

ETHNIC INTERMIXTURE OF MIGRANTS AND INDIGENOUS

PEOPLES IN AUSTRALIA

Charles Price

*Claims concerning the size of ethnic and indigenous communities need to be considered in the light of intermixture with other communities. Intermixture levels are in fact high for most of Australia's ethnic and indigenous peoples..*

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In a previous article :

[1] I wrote that some ethnic leaders not only exaggerated the size of their ethnic communities but also gave the impression that the number they claimed consisted of pure ethnics; that is, of persons whose ancestors were all of that one ethnic origin. In 1986, for instance, some claimed that there were 400,000 'Maltese' in Australia; which was considerably more than the population of the whole Maltese archipelago, 346,000 in 1987. In fact, in 1986, there were in Australia only about 169,000 persons with any ethnic Maltese ancestry, of whom some 103,000 were of pure or unmixed Maltese descent and 66,000 of mixed Maltese and other origins.

Likewise, there were claims that Australia had one million 'Italians'; a total unchanged since it was first claimed in the mid 1970s. In fact, in mid-1986, there were about 694,000 persons with some Italian ancestry, about 465,000 being of unmixed Italian descent and 229,000 of mixed Italian and some other origin. (1986 is a good year to work with as the 1986 Census asked a question on ancestry as well as questions on birthplace and language.)

We can compare these totals with the 1986 German figures: about 1,322,000 persons with some German ancestry, maybe 240,000 of pure or unmixed German origin and 1,082,000 of mixed German and other ethnic origin. The Irish figures were: about 6,500,000 Australians with some Irish ancestry, 290,000 being of unmixed Irish descent and 6,210,000 of mixed Irish and other ethnic origin. The Germans and Irish, being well established in Australian since early colonial days, feel no need to make many public statements about how numerous and important they are. Moreover, they have been long enough in this country to have spread widely about it, and to have intermixed freely over that time with persons of other ethnic origins.

Where do these estimates come from? Detailed discussion of the statistics appears in the works listed in the bibliographical note. Here it is enough to say that they come, as a first step, from estimates of birthplace origins. Those of the first generation (the overseas-born immigrants) derive from the birthplace totals published by Colonial and Commonwealth

censuses from 1846 onwards. Those of the second-generation (Australian-born persons with overseas-born parents) derive from the census figures of Australian-born persons by birthplace of parents, published from 1971 on, and from statistics of births in Australia by birthplace of parents published from 1988 onwards. Third generation origins can be estimated by imputing birth rates to the second generation. With later generations I constructed probability models of intermarriage and fertility and selected those which seemed to fit best with other information, such as family histories or ethnic group surveys.

Birthplace origins, however, are not the same as ethnic origins. Consider, for instance, all those Australians born to British parents in India, to Greek parents in Egypt, to Russian parents in China, to Polish parents in German Displaced Persons camps, to Dutch parents in Indonesia, to Indian parents in Fiji or to Chinese parents in Malaysia. We here have to draw on statistics of citizenship, language, religion, race, ancestry and so on; all of which have been collected by Colonial and Commonwealth statistical authorities. (Race statistics were collected from the 1950s until 1976 and, though much frowned upon these days as being 'racist', are statistically useful.)

Using all these statistics to modify birthplace estimates is a long and complex procedure, but in the end gives us some idea of the ethnic origins of our population and the extent to which various ethnic groupings have intermixed over the decades. My 1988 estimates were that 47.9 per cent of the Australian population were of Anglo-Celtic origin only, 22.3 per cent of non-Anglo-Celtic origin, and 29.8 per cent were mixed Anglo-Celt and non-Anglo-Celt.<sup>[2]</sup>

Intermixture was, of course, greater than this as there was much mixture not only between the English, Irish, Scots, Welsh and Cornish but also between Danes and Germans, Poles and Ukrainians, French and Belgians, Indians and Nepalese, Filipinos and Chinese, and so on. In all, in 1988, about 66 per cent of the Australian population were of mixed ethnic origin and 34 per cent unmixed. Mixing has, of course, been much higher in the third and later generations. Only ten per cent of these generations were of unmixed origin though with slower mixing peoples - Greeks, Italians and others - the unmixed third generation proportions were nearer 33 per cent.

Table 1

[\[Table 1\]](#) sets out my calculations, for mid 1987, for select ethnic groupings.

Since 1986-87 the mixing process has continued, but some ethnic groups are relatively new (Vietnamese, Iranians, Ethiopians, Koreans, etc) and have relatively few adult second generation persons; with them the mixing process has only just begun. Some older groups - Chinese, Japanese and others - had been mixing quite freely but recently experienced a surge of new immigration, with China-born persons (including Taiwan) rising from 17,600 in 1971 to 78,900 in 1991 and Japan-born persons rising from 4,900 to 26,000; consequently these groupings have reverted to the lower mixing patterns of more recently-arrived peoples. With Filipinos and Thais, though immigration has jumped spectacularly (Philippines-born persons increased from 2,550 in 1971 to 73,400 in 1991 and Thai-born persons from 1,000 to

14,000), a large proportion have come as wives and fiancées of Australian men of other ethnic origins; they have high mixing levels, even in the first generation.

All in all, though recent years have seen some slowing down of the mixing process with some ethnic groups, the general pattern is for increasing intermixture, especially with the third generation onwards. It is a bold, even foolhardy, ethnic leader who speaks as if 'his' ethnic group is going to continue for-ever as a distinct and pure ethnic grouping. A core will always remain but will grow less and less as decades pass.

**INTERMIXTURE AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**The indigenous peoples of Australia present very different problems. In terms of birthplace origins they are lost in the general Australian-born population. This matters not because since 1971 there has been a special census question asking whether a person is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (TSI) origin or not. From answers to this question the Australian Statistician can say that those stating they were of Aboriginal or TSI origin increased from 116,000 in 1971 to 265,500 in 1991 - a substantial increase caused partly by better counting procedures, partly by higher than average fertility, and partly by more and more persons of mixed indigenous and non-indigenous origins opting to mention their indigenous origins only.

For this the census question is partly responsible because it instructs 'persons of mixed origin' to indicate only the main origin 'to which they think they belong'. Naturally enough, those proud of their Aboriginal or TSI origin give that origin even if only one-quarter indigenous by ancestry.

That a number are prepared to mention their mixed origins if given a chance is shown by the 1986 census question asking each person for their 'ancestry'; and recording the first two answers if the person gave more than one ancestry. Some 85 per cent of Aboriginal persons answering the question gave 'Aboriginal' as their only ancestry while the other 15 per cent gave their ancestry as 'Aboriginal: English' or 'Chinese: Aboriginal' or some such. (For these calculations I transferred those saying 'Aboriginal: Australian' or 'Australian: Aboriginal' to the unmixed Aboriginal total because I felt the word 'Australian' was here being used in a geographical rather than ancestral sense. So also with the TSI.) With TSI some 76 per cent of those answering the question gave TSI as their only ancestry while the remaining 24 per cent gave answers such as 'TSI: Irish' or 'German: TSI'. The major mixtures are set out in

Table 2.

[\[Table 2\]](#)

Nearly 900 persons gave their ancestry as mixed 'Aboriginal: TSI' and 270 as 'TSI: Aboriginal'. Most of these were living in Queensland. Given all the talk about mixture between the two peoples I was surprised their number was not greater.

It is interesting to note that the number giving 'Aboriginal', either as their only ancestry or as one of their ancestries, totalled 185,590; which was 90.05 per cent of the 206,100 who

answered 'Aboriginal' to the special question on 'Aboriginal origin'. The remaining 20,510 either failed to answer the ancestry question altogether or else gave their ancestry simply as 'Australian'. The TSI figures were very different. Some 11,900 answered the ancestry question but this was only 55.25 per cent of the 21,540 who answered TSI to the special question on 'origin'. Presumably, as many TSI do not think of themselves as 'Australian', most of the remaining 44.75 per cent (9,640) simply did not answer the ancestry question at all.

Do these statistics of indigenous intermixtures - 16 per cent for Aboriginal and 24 per cent for TSI - faithfully represent the total extent of intermixture, or is intermixture in fact much greater? Here we can go back to the last census asking a full 'Race ' question, that of 1966. The Australian Statistician distrusted the quality of many of the answers and published only summary figures. The full answers have been available, though, and suggest that of those recorded in the 1966 census more than 52 per cent of Aboriginal people, and even more TSI, were of mixed indigenous and other descent.<sup>[3]</sup> Later censuses undoubtedly covered a higher proportion of all indigenous people but many of these extra are clearly of mixed origin.

In 1986 terms this implies there were at least 120,000 persons of mixed Aboriginal and other origins, compared with 27,000 who actually gave two ancestries; and at least 15,000 persons of mixed TSI and other origins compared with the 2,850 actually stating two ancestries. In other words, though an appreciable number of persons of mixed indigenous and other origins are willing to give their other ancestries in a census ancestry question there are considerably more who do not admit to any ancestry other than Aboriginal or TSI. So long as indigenous persons take pride in their indigenous origins - and sometimes receive financial advantages for doing so - this tendency for many persons of mixed indigenous and other origins to admit only to their indigenous origin will continue. This does not, however, affect the usefulness of Table 2 in showing the main mixtures involved.

## References

1 Charles Price, *People and Place*, vol. 4, no. 4, 1996

2 Charles A. Price, *Ethnic Groups in Australia*, Office of Multicultural Affairs, Canberra, 1989

3 My own working, see also L. R. Smith, *The Aboriginal Population of Australia*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1980, pp. 199, 203; and ABS, *The Aboriginal Population of Australia*, 30 June 1966 and *Special Statement - Full-blood Aborigines*, 11/8/1967

## For further reading on ethnic intermixture in Australia see:

C.A. Price 'The ethnic character of the Australian population', *The Australian People*, ed. James Jupp, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 188, pp. 119-128

Charles A. Price, 'The ethnic composition of the Australian population', Part Three of

Immigration and Ethnicity, *Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs*, Canberra, 1996

Siew-ean Khoo and Charles A. Price, *Understanding Australia's Ethnic Composition*, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Canberra, 1996

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