number of females entering Australia as spouses 1997-98 to 1998-99
	Bride born in same overseas country as groom's mother	Bride with one or both parents born in same o/s country as groom's mother *	Other Brides **		
<b>EUROPE</b>					
Greece	61	852	710	1,623	30
Italy	53	1,130	1,591	2,774	29
Former Yugoslavia	67	294	572	932	256
<b>MIDDLE EAST</b>					
Lebanon	75	170	156	401	279
Turkey	18	19	24	61	167
<b>ASIA</b>					
Indonesia	1	0	52	53	202
Malaysia	5	0	40	45	125
Philippines	3	1	15	20	889
Vietnam	0	0	5	6	976
China	5	18	89	113	1,173
Hong Kong	2	2	20	24	128
India	5	3	138	146	364
Sri Lanka	1	1	38	39	176

Source: ABS Marriage Registry Data 1996-1998; Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) 1997-98, 1998-99 Arrivals and Departures data.

\* This column of data means that the bride was born in Australia, but had a parent born in groom's mother's country of birth.

\*\* Other Brides = Brides with both parents born in country other than that of the groom's mother.

majority of persons arriving from overseas as spouses would have married overseas and thus are not recorded in the Australian marriage registry data. We do not know who sponsored these spouses. Their spouses could be first or second-generation persons originating from the same country or from a different country. In the case of the Greek and Italian-born this is not an issue since Tables 2 and 3 show that the number of spouses migrating from these countries to Australia is very small. Even in the unlikely event that all of the immigrant spouses were sponsored by second-generation persons from the same country, it would barely affect the level of in-marriage of second-generation Greeks or Italians. From the point of view of the survival of the ethnic community, this apparent sundering of migration links to the homeland is of great significance. If large numbers of Australian-born persons of Greek or Italian origin were returning to Greece or Italy for a spouse, their fresh cultural links to the 'homeland' would probably help fortify the ethnic community.

The picture is quite different for second-generation persons from the Middle East. The level of in-marriage for second-generation brides and grooms from the Lebanon and Turkey, which was already high in the early 1990s, has further increased during the 1990s. Moreover, the in-marriage levels shown in Table 1 for these countries of origin significantly understate the actual level. As Tables 2 and 3 show, there is a continuing high inflow of male and female spouses entering Australia from the Lebanon and Turkey. It is highly likely that many of these have married second-generation Lebanese and Turkish persons.<sup>7</sup> Brides and grooms of Lebanese and Turkish origin are returning to their

respective homelands for spouses in about equal numbers. This partially reflects parents' desires for a culturally 'pure' spouse. But in addition, such are the migration push pressures from these countries that Australian-born spouses can take their choice of many potentially willing partners. For these two countries, the level of second-generation in-marriage is thus likely to be much higher than the 60 per cent level shown in Table 1.

These data give some clues to the factors which may limit Australia's integrative capacity. The communities in question are predominantly Muslim. Lebanon and Turkey constitute the two largest individual source countries for Muslims in Australia.<sup>8</sup> Almost all Turks are Muslims. In the case of the Lebanese, most of those coming to Australia since the mid-1970s have been of Muslim background. Before this time most Lebanese migrants to Australia were Christian. Many of these recent arrivals entered under the humanitarian sub-program. They brought limited English and educational skills with them, as well as their Muslim religious commitments. The combination of sharp cultural differences with the mainstream community, community isolation in Australia, limited upward mobility in the second-generation and a strong desire to maintain their religious identity has restricted out-marriage. For these communities, there is a real prospect of maintaining ethnic communities across successive generations, especially if in-marriage continues with co-ethnics from 'home'.

At first glance, the Asian experience looks very like the European pattern. The percentage of second-generation Asians (including those of Chinese and Indian descent) marrying in, (see Table 1), is very low. Writing about similar data

published in the AST2000 report, the social commentator Hugh Mackay concludes:

We had better dismantle any lingering prejudices on the subject of ethnic exclusiveness. Whether we are officially committed to it or not, our rising rates of ethnic intermarriage show that assimilation is a long-term inevitability.<sup>9</sup>

If these data truly described the situation for second-generation Asians, such strong judgements would be justified. But there are good reasons to question generalisations which are drawn from the second-generation marriage registry data above. Marriage patterns for the much larger number of marriages amongst first-generation Asian-born persons are not consistent with this conclusion. ABS marriage data for the late 1990s show few signs of out-marriage. Only a minority of China, India, Vietnam and other brides and grooms born in Asia who marry in Australia do so with persons born in Australia. Most marry persons born in the same overseas country as themselves. For example, of the 654 marriages involving Filipino-born grooms in Australia in 1998, 90 were to Australian-born brides, 524 to Filipino-born brides and 40 to brides from some other country.<sup>10</sup>

But perhaps second-generation Asians are different? Many have been successful in educational and occupational terms and thus have intermixed widely with the mainstream population. Also, as Tables 2 and 3 show, the number of second-generation Asian brides and grooms is small, because it was only in the 1970s and 1980s that a significant adult migrant population from Asia had become established in Australia. As a tiny minority they may have had to look for partners amongst the host population.

A more likely explanation for the

apparent low Asian second-generation in-marriage levels is that the data in Table 1 are not a reflection of actual marriage patterns. The data shown in Tables 2 and 3 indicate that there are a large number of marriages involving Asian-born persons which have occurred overseas, after which the spouse has been sponsored to come to Australia as an immigrant. Their numbers dwarf the number of marriages registered between second-generation Asian-origin brides and grooms to persons born in the same country as the bride or groom's mother, or to second-generation persons from the country in question. Of course, we do not know the country of birth (or parents' country of birth) of the sponsors of these immigrant spouses. Most would be first-generation persons born in the same country.<sup>11</sup> But a minority of sponsors are likely to be second-generation persons descended from parents from the same country.<sup>12</sup> Even if only a minority, the numbers of these second-generation spouse sponsors would be sufficient to significantly dilute the out-marriage rates shown in Table 1.

The reasons are similar to those cited for the Lebanese and Turkish experience. There are strong push pressures from China, Vietnam and the Philippines (among other countries), and these pressures allow people with Australian residence a wide choice of eager potential partners. Though religious endogamy is not such a powerful factor as it is for the Muslims, the desire for a spouse of similar background appears to be a factor with persons of Chinese and other Asian backgrounds. As Penny and Khoo have shown, there is still a vast gulf in family norms between Chinese immigrants and Australians.<sup>13</sup> The strong identification with family and the primacy of family interests amongst the Chinese (and other

Asian communities) also promotes immigration movements to countries like Australia, the USA and Canada. If family members are anxious to move to a western nation, or the family wishes to establish branches in these nations, there may well be pressure on prospective brides or grooms who have permanent resident status in one of these countries to select an overseas-resident partner with family connections.<sup>14</sup>

The experience of high out-marriage in the case of American Jews is such a powerful one that it is tempting to conclude that, in liberal societies where upward mobility is common, there is little chance of ethnic community survival. If the Jews cannot sustain their community in the face of these assimilative pressures one wonders what community could. It has been argued that Australia is not following the U.S. pattern. According to the 1996 Australian Census results, the great majority of married persons identifying as Jews reported being married to a Jewish partner.<sup>15</sup> The Jewish community, particularly in Melbourne, has managed a high degree of ethnic closure, especially via its separate school system, which most young Jews now attend. But, as the U.S. experience attests, it is doubtful whether this degree of closure can be maintained over successive generations in the face of the integrative pressures that their economic success generates.

Most U.S. Jews are now third or fourth generation persons who are descended from the migrants arriving in the U.S. between the 1890s and World War I.

The Australian second-generation marriage record, at least for persons of European origin, seems to confirm the strength of these integrative pressures. Ironically, from the point of multicultural advocates who hope for the perpetuation of ethnic communities in Australia, the ideology of multiculturalism has probably facilitated this process. By contributing to the eradication of ethnic prejudice it has helped remove one of the barriers to intermarriage.

This rosy picture of the integrative capacity of Australian society does not apply to the major Middle Eastern communities in Australia. If anything, the divisions are widening (at least as indicated by in-marriage levels). There are also doubts about what is happening within the Asian communities. It is too early to conclude, as does Mackay, that the European pattern of high out-marriage in the second generation is or will occur within these communities. This is partly due to the cultural differences between the mainstream and the Asian communities and partly to the continuing pressures for family migration from Asia. A sustained migration stream will also contribute to the reproduction of Asian ethnic communities in Australia.

#### References

- <sup>1</sup> S. M. Lipset and E. Raab, *Jews and the New American Scene*, Harvard, Cambridge, 1995, p. 51
- <sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p. 72
- <sup>3</sup> C. Price, 'Ethnic intermixture in Australia', *People and Place*, vol. 2, no. 4, 1994, p. 9
- <sup>4</sup> *Australian Social Trends 2000*, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Cat. no. 4102.0, pp. 52-56
- <sup>5</sup> B. Birrell and S. E. Khoo, *The Second Generation in Australia: Educational and Occupational Characteristics*, Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research, Canberra, 1995
- <sup>6</sup> A. C. Gariano and S. D. Rutland, 'Religious intermix: 1996 census update', *People and Place*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1997, p. 14
- <sup>7</sup> S. E. Khoo's study of the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia shows that while just over half of the sample of sponsors who brought spouses or fiances to Australia from the Lebanon and Turkey were from the Lebanon and Turkey, the rest were Australian-born persons. She believes that most of these Australian-born persons were second generation Australians with parents from these countries. S. E. Khoo,

- Sponsors of Spouse Migration to Australia*, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Canberra, 1997, pp. 25-26
- <sup>8</sup> G. Bouma, *Mosques and Muslim Settlement in Australia*, Australian Government Publishing Service (AGPS), Canberra, 1994, pp. 224-25
- <sup>9</sup> H. Mackay, 'How love leaps the ethnic barrier', *The Age*, 18 August, 2000
- <sup>10</sup> *Marriages and Divorces*, 1998, ABS, Cat. no. 3310.0, pp. 34-35
- <sup>11</sup> S. E. Khoo, op. cit., p. 25
- <sup>12</sup> Some evidence is provided in B. Birrell, 'Spouse migration to Australia', *People and Place*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 9-16.
- <sup>13</sup> J. Penny and S. E. Khoo, *Intermarriage, A study of Migration and Integration*, AGPS, Canberra, 1996, Chapter 9
- <sup>14</sup> For example, see R. Thompson, *Toronto's Chinatown*, AMS Press, Inc., New York, 1989, Chapter 4.
- <sup>15</sup> Gariano and Rutland, op. cit, pp 14-15