DISCUSSION SERIES #6

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Acknowledgments

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I begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the lands on which this House stands – the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people of the Eastern Kulin Nation – and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

This year, *Understanding Victoria* has delved into key elements of social and political policy in the 20th century.

We began the year exploring the development of trade union campaigns for the eight-hour working day and for protection from employment practices that undercut wages.

Next, we examined the factors that shaped the distinguishing features of social welfare policy in Australia as it developed in the twentieth century.

Today, in the final discussion for the year, we consider the third major arm of government policy that shaped our economy and society – immigration.

The title of today's event – *'From all the lands on earth we come'* – is, of course, a reference to a line in the verse of *I am Australian*.

Since the song's initial release in 1987, it has been sung by countless audiences at civic events across our country – and even been proposed as an alternative national anthem.

That phrase resonates particularly strongly here in Victoria.

In our State today, so much of our population were either born overseas or have a parent born overseas.

Yet even as we sing *'…we are one, but we are many…',* we do not fully capture how migration has shaped our nation over the decades.

The existence of diverse communities is the outcome of deliberate decisions – with population policies dating back before we became a nation.

The colonies that formed the Commonwealth built their populations through migration.

From Federation and the passing of the Immigration Restriction Act 1901 that underpinned the White Australia policy, it was the decisions about <u>which</u> people from <u>which</u> lands on earth could come that shaped the State of Victoria and the nation that we have become.

It was not until 1973 under the Whitlam government that preferential treatment for British subjects was removed, as were restrictions on migrants of non-European descent.

From a policy of assimilation with a focus on the 'mother country' Britian, where an idea of Australian identity and values to replace the previous culture and values of the immigrant…

…we moved to multiculturalism, which recognises the cultures from which people come and sees them enriching the culture of Australia.

From today's viewpoint, we can look back and see these distinct periods of change, the circumstances that defined them, and the policies that enabled them.

We see more clearly the waves of new migrants that arrived, the challenges and opportunities they faced, and the contributions they made.

In the three decades post Word War II, Australia created a nation where population growth came to be dominated by migration, and a nation where diversity of cultural and linguistic groups became characteristic.

The outcomes of such changes are more than demographic and cultural – they reshaped our economy, physical landscapes, institutions and society.

The post-war emphasis on assimilation and integration, for better or worse, implied the existence of a culture, known and fixed, to which new arrivals were expected to subscribe.

Each new wave of migrants provided the impetus for Australians to reflect on national identity, and to exchange ideas about who we were, or are, as a people.

These are questions of self-definition and shared values that we still ask today.

It is in this spirit of deepening comprehension about ourselves that we embark on our discussion today.

After the horrific attack on our Jewish community last week, we have heard issues of immigration raised by some as part impetus for terrorism.

Given our historical reliance on migration to build Australia, it would be regressive and divisive to form anti-immigration rhetoric in the face of this tragedy.

Australia – and Victoria's – story of migration does not fit neatly into the verse of song.

Rather, it is nuanced and ever-changing – the collective outcome of countless individual stories of successes, hardships, aspirations and disappointments.

I am aware there is much lived experience in the room with us today, and – and, as with our exploration of the 1970s protest movements last year – these personal insights will add much depth to our discussion.

In particular, I want to extend my gratitude to speakers Emeritus Professor Andrew Markus, Dr Andonis Piperoglou and Professor Nathalie Nguyen for generously sharing their expertise.

And of course, thank you to Jon Faine for facilitating today's discussion.

Thank you.