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# Australia's migration policies: African dimensions

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Background paper for *African Australians: A review  
of human rights and social inclusion issues*

Professor Andrew Jakubowicz

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## **About the author**

Andrew Jakubowicz is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Technology, Sydney. He is also the co-director of the Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Research Centre at the University of Technology. Since the early 1970s he has been involved in action research and race relations, and has been centrally involved in the development of materialist theories of cultural diversity. He has taught at universities in the USA, Europe and Asia, and was the foundation director of the Centre for Multicultural Studies at the University of Wollongong. He has published widely on ethnic diversity issues, disability studies and media studies.

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## **1 Introduction: African images in Australian society**

Searching Google in May 2009 for information on Australia's relationship with Africa returned nearly 24,000,000 hits. Most refer to cricket or rugby matches with South Africa. To most Australians who are not of African origin, Africa is a map composed of stereotypes; South Africa's sportsmen; the civil wars of the Congo and Burundi; the dictatorships of Zimbabwe and Liberia; the famines of Ethiopia and Eritrea and the world's response in 'Live Aid'; the murderous rampages in the Darfur region of Sudan; 'Black Hawk down' and the conflict in Somalia; the ancient history of Egypt; and the recent emergence of Islamist political movements. These momentary glimpses expose the lenses through which most of the Australian community have come to engage with modern Africa. While many of Africa's current problems and conflicts derive from its colonial past, other pressing challenges facing Africans include the continuing pressures of population growth, climate change, resource shortages and economic under-development. Africa is, of course, rather more than these glimpses allow; it is a continent of great complexity, diversity, history and civilizations.

Africans have arrived in Australia in a number of different waves. Before 1976 the intake was primarily from South Africa (42% of all African-born residents in 2006) and white; or from Mauritius (7.3% in 2006) and Egypt (13.5% in 2006) and Christian or Jewish (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). By 2006 there were almost 250,000 African-born people living in Australia, accounting for 5.4% of the total overseas-born population. Communities whose members mainly (90% or more) arrived after 1996 include those from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Sudan. Thus a snapshot of Australia's African-born residents would look very different in 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000 and today. Recognising these waves of immigration helps explain different community capacities and the depth of social networks available to support newcomers. (A detailed presentation of the demography of African communities is discussed by Professor Graeme Hugo in an accompanying paper for this project).

Given the growing number of people arriving from Africa, it is important that the broader Australian community understands the enormous diversity of the African continent. In 2000 Africa was home to 30 per cent of the world's oral languages (about 2,000 out of 6,800) but only 13 per cent of the world's population. African communities from different regions and different ethnicities have less in common with each other than do Europeans, being differentiated by physiognomy, language, history, religion and cultural practices. Australia's relationship with Africa follows the contours of this diversity, beginning with the first Africans to arrive with the early European settlers in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Members of the African diaspora entered colonial society at many points before Federation in 1900. Some were African Americans, former slaves or escapees from the United States, while others were sent as convicts by the British (Pybus, 2006). Some were 'seedies', East African sailors who manned the windjammers and later worked below decks on the steamers that ploughed the routes from Africa to Asia and down to Australia (Ghosh & Goodall, 2009). While they did not arrive in great numbers, they were sufficient to add to an underlying fear of non-whites that drove the establishment of the 'White Australia' policy at the time of Federation (Rivett, 1962). Africans were specifically mentioned in the debates about immigration restriction and limitations of the franchise in the first years of the Commonwealth.

The Constitution specifically allowed the Australian Government to make laws in regard to races of people and, if desired, to discriminate against them (Williams, 2009). The Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 was one of the first pieces of Commonwealth legislation and represented the institutionalisation of ideologies of racial superiority, widespread in colonial-settler societies of the day (Jupp, 2007).

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the global spread of Garveyism, an ideology of black nationalism, reached Aboriginal Australians from the United States, carried by African Americans and their newspapers, and also from Africa, through people like the Mauritian teacher Shadrach James Peersahib (later Shadrach James). James became very influential with the Aboriginal leaders who established the Australian Aborigines' League in 1933 (Ghosh & Goodall, 2009).

White Australians and white South Africans also developed a close relationship, which was initially rather more important to Australia than to South Africa, particularly given Capetown's position as the restocking port for ships bound for Australia from England. South African miners came to Australia in the later gold rushes and Australians went to South Africa when the rushes were on there. Australians fought in British colonial conflicts in Africa, starting with the 1885 Sudan campaign against a Muslim uprising and then in the Boer War. At least 12,000 Australians served in contingents raised by the six colonies and, from 1901, by the new Australian Commonwealth; many more joined British or South African colonial units in South Africa. Australians served mostly in mounted units formed in each colony, often known as mounted rifles, bushmen or imperial bushmen. After the Boer War, many Australians were demobbed in South Africa and entered the mining industry, introducing Australian Rules football to Johannesburg. They also helped form the South African Labour Party (SALP) in 1907, which introduced militant Australian trade union perspectives into South African political life. The SALP would also be the first party to advocate a strongly racist social policy, mirroring union attitudes in Australia (Tothill, 2000).

There are other notable examples from that time that demonstrate Australia's close contact and relationship with South Africa. The 'dictation test', developed in Natal province in 1897, was used as a device to exclude immigrants, especially Indian immigrants. At first Natal had wanted to exclude all non-whites using an approach set out in a New South Wales bill, however this was seen as too overtly racist by the British Government, which refused to give its assent. When the test had been fine-tuned (it could be administered in any European language to ensure one could be found that Indians would fail, as many spoke and some could read English) it was then offered by British authorities to Australia as a 'non-racial' model by which non-white immigrants could be excluded. It quickly became the most powerful weapon in Australia's Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 (Lake, 2004). The Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902 (section 4) ensured that there could be no misunderstanding of what the implications of a 'non-racial model' of citizenship would be: "No aboriginal native of Australia Asia Africa or the Islands of the Pacific except New Zealand shall be entitled to have his name placed on an Electoral Roll unless so entitled under section forty-one of the Constitution" (i.e. previously eligible in one of the states). This exclusion lasted until 1961 when the Menzies Government withdrew it as "objectionable and outmoded", with all Aboriginal peoples being entitled, but not required, to vote in 1962 (Norberry & (with) Williams, 2002). The bar on African 'native' immigration would, however, remain in effect for at least another decade.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Australia and the African continent were related through trade and through occasional wars. Australian troops served with the British in North Africa in both World Wars and some served in British East African military groups. The Australian navy was engaged against the Germans off East Africa during the Great War. During the Second World War, Australians grew to know the sites of Libya and Egypt, where battles such as those at Tobruk emblazoned themselves in popular memory. Most Australians though garnered what knowledge they had of Africa through the media – originally cinema (most infamously through the white-hero Tarzan movies that flourished in the childhood imaginations of 1950s Australian children) and then through the funnelled realities of Western television.

The harsher political dimensions of Africa became more apparent to Australians during decolonisation (such as in Kenya in 1964) and the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. During the 1960s black African students began to arrive in small numbers in Australia and helped build coalitions against apartheid and the white regime in Rhodesia (which became the independent nation of Zimbabwe in 1980). The end of the White Australia policy in the decade after 1967 increased this flow quite significantly and the subsequent growth of the local anti-apartheid movement foregrounded African race relations in Australia. Young Australians became increasingly aware of the issues of race in South Africa, a process that also forced them to reflect on the parallels between South Africa's treatment of its indigenous peoples and the experience of Aboriginal peoples under white Australian rule.

Through the 1970s and 1980s Australian awareness of Africa grew further, both with the erosion of apartheid (which ended in 1994) and the eruption of major political and environmental crises in northern and central Africa (including the Ethiopian-Eritrean war and civil wars in Somalia, Sudan, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo). For Africans forced to flee their homes, these were times of enormous trauma and suffering. Many millions would spend years wandering in remote areas seeking refuge or finding limited respite in under-resourced and often dangerous refugee camps. There were numerous consequences for those who survived and eventually came to Australia. Most had broken or non-existent experiences of education. They may have seen family and friends badly injured or killed or themselves been brutalised, tortured or forced into the armies of children that various warlords and factions used to prosecute their violent agendas. Many would have been targeted on the grounds of their religious affiliations, tribal membership or clan identities.

Australian troops continue to serve in peacekeeping roles in Africa though in August 2009 the last Australian military personnel were ejected from Sudan and their peace-keeping role in Darfur. Australians had previously served in Eritrea and Somalia. The current Australian Government has increased both foreign aid and military training and a support presence as part of conflict resolution priorities in Africa, reasserting a relationship that had faded under the former Coalition Government.

With the growth of humanitarian immigration from Africa after 1990, the presence of African arrivals in Australia's towns and cities has become more discernable. Previously few in number during the height of European and Asian immigration from 1950 to the early 1990s, in the past two decades Africans have become very much part of mainstream settlement programs across the country and are now firmly part of Australian society.

## 2 Africa's diversity

There are over 50 countries in Africa, running for thousands of kilometres from the Mahgreb of the southern Mediterranean littoral, across desert, mountain, plains and jungle societies to the far tip of the Cape of Good Hope. Most of these States are the consequence of European colonialism and only rarely does State (political-institutional organisations) and nation (ethno-political formations) coalesce comfortably. Within States there can be many descendants of pre-colonial nations or ethnic societies, all with their own complex histories, divisions and contradictions. Much of recent political history in Africa reflects attempts to manage these longer-term tensions with ethno-political struggles over diminishing natural resources and sources of contemporary wealth.

The African countries with the largest resident populations in Australia are those with strong European colonial histories (compared with those dominated by plantation or extractive economies managed by small minorities of Europeans) or are the primary sources of humanitarian entrants. South Africa (104,000 in 2006) and Egypt (33,000) remain the two largest source countries, followed by Zimbabwe, Sudan and Mauritius (between 18,000 and 20,000 each). Altogether 51 African countries are listed in the 2006 Census as places of birth, with half having more than 300 people resident in Australia (see Table 1). The gender balance should be interpreted carefully, as there are many female-headed households among humanitarian and refugee groups, which each may have a number of male children.

**Table 1: Country of birth in Africa at 2006 (gender and sex ratio) and 2001 Census**

	2006				2001
	M	F	T	Proportion male	T
South Africa	51,036	53,092	104,128	0.49	79425
Egypt	17,094	16,403	33,497	0.51	33432
Zimbabwe	9,967	10,190	20,157	0.49	11734
Sudan	10,318	8,731	19,049	0.54	4900
Mauritius	8,815	9,360	18,175	0.49	16962
Kenya	5,057	4,883	9,940	0.51	6870
Ethiopia	2,821	2,812	5,633	0.50	3544
Somalia	2,073	2,243	4,316	0.48	3713
Zambia	2,000	2,082	4,082	0.49	3070
Ghana	1,480	1,291	2,771	0.53	2040
Seychelles	1,147	1,361	2,508	0.46	2,448
Nigeria	1,480	1,016	2,496	0.59	1,738
Eritrea	991	1,025	2,016	0.49	1,599
Sierra Leone	912	897	1,809	0.50	363
Uganda	873	840	1,713	0.51	1,217
Liberia	714	812	1,526	0.47	124
Libya	810	706	1,516	0.53	1,442
Morocco	763	532	1,295	0.59	1,170
Botswana	508	355	863	0.59	709
Burundi	393	358	751	0.52	32
Namibia	344	358	702	0.49	437
Malawi	329	355	684	0.48	486
Mozambique	317	324	641	0.49	551

	2006				2001
	M	F	T	Proportion male	T
Congo, Democratic Republic of	321	297	618	0.52	267
Southern and East Africa, nfd	249	349	598	0.42	727
Congo	291	232	523	0.56	134
Tunisia	263	178	441	0.60	425
Guinea	175	155	330	0.53	31
Cote d'Ivoire	134	116	250	0.54	75
Swaziland	113	118	231	0.49	208
Rwanda	85	117	202	0.42	46
Central and West Africa, nfd	82	117	199	0.41	178
Senegal	118	78	196	0.60	185
Madagascar	85	103	188	0.45	162
Cameroon	75	60	135	0.56	66
Gambia	76	56	132	0.58	59
Djibouti	46	51	97	0.47	71
Lesotho	41	38	79	0.52	53
Mali	33	27	60	0.55	26
North Africa and the Middle East, nfd	20	31	51	0.39	57
Togo	20	15	35	0.57	13
North Africa, nfd	18	15	33	0.55	129
Chad	14	18	32	0.44	36
Gabon	14	12	26	0.54	22
Burkina Faso	15	9	24	0.63	14
North Africa, nec	3	21	24	0.13	6
Benin	10	12	22	0.45	21
Cape Verde	12	6	18	0.67	22
Western Sahara	6	9	15	0.40	0
Mauritania	8	6	14	0.57	13
Niger	9	3	12	0.75	17
Guinea-Bissau	10	0	10	1.00	0
Central African Republic	3	6	9	0.33	0
Equatorial Guinea	6	3	9	0.67	0
Sub-Saharan Africa, nfd	5	0	5	1.00	0
Southern and East Africa	0	4	4	0.00	0

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

### 3 Background to Australian immigration policy

Immigration control was the primary focus of the new Commonwealth of Australia following Federation in 1901. The future racial and cultural make-up of the nation drew together many opponents who would, on this issue, be allies. Few people,

except those so badly affected through exclusion or forced repatriation (primarily Chinese and Pacific Islanders), disputed the imperial ideology of white supremacy or the mix of religious, economic and scientific rationales that were used to advance its political power. The Immigration Restriction Act 1901 effectively put an end to any legal non-white immigration from Africa, a situation which would remain for the best part of three generations. The issue of race itself was, however, carefully not included in the legislation; indeed, even as non-discriminatory approaches to immigration were gaining strong public support in the 1970s, one well-versed commentator of the day pointed out that “no law excludes non-Europeans from entering Australia, and no statute discriminates between intending immigrants on the ground of race” (Palfreeman, 1974). In practice, though, there was no point in a non-white from Africa trying to enter Australia legally with any intent to stay for a long period – this even applied to people of Indian descent who at the time were able to enter Britain after the rise of exclusionary indigenous regimes in East Africa. The only exceptions in Australia applied to some “coloured” people of mixed European and Asian heritage who could “pass” as white (Rivett, 1962). The informal but effective methods of exclusion lay in bureaucratic practice and the unquestioned assumptions that underpinned the consensus about the White Australia policy and its application.

Australian solidarity around immigration policy began to crumble in the late 1950s. At that time anti-colonial struggles were eroding the foothold of European empires in the region. The Dutch had been thrown out of Indonesia, the French withdrew from Indochina and the British departed the subcontinent and the Malayan peninsula and archipelago. In 1958 a revised Immigration Act abolished the dictation test (which had not been used for many years) and, in the following year, ‘distinguished’ non-Europeans were permitted to settle in Australia with Ministerial approval.

Social movements for a non-racial immigration policy evolved in Victoria in particular, where the Australian Government’s ‘Colombo Plan’ brought young adults from Asia to study at local universities. There they mixed with Australian middle-class students who discovered the visitors were not the threat that white Australia had claimed all Asians to be. At Melbourne University an Immigration Reform Group began to agitate for change, publishing the ground-breaking ‘Immigration – control or colour bar?’ as a pamphlet in 1960 and as a book in 1962 (Rivett, 1962; Tavan, 2001; Viviani, 1992). During the 1961 federal election a young Australian Labor Party (ALP) candidate, Moss Cass, stood in the Kooyong electorate against then Prime Minister Robert Menzies and declared himself for a non-racial immigration policy. While this was not ALP policy at the time, Cass became part of a group that called on the party leadership to remove the White Australia policy from the ALP platform. In 1965 Don Dunstan, South Australian leader of the ALP, would successfully move the resolution at the party’s national conference and had former Immigration Minister and ALP federal leader Arthur Calwell second it with “ashes in his mouth” (Don Dunstan interview with making Multicultural Australia at <http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/library/media/Audio/id/386.The-end-of-White-Australia>). As a sign of a broader change in sentiment, that same year the Australian Government agreed to allow non-Europeans to become Australian citizens, albeit after 15 years of residency.

When Menzies retired shortly after, the Liberal Party too began to move rapidly towards liberalisation. Under new Prime Minister Harold Holt, a former Immigration Minister and Melbourne progressive, and his Immigration Minister Hubert

Opperman, the old policies of assimilation (to which non-whites could only hope to aspire) were replaced by the new language of integration (which accommodated people irrespective of colour); non-Europeans were permitted to become citizens after five years. In 1966 Australia signed the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, further undermining the basis for its long-standing racially-based model of immigration control.

Piece by piece the legislative architecture of racial discrimination began to be dismantled. In 1973, under the ALP Whitlam Government, a fully non-racial policy was introduced by Immigration Minister Al Grassby. Grassby was subsequently defeated in the 1974 election following a targeted campaign in his rural Riverina seat by racist groups opposed to immigration reform. However, the die was cast. By 1975 both major political parties had adopted a non-racial approach to immigration and public policy, supporting the Racial Discrimination Act that was drafted by the ALP in 1975 and passed by the incoming Coalition Government in 1976. However, the public expectation remained that new non-white immigrants would be, for the most part, educated, Westernised and culturally attuned to modern Australian life.

It is at this point that non-white immigration from Africa begins, also reflecting the major political and social changes that transformed the continent in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). The Australian Government sought to recognise and respond to these changes, firstly through the gradual opening of immigration opportunities and through the subsequent allocation of humanitarian places to internally displaced and refugee applicants in Africa.

#### **4 Immigration from Africa**

In its discussion of Australia's renewed aid engagement with Africa, the Lowy Institute (Negin & Denning, 2008) cites increased immigration from the continent as an important factor:

There are also an increasing number of people in Australia of African descent, bringing with them potentially valuable cultural, social and economic ties to the region. The 2006 census reveals that there are more than 100,000 South African-born people in Australia, along with more than 20,000 Zimbabweans, 19,000 Sudanese, 18,000 from Mauritius and almost 10,000 Kenyans. In 2005-06 permanent settler arrivals to Australia included 4,000 South Africans and 3,800 Sudanese, constituting the sixth and seventh largest sources of migrants respectively... Africa contributes significantly to Australia's skilled workforce. Based on the 2006 census, there are just under 3,000 medical doctors and over 4,100 nurses working in Australia who are African-born. This represents 5.4% of medical doctors working in Australia. Given that only 1.5% of all working people in Australia are African-born, the over-representation in skilled positions is remarkable.

There are very different groups of African-born immigrants who have settled in Australia (Table 2). Many of the professionals or managers, highly skilled and educated, have come from South Africa and Egypt; they are mostly European by descent and are part of a long history of immigration to Australia. Others have come from the educated indigenous (and in some cases Asian) middle classes of Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, Zambia and Tanzania, whose governments have often decried this 'brain drain' to the West. Not surprisingly the countries of birth with the highest rates of employment as labourers – Burundi, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan,

Eritrea and Botswana – have recently experienced conflict and other difficulties, which have had a significant effect on its citizen's access to education.

While the majority of immigration from Africa is through skilled or family categories (many of these are nominees of earlier humanitarian arrivals), a significant number of new arrivals to Australia include refugees or other humanitarian groups. A refugee is someone who meets the definition set out in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (and its 1967 Protocol).

The Convention, to which Australia is a signatory, defines a refugee as:

Any person who owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country.

A Special Humanitarian Program entrant may experience similar threats and dangers as a refugee but is normally sponsored by an Australian resident or organisation. The Special Assistance category is used in defined situations; again the entrant would normally have pre-existing links to Australia. Australia has received approximately 13,000 humanitarian entrants each year for some years now (rising from about 7,000 per year at the beginning of the decade), with about 10% of places allocated to women at risk. The Women at Risk program assists women who do not have the protection of a male relative and are in danger of victimisation and serious abuse because of their gender. Australia introduced the Women at Risk visa class in 1989 in recognition of the priority given to the protection of refugee women in particularly vulnerable situations by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Australia had accepted over 8,800 women and their children under the program by 2008 (the allocation rising to about 14% of all humanitarian entrants that year).

**Table 2: Country of birth by Occupational Group, ranked by percentage of managers and professionals**

COUNTRY OF BIRTH	Total number in all identified occupations	Percentage professional or managerial	Percentage labourers
UGANDA	975	59	3
TANZANIA	1,265	56	7
NIGERIA	1,634	53	9
MALAWI	448	52	7
SOUTH AFRICA	63,900	51	5
ZAMBIA	3,003	51	9
CONGO	161	50	11
KENYA	5,659	50	7
NAMIBIA	432	50	8
ZIMBABWE	13,413	46	7
EGYPT	14,200	43	8
LIBYA	683	43	9
SOUTHERN & EAST AFRICA, NFD	389	42	6
OTHER SUB-	1,051	40	12

COUNTRY OF BIRTH	Total number in all identified occupations	Percentage professional or managerial	Percentage labourers
SAHARAN AFRICA			
ALGERIA	458	40	7
BURUNDI	86	37	37
GHANA	1,635	36	13
CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF	246	34	14
BOTSWANA	288	32	30
TUNISIA	183	32	13
OTHER NORTH AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST	84	31	19
MAURITIUS	10,472	29	12
ANGOLA	267	28	18
SUDAN	3566	21	30
ERITREA	840	20	26
SOMALIA	967	17	16
SIERRA LEONE	716	17	29
LIBERIA	457	14	39

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics cross tabulations made available to the author by the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship

Note: Missing data covers those not in workforce (female care givers, children and retirees) or not given. These are current occupations and do not reflect occupations in country of origin.

#### **4.1 Southern Africa**

Immigration to Australia from Southern Africa accelerated in the 1980s. There had been some immigration during the height of apartheid by opponents of the South African regime and Perth received a regular inflow of white Africans, especially from Rhodesia in the lead up to and following the end of white rule in 1979. Most early immigration from the region involved people of European or 'coloured' descent. In 1987 Australia commentators noted that: "The South Africans who have been admitted under business migration, family migration and labour shortage categories are more likely to have been white South Africans. The government should develop a special humanitarian program for black South Africans who wish to migrate to Australia" (Anon., 1987).

Black immigration from South Africa became a topic of political controversy in 1987 when the then Returned Services League President Bruce Ruxton, a key opponent of non-white immigration, abused black South African Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu, describing him as "a witch doctor...breathing hatred" (Australian League of Rights, 1987). There were clear signs at that time of links between extremist right wing Australian organisations and some white nationalist refugees from South Africa.

In 1992 an African Australian commenting on settlement in Australia noted that:

Compared to almost any other region, Africa has very few immigrants in Australia. It is the second largest continent and has a population of 160 million. Yet Africans make up only 0.6 per cent of the Australian population. There were 3,728 members of the African community in Australia [sic: refers to 1986 Census]. Of this number about two-thirds were from South Africa. Presumably most of the South Africans in Australia were white. One reason for the low representation of people from other parts of Africa is the almost complete absence of diplomatic and immigration posts. Apart from South Africa, there are immigration posts in only two African countries, Kenya and Zimbabwe (Kwakwa, 1992).

The author could well have made the same point about the exodus from Kenya and Zimbabwe, where it appears that immigration posts were established primarily to service the emigration of whites leaving after independence of those countries and the establishment of majority rule (Brownell, 2008). Nairobi also later became the central point for processing refugees from Somalia and the Horn of Africa.

Since the 1990s there has been a large influx of South Africans, a significant number of whom are Jewish and descendants of the 1920s migration of Lithuanian Jewry to South Africa. There was also an earlier immigration of Jewish Egyptians to Australia in the 1950s and 1960s, following the rise of nationalist regimes and the war between Egypt and Israel in 1956 and again in 1967.

Religious identification provides another sense of the diversity of the African-born population in Australia. South African born residents in 2006 comprised 15,000 Anglicans, 14,000 Catholics, 11,000 Jews, 7,000 Uniting Church, 3,500 Presbyterians, 3,000 Hindus and 2,000 Muslims (the latter two groups descendants of earlier Indian immigrants) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006 Census; figures provided by Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship).

## **4.2 Northern Africa**

The Australian Government has tended to group the non-European Mediterranean littoral states into a single category, possibly because of their Ottoman Empire and Muslim histories. While it is possible to disaggregate them, the concept that appears to underpin this category still draws a potent dividing line in official documents. Consequently Morocco, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt – with the Middle East across to the Arabian Gulf – tend to be viewed as 'not Africa', while the north-east Horn of Africa and the countries to the south are somehow 'more African'. This distinction may owe more to European history than to African history.

The most significant source of migrants to Australia from the region has, of course, been Egypt, which encapsulates many of the general issues affecting immigration and settlement policies in relation to Africa. Egypt is a multicultural country bearing testimony to waves of imperial expansion. It is a majority Muslim country, with a strong Christian Coptic minority. It has been occupied, or at least administered, by the Ottomans, the French and the British. It was a vanguard in developing a secular, nationalist government, which had overthrown a royalist government and which confronted European power in the post-war decade. Egypt was the birthplace of Muslim nationalism and the point of origination for the Muslim Brotherhood. It has a youthful, well-educated population but lacks sufficient occupational opportunities. At various stages political unrest, religious conflict and economic crises have driven people to emigrate.

According to the 2006 Census, the 33,000 Egyptian-born residents in Australia comprised 9,700 Coptic Christians, 8,000 Catholics, 5,000 Greek Orthodox, 3,000 Muslims and 500 Jews. It is a well educated and professional community, although it has a high proportion of retirees; less than half are in the labour market. Further, the major factors behind emigration – political and ethno-religious conflict – mean that the Egyptian community in Australia has a very different profile to its country of origin.

Sudan has become a controversial source of immigration from Africa, partly due to the rapid growth in the number of immigrants to Australia and partly because of comments made in 2007 by the then Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews alleging they had shown a poor history of integration. Sudan is located between Egypt and the Horn of Africa. Physically the largest country on the continent, Sudan has a long history of struggle between Arab and indigenous African influences and varying reactions to colonial intrusions. Australian troops fought there in the 1880s, supporting the British. Over the past two generations the country has been embroiled in wars and inter-ethnic conflicts, with Muslim militias attacking the Christians and Animists of the south. A major location of this conflict is the south-western region of Darfur, where there have been regular reports of massacres in refugee camps and sustained attacks against civilians. In 2001 the Sudanese population in Australia was slightly less than 5,000, most of whom were refugees. By 2006 the number had grown to just under 20,000, a rate of growth that put enormous pressures on the fragile community structures established by earlier arrivals. As a result, many newly arrived refugees and humanitarian entrants had only limited community support to ease them into their new environment. The peak year for immigration was 2004-5, when just under 6,000 people arrived. The community is heavily male (54%) and mostly young. About three-quarters were sponsored to Australia under the Special Humanitarian Program and thus joined pre-existing communities. The vast majority are Christians (80%), with a smaller group of Muslims (12%). The largest settlement is in Melbourne, followed by Sydney, and there are smaller communities in the Darling Downs in southern Queensland and the Hunter region around Newcastle (Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 2006e).

### **4.3 North East – the Horn of Africa**

The Horn of Africa encompasses a region of great diversity, environmental stress and political conflict. Three countries stand out for the purposes of this paper – Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia. Ethno-national communities live within and across State borders and war and environmental stress may drive them further afield, as internally displaced persons or as refugees. Australia has taken an active humanitarian role in the region, working with UNHCR officials.

Ethiopia has experienced over 30 years of disruption, with refugee communities scattered through Somalia, Sudan, Djibouti and Kenya. It is the largest Horn of Africa country, with a population of 85 million. By 2001 Australia was home to 3,600 Ethiopians, with most settled in Victoria. In part this reflected the very different views of Australia's state governments; in general Victoria has welcomed new settlers, while New South Wales has sought to dissuade immigrant settlement where it could. In the period from 2000 to 2005 a further 3,000 people arrived from Ethiopia. The 2006 Census recorded the community at about 5,000, with 60% living in Victoria.

The vast majority arrived under humanitarian schemes or family reunion, with a significant group of 350 (comprising Christian women with children at risk) arriving in 2004 from the Abu Rakhm camp in Sudan (Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 2006c).

Eritreans form a smaller group and come from a society with at least nine ethno-linguistic groups. In 2001 there were about 1,600 Eritreans living in Australia – again, mostly in Victoria – with the number growing to about 2,000 by 2006. Eritrea has a complicated history in relation to Ethiopia, being amalgamated under the Italians in the 1930s and then seeking independence in a series of wars through until the 1990s. Almost all Eritreans in Australia are either humanitarian or family entrants; over half identify as Muslim, with a smaller number being Coptic and Eastern Orthodox (Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 2006b).

Somalis were some of the first refugees from Africa to be accepted in Australia. They began arriving in the 1980s and established community organisations early on. Most gravitated towards Melbourne, where the Somali Relief Association opened in the mid-1980s, the Somali Community Association in 1988 and the Somali Cultural Association in 1995. In 1996 there were 2,061 Somalis, a number which increased to 3,713 by 2001, with most arriving between 1994 and 1998. The community has grown only slightly since then (4,316 by 2006). Most Somalis are Sunni Muslims and their religious practice has helped them establish links with other Muslim communities in Australia. Somalia was an attempted amalgam of former British and Italian colonial territories and has experienced constant civil war and tension, characterised by the collapse of central authority and government. Australian troops served as part of a failed peacekeeping exercise between 1991 and 1993, the period in which the Hollywood film 'Black Hawk Down' was set (Jupp, 2001). Refugees to Australia were processed through Nairobi in Kenya. Somalis are less likely to identify as 'African', often preferring their ethnic, religious or other identities. The established Somali community in Australia was somewhat shaken by the anti-African sentiment stirred up in 2007, which they felt inappropriately included them in the criticisms of Sudanese and other 'black' Africans (discussion between author and young Somalis, Melbourne, February 2009).

#### **4.4 Sub-Saharan Africa**

In mid-2006 the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs began to publish a series of booklets on African refugees, their backgrounds and issues associated with settlement, especially relating to the refugee experience. The booklets aimed to raise awareness and increase understanding of African refugees in the broader Australian community. Among them was a collection on sub-Saharan Africans, at that stage a fairly small part of Australia's intake, from countries including Togo, the Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone. It signalled a Departmental expectation about the possible future pattern and source of African refugee and humanitarian intake and the importance of building understanding about people from countries that had not part of Australia's immigration history. The booklets addressed what could be seen as the general ignorance of most Australians about the situation facing many Africans and also the very different national and cultural expectations that new arrivals brought with them – different among the various African ethno-tribal groups and different from earlier immigrant arrivals and the Australian-born population.

It is likely that these groups were selected because of the rapid increase in community numbers, usually from a low base. Liberians increased from 124 to 1,526 in the five years from 2001 to 2006; Congolese, from both Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), from 400 to about 1,100; and those from Sierra Leone from 360 to about 1,800 (Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 2006a, 2006d, 2006f, 2007). These groups usually arrived after experiencing significant trauma, including warfare, horrendous violence and years as refugees either in camps or in urban poverty in other African countries. Most new arrivals to Australia were overwhelmingly young, with little educational experience and limited English language skills. For the Congolese, French was more likely to be spoken than English.

Unlike the Horn of Africa communities, most members of sub-Saharan communities identify as Christian. They have often been sponsored by church organisations in Australia and many strongly identify with their religious background, especially among the Congolese where there are over 250 ethnic groups. Refugees and humanitarian entrants from the Democratic Republic of Congo often spent most of their lives in a neighbouring society and commonly lost family members in the violence; some may have escaped from early forced recruitment as child soldiers (Jal, E., 2010). A large proportion of the Congolese arrivals in Australia were children.

Those coming from Liberia, however, were essentially young adults; often women with young families (21% were women at risk), while 73% were refugees (rather than sponsored humanitarian arrivals). Most had experienced trauma and torture. Drawn from some 30 different ethno-linguistic groups or tribes, few Liberians would have been familiar with urban life. However, most had some experience of schooling, albeit limited..

Sierra Leone gained independence from Britain in 1961. As a result, unlike many other African countries, English is spoken by a large number of people (about one-third) and there is also a widely-spoken Creole (Krio). Most arrived as refugees or sponsored humanitarian arrivals, with about half settling in New South Wales. Predominantly young adults and children, the religious make-up of the group is about two-thirds Christian and one-third Muslim.

It is likely that the intake from central Africa will further diminish in the coming years, except through family and humanitarian sponsorship. However Australia's stated policy of greater engagement with Africa, especially in relation to peace-making and security, may increase the call on Australia as a country of first refuge from ongoing conflicts.

## **5 A decade of Australia's immigration policies in relation to Africa**

Immigration from Africa since the mid-1990s reflects the broad mix of policy streams that have evolved in response to economic, social and humanitarian priorities. These immigration streams are usually described as 'humanitarian', 'family' and 'skill'. In addition, there are medium-term entrants under the 457 visa class (fixed-term, sponsored, skilled workers) who are not classed as settlers but who are still very much part of Australian society. (More information on Australia's migration program is

available from the website of the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship: [www.immi.gov.au](http://www.immi.gov.au).)

In the decade from 1997 to 2007 about 136,000 people migrated from Africa to Australia as humanitarian (30%), family (15%) and skilled (55%) entrants. A handful of countries contributed the vast majority of entrants under the skilled category: South Africa (70% of skilled entrants; 86% of all South Africans), Zimbabwe (14.5%; 88%), Mauritius (3%;76%) and Kenya (4%; 55%).

The arrival of humanitarian entrants from Africa cannot be easily separated from the wider political debate about Australia's refugee program and its response to asylum seekers. While the majority of African humanitarian entrants have been 'lawful' arrivals processed off-shore in conjunction with UNHCR, a minority have entered the very rough terrain of being defined as 'unlawful' arrivals.

In 1999, the Australian Government, through the then Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock, initiated a major campaign against unlawful arrivals and the 'people smugglers' who helped get them to Australia. The aim was to detect, deter and detain any such arrivals (Australian Customs Service, 1999) (Jakubowicz, 1999) (Wills, 2002). The program soon had its desired effect and numbers began to decline. While on-shore and 'boat arrival' applicants for asylum had been held in Australian immigration detention centres since 1992 under the Hawke and Keating Governments, the Howard Government moved in 2001 to develop the so-called 'Pacific Strategy' (or 'Solution'), incarcerating intercepted asylum seekers and transferring them to a number of Pacific Ocean islands, such as Nauru, where their applications were processed.

As the regime became more stringent and coastal patrols strengthened, the government advertised widely in other regions, including Africa, that there was a certainty of detection for unlawful entrants and a high and expensive likelihood of return to their point of origin. A media report from the time noted: "Immigration minister Philip Ruddock believes that deporting illegal arrivals as soon as possible will help discourage smuggling. When 2,000 Africans boarding ships in Somalia for Australia learned from radio reports that the Australian government was not going to allow their entry, the passengers turned on the smugglers and the \$4 million scheme was thwarted" (Anon., 1999). This tougher approach also generated a wave of appeals to the Federal Court following negative Refugee Review Tribunal decisions.

The conditions in Australian immigration detention centres, often located in remote parts of the country, were similarly inhospitable for asylum seekers arriving by boat. The issue received international attention during the Sydney Olympic Games when three Somali men reportedly requested Australian officials to send them back to Somalia, claiming "they prefer possible death and torture in Somalia to enduring the harsh conditions in Australia's immigration detention centres." They had been held in detention at Port Hedland in Western Australia since November 1997 and in their letter wrote: "'Because of the depression, trauma and anxiety and mental pressure, we are afraid to commit suicide or lose our mind. Therefore, we do prefer to go back to Somalia and die as innocent victims.' An Australian church says the three have already lost members of their families to violence in Somalia and face persecution and death if they return" (BBC online news, 27 September 2000; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/944631.stm>).

Racist perceptions of Africans still remain and are a cause of legitimate concern for African communities and the wider society. A low-level rumble of extremist opposition to black African immigration began to make its way into the public arena during the mid-2000s. When Andrew Fraser, an academic from Macquarie University, engaged in a string of insulting criticisms of African immigrants on the basis of his prejudices regarding racial hierarchy, African communities were active in their own defence and in collaboration with many Australian community organisations (Queensland Department of Communities, 2008). Fraser's comments, that "an expanding black population is a sure-fire recipe for increases in crime, violence and a wide range of other social problems" (Dick, 2005), were prompted by a Parramatta Sun story celebrating the success of a young Sudanese girl in becoming part of the Australian community and her parents acceptance of the responsibilities of Australian citizenship. While Fraser ultimately apologised for his comments, there were continuing outbreaks of anti-African agitation, especially in Queensland, leading to a significant government initiative in that state to enhance the self-esteem of African migrants and refugees and deal with confronting social issues (Queensland Department of Communities, 2008).

### The Queensland Government's Engagement with African Refugees

One of the more controversial dimensions of the humanitarian scheme remains its vulnerability to political interference by the Immigration Minister of the day. The most dramatic example occurred in early October 2007 when the then Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews, a member of the Howard Government, publicly declared his concern about the slow integration of African humanitarian arrivals. He expressed particular concern about the apparent violent behaviour of young Sudanese men; one of whom was found dead in a Melbourne street from a bashing a week after Andrews' statement. His attackers – non-Africans – were charged and later, in December 2009, convicted of his murder. The victim's mother told a crowd at his funeral that her son was not a refugee but an Australian citizen who had arrived in 2000 (Collins, 2007).

In a doorstep interview a few weeks before the 2007 federal election (and a week before the murder), Andrews said: "We do have a responsibility to the Australian community to ensure that when people come to Australia they're able to adequately settle in this country. And we have detected that there have been additional challenges in relation to some of the people that have come from Africa over the last few years." He went on to note that: "Now, there is a need obviously in Africa, and Australia has been very responsive to the need in Africa. We took the proportion of our refugee intake from, I think, about 23 per cent coming from Africa, I think, six years ago up to 33 per cent. We then took it up to, as I recall, 50 per cent. Then for two years it was 70 per cent of the total intake, it was 50 per cent last year and it's still 30 percent, that is three out of every 10 refugee and humanitarian entrants that come to Australia this year will come from Africa" (Andrews, 2007). A month before his remarks there had been public notice of this change in direction in immigration policy, without significant outcry. The orientation had already been shifted away from Africa towards new hot spots in Asia, especially Burma, although there were no moves to reduce African immigration any further than had already occurred – the halt that was announced simply reflected an early filling of the annual quota of refugee and humanitarian entrants.

Andrews' comments were widely reported and may have signaled to some (as a dog whistle does to those who can hear its frequency (Fear, 2007)) that Africans were

unacceptable and dangerous – and that assaults on them could be defended as expressions of righteous nationalism. There are other indications that Andrews' comments had a broader political intent, or at least a political effect. Katherine Betts, in her discussion of the 2007 federal election, notes that in 2004 and before Victorians had been between four and five per cent more 'positive' towards immigration than the national average, however support during the 2007 election campaign dropped back to that of the other states (Betts, 2008). Andrews' comments just before the election may well have played a part in that shift in opinion.

The Refugee Council said of the events: "The nature of the public criticism was unprecedented for an Immigration Minister in the 30 years of the Government's Refugee and Humanitarian Program – never had a Minister been so critical of the program for which he or she was responsible. The criticism was extraordinary because the Minister did not alter the program in any way. The 2007-08 program continued to operate in the way the Minister announced in August 2007." It was, in fact, a reduction from 70% of Africans comprising the humanitarian intake in 2004-5 to 30% in 2007-8. The Council went on to note that: "Mr Andrews has linked ability to settle in Australia to a person's race, rather than his or her individual circumstances" and that "[s]uch a sweeping generalisation about an entire racial or national group is unjustifiable – and far more dangerous than the Minister realises."

The Australian Human Rights Commission argued at the time: "The government's decision to cut African refugee numbers because they are not settling and adjusting to the Australian way of life is at odds with the primary concern of the Refugee Convention; that is, providing a safe haven for people who are fleeing persecution in their country of origin."

The introduction of the idea that integration capacity should be used as a filter to select refugee applicants would have produced a major change to the universal rights associated with proven refugee status. Andrews' argument was the first fundamental challenge by the Australian Government to the world community's approach to the definition of refugee rights.

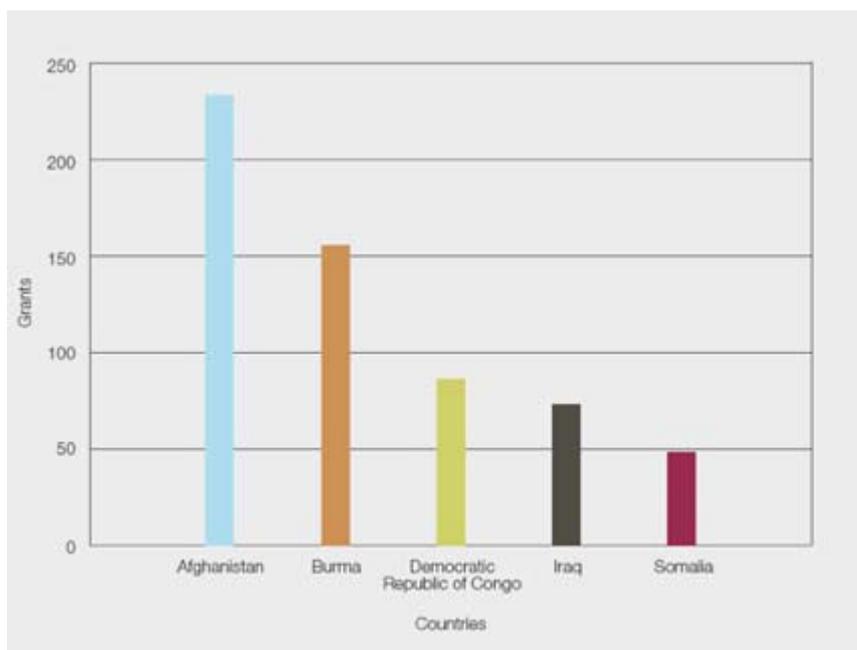
The Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) reports identify trends in the focus and priorities adopted by the government and collaborating civil society settlement organisations. In 2001-2 the IHSS assisted about 8,000 people, of whom just under a quarter came from Africa. In 2002-3 the total increased to 10,000, with around 40% from Africa and in 2003-4, with the total still at 10,000, 6,500 were from Africa (65%). Over that same period on-shore arrivals (defined as Temporary Protection Visas, Temporary Humanitarian Visas and Permanent Protection Visa holders) declined from approximately 2,000 (about 25%) to just 46 – demonstrating the dramatic impact of the Australian Government's 'deter, detect, detain' approach and the 'Pacific Solution' (which was still processing people held in off-shore detention centres). In 2005-6 the African component began to decline, necessitated in particular by the rapid rise in refugees generated by the 'coalition of the willing' attack on Iraq and the anti-Taliban intervention in Afghanistan.

In 2006-7 the number of refugee and humanitarian entrants grew to over 12,000 – rising again to 13,000 in 2007-8 – but on-shore visa applicants also increased as a proportion to 17%. In 2008 Africans made up about 30% of the off-shore total, a significant decline from 2004 and an indication of Andrews' claim that an inter-departmental committee had already implemented policy changes as a result of

reported concerns about the numbers of Africans arriving and pressure from the immediate region for help in response to their own crises. Andrews' remarks had another effect that the Department recognised in its 2008 Annual Report, in which it noted the decline in applications, the tightening up of selection criteria and "publicity regarding the availability of places" (Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2008).

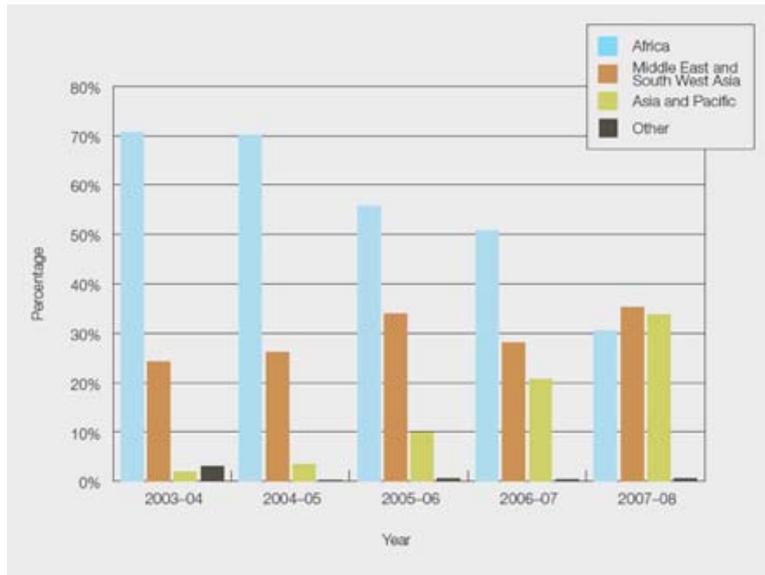
The most recent figures demonstrate the current characteristics of the African humanitarian situation as it is perceived and acted on by Australian Government agencies. In general the focus on recruiting applicants from Africa has been reduced and resourcing for settlement services has been increased. The 'scare' of October 2007 seems to have done its work, which was to sufficiently alarm the Australian population that there would not be any widespread reaction against the decline in arrivals and to warn off people in the camps in Africa from seeking refuge in Australia. (Australia Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2008) At the same time, greater priority was given to assisting women at risk, to some extent addressing any public concern about a reduction in humanitarian compassion for the victims of Africa's crises.

### **Humanitarian Program Woman at Risk grants 2007–08: top five countries of birth**



Source: Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship Annual Report 2007-8, Figure 20

### **Humanitarian Program visa grants offshore: regional trend**



Source: Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship Annual Report 2007-8, Figure

## 6 Conclusions

Australia's approach to immigration, including its relationship with Africa, was long informed by viewing the issue through the lens of race, accepting 'whites' and rejecting 'blacks'. The loosening of the White Australia policy from the 1960s, while driven by priorities in the immediate region, opened up opportunities for immigration by non-Europeans from Africa. In Africa the drivers of emigration began to explode in the wake of decolonisation, especially the conflicts and instability generated by under-resourced, newly-born States seeking to hold together political entities previously created by imperial powers to suit their now superseded interests.

In addition, economic under-development failed to meet the needs of surging populations and the expectations generated by the growing influence of Western societies and media. Corruption and poverty drove horrific conflicts, which wrecked the social basis of many communities and forced millions to flee. In other parts of Africa, expanding education systems created new classes of technicians and professionals whose expectations also could not be satisfied in the contradictions of their home societies.

In Australia many of these issues came to a head during the immigration crisis of 2006-7, when the government's anxiety to recruit highly skilled immigrants, especially for the burgeoning mining industry, turned it ever more away from dealing with the humanitarian problems of Africa. It consistently stated that the Australian public's support for increasing migration (the second half of the Howard Government saw immigration increase dramatically) was directly related to its sense that the migrants would add to the nation's economic prosperity without threatening social cohesion. The public comments of the Immigration Minister in 2007, and the narrative promoted of violent Sudanese young men, was apparently framed by the government's apprehension about dwindling public support for the expanding immigration program; not dissimilar, though on a much smaller scale, to the public debate initiated around 'unlawful arrivals' which was a prelude to the 'Pacific Solution' of 2001. In retrospect, the government's comments and action may have actually accelerated the decline in public support.

A highly diverse range of immigrants from Africa continue to play their roles as Australian citizens and productive members of society. They bring human capital that has proved of immense value to the nation, adding their wealth of ideas and experience to the broad multicultural society that they have entered. While some African-born Australians still struggle with the challenges of re-orienting to a new life, having been granted refugee or humanitarian status, others have found opportunities to develop careers, create new homes and contribute to community organisations that now support more recent arrivals.

Yet as so many immigrants have found before, there are some Australians who react with anger and suspicion to cultural and physical difference, offering violence instead of welcome. While these problems can be identified and the perpetrators dealt with by legal processes where necessary, there remain some fundamental structural impediments to full racial equality. These include a Constitutional power to make laws based on race (and to make them in ways that can harm members of a 'race'), and the power to overrule the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 should the government wish.

Until these questions are ultimately resolved – possibly through a federal Human Rights Act that ensures cultural difference is not a basis for discrimination and persecution – the immigration program is likely to provide a continuing challenge for African immigrants. While many have found Australia a welcoming society with an open opportunity structure, others have not. The door that Australia opened a generation ago to the survivors of the Somali tragedy and the Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict has swung more widely and more narrowly as Australian political winds have blown. Every change in the breeze has profound effects for less powerful and more vulnerable individuals and groups.

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