

2010 *What Matters?* Competition

YEAR 7/8 RUNNER-UP

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What Matters

What matters to me is that ways of interacting together can be found to avoid conflict, and create peace. Humans have a long history of fighting between groups over territory. As a multicultural society, Australian's run the risk of classifying ourselves in various ethnic groups. If Australian's fail to focus on common bonds, rather than what separates us, we too become vulnerable to territorial conflict. Race riots between white Anglo-Saxon Australians, and Indian immigrants have gained recent media attention in Australia. What is lacking is a solution to eradicate social division responsible for such racial disharmony.

Citizenship is an attempt at forming a common bond. But how many times have you asked somebody are they an Australian citizen? This means that if we can't easily recognize citizenship, then we must question how effective it can be as a common bond. A more informal common bond than citizenship however, is the easily recognized use of a common language to communicate in societies. The common bond of the word hello for example, is understood as a greeting by all interacting cultures in Australia. Recently a friend asked me what nationality I was. With a Samoan father, and an Aussie' mother, I said I was Samozzie! Or was that an Ozziemoan? This got me thinking. How do I respectfully and seriously answer this question doing both nationalities justice using our common English language?

Usually, I hear mates say they are Chinese, Greek or Italian. But they seem to forget the Aussie part. Sure, there is a respected loyalty attached with announcing cultural heritage, but the problem is in Australia's heavily multicultural community, not enough people by instinct call themselves Australian! This is understandable when we consider a quarter of Australian's were born overseas, and more than half of us have at least one parent born overseas. The description of nationality is usually answered at present focusing on cultural family descent, which inadvertently is a show of absolute preference to be identified as an alternative nationality to Australian. This use of language does nothing to promote integration and equal belonging. Could this be how race riots begin?

The solution I am proposing was inspired during media hype, as Barack Obama became the first African American President of the USA. Like many Australian's, President Obama has a historic cultural descent which he claims is part of his identity. Yet it would sound strange if the news announced President Obama as the first African president of America. The dual nationality of African-American provided the most appropriate identity for the President who considers America his home, and has an African ancestry. What a great way of celebrating cultural diversity and multicultural unity in one simple statement!

Perhaps if Australian's do not consider themselves as Australian alone, they too could embrace Obarma's model and add 'Australian' as the second, of a two part, national identity. This model would then position me as Samoan-Australian. If Australian's make this simple shift in language, we can place us all under the one "surname" of Australian, creating an integrated, not separated identity. I believe that this conscious change could therefore avoid ethnic related territorial conflict, as we would become all equally belonging members of our state, sharing a common bond through our everyday language.