

NATIONAL IDENTITY IN MULTICULTURAL SOCIETIES: THE  
POLITICAL USE OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN AUSTRALIA  
1996–2007

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*Thesis*

*Master of Arts History, Political Culture & National Identities*

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National identity can never be defined according to partisan political goals and objectives.

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— John Howard, 1995



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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1 Introduction

When, in March 1996, the Howard Government emerged victorious in the Australian federal election, it was the first such victory by the coalition of the Liberal and National Party at the federal level since 1980. This coalition would go on to win a further four elections and, when John Howard was finally defeated at the polls in December 2007, he had become the nation's second longest serving Prime Minister.

The sources of Howard's political success, and with it the revived fortunes of Australian conservatism, have been the source of much popular and scholarly debate. No single factor can by itself account for this remarkable turnaround. The Howard government enacted a range of policies which, regardless of their actual outcomes or success in achieving their stated policy objectives, proved hugely popular with the electorate. This was particularly true for Howard's combative stance regarding asylum seekers, Indigenous affairs and the War on Terror, as well as his private view of multiculturalism.

Howard further benefited from a range of accommodating structural conditions during the late 1990s, which was generally a period of sustained economic growth which in turn ensured a receptive audience for Howard's enthusiastic embrace of economic globalisation and his adherence to free market economics. These factors were further

compounded by reliable support from a compliant, conservative oriented press.<sup>1</sup> John Howard's personality and his skills as a politician, once underestimated by many in the political establishment, proved equally formidable. His personal popularity was bolstered by skilful and shrewd (if not necessarily calculating) management of his public persona, on frequent display at major sporting events. Commentators have variously drawn attention to a range of personal qualities, emphasising his integrity, his strongly held personal values, his political acumen, debating skill and his good fortune.

Among all these doubtlessly important determinants of Howard's political success, there is one that sets him apart from his predecessors in the Australian conservative tradition: his frequent and impassioned appeals to Australia's history and national identity. The major parties had often sought to bolster their legitimacy through an association with what were perceived to be powerful and widespread currents of popular identification with national symbols, rituals and practices. The conservative parties – in no small part due to their roots in the 'squattocracy' (landed gentry), their association with the interests of urban businesses and ties to imperial Britain – had often been successfully portrayed by their labour opponents as the party of the privileged few, hostile to the grass roots democratic values of its own constituency. Yet John Howard had managed to appropriate, if not the substance, then the particular inflection of these national traits in popular consciousness. Listening to Howard's rhetoric, one gleans a picture of Australian national identity that is infused with a rhetoric of individualism, self-reliance, family values and, in general, a distinctively modern synthesis of traditional conservative cultural values and emergent neo-liberal politico-economic doctrines.

This thesis will address two principal questions prompted by this remarkable departure from historical trends, one to do with history, the other with social theory.

The historical question asks what factors account for this successful realignment between politicians and national identity. How can we explain Howard's by-and-large successful attempts to portray core Australian values in a vocabulary drawn largely from conservative and neo-liberal thought, given its historical associations with popular,

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<sup>1</sup> Joshua S. Gans and Andrew Leigh, "How Partisan Is the Press? Multiple Measures of Media Slant," *Economic Record* 88, no. 280 (2012): 127–147. Between 1996 -2007 on average, 77 per cent of the 10 major newspapers'editorial endorsements favoured the Coalition.



solidarity based movements? Moreover: how do we account for its emergence at this particular point in time? What circumstances made a discursive pivot to the rhetoric of identity and nationalism so potent at precisely this juncture?

The theoretical question concerns national identity itself, as a more general phenomenon in social life. Social theorists have long debated the relative priority of mass, bottom-up, grass-root social processes in constituting and shaping the substance of national identity, relative to the attempts of cultural, political, ideological and economic elites to shape and mould national identity to serve their own ideological and material ends. That both bottom-up and top-down processes are involved is relatively uncontested but it is the direction of the causality which marks the battle lines.

On the one hand there is the view that the substantive core of national identity is durably forged in the cauldron of mass society, with elites perhaps capable of subtly modifying its contours, but generally having little choice but to accept national identity as given for most practical purposes. On the other hand, there are those who believe modern societies possess unprecedented institutional and technical means, exemplified by mass education, modern media and communication technologies, for the elite to foist their ideals, symbols and mythology on the masses in an attempt to consolidate their own privileged position in the social hierarchy.<sup>2</sup> In brief, there is common ground in the view that national identity, as a product of social artifice is *constructed*. What is less clear, is the extent to which it is *constructable*, and if so, who has the power to do the constructing, and under what circumstances.

These are the issues which this thesis will attempt to illuminate.

## 2 The Argument

It is quite plausible that John Howard's frequent appeals to national identity were not generally a result of political cynicism. Indeed, there is a good deal of evidence that his personal values were sincerely held and remained consistent throughout his

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen E. Cornell, *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World*, Sociology for a New Century (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Pine Forge Press, 1998), 13.

political career.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, as we will see below, there is little doubt that when the opportunity presented itself to secure political advantage by publicly espousing his particular interpretation of the nation's identity, he duly seized it, often by exhibiting his personal values and identifying these with national achievement and the values of 'home,' 'mainstream Australia' and the 'Anzac spirit.'<sup>4</sup> This point matters because, although we shall in a sense be discussing the political manipulation of national identity, such manipulation does not necessarily imply the presence or absence of political opportunism.

This thesis *will* argue that political elites can manipulate and appropriate national identity for their own ends, but it also emphasises that this is most likely to be successful under a specific set of social, economic and cultural circumstances.

The basic premise underlying the present analysis is that the practical function served by a concept of national identity is to establish and promote *social cohesion*. This can be done in various ways - by fostering a sense of community, by constructing symbols of shared identification, and by encouraging rituals in which group cohesiveness is further consolidated. Yet I will focus on one specific trajectory through which national identity tends, logically and historically, to promote social cohesion: by separating *us* from *them*.

This thesis argues that the salience of national identity in the popular consciousness is correlated to its success with which it clearly distinguishes the 'in' from the 'out' group.<sup>5</sup> This is, in a sense, an analytical property of national (and, indeed, all concepts): it applies to some elements by virtue of not applying to others. Thus, if the in-group (as defined by a dominant conception of national identity) is all inclusive, then there is no group to function as the out-group, thus impeding one of the central social functions that national identities are often called upon to fulfil. My contention, then, is that

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<sup>3</sup> Kim Murray, "John Howard: A Study in Political Consistency" (PhD Thesis, University of Adelaide, 2010), chap. 1, (<http://digital.library.adelaide.edu.au/dspace/handle/2440/70068>).

<sup>4</sup> Peter Stanley, "Australian War Memorial," 2002: "...there is general consensus over the essence of what is regarded as the ANZAC spirit. ANZAC came to signify the qualities which Australians have seen their forces exhibit in war. These attributes cluster around several ideas: endurance, courage, ingenuity, good humour, and, of course, mateship. These qualities collectively constitute what is described as the ANZAC spirit." In this thesis ANZAC refers specifically to the military formation, otherwise Anzac is used.

<sup>5</sup> Henri Tajfel, *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

national identities are only sustainable as a unifying force if they successfully establish a clear boundary between 'us' and 'them,' between an in-group and an out-group. Moreover, the strength of these distinctions is related: the more defined the line between in and out, the more solid and permanent the conception of the in-group's own national identity becomes. Australia's history demonstrates both of these notions.

This thesis will contribute to an understanding of the conditions under which national identity becomes malleable, allowing it to be more easily appropriated by enterprising politicians.

These conditions are likely to include any and all factors that may lead to national identity's failure to fulfil its main social function of ensuring social cohesion (by the in/out group delineation), by exacerbating the perceived need or desire for social cohesion. These condition can then coalesce with the emergence of an able politician whose political skills enable him to capitalize on a fortuitous set of circumstances.

The evidence to test my premise will come principally from a case study of John Howard's political career. I purport that whiteness and to a lesser extent Britishness, were the continual threads that were present at every stage of the construction of Australia's national identity and this element created and maintained a sense of unity. Other symbols or myths may have been more visible or figured more prominently at different times, but in the national consciousness the former issues were constant and solidly entrenched. Importantly, these factors were highly effective at establishing a clear dividing line between an 'us' (an overwhelmingly British-white majority) and 'them' (non white, immigration minorities). The aforementioned argument implies that if circumstances exist or contrive to challenge the solidity of whiteness, then there will be a corresponding effect on national social cohesion: concepts of national identity will become malleable and 'up for grabs,' owing to their diminished effectiveness in consolidating a clear in-group. An astute politician could invoke a more virtuous past, when national identity was more solid and a collective sense of self more durably settled, to strengthen his or her own political credentials. The perceived threat to racial homogeneity due to the arrival of non-white immigrants and asylum seekers was one such threat, and indeed was framed at the time as an affront to dominant notions of whiteness and Britishness that were at the core of Australia's national identity. In this

sense I do not deviate from the arguments promoted by a host of prominent past and present historians such as Hancock,<sup>6</sup> Meaney,<sup>7</sup> as well as Curran, Tavan, Lake and Reynolds, Curthoys, McQueen, Moran, McGregor, and Bonnell and Crotty among others<sup>8</sup>, whose work portrays the substantive elements of Australia's national identity in broadly similar lines to those pursued in this thesis and inform much of the subsequent argument.

Whiteness and Britishness – and matters of race and ethnicity more generally – are not, of course, hard facts about the world: they are as much social constructions as are national anthems, flags and sports teams. I accept that all elements of national identity are to a greater or lesser extent constructed or imagined (including race) and therefore susceptible to change.

But although the literature rightly stresses the salience of social construction and, consequently, the fluidity of national identity, I argue that in the case of Australia's national identity, Britishness and whiteness were far more entrenched and less malleable than other national characteristics, symbols or myths. Consequently played a greater role forging a sense social cohesion. In practice, Britishness and whiteness were rarely challenged, and it would require a special set of structural and/or coincidental circumstances to occur for any political elite to successfully challenge these entrenched elements.

It is my conjecture that such a set of circumstances coincided with John Howard's

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<sup>6</sup> William Keith Hancock, *Australia*, 1930th ed., 1961.

<sup>7</sup> Neville Meaney, "Britishness and Australian Identity: The Problem of Nationalism in Australian History and Historiography," *Australian Historical Studies* 32, no. 116 (2001): 76–90.

<sup>8</sup> James Curran and Stuart Ward, *The Unknown Nation: Australia after Empire* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Publishing, 2010); Gwenda Tavan, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia* (Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2005); Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality*, *Critical Perspectives on Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Ann Curthoys, "Disputing National Histories: Some Recent Australian Debates," *Transforming Cultures eJournal*, 1, no. 1 (2006); Humphrey McQueen, *A New Britannia* (St. Lucia, Qld.; Portland, Or.: University of Queensland Press[202F?]; 2004); Anthony Moran, "Multiculturalism as Nation-Building in Australia: Inclusive National Identity and the Embrace of Diversity," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34, no. 12 (2011): 2153–2172; Russell McGregor, "The Necessity of Britishness: Ethno-Cultural Roots of Australian Nationalism," *Nations and Nationalism* 12, no. 3 (2006): 493–511; Andrew Bonnell and Martin Crotty, "Australia's History under Howard, 1996-2007," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 617 (2008): 149–165.

political career. In surveying the Howard years, my thesis will attempt to show that until he came to power, national identity had been so successful at drawing in/out group lines, mainly through emphasising race and Britishness, that the substantive elements of Australian national identity were very solid and entrenched, and thus not very susceptible to political manipulation. Howard's arrival coincided with the creation of a void in the function of defining the distinction between the in/out-group. This void was caused by the dilution of Britishness, demands for Indigenous rights, the arrival of non-white immigrants and asylum seekers and, more generally, by a more post-modern ethos that eschewed particularistic attachments and explicitly celebrated diversity.

It was in such circumstances that national identity, once a fairly static and entrenched fixture of political life, became more malleable and stringently contested. John Howard, it turns out, was the largest beneficiary of this contestation. John Howard managed to step in the void created by the rise of state-sanctioned identity politics, essentially by re-establishing the firm sense of separation of an earlier epoch. He did this mainly by stressing his personal values as exemplifying the nation's mainstream values and by personally adopting the image of the 'ordinary Australian bloke,'<sup>9</sup> thus implicitly charging his political opponents with having forgotten or wilfully relinquished any sense of 'Australianness'. It was such rhetoric which functioned as the conduit of Howard's success, but it was also the circumstances of his time that encouraged him to seek out such rhetoric in the first place.

### **3 Thesis Outline**

My thesis traces the historical development of Australia's national identity, but it does not assess the distinctiveness of Australian identity relative to other nations, nor does it challenge or endorse any particular strand of the Australian national narrative. In so doing, it aims to substantiate the claim that Australian national identity has evolved through different levels of 'solidity', corresponding to varying degrees of success in separating an in- from an out-group and thus providing different opportunities for

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<sup>9</sup> Liz Jackson, "An Average Australian Bloke," *Four Corners* 19/2/1996, accessed January 18, 2014.

political elites, such as John Howard, hoping to press the rhetoric of national identity into service for their own ends.

In chapter two, I briefly survey some influential theories on nationalism and national identity, and I further turn my attention to the literature concerning Australia's national identity. The adoption of national icons, symbols and legends and the construction of Australia's national identity are addressed in chapter three. The place of whiteness in the nation's identity is addressed in chapter four, culminating with Federation and the adoption of the White Australia policy as an expression of national independence. Paradoxically this policy was also an affirmation of Australia's place in the British Empire, and relates to a wider system of complex interactions between independence and imperial solidarity. The historical circumstances leading to state sponsored mass immigration and the subsequent adoption of multiculturalism are dealt with in chapter five.

From chapter six my thesis concentrates on John Howard's career as Prime Minister and his values, political rhetoric and policies. Chapter seven probes the influences leading to the his reactions to selected domestic and international events which gave him the platform to espouse his views on national identity. It covers Howard's reaction to significant events including the Australian High Court's decisions concerning native land title, the arrival of asylum seekers by boat and the threat posed to Australia by the rise of international terrorism. Chapter eight assesses the reasons for Howard's political success and attempts to explain the significance of my premise that when the function of national identity to foster social cohesion failed, Howard manipulated national identity by re-asserting the national values that were prominent when this function was solid.

## **4 Synopsis**

Fundamental to my thesis is an explicit recognition that the issue of race functioned as a crucial factor to demarcate the boundary of Australian national identity. That is, a line between the dominant 'us' and the minority 'them' group. From the latter half of the nineteenth century the exclusion of non-white immigrants and the Australia's treatment of its Indigenous population was an all too visible thread that ran through

the Australian story. From the 1890s this was in part due to supporters of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) perceiving non-white immigration as synonymous with cheap labour and hence a threat to fair working conditions. Moreover, some conservative and liberal supporters as well as radical nationalists saw non-whites as an impediment to democracy, arguing that only the Anglo-Saxon race possessed the requisite qualities to function in this system. A multiracial democracy was considered impracticable and, in more extreme versions, a contradiction in terms. In effect, nation-building rested on the presumption of racial homogeneity.<sup>10</sup>

At the time of white settlement in 1788 the physical out-group comprised the indigenous population. The prevailing notions of British race patriotism and widespread belief in white transcendence also identified the non-white populations of the near Asia-Pacific region as a potential out-group. In the century prior to federation this out-group was extended to include, non-white immigrants (particularly Chinese); and in the twenty first century it would, very publicly, be applied to asylum seekers.

Consequently, in this period the in-group's conceptions of whiteness, mateship, the fair go, the digger, the battler and the mainstream values of the 'ordinary bloke' became more solid by virtue of an identifiable group of people who did not partake of these typical Australian virtues. When as in the time of the White Australia policy, racism was overt, national identity was a strong force for social cohesion and the notion was solid and less contested as the constituent elements of the out-group were clearly defined by skin colour. One element of the out-group was excluded from entering the country and the other was denied the same political rights as the in-group of white Australian citizens. Both elements of the out-group were thus kept at a distance, either physically or politically, all the while as the image of an out-group remained ensconced in the collective memory of in-group and strengthened the bond of community; the social function of national identity was solid. Subsequently, post Second World War mass European immigration led to the adoption of state sponsored multiculturalism which according to my premise should then have weakened the in-group and out-group distinction. However, the background this group of immigrants was predominately Anglo-Celtic and wholly European, Christian and white. Although the arrival of this

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<sup>10</sup> Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 6,7.

group did weaken the lingering attachment to Britain and precipitated the adoption of official multiculturalism, whiteness still functioned as the distinguishing feature of the two groups. Multiculturalism promoted the acceptance of unity through diversity which then produced an exaggerated perception of national maturity and tolerance which I have called 'celebratory multiculturalism.' This period marked a transitional period as the relevance of national identity gradually diminished in terms of its cohesion promoting qualities. The decline of the functionality of national identity was partly masked by the fact that the initial phase of 'celebratory multiculturalism.' involved mainly semi-others, mainly immigrants with a non English speaking background but crucially European and therefore white. This accounts for the gap or void between abolishing the White Australia policy and Howard's re-assertion of 'mainstream values.' My theory suggests that in this period the notion of national identity receded in public importance and it signified a corresponding weakening of social cohesion.

In the early 1970s Prime Minister Whitlam's 'new nationalism' called for a more mature expression of national identity by pleading for a 'greater Australia, not in any bombastic or chauvinistic sense, but generously, humanely, out of regard for the welfare of our fellow man and our neighbours.'<sup>11</sup> Whitlam's words were followed up with action when he introduced the Racial Discrimination Bill 1973 and the Human Rights Bill 1973 which marked the official demise of the White Australia policy. This legislation also served to re-awaken the racial element of Australia's national identity which was subdued during the assimilation and integration periods of post war immigration and overshadowed by the apparent tolerance of diversity associated with the integration policy of official multiculturalism. The legislation removed the official barrier to non-white immigration and this resulted in a less clearly define the line between the in-group and the out-group.

The subsequent flow of refugees and asylum seekers as well as widespread public acknowledgement of the dispossession of the Indigenous peoples facilitated the creation of a new out-group.

As long as the out-group was contained physically (by exclusion) or conceptually (by fear of the 'other') the social function of national identity served its purpose

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<sup>11</sup> James Curran, "Visiting Scholars' Lectures -Curtin University," 2004.



well. It was only when circumstances arose that blurred or disrupted the image of the out-group in the nation's consciousness that a vacuum was created which an enterprising politician such as Paul Keating or John Howard could exploit for political purposes. These circumstances included the realisation that British element of the nation's identity was becoming redundant, (typified by Keating's ambition to forge closer economic and cultural ties with Australia's Asian neighbours thus creating a void in the unifying function of the established national identity) the social realignment caused by neo-liberal economic policies and the agitation of the Indigenous population and the recognition of some of their legal rights. These circumstances also coincided with the parallel political careers of Keating and Howard and culminated in the early period of the Howard governments.

As my premise is that the social function of national identity is to differentiate the in-group from the out-group; the more successful it is at doing so, the less malleable national identity becomes and the less susceptible to conscious manipulation by enterprising politicians. The arrival of non-white asylum seekers is one clear example which weakened the demarcation between in and out group and opened a window of opportunity for John Howard to profile his concept of national identity for political advantage. He achieved this by re-asserting the pre-multiculturalism values of Britishness and whiteness and by re-interpreting many traditional, solidarity based concepts (such as mateship and the 'fair go') in light of his free market ideology.

Before addressing the central issues of this thesis; it seems pertinent to survey the literature dealing with notions of nation, nationalism and national identity before proceeding to the evolution of Australia's view of itself and some of the more significant historical issues that have a bearing on the period under consideration in this paper. These are the subjects of the following chapter.



# Chapter 2

## Conceptions of National Identity

### 1 Imagined Communities & Common Ethnicity

One essential requirement in assessing the political use of national identity is the need to establish a workable definition of national identity and to survey the most common notions of nationalism and the nation-state. National identity is an essentially contested concept yet if its basic definition as a ‘sense of a nation as a cohesive whole, as represented by distinctive traditions, culture, and language’<sup>1</sup> is plausible, then we first need to address the concept of ‘nation.’

One common notion of the nation is that it is an ‘imagined community’ in the sense that its members scarcely know one another as Benedict Anderson<sup>2</sup> points out. It is also a concept which is mainly the product of top-down, elite projects of national construction as Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger<sup>3</sup> as well as Anderson have argued. This school of thought saw nations and nationalism as constructed entities serving the needs of the cultural elites. Conversely, it could be better understood from the bottom up, as constituted by commonly and widely shared national characteristics and practices of cultural and ethnic identification. Should this be the case then national

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<sup>1</sup> “Oxford English Dictionary” (Oxford University Press, n.d.).

<sup>2</sup> Benedict R. O’G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed (London[202F?]; New York: Verso, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> E. J Hobsbawm and T. O Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ Press, 2012).

## 2. CONCEPTIONS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

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identity is the result of mass identification with the nation-state where ‘the nation is tied inextricably to ethnicity: a belief in or an intuitive conviction of common descent’ as asserted by Walker Connor.<sup>4</sup> Nations could also be constructed by both top-down and bottom-up forces, as Hobsbawm has suggested.<sup>5</sup>

Ernest Gellner defined nationalism as a ‘theory of political legitimacy’ contingent upon there being a state and a nation, and a state ‘exists where specialized order-enforcing agencies...have separated out from the rest of social life.’<sup>6</sup> He further explains that nationalism ‘is an expression of continuity with the past’<sup>7</sup> and he also points out that national identity is determined by the identification of citizens with a public, urban high culture.<sup>8</sup> Anthony Smith does not accept that national traditions are wholly imagined or invented but stem from ethnic origins preceding the creation of nations and nation-states. That is, from ‘populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity’ and that there is no single civic nation with a homogeneous national identity.<sup>9</sup>

Smith defines the nation as ‘a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members.’<sup>10</sup> His observation that, ‘the agencies of popular socialization – primarily the public system of education and the mass media – have been handed the task of ensuring a common public mass culture’<sup>11</sup> places the stewardship of national identity in the hands of the ruling elite as they are able to influence these mechanisms.

It may not even be possible to identify a single national identity, as it presumes that disparate groups, social classes, religious and ethnic communities can in fact share

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<sup>4</sup> Walker Connor, “The Timelessness of Nations,” *Nations and Nationalism* 10, no. 1–2 (2004): 35–47..

<sup>5</sup> E. J Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Ernst Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 4: “Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent.”

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>8</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London[202F?]; New York: Routledge, 1998), 38.

<sup>9</sup> Anthony D Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 32.

<sup>10</sup> Anthony D Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991), 14.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

enough common values to express a national identity.

The notion of national identity has attracted the attention of the aforementioned scholars and others across a range of academic disciplines. However, my argument, which rests on the idea of an in-out group dynamic, is drawn from the work of the social psychologist Henri Tajfel.<sup>12</sup> He pioneered the ‘social identity theory’ approach to the study of group identity which holds that group members of an in-group will contrast and emphasise any unfavourable features of an out-group, in order to reinforce the sense of belonging within the in-group. Tajfel’s work has since spawned a large body of literature, much of it transcending his own academic discipline.<sup>13</sup>

My approach thus relies less on more orthodox and influential concepts of national identity, such as those developed by Hobsbawm, Ranger,<sup>14</sup> and Anderson<sup>15</sup> which were mainly developed in the context of the academic study of *nationalism*, which itself was concerned with the rise of the nation-state which burgeoned during the long nineteenth century. Nevertheless, their ideas remain relevant to my argument as the imagined ‘other’ is a key element of John Howard’s rhetoric against asylum seekers and could explain his political success.

What these theories have in common is that national identity is an idea conditional upon a socially constructed myth about a group of people. It is not the result of a natural historical progression. In the words of Ernest Gellner, conceptions of ‘nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent though long delayed political destiny, are a myth.’<sup>16</sup>

That being said, the earlier arguments mentioned by Connor<sup>17</sup> and Smith,<sup>18</sup> recognise the importance of an ethnic element to the construction of national identity,

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<sup>12</sup> H. Tajfel and J. Turner, “An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict,” in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. W. G. Austin and S. Worchel (Monterey: CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979), pp. 33–47.

<sup>13</sup> S. Alexander Haslam, S. Reicher, and R. Spears, *The Social-Identity Approach in Social Psychology in The Sage Handbook of Identities*, ed. Margaret Wetherell and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (London: Sage Publications, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*.

<sup>15</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

<sup>16</sup> Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 48–49.

<sup>17</sup> Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>18</sup> Smith, *National Identity*.

that is, an element based on shared myths, memories and symbols. This line of thought will be important in what follows, as my argument holds that certain elements (mainly those emphasising race and ethnicity), although not incontestable facts of the universe, are nevertheless more entrenched than more overtly social constructs, ideas and symbols (we will see this, for instance, in Howard's references to shared Anglo-Celtic ethnic characteristics which he used to project the solidity and 'naturalness' of common heritage).

C.A. Bayly<sup>19</sup> adds an important corrective to the parochial, nationalist view of national identity, by shifting emphasis away from Europe and placing national identity in the context of global imperialist history from 1780. Bayly points out a range of connections and identities linked to globalised economic practices, ideology, race, religion and ethnicity and notes numerous transnational similarities, including those among the settler nations of the British Empire. This wider context particularly serves to bring out the inclusionary and exclusionary effects of national identity, which functioned beyond the national borders in a global context, situating a particular nation and people amidst a larger group of distinct nations.

For my purposes, what these theorists have in common is the recognition that national identities provide a similar social function, namely, they serve to differentiate one group of people from another group, and that certain factors such as race more naturally tend to be represented as 'natural' and 'innate', thus facilitating a high degree of social cohesion throughout Australia's history as differentiation consolidated Australia's identity by emphasising racial homogeneity. When this homogeneity was threatened by non-white 'illegal' immigrants, the social function of national identity was ripe for exploitation by populist politicians.

## 2 Australian national identity

Australia's national identity has also been addressed by a host of historians and social scientists. Initially the most prominent focus of this line of research was directed

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<sup>19</sup> C. A Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914*[202F?]: *Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004). See also the parallel developments among white settler nations of the former British Empire, discussed below.

at the degree of authenticity. That is, which components of the nation's identity are commonly acknowledged as being unique to Australia and influence the sense of belonging to the nation and as a 'people.' Much early literature on Australian national identity rests on the assumption that from settlement in 1788 white Australians have been developing a unique identity by simply following the inevitable progression of an adolescent nation, dependent on the mother country and culminating in a distinctive national identity and independence in the 1970s. Neville Meaney points out that the historians endorsing this school of thought<sup>20</sup> have tended to portray the post war Labor Party as the principal agent in defining Australian nationalism. According to Meaney this assumption generally followed the historical evolution thus: an instinct towards independence was latent from the time of the arrival of the first European settlers; that it was evident in the colonial resistance to transportation and for colonial self-government, and in the ethos created by the diggers on the gold fields, most notably the anti authoritarian rising at the Eureka Stockade; that the 1890s gave it a literary form and inspiration; that Federation was an expression of an Australian independence by asserting its desire for racial homogeneity against the wishes of the British Colonial Office; that the Anzac experience complemented competing versions of the bush legend and produced a sense of Australian uniqueness; that Prime Minister Hughes' insistence on separate representation at the Paris Peace conference and in the League of Nations was a manifestation of a growing Australian nationhood; that Britain's inability to protect Australia after the fall of Singapore precipitated John Curtin's public turn toward America and the Labor government's subsequent assertive foreign policy drew

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<sup>20</sup> C. M. H Clark, *Manning Clark's History of Australia*, Vol IV (Carlton; Melbourne: Melbourne University Press[202F?]; Specialized Book Service, 1978); Stephen Alomes, *A Nation at Last?: The Changing Character of Australian Nationalism, 1880-1988* (North Ryde, NSW, Australia: Angus & Robertson, 1988); Robert Birrell, *A Nation of Our Own[202F?]: Citizenship and Nation-Building in Federation Australia / Robert Birrell* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1995); David Day, *The Great Betrayal: Britain, Australia and the Onset of the Pacific War 1939-42* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); David Day, *Reluctant Nation: Australia and the Allied Defeat of Japan 1942-45* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War* (Ringwood, Victoria, Australia; New York: Penguin Books, 1975); Helen Irving, *To Constitute a Nation: A Cultural History of Australia's Constitution* (Cambridge University Press, 1999); Christopher Waters, *The Empire Fractures: Anglo-Australian Conflict in the 1940s* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Pub, 1995).

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a line under the period of subordination to Britain.<sup>21</sup> The Menzies era retarded this development somewhat but the nation building project of mass post war immigration and the entry of Britain to the European Economic Community led to the erasure of any lingering Britishness and the recognition of a distinctive identity expressed in the diversity of the multicultural society.

However, my argument acknowledges the agency of the labour movement and the radical nationalists in constructing elements of Australia's national identity but I contend that whiteness and Anglo-Celtic ethnicity played a more prominent role. The White Australia policy was an expression of a distinctive Australian nationalism yet it also served to maintain the Britishness of Australia's national identity, as the following more recent studies emphasise. The British element of Australian national identity was addressed by James Curran and Stuart Ward, who stress the confusion that Australia has experienced in expressing a distinctive national identity since post war immigration hastened the demise of Britishness as the central element of the nation's identity. Consequently, a 'new nationalism' emerged which functioned as a distinctive Australian identity.<sup>22</sup> However, it has not been overly successful in replacing the British element and this has left a void in the construction of Australian national identity.<sup>23</sup> Russell McGregor similarly emphasises Australia's British heritage in that it has provided the 'myths, memories and symbols that unify the nation and embed it in deep historical time'<sup>24</sup> and notes the legacy of British institutions and legal traditions evident in Australian civic society.

Others such as Richard White<sup>25</sup> contend that the notion of 'Australian Way of Life' dominated Australia's view of itself from the 1950s yet this notion was ill defined, constantly changing and focussed on national achievement. Pride in national achievement was a cornerstone of John Howard's appeals to national unity.

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<sup>21</sup> Neville Meaney, "Britishness and Australian Identity: The Problem of Nationalism in Australian History and Historiography," *Australian Historical Studies* 32, no. 116 (2001): 77.

<sup>22</sup> James Curran and Stuart Ward, *The Unknown Nation: Australia after Empire* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Publishing, 2010), 6.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>24</sup> Russell McGregor, "The Necessity of Britishness: Ethno-Cultural Roots of Australian Nationalism," *Nations and Nationalism* 12, no. 3 (2006): 498.

<sup>25</sup> Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity, 1688-1980* (Sydney; Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1981).



Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds,<sup>26</sup> Adam McKeown<sup>27</sup> survey the influence of race on Australia's national identity from the nineteenth century. They compare white settler nations of the Pacific rim and in Africa and their fear that non-white immigration would supplant white hegemony in the New World. Furthermore, these authors show these societies protected their perceived national interests by introducing exclusionary immigration policies and how they adopted and adapted each other's administrative instruments, such as literacy tests, to facilitate the implementation of restrictive immigration and discriminate against those non-whites who were already domiciled in these societies. They also traced examples of cultural transfer between white settler societies by highlighting the tendency of these societies to borrow and learn from each other's experiences with multiracial communities. In effect these authors illustrate that racial homogeneity and whiteness were expressions of both independence and nationalism. These notions are pertinent to my argument as Howard's emphasis on 'mainstream values' was electorally successful and these values were not far removed from historical associations with the national unifying concept of racial homogeneity. My thesis will attempt to show that Howard aimed to consolidate his mainstream credentials by re-establishing these elements of national identity when the void was created by Keating's engagement with Asia and his public antagonism toward the more established British elements on national identity.

In assessing the impact of multiculturalism in Australia I have drawn from the work of Tim Soutphommesane, Anthony Moran, Michael Clyne and James Jupp, Ien Ang and Ghassan Hage<sup>28</sup> whose research also showed the impact citizens of middle Eastern

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<sup>26</sup> Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality*, Critical Perspectives on Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Adam McKeown, *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>28</sup> Tim Soutphommasane, *Don't Go Back to Where You Came from: Why Multiculturalism Works*. (Sydney, A: University New South Wales Press, 2012); Anthony Moran, *Australia: Nation, Belonging, and Globalization* (Psychology Press, 2005); Anthony Moran, "Multiculturalism as Nation-Building in Australia: Inclusive National Identity and the Embrace of Diversity," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34, no. 12 (2011): 2153–2172; Michael G Clyne and Jupp, James, *Multiculturalism and Integration a Harmonious Relationship* (Acton, A.C.T.: ANU E Press, 2011); Ien Ang, "Between Nationalism and Transnationalism: Multiculturalism in a Globalising World ICS Occasional Paper Series Volume 1, Number 1" (Institute for Culture and Society, University of Western Sydney, 2010); Ghassan

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appearance had on people who considered themselves mainstream Australians. These authors also underscore the importance of whiteness to the nation's identity.

For evidence concerning the public acceptance of national symbols and myths I have relied on Bruce Tranter and Jed Donahue's<sup>29</sup> analysis of the 2003 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes in which they confirm the significance of the Anzac myth. This aspect of national mythology is relevant to my thesis in that the Anzac myth figured prominently in Howard's plea to celebrate Australia's achievements. I note that Anzac had the useful function of a unifying myth unencumbered by the stain of dispossession and violence associated with the nationalist bush legends, and it is also a myth that celebrates the virtues of the dominant in-group - white Australian Britons.

Literature addressing Indigenous Australians is not only relevant to this thesis in that I contend that the High Court's recognition of Indigenous land rights served to blur the social function of national identity by fuelling the rift between the 'black armband' and 'three cheers' views of Australian history. It was also the point of contention that ignited the 'history wars' discourse concerning the veracity of the standard accounts of frontier violence and question the standards of historical scholarship and it was an issue which John Howard was to exploit. While this thesis does not address the standard accounts of Aboriginal history including those of C.D. Rowley,<sup>30</sup> Henry Reynolds<sup>31</sup> among others and the antagonists including Geoffrey Blainey<sup>32</sup> and Keith Windschuttle,<sup>33</sup> it does acknowledge the work of Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, Ann Curthoys, Robert Manne Andrew Markus, and Jane Robbins.<sup>34</sup> The latter group

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Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (Taylor & Francis, 2000); Ghassan Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism[202F?]: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society* (London: Merlin Press[202F?]; Annandale, NSW, 2003).

<sup>29</sup> Bruce Tranter and Jed Donoghue, "Colonial and Post-Colonial Aspects of Australian identity1," *The British Journal of Sociology* 58, no. 2 (2007): 165–183.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Dunford Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin Books Australia, 1972).

<sup>31</sup> Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> Geoffrey Blainey, *Triumph of the Nomads: A History of Aboriginal Australia* (Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook Press, 1993); Geoffrey Blainey, "This Land Is All Horizons: Australian Fears and Visions," Text, 2006.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Manne, *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (Melbourne, Vic.: Black Inc. Agenda, 2003).

<sup>34</sup> Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press,

of authors argue, as does my thesis, that the ‘history wars’ debates were exploited by politicians for political gain and they note the role of a conservative leaning press in influencing the debate.

In researching John Howard I have drawn on a variety of authors including his biographers, Peter van Onselen and Wayne Errington, Paul Kelly, Carol Johnson, Judith Brett, Robert Manne, Michael Clyne, Kim Murray, Nick Dyrenfurth, Graeme Davison, James Curran, Marion Maddox, John Warhurst,<sup>35</sup> the policy papers of the Liberal Party of Australia<sup>36</sup> and speeches of Howard himself, which are available online from the media archive of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.<sup>37</sup>

In this paper I refer to Australia’s national identity as the identification of its citizens collectively. That is, it refers to the political or civic community of Australian citizens,

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2003); Curthoys, “Disputing National Histories: Some Recent Australian Debates”; Ann Curthoys, “Expulsion, Exodus and Exile in White Australian Historical Mythology,” *Journal of Australian Studies* 23, no. 61 (1999): 1–19. Robert Manne, *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle’s Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (Melbourne, Vic.: Black Inc. Agenda, 2003); Andrew Markus, *Race: John Howard and the Remaking of Australia* (Crow’s Nest, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2001); Jane Robbins, “The Howard Government and Indigenous Rights: An Imposed National Unity?,” *Australian Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 2 (June 2007): 315–28.

<sup>35</sup> Wayne Errington and Peter Van Onselen, *John Winston Howard: The Definitive Biography* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2008); Paul Kelly, *The March of Patriots: The Struggle for Modern Australia* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2011); Carol Johnson, “John Howard’s ‘Values’ and Australian Identity,” *Australian Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 2 (2007): 195–209; Judith Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class from Alfred Deakin to John Howard* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Judith Brett, *Quarterly Essay Issue 28 2007: Exit Right the Unravelling of John Howard* (Black Ink, n.d.); Robert Manne, *The Howard Years* (Melbourne: Black Inc. Agenda, 2004); Michael Clyne, “The Use of Exclusionary Language to Manipulate Opinion: John Howard, Asylum Seekers and the Re-emergence of Political Incorrectness in Australia,” *Journal of Language & Politics* 4, no. 2 (2005): 173–196; Kim Murray, “John Howard: A Study in Political Consistency” (PhD Thesis, University of Adelaide, 2010), (<http://digital.library.adelaide.edu.au/dspace/handle/2440/70068>); Nick Dyrenfurth, “John Howard’s Hegemony of Values: The Politics of ‘Mateship’ in the Howard Decade,” *Australian Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 2 (2007): 211–230; Graeme Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History* (St. Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 2000); James Curran et al., *The Power of Speech: Australian Prime Ministers Defining the National Image* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2004); Marion Maddox, “Howard’s Methodism: How Convenient?!” *Journal of Australian Studies* 28, no. 83 (2004): 1–11; John Warhurst, “The Howard Decade in Australian Government and Politics,” *Australian Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 2 (2007): 189–194.

<sup>36</sup> “The Liberal Party of Australia,” n.d.

<sup>37</sup> Canberra Commonwealth of Australia, “Australian Government The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet PM Transcripts,” n.d.

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of belonging to one legitimate nation-state rather than to another. I also recognise that this can be influenced by a more individual identification with the values that determine national characteristics, which may be shared or derived from or influenced by ethnic background, language, history or religious affiliation.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, I proceed under the premise that the traditions underpinning national identity are imagined and/or socially constructed yet also partially dependent on the notion that it is embedded in the ethnicity of the population. I contend that there are several components that constitute national identity; those which are fluid and those that are more entrenched, yet all elements can be manipulated, given the right set of circumstances.

Furthermore, my thesis is more concerned with the manipulation of national identity should its social function fail or become unstable. The beliefs, culture and world-view of those in control of the state apparatus are in a prime position to exploit this situation should it occur. As Prime Minister for nearly eleven years, John Howard was in a position to control the apparatus of state and thereby manipulate national identity should it fail to ensure social cohesion. In fact Howard charged that his opponents, the politically correct elites, influenced the implementation of official multiculturalism without a proper mandate.<sup>39</sup>

As Richard White has observed ‘When we look at ideas about national identity... we need to ask, not whether they are true or false, but what their function is, whose creation they are, and whose interests they serve.’<sup>40</sup>

Before examining John Howard’s role in using the nation’s identity and in whose interests it served, it may be useful to survey important elements relevant to the construction of Australia’s national identity.

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<sup>38</sup> Smith, *National Identity*, 9.

<sup>39</sup> Gwenda Tavan has cast doubt on the idea that political elites dismantled Australia’s restrictive immigration policies “by stealth” against the wishes of the general population to pave the way for multiculturalism. See Gwenda Tavan, “The Dismantling of the White Australia Policy: Elite Conspiracy or Will of the Australian People?” *Australian Journal of Political Science* 39, no. 1 (2004): 109–125.

<sup>40</sup> Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity, 1688-1980*, The Australian Experience no. 3 (Sydney[202F?]; Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1981), viii.

## Chapter 3

# Australia: Outpost of the British Empire in the Antipodes

Nation-states capture and are able to construct their past and thus their national identity by choosing symbols, icons and heroes to memorialise. In exercising this choice, other components of the past are excluded or rendered less significant. Australia is no exception to this idea. In the Australian story two of the most striking examples of this are the prominence given to the ANZACs<sup>1</sup> and the blind acceptance of the notion of *terra nullius*.<sup>2</sup> In the Australian context, Gellner's 'order enforcing agencies' include not only the state bureaucracy but also state sanctioned national commemoration events such as Australia Day and Anzac Day<sup>3</sup> and state regulated institutions such as the Australian National Museum, Australian War Memorial, and a national publicly funded education system.

A salient point in defining Australia's national identity is that it is relatively new nation-state.

Inaugurated on the first day of the twentieth century, it has been since its inception

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<sup>1</sup> ANZAC is an acronym for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Cane, Joanne Conaghan, and David M Walker, *The New Oxford Companion to Law* (Oxford [England]; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Australia Day Commemorates European Settlement on 26th January 1788 (Indigenous Australians and others sometimes refer to European Invasion or Occupation). Anzac Day Commemorates the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps' landing at Gallipoli during the Great War on 25th April 1915.

a nation of migrants. The first white settlers in 1788 did not arrive with an intact Australian identity or with Australian national characteristics or a sense that Australia was their homeland. Their ethnic background was Anglo-Celtic thus they shared a common language, but what the settlers also had in common was a sense of whiteness that distinguished them from the Indigenous population and from Australia's Asian neighbours. A distinctive Australian national identity had yet to be defined and the foundation for this was laid with the existing close ties to Britain, particularly the legal and institutional ties of the British state and her world view. Australia would retain many of these links, both in the adoption of formal institutions and particularly in the sense of whiteness. The first white settlement began as an outpost of the British Empire in the antipodes. However, if a distinctive Australian national identity was to emerge, symbols, values and myths had to be invented to complement those already inherited, and the differences between Britain and Australia heavily accentuated in order to loosen the historical ties with Britain. The question was whether Australians identified with their white British 'outpost' or did they seek strength and stability by remaining a part of the British Empire.

Notions of national identity could serve the broad national interest, the interests of social class or political parties or political leaders. The 'bush legend' is illustrative of his point. The archetypal Australian of this legend was portrayed by radicals as the itinerant agricultural labourer and by conservatives as the frontier settler, and in both cases this national icon was white. The radical version stressed the solidarity of the working class, mateship and rugged independence with this legend while the conservative interpretation was inclined to highlight the courage of the individual pioneer landowner and it also included women.

Politicians in particular attempted to present their own agendas as fundamental to the national interest in the hope that their policies become accepted as the logical choice, based upon identification with national identity, interest and values. Immigration policy under the Keating and Howard governments, where the former stressed closer ties with Asia and the latter a more circumscribed engagement with Asia, is also a case in point. Immigration policy serves as a prime example of the values of the political elite influencing the community in the name of national interest.

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In a liberal democracy such as Australia, elections and responsible government confer political legitimacy. Even before federation, the political legitimacy of the colonial governments was founded upon free elections which by nineteenth century standards were noteworthy for the high level of enfranchisement. The civic identification with Britain remained strong with all colonies maintaining some formal legal ties to the British parliament and in 1901 the Commonwealth of Australia adopted the Westminster system of Responsible Cabinet government but with an elected upper house. A distinctive Australian civic national identity manifested itself in that the state had its own constitution (a British Act of Parliament),<sup>4</sup> a legal system including a High Court (established 1903) although leave could be sought to appeal to the Privy Council of the House of Lords until 1968.<sup>5</sup> Australia's constitution ensured responsible parliamentary government and the adoption of the common law was a guarantee of popular democracy and the protection of individual rights.

Australia had a territorial homeland, it conferred citizenship (although Australians were British subjects until 1948), maintained defence forces and functioned under the rule of law with an autonomous legal system. In short, the Commonwealth of Australia was by any definition a nation-state and according to the previously mentioned theorists it satisfied the conditions necessary to adopt or invent a national identity, including the monopoly of securing political legitimacy by force.

The Commonwealth government ruled with the consent of the majority of those governed. Voting was sometimes contingent upon property qualifications and all women were franchised for federal elections in 1902, and by 1911 women also had the franchise in all of the states. Aborigines however did not possess this right.

If political legitimacy rests on the idea that those governed accepted that the proper people and institutions governed by their consent and in the interests of all citizens, then the fact that the elected government sanctioned discriminatory measures against non-white Australian aspirant residents (both immigrants and Indigenous inhabitants) in the name of its citizens seems to confirm the view that being white was the common denominator in the collective identity, or at least it certainly functioned as an important

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<sup>4</sup> Commonwealth Parliament Canberra, "The Australian Constitution," accessed January 26, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Australian Government, "Privy Council (Limitation of Appeals) Act 1968," accessed January 19, 2014.

cohesive factor. If the state's political legitimacy is dependant upon the notion that it represents the nation then the inference is that the enfranchised population also legitimised the Commonwealth of Australia and its policies.

## 1 Icons & Legends; Anzac, the Bush and Mateship yet still British

Apart from whiteness, there was also some agreement as to what the core components of Australia's national identity were. Australia's history from 1788 through the pioneering nation-building of the nineteenth century up until the foundation of the nation-state in 1901 chronicles the evolution of the Australia's identity epitomised initially by its Britishness, then its identification with other 'white' settler nations in the Pacific, Africa and North America and eventually leading to a more distinctive Australian outlook. By 1948 the well developed tradition of bush poetry and prose which began in the nineteenth century had been further developed. Moreover, it was complemented by an Australian school of artists and with the publication in 1957 of *The Australian Legend*,<sup>6</sup> the association with the bush was consolidated. Ward's 1957 study of the place of the bush and the outback working man in the nation's conscientiousness (largely formulated by urban intellectuals) remains useful in both explaining and promoting the Bush ethos as a major component of Australian national identity and one aspect which was closely identified with the labour movement in the form of radical nationalism. A different slant was given to the bush legend by John Hirst who acknowledged the bush traits already mentioned but emphasised the individualism of the frontier pioneers to establish a rival 'pioneer legend.'<sup>7</sup> The bush legend did not go unchallenged and historians such as C. D. Rowley<sup>8</sup> and Henry Reynolds<sup>9</sup> produced studies highlighting evidence of racism and slaughter perpetrated by pioneer

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<sup>6</sup> Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, New illustrated ed (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1978).

<sup>7</sup> J. B. Hirst, "The Pioneer Legend," *Historical Studies* 18, no. 71 (1978): 316–337

<sup>8</sup> Charles Dunford Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin Books Australia, 1972).

<sup>9</sup> Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2006).



settlers. Whether Australians identified with the bush agricultural labourer or the frontier landowner, they both recognised battling and solidarity as core characteristics of national identity. Settler solidarity seemed crucial for survival in both versions of the bush legend. The tradition of radical nationalism in Australia had its roots in this nineteenth century celebration of convicts, diggers, and bush workers as the carriers of a tradition centred on egalitarian virtues but also mainly on masculine solidarity.

From the 1880s the major vehicle for the propagation of the bush ethos as a form of radical nationalism was then radical magazine *'The Bulletin'* which remained an influential medium of cultural transfer well into the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> Also known as *'The Bushman's Bible,'* the publication had the banner *'Australia for the White Man'*<sup>11</sup> which was prominently displayed on its cover during the nineteenth century and was a none too subtle manifestation of Australia asserting race at the core of its national identity and acting contrary to the ideals of a British Colonial Office where the non-white colonial populations of the Empire were to be treated as equals. Australia certainly had no intention of treating non-white populations as equals, yet at the same time it strongly identified with the British race. The distinguishing feature of nineteenth and early twentieth century Australian nationalism was the idea that Australians were Britons without the limitations imposed by a rigid class system. Australians thought of themselves as a more independent type of Australian Briton but the overriding common factor was whiteness. As the then Prime Minister stated in 1919; 'We are more British than the people of Great Britain, and we hold firmly to the principle of the White Australia'<sup>12</sup> The bush legend was a tenet of what became known as Australian radical nationalism which promoted a more distinctive independent Australian identity but this tenet ran parallel to the idea of belonging to the global British race. In this sense Australia could be described as having a dual national identity that lasted at least until the 1970s.

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<sup>10</sup> The Bulletin was published in Sydney from 1880 to 2008. During The Bulletin's heyday from 1880 to 1918 it dictated the debate in Australian culture and politics. In the 1960s it was resurrected as a current affairs magazine until its final issue on 23 January 2008. "The Bulletin. NSW Migration Heritage Centre - 1910 The Bulletin Magazine," accessed January 22, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> James Curran, *The Power of Speech: Australian Prime Ministers Defining the National Image* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2004), 7.

By the beginning of the twentieth century Australia had developed many of the civic and cultural institutions typically associated with western European civilization. Universities had been established in the major cities in the late nineteenth century and Melbourne founded Australia's first symphony orchestra in 1906. Museums in the major cities were also established in the nineteenth century and compulsory education was introduced in the 1870s.

Democratic institutions were operating in the various colonies before Federation and labour parties had been founded in the 1890's, and the world's first labour government was elected in 1904. Women gained the right to vote and stand for parliament in South Australia in 1894. The separate colonies had sent armed contingents to Britain's imperial conflicts in Africa and China in the nineteenth century but it was Australia's contribution to the British war effort in the Great War that provided added impetus to the myth-making of the archetypal Australian.

This typology built on the previously established Bush legend and portrayed the recognisable aspects of the national character as white, rugged, egalitarian, suspicious of authority, resourceful, laconic, stoical, loyal and bold. The Anzac legend (or myth)<sup>13</sup> was born in 1915, consolidated between the two World Wars with state sanctioned memorials, the commemoration of the Anzac Day landing of Australian forces at Gallipoli in 1915, the publication of the official war histories by Charles Bean<sup>14</sup> and in 1917 by the establishment of the Australian War Memorial (completed in 1941) in Canberra. Apart from a drop in attendances at Anzac Day marches in the 1960s and 1970s (during and after the Vietnam War), Anzac Day and has been officially venerated ever since, as the recent attendance trend attests. Up to 8,000 Australians (mostly young backpackers) annually attend official services at Gallipoli in Turkey on the 25<sup>th</sup> April. This recent trend has become so significant that the Australian government intends to restrict the number of citizens planning to attend the 2015 ceremonies as more people attending would be impossible to accommodate.<sup>15</sup> World News Australia on

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Ely, "The First Anzac Day: Invented or Discovered?" *Journal of Australian Studies* 9, no. 17 (1985): 41–58. Anzac Legend has a positive connotation while Anzac Myth refers to a more negative image.

<sup>14</sup> C. E. W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*: (University of Queensland Press, 1983).

<sup>15</sup> Oliver Milman, "Anzac Day: Large Crowds Mark 99th Anniversary of the Gallipoli Landing," *The*

SBS Radio (a news and current affairs programme with a focus on multicultural and Indigenous issues) carried this story in which the following quote appeared, which is a contemporary illustration of the place Anzac occupies in Australia's national psyche: 'Despite the (Gallipoli) campaign's failure, the Anzac spirit forged during the fighting became pivotal to creating Australia's national identity.' The programme transcript also quotes a senior public servant in the Department of Veterans Affairs thus: '...for many, April 25 is a day to think about Australian nationhood. Anzac Day is one of those days that reverberates in the national consciousness.'<sup>16</sup> Perhaps it was more than a coincidence that the practice among young backpackers of attending Anzac Day ceremonies at Gallipoli became popular during the period of John Howard's governments and has remained so ever since.

The ANZAC soldier's perceived virtues of stoicism, mateship, anti-authoritarian attitude, resourcefulness and practicality were accentuated by the official war historian Charles Bean. He suggested that these traits served to distinguish the Australian soldier from his British counterpart who was seen as being subordinate to a rigid class ridden imperial army. However, while extolling the virtues of the individual ANZAC and even suggesting they they were 'better Britons,' Bean also subscribed to the view of a dual identity; 'Since World War I... it has become more and more clear to everyone that Australian patriotic sentiment does not usually or necessarily involve weakening in attachment to Britain, but rather the reverse'<sup>17</sup> Despite this attachment to Britain, Bean was convinced that the Australian character had a measure of distinctiveness. He contended that the four main national types that constituted Great Britain were more evenly distributed in Australia as they were wrought through intermarriage to produce a national type more representatively Anglo-Saxon than the characteristics of the British themselves.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, there was little doubt in Bean's mind that race was a motivational factor in the minds of the AIF soldier who enlisted in 1914. While pointing out that colonial loyalty took precedence over national loyalty before

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*Guardian*, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> "Restricted Numbers of Aussies at Gallipoli in 2015," *SBS News*, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> C.E.W. Bean, Cited in Neville Meaney, "Britishness and Australian Identity: The Problem of Nationalism in Australian History and Historiography," *Australian Historical Studies* 32, no. 116 (2001): 81.

<sup>18</sup> Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*, 4.

Federation and that loyalties to the separate State produced points of disagreement, the situation leading up to 1914 was patently clear; 'Only in one point was the Australian people palpably united in a determination to keep its continent a white man's land.'<sup>19</sup>

A later scholar of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) concurs with Bean's view but observed some weakening of Australia's attachment to Britain and some subtle changes in the AIF soldier's perception of race. Before the war racial stereotypes were aroused to differentiate white from non-white, Australian from English, and British from other white nationalities, 'they spoke of an "Australian" race to distinguish themselves from Englishmen...or "Anglo-Saxon" race to differ from Boers or Germans or Frenchman, but essentially, when they referred to race, they meant a union of colour, and their most determined attachment was to a white Australia.'<sup>20</sup> Before 1915 Australian soldiers had endorsed the racial stereotypes of wartime propaganda which emphasised the hierarchy of races according to their perceived Anglo-Saxon characteristics, but the ANZACs' admiration for the fighting spirit of the Turks acquired during the Gallipoli campaign, forced a reassessment of this idea of racial hierarchy. The ANZAC's view of race was revised due to the privations of battle 'most lighthorsemen assumed a racial superiority over their opponent, few despised him.'<sup>21</sup> As Gammage postulated, 'whiteness and superiority could no longer be considered inevitably synonymous'<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the Anzac legend provided an independent Australian tradition focussed on Australian accomplishment which was deemed worthy of national celebration. The Anzac legend 'seemed to express the best of both nation and Empire which inevitably reduced the Imperial attachment of Australians.'<sup>23</sup> The key word here is 'inevitably,' as the attachment to Britain remained strong for most of the twentieth century as did the notion of white transcendence. These sentiments would later come into play during John Howard's Prime Ministership.

Other symbols of national identity came to be recognised as uniquely Australian. Yet while commonly recognised they were sometimes contested by sections of the pop-

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>20</sup> Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War* (Ringwood, Victoria, Australia; New York: Penguin Books, 1975), p 1.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 277.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

ulation. To some bushrangers such as Ned Kelly and Ben Hall were important national folk heroes who symbolised the anti-authoritarian streak inherent in a distinctive Australian character.<sup>24</sup> To others they were simply outlaws. Similarly, the diggers who rebelled against the miner's licence at the Eureka Stockade represented to some the typical Australian's suspicion of authority and growing identification with democracy. Of course this imagery was contested. The term 'digger' came to be associated with anti-authoritarian sentiments by the left while to conservatives it symbolised the individual sacrifice and resourcefulness of the Australian soldier. However, the word 'digger' entered the Australian vernacular with a positive connotation and it is significant in that it was evidence of an Australian characteristic as distinct from a British trait.

There are other national symbols that most white Australians would recognize and there has been much debated and written about the nature of Australia's national identity and the scope of my thesis prevents me from carrying out a more comprehensive analysis of the literature on this subject. I will instead accept the following traits as those which most politicians in Australia would commonly identify with and consider as core values shared by the majority. Namely, overwhelmingly male and white, complemented with the traits of courage, loyalty, perseverance, egalitarianism, suspicion of authority, fair mindedness, resourcefulness, stoicism, resilience and perhaps above all – 'mateship' and 'the fair go.'

The claim that the Left had a near monopoly on the most recognisable traits of Australia's national identity also rested on the works of some left wing historians and that egalitarian traits and mateship were cornerstones of trade union solidarity. As one commentator observed; "Their publications sought to place a history or tradition of egalitarianism - conceived of as an inherently radical or Left-wing national identity - at the heart of the popular Australian experience."<sup>25</sup>

Feminist writers from the 1960s were responsible for highlighting the fact that the national icon of mateship excluded women.<sup>26</sup> This goes some way to explaining why

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<sup>24</sup> B. Tranter and J. Donoghue, "Ned Kelly: Armoured Icon," *Journal of Sociology* 46, no. 2 (2010): 196.

<sup>25</sup> Nick Dyrenfurth, "John Howard's Hegemony of Values: The Politics of 'Mateship' in the Howard Decade," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 2 (2007): 214.

<sup>26</sup> Marilyn Lake, "Nationalist Historiography, Feminist Scholarship, and the Promise and Problems of New Transnational Histories: The Australian Case," *Journal of Women's History* 19, no. 1 (2007): 180.

the left was later to offer only token resistance when John Howard used this trait to woo support from the electorate. The radical left was predisposed to being suspicious of excessive nationalism, particularly when clothed in military paraphernalia. The left considered Australia's most recognisable national symbols as being too closely associated with imperial notions of race, the exclusion of women and the Indigenous population. In short, the radical left vacated the political playing field of national identity and this led to Howard being able to present his own version of national identity as a better alternative to what he saw as the divisive effects of multiculturalism.

Despite the influence of the bush legend, mateship and egalitarianism, Australia's view of its own national identity at the turn of the nineteenth century was distinguished by certain traits which made them worthy bearers of the virtues of a wider British race. Australia's current national anthem 'Advance Australia Fair' was adopted in 1984 but it was written in the late nineteenth century by a Scottish born teacher and one commentator suggests that was written as a tribute to the Britishness of Australians: 'One stanza, subsequently excised from the sanitised version of the post British era, proclaimed that

Britannia then shall surely know  
Beyond wide oceans' rolls  
Her sons in fair Australia's land  
Still keep a British soul.'<sup>27</sup>

However, the national traits of egalitarianism and mateship served to illustrate that Australians were not subordinate to Britain. They were Britons but in their opinion only better, or independent Australian Britons who had distinct national myths and characteristics which set them apart from other peoples in the Asia Pacific region and with Australia's Indigenous population. The distinguishing characteristic was skin colour. This sentiment was expressed by *The Bulletin* a widely circulated nineteenth century publication thus:

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<sup>27</sup> Meaney, "Britishness and Australian Identity," 80.

...all men who leave the tyrant-ridden lands of Europe for freedom of speech and right of personal liberty are Australians before they set foot on the ship which brings them hither...No nigger, no Chinaman, no lascar, no kanaka, no purveyor of cheap labour is an Australian.<sup>28</sup>

Australia's national identity could largely be seen as the summative consequences of social, political and economic developments and the relations between white settlers and the Indigenous population, her Asian neighbours, racial homogeneity and war. Australia's 'distinctive' nation identity was developing and increasingly influenced by the white settlers' efforts in coming to terms with the hitherto unimagined expanse of an arid inhospitable landscape, and the distance from the ancestral homelands in the British Isles. Both of these concerns accounted for the national will and hence the necessary social cohesion to defend the Empire in 1914 while accommodating the distinctive dimension of national identity expressed in the Anzac myth and bush/pioneer legends

## 2 Conclusion

Australia's national identity was being constructed within the confines of the British Empire and the restraints of physical geography. Despite the distinctive characteristics of the bush and Anzac legends, Britishness remained an integral element of the nation's identity. The Indigenous peoples and non-white immigrants were identified as an out-group, which explains their exclusion. The resultant social cohesion among the white population is solid and national identity was serving its purpose as evidenced by the enthusiasm to defend the nation's interests by participating in the Great War. Many national characteristics were fluid but whiteness and Britishness remained entrenched. Furthermore, in this period what most strongly bound Australians to their national identity were the notions of Britishness expressed in 'whiteness' and Australians had no desire to add even a darker shade of pale to their complexion. As Henry Reynolds and Marilyn Lake so aptly put it "Thus at the beginning of the twentieth century, Australians

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<sup>28</sup> Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity, 1688-1980*, The Australian Experience no. 3 (Sydney[202F?]; Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1981), 81.

drew a colour line around their continent and declared whiteness to be at the heart of their national identity.<sup>29</sup>

In chapter three we will consider the emergence of official 'White Australia' as expressions of both Australian independence and global white solidarity before moving on to the nation-building enterprise of government sponsored mass immigration.

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<sup>29</sup> Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality*, Critical Perspectives on Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 138.



# Chapter 4

## White Australia

### 1 Australia for the White Man

For much of its history Australia has excluded the original inhabitants from its collective identity and pursued a racially based policy of restricted immigration. The origin of Australia's identification with race can be found in nineteenth century European attitudes of racial superiority and in the theories of nationalism and liberal democracy, and more particularly by the adoption of British race patriotism. Australians in the nineteenth century would have had a certain sense of superiority in the knowledge that as members of the British Empire they belonged to the most dominant economic and political power on earth. Their identification with skin colour was to a prove more powerful binding factor than their affinity with the dark skinned fellow members of the British Empire. In common with other white settler nations in the Asia Pacific region, Australia developed state instruments to select prospective migrants on the basis of race.

Nineteenth century nationalism and liberal democratic theory promulgated the idea that democracy could only flourish under the condition of a racially homogeneous population. A central figure in the discourse was John Stuart Mill, who wrote in 1861:

Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities. Among a people without fellow-feeling, especially if they read and speak different languages, the united public opinion necessary

to the working of representative government can not exist<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, politicians in white settler societies such as the Australian colonies feared that Chinese immigration posed a threat to the development of democracy. Restricted immigration in Australia also attracted support from workers who feared competition for their labour. Most colonies insisted on state sovereignty to protect racial homogeneity and this took another step toward the nation's independence from Britain. This insistence overrode the interests of primary producers or planters in states such as Queensland which sought to delay restrictive legislation. It has also been argued that anti-Asian legislation found purchase among colonists as this legislation diluted the convict stain by contrasting the subordinate status of the Chinese with the 'egalitarian mateship achieved by white settlers.'<sup>2</sup>

As one of the most influential ideas among white settler nations in the nineteenth century was that a necessary condition to the good functioning of democracy was a homogeneous population, the ruling elite undertook to ensure racial homogeneity.

This ideology was endorsed by subjective interpretations of Darwin's 1859 book *The Origin of Species (1859)* and the conviction that only white men could function in a liberal democracy and that the non-white races were inferior to whites. Darwin's later work, *The Descent of Man (1871)* had a specific reference to Aborigines that seemed to justify frontier violence and promulgate the idea that they were destined not to survive.

At some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilised races of man will almost certainly exterminate, and replace, the savage races throughout the world...The break between man and his nearest allies will then be wider, for it will intervene between man in a more civilised state, as we may hope, even than the Caucasian, and some ape as low as a baboon, instead of as now between the negro or Australian and the gorilla<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, May, 2004 [EBook #5669] (Project Gutenberg, 1861), chap. XVI.

<sup>2</sup> Adam McKeown, *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 130.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Darwin, *Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex in Two Volumes — Vol. 1*, Darwin Online (London: John Murray, 1871), 201.

Accordingly, in the 1850s the colony of Victoria was the first settler society to introduce race based immigration regulations. The ideology which underpinned Australian federation was a nineteenth century concept that was also adopted by other white settler communities of the British Empire and California.

This Commonwealth of Australia came into being on the first day of the twentieth century by virtue of an Act of British Parliament. The first significant piece of legislation enacted by the newly created Parliament of Australia was the Restricted Immigration Act 1901, which aimed to ensure racial homogeneity and it was also a clue to how this new nation was to perceive itself for much of its written history. Moreover, Australia had formally inserted a racial element into its national identity with the enabling of this Act of Parliament. This legislation is more popularly known as the 'White Australia policy' and by the latter half of the twentieth century, despite the efforts of its many apologists, it was often perceived by the international community (particularly by Australia's Asian neighbours) as racist, and by many Australians in the latter half of the twentieth century as an international embarrassment.

However in the late nineteenth century there was little evidence of this policy being perceived in the Australian colonies as anything other than a legitimate measure to protect the movement of free labour (as opposed to indentured labour) and commerce, as well as to reaffirm the sovereignty of the state. A hundred years after federation John Howard would appeal to this sovereignty when he said; 'What I am asserting is the right of this country to decide who comes here.'<sup>4</sup>

Australia was not alone in arguing that the sovereignty of the state was paramount, particularly when it came to restricting immigration, which was also justified as a matter of self preservation. In 1901 the then Attorney General, Alfred Deakin echoed this sentiment when he stated in Parliament 'We here find ourselves touching the profoundest instinct of individual or nation — the instinct of self-preservation — for it is nothing less than the national manhood, the national character and the national future that are at stake.'<sup>5</sup> This instinct for preservation was heightened after the Japanese naval

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<sup>4</sup> John Howard, 29-10-2001, quoted from: Sarah Clark, "Liberals Accused of Trying to Rewrite History," *Lateline*, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates; House of Representatives 12 September 1901 quoted from: Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the*

victory over Russia in 1905.

In the nineteenth century the white settler nations of the Pacific rim and in Africa acted more or less in concert to erect barriers to stem the flow of non-white immigrants. From 1901 the newly federated Australian colonies could implement border controls and exclude those it considered undesirable on whatever grounds they wished. Restricted immigration also guaranteed that Australia would remain the preserve of the white man and it facilitated national solidarity by identifying a clear out-group based on race. As one former Australian Prime Minister proclaimed:

As far as I am concerned, the objection I have to the mixing of these coloured people with the white people of Australia...lies in the main in the possibility and probability of racial contamination.<sup>6</sup>

Thus the nineteenth century ideology of preserving Australia as an outpost of the British Empire exclusively for the white man was an integral part of Australia's historical national identity which would surface again in the late twentieth century. This would manifest itself in the treatment of Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders, Asian and other and non-white immigrants or aspirant migrants and asylum seekers.

If Australians assumed that the Indigenous population would die out there remained the fear of non-white immigration. The exclusion of non-whites was clad in a protective cloak of free labour ideology, where there was no place for competition from indentured labour. Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds make the point that Australia's road to becoming a 'white man's country' had its roots in the ideas expressed in the historian, politician and journalist Charles Pearson's 1894 publication *National Life and Character: A Forecast (1894)* in which this author saw the increasing democratization of white settler nations in the western seaboard of America, South African and the Pacific and the rise in global mobility, particularly the migration of Asians as a threat to white hegemony.<sup>7</sup> The assumption that in the nineteenth century flow of global migra-

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*International Challenge of Racial Equality*, Critical Perspectives on Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 139–140.

<sup>6</sup> John Christian Watson, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates Hansard House of Representatives Immigration Restriction Bill Second Reading*, 1901.

<sup>7</sup> Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 45–46.

tion would predominantly remain a Europe to America and other New World countries phenomena, was misplaced when Asian migration patterns were taken into account. In fact the extent of Chinese migration was comparable to the total of European world migration. 'About 20 million Chinese emigrated overseas from 1840 to 1940, of whom 90% went to Southeast Asia.'<sup>8</sup>

The nineteenth century witnessed a global wave of migration where for the first time in history free labour could move unimpeded across borders. This motivated the development of exclusionary immigration policies supported by a state sanctioned policies and innovations such as border controls, discriminatory poll taxes and passports which established the holder's national identity. These innovations strengthened the role of the state by in effect giving it the power to control the mobility of citizens. In the nineteenth century the ability to cross national borders unencumbered became the privilege of those who could satisfy the border controller that they merited special consideration, for commercial reasons, family ties and/or holding dual citizenship. The state had a mechanism to select its preferred type of citizen.

The harbinger of official White Australia can be traced back to Chinese immigration to the colony of Victoria during the gold rush of the 1850-60s and to the Californian rush which had begun a few years earlier. anti-Chinese riots at the diggings in Victoria were fuelled by disillusioned gold seekers who were none too subtle about their views that Chinese belonged to "the lower orders."<sup>9</sup> Spurious accusations of everything from sexually deviant behaviour (most of the Chinese were single men and did not or were not encouraged to mix with those of European extraction) to dishonesty, and these accusations and subsequent actions served as an outlet for unlucky white diggers to vent their anger at the alien 'other.' This anger was evident in contemporary accounts of agitation at the gold diggings. Referring to the riot in Buckland Valley 1857 the Melbourne Argus reported;

...when we read that a European woman had been grossly insulted, that English children of tender years had been taught filthy gestures by these

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<sup>8</sup> Adam McKeown, "Chinese Emigration in Global Context, 1850-1940," *Journal of Global History* 5, no. 01 (2010): 98.

<sup>9</sup> Marilyn Lake, Henry Reynolds, and David Marr, *Panel Discussion Adelaide Writers' Week Drawing the Global Colour Line: Henry Reynolds and Marilyn Lake*, 2008.

Mongolian wretches...the whole white population...have manifested such a deadly hatred towards the Chinese that, had they been wise, they would have taken themselves out of the way long ago.<sup>10</sup>

The Chinese also served as a convenient scapegoat for increases in taxes and other grievances. The colonial government's response to the anti-Chinese riots was to restrict Chinese immigration which according to Deakin was the first piece of restricted immigration legislation in the region 'It was in 1855 that the Legislative Council of Victoria passed the first legislation in this hemisphere for the exclusion of the Chinese,'<sup>11</sup> and following the colonial Premiers conference of 1896 the legislatures of New South Wales, New Zealand, South Australia and Tasmania passed these same measures.

Lake and Reynolds point out that many of the perpetrators in the riots were Californians or men who had spent time there. They argue that in the nineteenth century there was a transfer of attitudes about race between white settler nations around the world and that these attitudes went hand in hand with increasing enfranchisement among societies 'at the forefront of democratic reform.'<sup>12</sup> They also argue that these societies were pessimistic about the success of multi-racial democracies due to the negative views of post Civil War Reconstruction in the United States which were circulated by the American historians James Bryce and William Dunning.<sup>13</sup> Lake describes the consensus of many white men in America who looked to their recent history concluded that the enfranchisement of black Americans show how 'unfitted' the Negroes were to participate in a multi-racial democracy.<sup>14</sup>

Democratic progress and broader enfranchisement for the white settler communities in Africa, the Americas and the Pacific was not mirrored in the treatment Indian migrant workers in Natal, Japanese and Chinese immigrants in British Columbia and California nor the Chinese in Australia.

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<sup>10</sup> The Argus, "Riot at the Buckland. Expulsion of the Chinese. (From the Ovens and Murray Advertiser.)," *The Argus*, 1857.

<sup>11</sup> Alfred Deakin, *Commonwealth of Australia- Parliamentary Debates House of Representatives*, 1901.

<sup>12</sup> Lake, Reynolds, and Marr, *Panel Discussion at the Adelaide Writers' Week Drawing the Global Colour Line*, Marilyn Lake at Adelaide Writers'Week discussion panel 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 139.

<sup>14</sup> Lake, Reynolds, and Marr, *Panel Discussion at the Adelaide Writers' Week Drawing the Global Colour Line*.

During the nineteenth century the governments of California and British Columbia implemented measures to prevent Japanese from immigrating and disenfranchise those who had already taken up residence. Similarly, Indian workers in Natal were the object of discriminatory taxes and disenfranchisement. The Australian colonies were early leaders in devising ways of excluding Asian immigration. Between 1897 and 1899 four Australian colonies introduced literacy tests based on what was known as the Natal Formula. Previously the province of Natal had passed Act 14 of 1897 which required all new immigrants to have £25 in their possession and knowledge of a European language.<sup>15</sup> In 1901 Australia implemented a more stringent adaptation of the Natal Formula to restrict immigration, which was to require prospective immigrants to pass a fifty word dictation test in a European language and amended in 1905 to a test in a 'prescribed language.'<sup>16</sup>

Among other white settler nations this test became known as the 'Australian Solution' and it allowed the border control official to exclude any immigrant by applying this so called 'colour blind' test. This test produced the desired aim as it contributed significantly to the reduction in Chinese immigration to Australia from 1901.<sup>17</sup>

The nineteenth century development of border controls and the bureaucratic instruments that accompanied them described earlier by McKeown, Lake and Reynolds were not unique to Australia, but these regulations were exploited by Australian governments in the twentieth century to exclude undesirable immigrants. In the twentieth century 'the colour line' was now seen as not only politically expedient but also politically legitimate. It legitimised the concept of the 'illegal migrant.' The development of state border controls and the adoption of passports facilitated Australia with the means to exclude unwanted immigrants. The state now had a monopoly to decide who was legal and who was illegal. This point is perhaps more clearly articulated by the remark: 'we speak of illegal (often, indeed, of "undocumented") migration as a result of states' monopolization of the legitimate means of movement.'<sup>18</sup> This concept

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<sup>15</sup> Robin Cohen, *The Cambridge Survey of World Migration* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 40.

<sup>16</sup> McKeown, *Melancholy Order*, 196.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 197. From 32,717 in 1901 to 14,349 in 1933.

<sup>18</sup> John Torpey, "Coming and Going: On the State Monopolization of the Legitimate 'Means of Movement,'" *Sociological Theory* 16, no. 3 (1998): 243.

of the 'illegal' immigrant would feature later in Howard's rhetoric and it served to marginalise the non-white asylum seekers and place them in the out-group.

The consequence of the Colonies' restricted immigration policies in the nineteenth century was the implementation of the White Australia policy in 1901.

As Alfred Deakin put it in 1901;

Unity of race is an absolute essential to the unity of Australia. It is more, actually more in the last resort, than any other unity. After all, when the period of confused local policies and temporary political divisions was swept aside it was this real unity that made the Commonwealth possible. It prevented us from repeating the ridiculous spectacles unhappily witnessed in South America between communities called republics, the same in blood and origin, but unable to develop together or live side by side in peace.<sup>19</sup>

Deakin's view illustrates the link between Australia's national interest and racial homogeneity and controlling non-white immigration was seen as an efficient and legitimate method of preserving national identity and facilitating democratic progress. Furthermore, racially based exclusion practices formed the core ideology underpinning Australia's nation-building. One of Australia's most renowned historians once commented that the White Australia policy 'was an indispensable condition of every other Australian policy.'<sup>20</sup> Most Australian colonies implemented exclusion laws directed against the Chinese and federation provided an expedient instrument of coordinating immigration policy while at the same time asserting a measure of autonomy from the Colonial Office in London.<sup>21</sup>

In short, racial identity has been anchored in the nation's identity from the beginning of white settlement. Australia did not subscribe to the ideals of a multi-racial British Empire in the nineteenth century and in the twentieth century Federation asserted Australia's independence by defying the wishes of the Colonial Office in this regard. From the mid nineteenth century Australian national identity was based on

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<sup>19</sup> Deakin, *Commonwealth of Australia- Parliamentary Debates House of Representatives*, 3, 12 September 1901.

<sup>20</sup> William Keith Hancock, *Australia*, 1930th ed., 1961, p 59.

<sup>21</sup> McKeown, *Melancholy Order*, p 130.



the conviction that Australians were a British people who were also one of the more vigorous and politically progressive elements which constituted the British Empire. Federation was not only the most significant milestone in asserting independence from Britain but it also pronounced a distinctive Australian identity by adopting the White Australia policy. Preserving the 'whiteness' of the Australian population provided the impetus for Colonies' agreeing to federate.

The Founding Fathers of Federation, among them Henry Parkes, Charles Kingston, Edmund Barton and George Reid, all fervently supported restricted immigration to foster national cohesion. They were supported by the Australian Labor Party.<sup>22</sup>

The exclusion of all non-whites, particularly Asians, from entering the country distinguished Australians from the non-white peoples of the Empire accommodated the idea of British race patriotism within a more distinctive Australian identity; as a white British outpost in the Pacific.

## **2 *White Immigration as Nation-building***

Australia's white population<sup>23</sup> in 1901 was nearly 3,8 million, 96.1% of whom were born in Australia or in other English speaking countries.<sup>24</sup> These percentages had not altered significantly by 1948 although the population itself had. The total population according to the 1947 census was approximately 7 million. As the Australian Bureau of Statistics itself elaborates;

The composition of the overseas-born population between 1788 and 1947 remained predominantly British, although the gold rush in the 1850s encouraged the proliferation of a wider range of nationalities. For example, in Victoria...one man in five was estimated to be Chinese at some

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<sup>22</sup> Jack Lang, "I Remember," 1957, chap. 6: "The first Federal Platform for the Labor Party, January 24, 1900, was a model of brevity. ...There were only three planks. They were (1) Electoral Reform, providing for one adult one vote. (2) Total Exclusion of colored and other undesirable races, and (3) Old Age Pensions..."

<sup>23</sup> James Jupp, "Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Australia (Feature Article) Australian Bureau of Statistics," accessed September 21, 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics Year Book 1988, "Australian Bureau of Statistics Year Book 1988," 263, accessed September 21, 2013.

of the gold diggings...restrictive immigration practices imposed during the second half of the nineteenth century, curtailed Chinese and other non-European migration. With the adoption of the 'White Australia Policy' after Federation, and emphasis on United Kingdom migration throughout the first half of this century,..other overseas birthplace groups in the Australian population diminished further. By 1947, 97.9 per cent of the Australian population were either born in Australia or the United Kingdom, Ireland or New Zealand.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, taking the above into consideration it can be safely assumed that the ethnic background of Australians in 1948 was still overwhelmingly Christian, Anglo-Celtic, English speaking and white. The privileged position of this group was reflected in the The Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948 which not only discriminated against non-white but also against non-British European immigrants.<sup>26</sup>

In 1948 Australians had relinquished their status as British subjects and assumed Australian citizenship. At this time Australia's population was notable for its high degree of uniformity. The Indigenous population was thought to be stable, contrary to the expectations of the nineteenth century when it was assumed that would die out or form an insignificant percentage of the total population. Accentuating distinctive Australian values in effect meant diluting the Britishness of national identity.

This was achieved with mixed success. Since the first settlement there had been a significant element of Britishness in the nation's civic culture and inherited suspicions and latent animosities between Protestant Scots, Welsh, English and the Catholic Irish ethnic groups in society. Despite these 'national' groups having some influence on the development of political parties, trade unions and civic institutions they all fitted into the national identity expressed through membership of the British Commonwealth

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Farida Fozdar and Brian Spittles, "The Australian Citizenship Test: Process and Rhetoric" (*Australian Journal of Politics and History*: Volume 55, Number 4, 2009, pp. 496-512., 2009).n. The Irish could obtain Australian citizenship after living in the country for twelve months. Non-British Europeans, on the other hand, had to have lived in Australia for five years. Until 1956 non-European migrants were barred from applying for Australian citizenship altogether: after 1956 they could apply but were limited by suitability criteria including a requirement of fifteen years' residence. .

(replacing British Empire in 1949). The separate development of religious schools in parallel to state funded public education was managed by successive governments and apart from a few exceptions (e.g. the conscription plebiscites of 1916/17) operated without appearing to generate sectarian conflict.

British symbols endured in Australia in the form of cultural and civic institutions that were often based on British models. The Union Jack is portrayed on the national flag but the Southern Cross does occupy a more prominent position. The British class system was not replicated in Australia but the British honours system lasted until well into twentieth century, although class distinctions in Australia were less pronounced than in Britain. Australian cities and towns appropriated street names and geographical locations from the original locations in Britain and Ireland and although there were some Aboriginal place names recognised by the cartographers and town planners, the majority reflected Australia's historical ties with Britain. During the First World War place names of German origin in South Australia were Anglicised.

The perceived threat from Asia (the yellow peril) strengthened the identification of whiteness which was common to both native born and British born Australians. The idea of whiteness even extended to consumer products such as 'white sugar' which in the early twentieth century was advertised a socially responsible product uncontaminated by cheap kanaka<sup>27</sup> (black) labour.<sup>28</sup>

Later in the twentieth century circumstances altered the composition of Australia's population which had consequences for national identity. One major event was the inability of Britain to protect Australia as evidenced by the fall of Singapore in 1942 and the subsequent pronouncement by the then Prime Minister John Curtin that from then on Australia would look to America. This may have shifted Australia nominally away from Britain but it did little to lessen Australia's attachment to whiteness. Australia still looked to the white nations for strategic alliances, initially to Britain and later to America; the fear of Asian invasion and the threat to territorial sovereignty established

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<sup>27</sup> Kanaka was a term for a worker from various Pacific islands employed in British Colonies and in this case particularly in Queensland.

<sup>28</sup> Stefanie Affeldt, "White Sugar ( Against )Yellow Peril: Consuming for National Identity and Racial Purity" (presented at the Images of Whiteness - Exploring Critical Issues, Oxford: [https://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/fileadmin/.../text.../Affeldt\\_WSAYP.pdf](https://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/fileadmin/.../text.../Affeldt_WSAYP.pdf), 2011), 2.

with the border controls in the nineteenth century had not receded. Furthermore, Australia's attitude to race in the aftermath of the Second World War had not softened, as could be gauged by the opinion of Arthur Calwell who was one of the architects of mass assisted European immigration and the then Minister for Immigration. In 1947 he (in)famously stated in parliament in answer to a question concerning the status and possible deportation of a Chinese man who had been resident in Australia for over twenty years:

An error may have been made in his case. The gentleman's name is Wong. There are many Wongs in the Chinese community, but I have to say — and I am sure that the Honourable Member for Balaclava will not mind me doing so — that “two Wongs do not make a White.”<sup>29</sup>

### 3 Populate or Perish

However, the most significant development to weaken Australia's attachment to Britain was the Australian government's realisation that a nation-building project of mass (European) immigration was warranted if Australia was to secure its economic future; Australia would 'populate or perish.'

Populate meant attracting and facilitating a white only immigration policy albeit with a significant proportion on non-British background. Perish evoked images akin to the nineteenth century fear of Asian mobility. If whiteness was to remain an essential element of Australian nationalism, Australia now had to discourage Asian immigrants without recourse to the instruments provided by the legislation of the White Australia policy. The post war government assisted immigration programme alleviated Australia's fear of being 'swamped' by non-white immigrants. It did so by attracting the 'right kind' of migrant which reduced the emphasis on restricting the 'other' category of non-white migrants.

This development along with Britain's entry into the European Economic Community, post war de-colonisation and the passing of the Racial Discrimination Act of 1975

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<sup>29</sup> Arthur Calwell, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates Hansard House of Representatives*, 1947.

would have more impact on the defining a distinctive Australian identity. Furthermore, the White Australia policy legislation was steadily dismantled from the late 1950s before it was eventually repealed in 1973.

This post war immigration not only had an impact of Australia's economic development but it also had an effect on the ethnic composition of the nation's population. Between 1945 and 2000

approximately six million people came to Australia as new settlers. Agreements were reached with Britain, some European countries and with the International Refugee Organization to encourage migration, including people displaced by the war in Europe. Approximately 1.6 million migrants arrived between October 1945 and 30 June 1960, about 1.3 million in the 1960s, about 960,000 in the 1970s, about 1.1 million in the 1980s, over 900,000 in the 1990s.<sup>30</sup>

Of the four million people who emigrated to Australia between 1945 and 1980 almost all were European and white. Not all would have had close ties with Britain and many came from a non-English speaking background. Australia's racial homogeneity was still preserved although the cultural element was made considerably more diverse. This provided the impetus for the change in government policy from official assimilation to integration.

## 4 Conclusion

Australia was not alone among white settler nations of the Pacific rim and Africa in incorporating race into its identity. Whiteness continued as an essential element of Australia's national identity and when complemented by the colonial ties to the British Empire, national identity acted as a solid unifying force. Restricted immigration directed against Chinese and other Asian/Pacific peoples provided the focus on the out-group which again provided a sense of national cohesion. The determination of Australia to defy the wishes of the Colonial Office by implementing an immigration policy excluding fellow member populations of the Empire, asserted a degree of

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<sup>30</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Historical Population Statistics, 105.0.65.0012008* Table 8.1 *Net Overseas Migration, Australia(a), Year Ended 31 December, 1925 Onwards*, August 5, 2008.

independence and added distinctiveness which bound the in-group together. The broad support for restricted immigration illustrates the main premise that national identity often works best by creating in/out groups.

In short whiteness and Britishness remained entrenched in the nation's identity. Racism was now sanctioned by the state; the Australian government's most significant independent statement was in the context of standing up for its right to be racist.

The nation-building project of state sponsored mass immigration may have slightly diluted the degree of Britishness in Australia's national identity but the British and other European immigrants did not dilute the element of whiteness in national identity. The consequence being that according to my premise the social function of national identity remained solid.

# Chapter 5

## Multiculturalism

### 1 Multiculturalism

The post war period Australia's domestic social, economic and political circumstances required a more inclusive perception of national identity in the wake this unprecedented era of mass immigration and Australia's international obligations. These changes also led to the formation of Australia's much celebrated (although later contested by some) multicultural society.

Although Australia was until the later part of the twentieth century essentially still typified by a white Anglo-Celtic political culture, the state sponsored policy of multiculturalism came to be depicted as an example of successful integration. The type of multiculturalism as practised in modern liberal democracies such as Australia leads one to assume that a paradox of national identity had been overcome. That is, how the distinctiveness of the dominant group in civic society, with its common identity based on shared culture, history, values and common language can be reconciled with or included in a society which requires the recognition of the rights of another, usually a minority group, with different cultural backgrounds, languages and/or histories. To put it briefly, the aim of Australia's policy of multiculturalism was to create unity out of diversity, to integrate rather than assimilate. The general consensus that Australia's policy of multiculturalism successfully integrated its new arrivals was supported by evidence such as *The Multiculturalism Policy Index*, which placed Australia in the 'strong'

category (based on degree of integration) in each of its three ranking surveys in 1980, 2000 and 2010.<sup>1</sup>

Multiculturalism marked the transition from the previous policy of assimilation to one of integration, where the government not only encouraged but also facilitated immigrants to hold on to their original languages and traditions. However, the politician sponsoring the policy added the proviso ‘within strictly defined limits.’<sup>2</sup> These limits however, were not sufficiently defined and others, including journalists, historians and John Howard had their own interpretation of these limits.

Mass European immigration had taken root in Australian society as a solution to the ‘populate or perish’ dilemma. Assimilation remained at its core and it could also be seen as a politically expedient exercise to erase some of the more inconvenient truths and historical episodes from the nation’s collective memory, while simultaneously ensuring that the population remained predominantly white. Multiculturalism’s emphasis on integration went a step further. It implied reciprocal respect from majority and minority sections of society. It was endorsed by the both ALP and the Coalition and as previously mentioned, Australia’s policy was recognised domestically and internationally as a successful model of integration. Official government policy aimed to ensure that multiculturalism would be absorbed into the national psyche on an equal footing with the bush ethos, the Anzac spirit, mateship, the ‘fair go’ and the ‘Australian way of life.’ It was to be an enrichment and complementary to the existing values of Australian national identity.

Social cohesion was facilitated as from 1945 Australia had experienced a long period of relative economic stability in contrast to the adjustments of post war reconstruction in Europe. Successive governments had supported comprehensive programmes aimed at attracting and integrating new immigrants. A system of industrial arbitration and conciliation steadily refined from its inception in the 1920s and the relative absence of inherited privilege meant that no discernible (white) underclass had developed. Multiculturalism had bipartisan support since the 1970s and to some extent it expunged the sins of the White Australia policy. However, for the first time in the nation’s

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<sup>1</sup> Multiculturalism Policy Index, available at <http://www.queensu.ca/mcp>.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Galbally, *Migrant Services and Programs Office of Multicultural Affairs (1989) “National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia” Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra (AGPS, Canberra, 1978).*



history some non-white immigrants, mainly Vietnamese refugees, could be accepted into Australian society, thus weakening the in-out group distinction. The almost universal enthusiasm for cultural diversity fostered an inflated sense of tolerance and social inclusion - 'celebratory multiculturalism.'

Furthermore, by the time John Howard came to power Australia was undergoing significant economic and social changes. Globalisation had caused the previous governments to make economic adjustments which eventually led to the ALP losing some of its traditional blue collar support base. According to one reputable survey,<sup>3</sup> public support for immigration in Howard's early period of government was waning but Howard's rhetoric against (and muted response to Pauline Hanson's anti-immigration and anti-Aboriginal diatribes) cosmopolitan urban elites and political correctness was to relegate his political opponents' visions of an Australian Republic with its future tied to Asia, to the political back-burner.

We now take a slight detour from the chronology as I turn to Australian political party politics and John Howard's influence on perceptions of Australia's multicultural society.

## 2 John Howard's Arrival

For the reader unfamiliar with the Australian political system, a brief sketch of the situation leading up to 1996 is perhaps of some value. John Howard led the Liberal Party, which was one of the two major political parties that commanded a majority in the Australian House of Representatives during the period covered in this thesis. The other was the National Party and these parties were known collectively as the Liberal-National Coalition. The conservative Liberal Party drew its traditional support from the urban business community while the even more conservative National Party's traditional support rested upon the agricultural sector and rural business interests. The Coalition was not an *ad hoc* political expedient, it was more in the nature of a permanent political arrangement. The opposition was led by the ALP, which had its roots in the

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<sup>3</sup> Constitutional Referendum Study, 1999. cited here from Rachel Gibson, Ian McAllister, and Tami Swenson, "The Politics of Race and Immigration in Australia: One Nation Voting in the 1998 Election," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25, no. 5 (2002): 827. Fig 2.

trade union movement and identified itself with the urban working class. Both the Coalition and the ALP appealed to a broad electorate through their respective election campaigns and policies. By the period under consideration in this thesis, the ALP could be reasonably described as a 'third way' social democratic party<sup>4</sup> and the Coalition as free market conservative. From the late 1980s both the ALP and the Coalition had embraced the principles of market deregulation and the (semi) privatisation of public services, albeit to different degrees. Both parties embraced these doctrines as necessary measures to prosper in a globalised world economy. However, the negative effects of globalisation were not shared equally, as by 1996 the value of the wages share of GDP had declined significantly since the mid 1970s.<sup>5</sup> As a consequence, the average Australian wage earner faced more uncertainty as a result of employment flexibility and according to the in-out group dynamic this was one of the uncertain economic conditions that could weaken the solid sense of national social cohesion. The 'need' for in-out dynamic is less pressing in times of confidence, happiness, growth, general well-being.

Both major parties maintained similar economic policies and contended that globalisation had been a major factor in inducing governments to limit their role in the economy. Therefore, considering the similarities in both major parties' economic policies and the deteriorating purchasing power of the average worker, it is important to note that John Howard's view of national identity could be used to distinguish his policies from those of his opponents and help establish his political legitimacy.

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Keating cited in "The American: The Online Magazine of the American Enterprise Institute," accessed November 10, 2013, <http://www.american.com/archive/2007/september-october-magazine-contents/howard2019s-end>. Keating, ...claims that the reforms were the beginning of the concept of "The Third Way," an idea he says Tony Blair "stole" for Britain's Labour Party after visiting Australia.

<sup>5</sup> W. McLennan, *Australian National Accounts 1995-1996 National Income, Expenditure and Product* (Australian Bureau of Statistics, July 28, 1997), <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/5204.01995-96?OpenDocument>.

### **3 John Howard's Multiculturalism; Public Pronouncements, Populism and Private Opinions**

By the time of the first Howard government in 1996 Australia's population was complemented by a significant number of Europeans from a non English speaking background and a small but growing number of Asians, many being 'boat people' who were refugees from Vietnam. Australian accepted this group partly as a moral responsibility as Australians had participated in the Vietnam War. In the meantime Australia's demography had altered. At 30 June 1996, almost a quarter of Australia's resident population had been born overseas. Some 39% of the overseas-born population were born in the main English speaking countries of the United Kingdom, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada and the United States of America.<sup>6</sup>

When looking at Howard's favourable public pronouncements concerning multiculturalism, it would be plausible to support the view that the popular acceptance of official multiculturalism and his acute political sense persuaded him to celebrate Australia's new-found maturity and tolerance. Howard used the occasion of an Australia Day speech in 1997 to illustrate this point:

And one of the many things that has distinguished the Australian achievement has been our remarkable openness and tolerance. No nation in the world has more successfully absorbed people from the four corners of the Earth in a more tolerant fashion than has the Australian nation and when it comes to tolerance and when it comes to willingness to accept people, this nation should bend its knee to no group of people or to no nation in asserting the tolerance and the liberties and the open heartedness and the fair mindedness of the Australian community.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, "1996 Census of Population and Housing Population Growth and Distribution Australia," 1998, 10.

<sup>7</sup> John Howard, "Transcript of the Prime Minister the Hon John Howard MP Speech to the Marion City Council Australia Day Citizenship Ceremony, Hallett Cove, South Australia Prime Minister - Howard, John Speech - 26 January 1997," n.d.

Australia's official attitude and the public response to the increasing (yet by international standards modest) numbers of immigrants from Asia and to those citizens described by one commentator<sup>8</sup> as 'Third World looking people,' suggests that Australia's collective recognition of race remained a significant national characteristic and an agent of national solidarity. The aforementioned 1975 Act departed from Australia's discriminatory immigration policy, as the relevant ministry recently declared:

Australia's Migration Programme does not discriminate on the basis of race or religion. This means that anyone from any country can apply to migrate, regardless of their ethnic origin, gender or colour, provided they meet the criteria set out in law.<sup>9</sup>

However, this tolerance remains selective in that the immigration department reserves the right to apply 'different criteria for different categories of visas and the criteria are established to meet Australia's national interests and needs.'<sup>10</sup> This caveat in the legislation played a role in Howard's political rhetoric with the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers from the middle East between 1996 and 2007. It gave some legitimacy to his much quoted line delivered during the 2001 Federal Election policy speech, 'But we will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come... we decide who comes to this country.'<sup>11</sup> This statement heralded the adoption of the 'Pacific Solution' of transferring asylum seekers to territories in the Pacific rather than allowing these refugees to be processed in Australia. This policy was initially supported by the opposition at the time and although temporarily abolished after Howard's electoral defeat in 2007 and it has since become established practice.

Contrary to his public assertions, John Howard was personally sceptical about multiculturalism, as attested by his later rhetoric aimed at identifying urban cultural elites and other proponents of multiculturalism as impediments to the adoption of

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<sup>8</sup> Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (Taylor & Francis, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Commonwealth of Australia Department of Immigration and Citizenship, "Fact Sheet 4 – More than 65 Years of Post-War Migration," accessed January 29, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> John Howard, "Transcript of the Prime Minister the Hon John Howard MP Address at the Federal Liberal Party Campaign Launch, Sydney" (Sydney, 2001).

a unified national identity. Howard defined the limits of reciprocal recognition by placing the adjective 'Australian' before the noun 'multiculturalism' and promulgating the notion of 'the Australian way,' which had more in common with assimilation than integration.

Howard strongly endorsed the idea that the integration of immigrants should be patented by acceptance of 'the Australian way' which then assured recognition of one common national identity shared by all citizens. Howard's rendering of the term 'Australian multiculturalism' also found credence in the Roach Report<sup>12</sup> which also used the concept:

We emphasise that multiculturalism, as it has developed here, has a uniquely Australian character. Far from denying Australian culture and identity, it has its roots in them and contributes to their continuous enhancement.<sup>13</sup>

However this report also stressed inclusiveness and it is a matter of contention whether he agreed with this sentiment, particularly with this report's ninth recommendation, which stated;

A strongly expressed view in some of the public submissions from respondents who claim 'Anglo' or 'old Australia' heritage is that multiculturalism is a negative and divisive feature of Australian society, creating disdain for people of Anglo-Celtic origins and denigrating Australian culture by promoting other cultures as more worthy. The Council respects the people expressing these concerns but believes their views reflect an incorrect perception of multiculturalism, pointing to an important communication strategy priority.<sup>14</sup>

This '*incorrect perception of multiculturalism*' was at the core of populist rhetoric in Australia in the 1990s. Howard sought political advantage by choosing his language

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<sup>12</sup> National Multicultural Advisory Council, *Australian Multiculturalism for a New Century: Towards Inclusiveness[202F?]: A Report* ([Canberra]: The Council, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., viii.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 97.

carefully to avoid criticising the anti-immigration One Nation Party's leader Pauline Hanson for her populist views on multiculturalism: in defending her he stated 'if someone someone disagrees with the prevailing orthodoxy of the day, that person should not be denigrated as a narrow-minded bigot.'<sup>15</sup> Howard favoured term 'Australian multiculturalism' implied assimilation into a more mainstream Australian identity was the preferred outcome of this policy, which was identical to One Nation's policy. His decision to abolish the Office of Multicultural Affairs and the Bureau of Immigration, Multiculturalism and Population Research on coming to office in 1996 (and not replacing them)<sup>16</sup> signalled that Howard's professed support for multiculturalism was less than genuine. His sincerity was not helped by a National Party candidate who referred to naturalisation ceremonies as 'de-wogging' ceremonies.<sup>17</sup> Howard's private view of multiculturalism was unambiguous, "To me, multiculturalism suggests that we can't make up our minds who we are or what we believe in."<sup>18</sup> Yet less than a year later Howard was to boast of Australia's achievement of integration:

Our success over recent decades in particular in successfully absorbing people from the rest of the world in an atmosphere of great harmony and great openness and great tolerance is one of the proudest things we should feel on Australia Day...<sup>19</sup>

To Howard 'absorbing people from the rest of the world' also meant absorption into the core Australian culture. The significant issue here is that the generally accepted perception of the successful integration of large numbers of European immigrants into Australian society needs to be measured against the level of tolerance and perceived degree of integration afforded to non-white arrivals. In short, a 'whiteness' test

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<sup>15</sup> Wayne Errington and Peter Van Onselen, *John Winston Howard: The Definitive Biography* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2008), 253.

<sup>16</sup> Michael G Clyne and Jupp, James, *Multiculturalism and Integration a Harmonious Relationship* (Acton, A.C.T.: ANU E Press, 2011), 49.

<sup>17</sup> Errington and Van Onselen, *John Winston Howard*, 230.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>19</sup> Howard, "Transcript of the Prime Minister the Hon John Howard MP Speech to the Marion City Council Australia Day Citizenship Ceremony, Hallett Cove, South Australia Prime Minister - Howard, John Speech - 26 January 1997."

without the sanction of legislation such as the Restricted Immigration Act of 1901 which prevented the situation from arising. An observation from Ien Ang sums up, 'the ideal of homogeneous whiteness was no so much given up, but diluted by an insistence on the cultural homogenisation of all newcomers, their absorption into a unified, national imagined community'<sup>20</sup> It seems that ideas that bore the White Australia policy were revived in populist political rhetoric and implicitly supported by John Howard. The result being that race was 'still deeply embedded in the nation's self-image'<sup>21</sup> due to Howard's interpretation of where multiculturalism slotted into the nation's identity.

Australia may have become a more tolerant society since the nineteenth century and in 1975 it would have been hard to imagine the sort of public comment made by Arthur Calwell in 1947.

That is until 1996, when domestic politics, international events and Australia's diplomatic obligations would contrive to test Australia's commitment to a more culturally diverse multicultural society which would include a more significant non-white element. One of these domestic events was the election of Pauline Hanson to the federal parliament in 1996. Hanson had been dis-endorsed by the Liberal Party during the election campaign because of remarks she made about Australian Aborigines. As the dis-endorsement occurred too close to the election date for her name to be removed from the ballot paper, she appeared on the electoral ballot as a Liberal Party candidate. Hanson's maiden speech harked back to the days of Calwell's 1947 comment and when she claimed, 'I and most Australians want our immigration policy radically reviewed and that of multiculturalism abolished. I believe we are in danger of being swamped by Asians'<sup>22</sup> Moreover, Hanson explicitly appealed to the sentiments expressed by Calwell when she proclaimed:

Arthur Calwell was a great Australian and Labor leader, and it is a pity that there are not men of his stature sitting on the opposition benches today.

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<sup>20</sup> Ien Ang, "Between Nationalism and Transnationalism: Multiculturalism in a Globalising World ICS Occasional Paper Series Volume 1, Number 1" (Institute for Culture and Society, University of Western Sydney, 2010), p 5.

<sup>21</sup> N. Papastergiadis, "The Invasion Complex in Australian Political Culture," *Thesis Eleven* 78, no. 1 (2004): 11.

<sup>22</sup> Pauline Hanson, "Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates Hansard House of Representatives P. 3859" (Australian Parliament, 1996).

Arthur Calwell said: “Japan, India, Burma, Ceylon and every new African nation are fiercely anti-white and anti one another. Do we want or need any of these people here? I am one red-blooded Australian who says no and who speaks for 90% of Australians.” I have no hesitation in echoing the words of Arthur Calwell.<sup>23</sup>

John Howard as Prime Minister would be confronted with the arrival of non-white refugees and asylum seekers as well as demands to come to terms with the nation’s past treatment of its Indigenous citizens. He would also attempt to distance himself from Hanson while at the same time expressing similar if not so radical views. Howard did not waste much time in doing so, while being interviewed on a popular Sydney talk back radio programme he said:

I do believe, as I have done, that the Prime Minister of this country should reaffirm the principles on which our immigration policy is built and those principles are first and foremost immigration policy is meant to serve the interest of Australia, not to serve the interest of a particular ideology and secondly, and very importantly, that immigration policy has for more than 30 years been based on a non racial foundation. We do not believe in choosing people on the basis of their race or their ethnic background and that is a commitment that my Party has had for a long time.<sup>24</sup>

The policy of multiculturalism had enjoyed support from all major parties since the early 1970s and John Howard’s public support for a culturally diverse society as evidenced in his official statements above and in his 1997 reassurance that ‘the absolute, unqualified embrace of a culturally diverse, harmonious and tolerant Australian community is not in question’<sup>25</sup> are difficult to reconcile with his repetitive references to ‘mainstream’ Australian values.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> John Howard, “Transcript of the Prime Minister the Hon John Howard MP Speech to the John Laws Programme RADIO 2 UE” (Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 1996), 2.

<sup>25</sup> John Howard, “Address at the National Multicultural Advisory Council Issues Paper Launch -Multicultural Australia: ‘The Way Forward,’ Melbourne Town Hall, 11 December 1997,” 1997.



Pauline Hanson was unequivocal in her preference for cultural homogeneity whereas Howard was initially more circumspect with his political rhetoric as he quietly adopted some of the populist ideas supported by One Nation including the detention of asylum seekers while their status was determined. 'The Howard government's Border Protection Bill (1999) and new 'temporary safe haven' visa regulations introduced the same year without opposition from Labor were actually borrowed from Pauline Hanson's policies.'<sup>26</sup> The Pacific Solution and the establishment of domestic detention centres where asylum seekers were in effect more or less permanently quarantined and incarcerated respectively marked the end of Australia's tolerant integration policy in the form of state sponsored multiculturalism.

## **4 Cronulla: Mainstream's Reaction to Multiculturalism**

The post war immigration that led to a level of diversity that Anglo-Celtic Australians had never experienced, challenged the assumption that Australians would always share a collective identity based on a common ethnicity and culture. John Howard's notion of national identity rose to this challenge by stressing mainstream values even more vigorously. It was becoming clearer that Howard's mainstream Australia would not compromise when it came to recognising the rights of those who did not share its 'common values.' In 2005 Howard warned that Muslim schools in Australia must teach 'Australian values' while his Minister for Education delivered the following ultimatum to the Muslim community:

We don't care where people come from, we don't mind what religion they've got but what we want them to do is to commit to the Australian Constitution, Australian rule of law and basically, if people don't want to be

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<sup>26</sup> Scott Poynting and Victoria Mason, "Tolerance, Freedom, Justice and Peace"?: Britain, Australia and Anti-Muslim Racism since 11 September 2001," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 27, no. 4 (2006): 237..

Australians and they don't want to live by Australian values and understand them, well then they can basically clear off.<sup>27</sup>

Australia's appreciation of culturally diversity and community tolerance had also put to the test prior to the Minister's comments. John Howard's response to what became known as the Cronulla Riots in 2005 illustrated his canny use of language. The incidents that instigated the riots included a well publicized sexual assault case perpetrated by a group of immigrant youths and an attack on some community volunteers. When approximately 5,000 people assembled at the Sydney beach suburb of Cronulla in support of two off-duty volunteer surf lifesavers who had been assaulted by young men of Middle Eastern appearance. The following night, a bloody stabbing of a man on a footpath in a nearby suburb exacerbated the tension.<sup>28</sup> In the meantime Alan Jones, a popular Sydney radio host had urged his listeners to take action by reading out on air what has become an infamous SMS message with the following text:

This Sunday every Fucking Aussie in the Shire, get down to North Cronulla to help support Leb and wog bashing day ... Bring your mates down and let's show them this is our beach and they're never welcome back'<sup>29</sup>

On the following Sunday the situation turned ugly when men of Arabic appearance were assaulted. Subsequently, large groups of Lebanese Australians carried out reprisal attacks and police and rioters clashed resulting in dozens of people with serious injuries and over a hundred arrests. Jones received a warning from the media regulator for his inflammatory language but Howard defended Jones. 'I don't think he's a person who encourages prejudice in the Australian community, not for one moment, but he is a person who articulates what a lot of people think.'<sup>30</sup> Howard was at pains to point out that the riots were not racially motivated and after defending Jones, Howard then

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<sup>27</sup> Samantha Hawley, "ABC Radio Programme PM Teach Australian Values or 'Clear Off', Says Nelson," *PM* (ABC Australia, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> ABC, "Communities Clash Violently at Cronulla - 80 Days That Changed Our Lives - ABC Archives," 2012.

<sup>29</sup> David Marr, "One-Way Radio Plays by Its Own Rules," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2005, sec. National.

<sup>30</sup> David Marr, "No Victor in Fight over Inflammatory Talkback," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2009.

remarked 'I do not accept that there is underlying racism in this country. I have always taken a more optimistic view of the character of the Australian people. I do not believe Australians are racist.'<sup>31</sup>

Howard's refusal to condemn the riots as racially motivated and then to defend Jones is reminiscent of the free speech argument he later used to disagree with Pauline Hanson's anti-Asian comments without incurring collateral political damage. As the novelist and journalist Malcolm Knox succinctly put it, 'Howard's tactic then, as ever, was to disown the aggressors but not the attitudes that produced them.'<sup>32</sup>

Multiculturalism is successful if it serves as a cohesive force and if individual differences are recognised as equal, not just as tolerated by the dominant cultural group. The ability to tolerate implies the power to be intolerant, or as Ghassan Hage puts it, 'the advocacy of tolerance left people *empowered* to be intolerant'<sup>33</sup> When John Howard did speak positively about multiculturalism and Australian values he was emphasising the tolerant nature of the 'ordinary bloke' whom he so publicly admired. In so doing he empowered the dominant cultural group in Australia at the expense of the recent immigrant. On occasions members of the dominant group exercised the power to be intolerant as evidenced by the Cronulla riots and the random victimization of their fellow citizens who happened to have a dark complexion. Howard's rhetoric was cancelled out by his private views, his muted response to the populism of Pauline Hanson and the One Nation Party as well as his frequent references to mainstream Australia and his language in objectifying asylum seekers as unworthy illegal refugees. Charles Taylor makes a similar point with the observation that 'our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others.'<sup>34</sup> Howard's rhetoric and successful campaign slogans such as 'For All of Us' mis-recognised a sizeable percentage of his fellow citizens but it evidently attracted an even larger share of mainstream Australia's votes in four elections.

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<sup>31</sup> Anne Davies and Stephanie Peatling, "Australians Racist? No Way, Says Howard," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2005, sec. National.

<sup>32</sup> Malcolm Knox, "Cronulla Five Years On," *The Monthly*, 2010.

<sup>33</sup> Hage, *White Nation*, 86.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 1.

## 5 Citizenship & Australian Values

Howard's views on national identity were perhaps best confirmed by the 2007 introduction of the Citizenship Test and the Australian Values Statement that stipulates, '...all applicants aged 18 years and over are required to sign a values statement when applying for selected visas. The statement requires applicants to confirm that they will respect the Australian way of life and obey the laws of Australia before being granted a visa.'<sup>35</sup> This statement is supported by a booklet 'Life in Australia' in which the values are explained thus:

Australian values include respect for the equal worth, dignity and freedom of the individual, freedom of speech, freedom of religion and secular government, freedom of association, support for parliamentary democracy and the rule of law, equality under the law, equality of men and women, equality of opportunity and peacefulness. They also include a spirit of egalitarianism that embraces fair play, mutual respect, tolerance, compassion for those in need and pursuit of the public good. It is also important to understand that English is the national language and is an important unifying element of Australian society<sup>36</sup>

Further on in the same publication the historical background is more revealing:

Australia's first inhabitants were the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, whose unique culture and traditions are among the oldest in the world. The first migrants were mostly from Britain and Ireland and this Anglo-Celtic heritage has been a significant and continuing influence on Australia's history, culture and political traditions. Subsequent immigration waves have brought people from Africa, Asia, the Americas and Eu-

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<sup>35</sup> Commonwealth of Australia; Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), "Fact Sheet 7 - Life in Australia: Australian Values," accessed February 16, 2014, <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/07values.htm>.

<sup>36</sup> Australia and Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Life in Australia* ([Belconnen, A.C.T.]: [Dept. of Immigration and Citizenship], 2007), 1.

rope, all of whom have made their own unique contributions to Australia and its way of life.<sup>37</sup>

The line ‘this Anglo–Celtic heritage has been a significant and continuing influence’ is clearly dominant and while other cultures are mentioned they are implicitly subordinate to the mainstream Anglo–Celtic heritage. The mention of Indigenous culture is entirely factual and acknowledges no contribution to Australian values. As some critics have argued this reflects Howard’s personal and preferred version of Australia’s national identity of ‘Australia as a nation proudly based on Enlightenment liberal democratic values, explicitly linked to its colonial past, and having a Judeo-Christian and Anglo-Saxon/Celtic heritage.’<sup>38</sup> Howard’s ideal ordinary Australian, the battler, was now formalised through citizenship and this citizen’s values were derived from a European, preferably British or Irish background. The Howard Government explicitly used citizenship to exclude those who do not fit his mainstream vision of Australia. His rhetoric had not undone the policies of official multiculturalism but it did strengthen the monocultural nature of Australia that government policies since the Whitlam years had endeavoured to change. Furthermore, the appeal of possessing Anglo-Celtic heritage also resonated with the citizen whose share of the ‘national capital’ was modest compared to that of the cultural elite. The image of the ‘battler’ was synonymous with Anglo-Celtic and European. Moreover, the ‘battlers’ as described in Howard’s language were white and this group (mainstream) was endowed with implied rights, or what Ghassan Hage called ‘governmental belonging.’<sup>39</sup> Whiteness, through the aegis of white multiculturalism (with Anglo-Celtic as its core attribute) gave the less well-off working class citizen (through identification of with the governmental class) the experience of governmental belonging. By way of example Hage formulated the concept thus; ‘I have the identity of those who are middle class and who are in power...I have an essence /identity which gives me, unlike my Aboriginal, Arab, Hungarian or Chinese neighbours, the *possibility*

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>38</sup> Farida Fozdar and Brian Spittles, “The Australian Citizenship Test: Process and Rhetoric” (Australian Journal of Politics and History: Volume 55, Number 4, 2009, pp. 496-512., 2009), 505–506.

<sup>39</sup> Hage, *White Nation*, 211.

of accumulating more capital. I belong to the 'race' of those who rule, even though I am not actually ruling.<sup>40</sup>

The lasting legacy is that when Howard was elected in 1996, bi-partisan political support for official multiculturalism had confirmed it as having enriched Australian society. When he left office in 2007 the word multiculturalism had almost lapsed into disuse. If multiculturalism was a response to the dilution of Britishness in national identity, Howard's response to multiculturalism was to encourage a return to Anglo-Australian values.

## 6 Conclusion

Multiculturalism caused initial government policy to be adapted from assimilation to integration and it was seen internationally as a model of tolerant integration. Moreover, multiculturalism was initially a successful element of national identity because it still provided the white 'in-group' with a focus on an 'out-group' to cement social cohesion within the 'in-group.'

However, as evidenced by the Cronulla riots and the populist rhetoric of Pauline Hanson and One Nation, certain 'semi-others,' (social welfare recipients (often Aborigines), those benefiting from publicly funded help initiatives (often immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds) and (potential) asylum seekers. While Howard publicly supported multiculturalism, his private view was not so supportive. In fact his insistence on 'Australian' multiculturalism was a contradiction in terms. His reticence in publicly condemning populist attacks helped shift attention on those that could not or would not integrate. That is, to a group of 'semi-others,'(third world looking people) rather than to a clearly defined 'full-other' (non-white) which was the case when the White Australia policy was still in operation. The social function of national identity was becoming blurred as a result of populist agitation and Howard's politically motivated acquiescence. This was Howard's wedge to bolster his political legitimacy by exploiting the line of demarcation between the in-group and the out-group. His preference for 'mainstream' values could provide the stability reminiscent of the British-

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

centric racially homogeneous period when national identity ensured social cohesion. The period of official Australian multiculturalism marked return to assimilation, a reversion to pre-multiculturalist ideas. Multiculturalism 'muted' the in-out dynamic but that did not mean the need for distinguishing between 'us' and 'them' had receded.

John Howard's personal values and their similarity to his version of Australia's values and national identity are the subjects under discussion in the following chapter.





# Chapter 6

## John Howard the ‘Ordinary Bloke’

### 1 John Howard’s Values

John Howard’s concept of national identity was undoubtedly instilled in him from an early age. He grew up in suburban Sydney, was educated locally, represented a suburban Sydney constituency in the Federal Parliament and although as a young man he travelled overseas for a short period, he did not venture far away from his family roots. These roots were firmly embedded in his character. His father ran a small business in the neighbourhood, both his father and grandfather fought in France with the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and he was imbued with the Methodist denomination of protestantism by his parents, his school and the (Methodist) church.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, his personal identity was easily reconciled with his view of the nation’s history with regard to Anzac, Christianity, mateship, egalitarianism, thrift, hard work, individualism, self-reliance and family. Judith Brett points out that Howard’s convictions were distilled from his personal experience ‘...in the experiences he speaks of: families and small businesses centred on work and neighbourhood, bounded by a relatively taken-for-granted nationalism.’<sup>2</sup> Howard’s biographers argue

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<sup>1</sup> Marion Maddox, “Howard’s Methodism: How Convenient?!” *Journal of Australian Studies* 28, no. 83 (2004): 1–11. Marrying into Sydney Anglicanism, he identifies religiously as an Anglican. However, this carries nothing of the iconic weight of his childhood Methodism.”

<sup>2</sup> Judith Brett cited here from Robert Manne, *The Howard Years* (Melbourne: Black Inc. Agenda, 2004), 74.

that his political success was embedded in the “timeless values of his parents”<sup>3</sup> while the journalist Paul Kelly writes that Howard ‘saw his family story as a template for the nation’s story’<sup>4</sup> It would also seem reasonable to assume that Howard became an ardent believer in free enterprise through the influence of his father, who ran a small business in his neighbourhood and his respect for the Anzac tradition was undoubtedly grounded in the pride he felt in his father and grandfather’s self sacrifice during the Great War. His mother’s influence and the well trodden path of the Sydney University Young Liberal Club at the age of eighteen and where he served as president from 1962-64. Here he met some of his future colleagues and honed his debating skills while further developing his political consciousness. The values of thrift, hard work and sound financial management were perhaps not unique to Howard, but his firm belief in these values and his labelling of them as recognisable national traits proved to be a master stroke in election manoeuvring. It is clear that Howard believed in those virtues commonly attributed to the Protestant work ethic

... I was certainly brought up in the Protestant work ethic, very much... it’s the idea of working and expecting some reward, but doing it in an ethical fashion... And I regard that as part of the Protestant work ethic: that work has its own reward in return.

No my fundamental values haven’t changed. My belief in the centrality of the family, my very strong belief in private business enterprise, my very strong belief in the I think the stabilising influence of the Judaeo-Christian ethic in this country. Those beliefs haven’t changed at all. And you can find at every point of my time as Prime Minister a re-affirmation of those things.<sup>5</sup>

John Howard was a free market advocate in the mould of Margaret Thatcher and he was similarly noted for his socially conservative values and his admiration

<sup>3</sup> Wayne Errington and Peter Van Onselen, *John Winston Howard: The Definitive Biography* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2008), viii.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Kelly, *The March of Patriots: The Struggle for Modern Australia* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2011), 17.

<sup>5</sup> Geraldine Doogue, Compass: What Our Leaders Believe Episode: Election Special, Television programme, 2004.

of entrepreneurial spirit. What he lacked in personal charisma he made up for with determination. He had been Treasurer in the Fraser governments (1975-83) and after losing elections to Hawke and subsequently his own party leadership, he had shown resilience first by regaining his party's leadership and then by winning the 1996 federal election. The resilience he showed in regaining his party's leadership also helped Howard to project himself as a battler who eventually made good through determination and diligence. It was his ordinariness that had resonance with the image of the 'ordinary bloke' and Howard used this to good effect. In answer to a question asking Howard to describe himself, he replied thus;

As a person somebody very much with quintessential Australian values. I'm direct, I'm unpretentious and I'm pretty dogged and I hope I've got a capacity to laugh at myself and not take myself too seriously.... I'd like to be seen as an average Australian bloke. I can't think of... I can't think of a nobler description of anybody than to be called an average Australian bloke.<sup>6</sup>

The 'ordinary bloke' trope was also apt for the only Liberal Party leader to have been educated in the state school system and for someone who professed a love for the national sport – cricket.

Howard's political success should be seen in the context of the 1990s. There were domestic forces at work, such as strong economic growth from the export driven resources boom in Australia, the influence of the media and conservative 'think tanks' (such as the Institute of Public Affairs). External circumstances such as the widespread adoption of free market economic ideas by both the left and right in the United States, the United Kingdom and some western European countries, globalisation and international politics also played a role in Howard's electoral success. Some of these factors also influenced the electoral successes of Howard's predecessors in government despite the differences in the ALP and the Coalition's political and economic outlook. National political leaders of various colours were not averse to aligning themselves with what they considered to be the most prominent values of society.

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<sup>6</sup> Liz Jackson, John Howard Interview -Four Corners Programme "An Average Australian Bloke," 1996.

There were precedents in Australian politics for the kind of actions used by John Howard during his term of office. His predecessor as prime minister, Paul Keating, often made reference to the nation's history to justify his preference for an Australian Republic and his stance supporting closer ties with Asia. A string of former Australian Prime Ministers had deliberately cultivated a personal image that would resonate with the values of then dominant strand of the national stereotype. It was claimed that Ben Chifley (ALP) never owned a dinner jacket and avoided attending occasions when one was required. This underpinned his working class roots and complemented his former occupation as a train driver which enabled him to be easily identifiable with the hero of working class solidarity, the 'ordinary Aussie bloke.' Sir Robert Menzies (conservative UAP/Liberal Party)<sup>7</sup> was equally at home with his public image of the Australian Briton while Gough Whitlam (ALP) identified with an emergent independent national spirit. The Liberal-National Coalition Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser tempered his public image as member of a privileged propertied class by supporting multiculturalism. Bob Hawke (ALP) sat comfortably with his public image of the 'ocker,'<sup>8</sup> which appealed to a broad cross section of the male population and at the same time placated his party's traditional supporters who were uncomfortable when Hawke cultivated personal relationships with a number of successful businessmen and entrepreneurs. Hawke's association with prominent sportsmen also projected his own and Australia's 'have a go' mentality.

His successor, Paul Keating, proved to be adept at identifying himself with the multicultural society and engaging with Australia's Asian neighbours as an adjunct to his economic nationalism.

One national constitutional issue was undergoing a transformation, the formal relationship between Britain and Australia. The British sovereign remained Australia's Head of State but in 1984 'Advance Australia Fair' had been proclaimed Australia's national anthem (replacing 'God Save The Queen'). Howard endorsed the former but

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<sup>7</sup> The Liberal Party of Australia was formed by Sir Robert Menzies in 1944. The party was originally founded in 1910, became the Nationalists in 1917 and the United Australia Party in 1932. Since 1944, the Liberal Party governed Australia at the Federal level from 1949–72, 1975–83 and 1996–2007. On each of these occasions, the party governed in coalition with The Nationals (originally known as the Country Party). <http://australianpolitics.com/political-parties/liberal>.

<sup>8</sup> "Ocker," A good natured but uncultured Australian male.

took the opposite position on the latter issue.

Although the ALP had governed for 13 years prior to Howard's election victory, this party under Hawke and Keating had long since abandoned many of its major socialist policies in favour of free market economics. A salient point relevant to Howard's emphasis on national identity is that both he and his predecessor as Prime Minister Paul Keating were keen advocates of deregulation and privatisation, their different views on national identity thus served as the distinguishing feature between the ALP and the Coalition.

Howard's use of national identity is illustrated in the language he chose in his battles with political opponents. In some ways Howard had emulated his predecessor Paul Keating, who had skilfully assigned to his political opposition the label of backward looking conservatives who were nostalgic for Britain and stuck in the 1950s.<sup>9</sup> Howard in turn asserted that Keating's view of national identity is misplaced because it relied on political correctness or social engineering, whereas his own view articulated true, taken-for-granted conceptions of Australianness that have emerged organically from Australian history.<sup>10</sup> Howard was successful in promoting his image as anchor with his conservative emphasis on the ordinary bloke while simultaneously implementing his economic rationalisation.<sup>11</sup>

Keating was an avid supporter of multiculturalism who favoured the establishment of an Australian Republic and differentiated the memory of the nation's military past between imperial and national/regional conflicts. He believed the nation should apologise to the Indigenous Australians for historical injustices and cultivated a public image of an urbane, cosmopolitan reformer. Howard held the diametrically opposite position on all of these issues. He was a staunch supporter of the monarch as the nation's Head of State, believed the nation should celebrate its military past (particularly the Anzac heritage), was more likely to be seen at a major sporting event than at the opera, and his public image could be described as staid, homely and conservative. In

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<sup>9</sup> Anna Clark, "Politicians Using History," *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 56, no. 1 (2010): 125..

<sup>10</sup> Carol Johnson, "John Howard's 'Values' and Australian Identity," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 2 (2007): 196.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Bonnell and Martin Crotty, "Australia's History under Howard, 1996-2007," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 617 (2008): 156.

Howard's milieu he did not occupy an elevated plinth in the establishment but he could be characterised as 'safe pair of hands.'

In effect their different views of the nation, its history and its future meant that the electorate would choose their preferred candidate partly based on a perception of Australia's national identity.

## 2 Aussie battler

After Howard unsuccessfully fought the 1987 federal election against the then Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke, he was removed from the leadership by Andrew Peacock in an internal coup in 1989. Subsequently John Hewson led the Opposition from 1990, taking over the Liberal Party's leadership following Andrew Peacock's defeat in that year's election. Howard worked loyally as Hewson's lieutenant and collaborated on the Opposition's 'Fightback' programme. Following Hewson's defeat in the 1993 election (to Keating), Alexander Downer became leader until he made way for Howard's return in early 1995, by which time Paul Keating had been Prime Minister for five years. It was during this period that Keating applied his considerable (if somewhat abrasive) oratorical style to launch scathing attacks on what he saw as Howard's antiquated values. In a typical example, when referring to 'Fightback' and the idea proffered by Hewson and Howard that the 1950s were a golden age of prosperity, Keating said in parliament:

The same old sterile ideology, the same old fogyism of the 1950s, that produced the Thatcherite policies of the late 1970s is going to produce Fightback...You can go back to the fifties to your nostalgia, your Menzies, the Caseys and the whole lot. They were not aggressively Australian, they were not aggressively proud of our culture, and we will have no bar of you or your sterile ideology.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Keating, "Paul Keating, Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (CPD), House of Representatives, 27 February 1992," n.d.

Judging by his electoral appeal and results up until 1996, Keating had successfully painted Howard and the Coalition as more in tune with the old world of Imperial Britain than with the new world of globalisation. Moreover, the Coalition's view when juxtaposed against Keating's endorsement of closer economic ties with Asia and unqualified support for multiculturalism seemed to hark back to Australia's nineteenth century identification as Australian Britons and to the era of the White Australia policy. However, was to turn the tables on his political opponents. Howard's language created a nexus between his values and those of the nation. That is, the dominant group of mainstream voters, the ordinary bloke of his rhetoric. In 1995 Howard would launch his own campaign which was aimed at tarnishing his political opponents with the brush of social divisiveness. Although both he and Keating saw economic reform as key to their political careers (and presumably to the national interest), the uncertainties that arose among the population due to economic rationalisation could be better reconciled by the reassurances offered by Howard's appeal to home, family and the values of ordinary mainstream values. Conversely, Keating stressed a broader and more dynamic view of rapid adjustment to the globalised economy. The nation preferred Howard's view of the national interest.

Howard's political values were embedded in the Liberal Party's philosophy which he soon began to promote to the electorate. He set out his ideas in a series of talks known as the *'Headland Speeches'*,<sup>13</sup> which he began delivering in 1995, a year before his election as Prime Minister. This series of speeches set out the Liberal Party's broad ideals which included a starkly contrasting view of Australia's national character than that of Keating. In his speech entitled *'National Identity'* Howard accused Keating of trying to hijack his concept for his own political end and defined Australia's character as:

Our national character springs not from particular ideologies but from mainstream, egalitarian values, a robust democratic tradition, our history, our geography, many Liberal or Conservative-minded Governments;

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<sup>13</sup> John Howard, "Headland Speeches: The Titles of the Main Speeches Were 1. The Role of Government (June 1995); 2. Fair Australia (October 1995) & 3. National Identity (December 1995)," 1995.

and Labor ones as well, successive waves of immigration which have beneficially shaped our identity and, most of all, generations of unique individuals who have all played their part in moulding our national character.<sup>14</sup>

Here Howard articulated his view by inserting the words 'mainstream,' together with 'individuals' which blended his personal values with the more recognisable Australian trait of 'egalitarian values.' In one swoop he established a connection between mainstream and the middle class or ordinary Australian (bloke); that is; white, Anglo-Celtic and now European immigrant, who had 'individually' forged Australia's identity. Howard's emphasis on individualism was complemented by similar assertions about the 'family,' which is another mainstream value.

We take it as fundamental that sustaining and maintaining a fair and compassionate society in which individuals have the opportunity to succeed and prosper through their own initiative and endeavour requires a productive, competitive and growing economy...The family is, and will continue to be, the foundation and most important stabilising influence in our society. Protecting and strengthening the family unit is the key to maintaining social cohesion and economic stability in the future. A stable functioning family provides the best welfare support system yet devised.<sup>15</sup>

In the same speech this same sentiment was reinforced but this time coupled to a more modern colloquial self image:

The Australian tradition of "she'll be right, mate" has been very much the product of our strong self-belief that if you worked hard and looked after your family, this country would be able to provide the necessary opportunities to assure your future security.

Considering the place of 'mate' and 'mateship' in Australia's iconography where white male comradeship and solidarity were instilled in the bush worker, the unionised

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<sup>14</sup> John Howard, "National Identity: John Howard Headland Speech," 1995.

<sup>15</sup> John Howard, "Fair Australia: John Howard Headland Speech," 1995.



miner, the shearer and smelted into the Anzac legend, this reference could be seen as a useful semantic device to link the broader national values to idea of the individual and the family. These are the same personal values which John Howard held so dear. This may not have been an attempt by a member the political elite to impose his conception of national identity onto the masses, but it is strongly akin to a member of the political elite convincing the masses that he was one of them – a fellow member of the in-group. Howard was mixing traditional values of the left (comradeship and solidarity) with those of his conservative social values (family) and those of the economic free market (individualism).

### **3 Political Correctness versus Mainstream Values**

Howard's mainstream Australia occupied a primal position between the privileged and wealthy, and what he identified as the class of politically correct urban elites. Identifying the former category weakened voters' bonds to traditional party allegiances hence broadening the voter base and consequently his electoral appeal. Howard's disparaging description of the cosmopolitan politically correct class was an effective wedge device which isolated his political opponents. By identifying Keating with a small group of cultural elites, Howard drew traditional Labor voters' attention to the gap between their leader's perceived elitist values and to those values traditionally associated with working class backgrounds. It also served to distance Howard from his British-centric image which Keating had always been so keen to highlight.

The tag of political correctness stuck to Paul Keating as a result of Howard's unrelenting political rhetoric. Keating was and economic reformer as was Howard, but this tag followed Keating whenever he broached the issues of a new national flag, Australia becoming a republic, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and closer ties with Asia. As the result of the 1999 referendum where Australians rejected a proposal to establish the Commonwealth of Australia as a republic showed, Howard's mainstream Australia was by some distance more popular or at least more comforting to the electorate, than Keating's vision of Australia's future which he linked to the dynamic Asian economies.

Howard's success in using his language of mainstream identity to capture the support of his opponents is illustrated by a verbal joust he had with Keating who could not shake off the label of politically correct cultural elitist despite his impeccable left wing credentials. Keating was a socialist who represented an inner city working class constituency (Bankstown) and he was also a protégé of Jack Lang, a Depression era socialist state premier. Howard memorably used this against Keating in 1995 with the comment that:

The battlers have taken a fearsome battering from the boy from Bankstown. It is little wonder that he is seen increasingly by Labor's traditional constituents as a remote, elitist figure, comfortable with the chattering classes but decidedly uncomfortable with the rank and file who spawned him<sup>16</sup>

The fundamental pillars in Howard's construction of national identity were ordinary Australians, the battlers who Howard convinced were short changed by the cultural elites who used political correctness as a weapon to justify concessions to special interest groups and Indigenous Australians. As we have seen the figurehead of this class of privileged cultural elites was Paul Keating, and the contrast in his style and views produced a clear choice for the electorate in the 1996 election. The choice was also made in Howard's favour with assistance from an under performing economy and what might be called the 'rhetoric of resentment' emanating from Pauline Hanson but tacitly supported by Howard (partly as a concession to his coalition partner) under the auspices of freedom of speech. Hanson had nearly usurped Howard's appeal to Australia's mainstream constituency and she embodied the struggles of the veritable 'Aussie battler.' Hanson attributed the country's economic plight to the effects of globalisation and to Asian and other immigrants, Aborigines and even single mothers, which echoed Howard's emphasis on mainstream family values. Such terminology typified the language of exclusion which was prevalent in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries which ensured the continuance of a white Australia. The language now divided Australians into the opposing factions of 'us' and 'them.' In this case

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<sup>16</sup> John Howard, "The Role of Government: John Howard 1995 Headland Speech," n.d.

the 'us' being the group of mainstream Australians, and 'them' referring to 'Aboriginals' and 'Asians.' In her maiden speech in parliament Hanson used language that echoed Howard's the image of the ordinary Australian.

Immigration and multiculturalism are issues that this government is trying to address, but for far too long ordinary Australians have been kept out of any debate by the major parties.<sup>17</sup>

Howard in turn borrowed from Hanson's language. The sentence that Howard exploited in his election speech of 2001, 'But we will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come' became the most well known slogan of the campaign. However, a similar remark 'I should have the right to have a say in who comes into my country' was initially used by Hanson in 1996.<sup>18</sup> In the opinion of Howard's biographer 'Hanson was prepared to state bluntly what many of Howard's critics believed to be his implicit message on race.'<sup>19</sup>

In the lead up to the 1998 election economic pressures resulting from a decline in the agricultural sector and the negative effects of globalisation on small rural town businesses was cause of some electoral concern for Howard. His political acumen was confirmed by the realisation that Hanson's One Nation Party represented a constituency which was vital for the government, particularly for the Coalition's junior partner, the rural-based National Party, which many voters had fled in favour of Hanson's One Nation Party. Both the Coalition and Hanson were using the invasion fear sown by the History Wars debates and the electorate's 'rejection of the politically correct and distorted view of Australian history.'<sup>20</sup> The Coalition was narrowly returned to power and with Hanson losing her seat it became easier for Howard to regain this part of his mainstream constituency.

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<sup>17</sup> Pauline Hanson, "Pauline Hanson's Maiden Speech In The House Of Representatives Sep 10, 1996," 1996.

<sup>18</sup> Pauline Hanson, "Official Website One Nation -the Voice of the People Pauline's Contribution," One Nation Party, n.d.

<sup>19</sup> Errington and Van Onselen, *John Winston Howard*, 252.

<sup>20</sup> Carol Johnson, "John Howard's 'Values' and Australian Identity," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 2 (2007): 195–209.

## 4 Privatisation

In 2000, Howard cited four distinctive Australian values which underscored his government's free market credentials and merged recognisable traits of the national character. He named these values as 'self reliance, a fair go, pulling together, and having a go.'<sup>21</sup> He also mentioned other values in this speech, undoubtedly in an attempt to deflect attention from some of the more unpleasant economic consequences of globalisation and the effects of his government's free market rationalisation of the economy. Further into the same speech Howard enlists egalitarianism, an icon of Australia's identity to reinforce his and the nation's economic management image of stability:

Economically, the forces of globalisation, access to new technologies, enhanced communication capability and highly mobile labour and capital markets present us with both great opportunities and great risks. Our social cohesion, flowing directly from a quite unique form of egalitarianism, is arguably the crowning achievement of the Australian experience over the past century...The Australian people too have outstanding qualities which set us apart. There is an Australian Way – different and so often better than that of other comparable societies. These values allow us to provide that certainty to the Australian people.<sup>22</sup>

To implement his economic agenda Howard secured passage of the Workplace Relations Act 1996. In so doing he departed from Hawke's policy of arbitration and consensus which itself was based on the federal Conciliation and Arbitration Court. This court had been established just after federation with a brief to resolve disagreements between employers and employees. In 1907 this court was responsible for establishing the principle of the 'basic wage' which guaranteed a minimum wage calculated to sustain married male wage earners. Under Howard's legislation, jurisdiction over industrial relations was transferred to the Federal Court of Australia. With the further introduction

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<sup>21</sup> John Howard, "Australian Politics.com John Howard: Four Distinct And Enduring Australian Values" (Melbourne, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

of the Workplace Relations and Other Legislation Amendment Act 1997 the practice of court sanctioned award wages was replaced by direct employer–employee bargaining. The WorkChoices policy, central to Howard’s political agenda of privatisation was finally completed in 2006 and it also required the federal government’s Commonwealth Employment Service to compete with private employment service companies. In short through his use of language invoking the imagery of the ‘Australian way,’ Howard succeeded in garnering support to legitimate his privatisation laden political agenda.

John Howard’s ability to use of the language of national values to evoke a cohesive sense of national identity was perhaps his most useful political asset. The references Howard made to collective Australian values dealt with in this chapter are but a representative sample. It is clear that he used the imagery of mainstream Australia to reconcile his and his party’s values to what he perceived to be those of the electorate and Australia’s economic future. His language placed the historical values such as mateship, egalitarianism and ‘a fair go’ with self reliance and individual responsibility which slotted comfortably in with his restructuring of the industrial relations system which he considered necessary due to the economic changes brought about by a globalised free market economy. Howard may have been fortunate in that his political opponents failed to capitalise on the instability that flexible work contracts produced. As his biographers noted: ‘More competent opponents could easily have turned the values issue against Howard, contrasting his industrial relations legislation with the Australian ethos of a fair go.’<sup>23</sup> However, they did not, and Howard’s feat in reforming work place relations to come into line with neo-liberal economic ideology was in some measure due to his linking of the imagery of Australia’s national identity to the free market.

## 5 The History Wars & One Nation

John Howard’s appropriation of national identity can be made clearer by examining his contribution to the so called ‘history wars’ debates. These debates constituted a part of the broader ‘culture wars’<sup>24</sup> debate over the authenticity of Australia’s history.

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<sup>23</sup> Errington and Van Onselen, *John Winston Howard*, 380.

<sup>24</sup> Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2003), 7–10.

I have spoken tonight of the need to guard against the re-writing of Australian political history...There is, of course, a related and broader challenge involved. And that is to ensure that our history as a nation is not written definitively by those who take the view that Australians should apologise for most of it. This 'black arm band' view of our past reflects a belief that most Australian history since 1788 has been little more than a disgraceful story of imperialism, exploitation, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. I take a very different view. I believe that the balance sheet of our history is one of heroic achievement and that we have achieved much more as a nation of which we can be proud than of which we should be ashamed.<sup>25</sup>

Howard's faith in the virtues of mainstream Australia underscored his personal and politically expedient campaign against the 'black armband' school of Australian history whose interpretation of the nation's history contested Howard's patriotic nationalist view of Australia's national story. Howard's interpretation celebrated achievement often won in the face of overwhelming odds as epitomised by the Anzac myth and the battler, both of which fought to protect a white imperial outpost in the Antipodes. The black armband in Howard's view was false and paid undue attention to frontier violence and discrimination while neglecting the nation's achievements and sacrifices such as those made by the ANZACs. The impetus for the history wars was given by the remarks made by the renowned historian Geoffrey Blainey about the scale of Asian immigration. Conservative newspapers, historians journalists and particularly the journal *Quadrant* supported Blainey's view that the pendulum in historical scholarship had swung from an overly optimistic 'three cheers view' of the nation's history to an overly pessimistic 'black armband view.' The opposite view attracted equally notable historians such as Henry Reynolds. Books and articles were published to attack or refute aspects of the nation's history and reputations were sullied and defended, even those of Manning Clark (although he passed away in 1991) and Blainey himself.

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<sup>25</sup> John Howard, "Sir Robert Menzies Lecture Trust. The 1996 Sir Robert Menzies Lecture The Hon. John Howard MP Prime Minister of Australia The Liberal Tradition; The Beliefs and Values Which Guide the Federal Government," 1996.

The 'history wars' were sustained by the press and by the publication of (and significantly, the publicity given to) Keith Windschuttle's book *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*<sup>26</sup> but the important point is that the discourse gave Howard the confidence to continue his anti political correctness rhetoric and to interfere with cultural institutions such as the National Museum of Australia. Howard had appointed three political allies<sup>27</sup> to the board of the museum before calling a review into the operation of the museum. The outcome of the review was that the contract of the museum's director<sup>28</sup> was not extended and although there was some criticism, it was seen by many commentators as another episode of the history wars which gave Howard the opportunity to promote his version of the nation's history. Some thought it was even more serious:

Here the object was to impose control on a public institution, to override the professional judgement of its staff and to root out exhibitions that challenged the critic's preferred version of history. This was no longer a campaign against political correctness, it was an imposition of affirmative orthodoxy<sup>29</sup>

The Australian history wars may have been instigated by Blainey and carried further by Windschuttle, but as a former editor of *Quadrant* observed "They did so mainly because of the steady covert support offered by the Howard government and the enthusiastic overt support offered by the Murdoch press, in particular by its flagship, the *Australian*."<sup>30</sup>

The prosecution of the 'history wars' is less relevant to this thesis than the outcome, that is the perception that Howard saw himself as the winner, as he duly proclaimed in

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<sup>26</sup> Keith Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (Sydney: Macleay Press, 2002).

<sup>27</sup> The NMA Board's chair was Tony Staley; a former Federal President of the Liberal Party. He also appointed David Barnett, who had written a biography of Howard and Christopher Pearson who was Howard's former speechwriter.

<sup>28</sup> The director of the NMA was Dawn Casey, an Aboriginal woman who was descended from the Tuckala people of Queensland and whose father, mother and mother's mother were all taken from their families. <http://mkc.nsw.edu.au:3390/National%20Museum%20of%20Australia.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Macintyre and Clark, *The History Wars*, 197–198.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Manne, "The Monthly Comment," *The Monthly*, accessed February 6, 2014.

his Australia Day speech of 2006 and reported in a national broadsheet newspaper as such:

John Howard...claimed victory in the culture wars, including the end of the "divisive, phoney debate about national identity"... "We've drawn back from being too obsessed with diversity to a point where Australians are now better able to appreciate the enduring values of the national character that we proudly celebrate and preserve," he said...Mr Howard said that while on Australia Day we should celebrate our diversity we should also affirm the "one people, one destiny" sentiment that propelled Federation... "And too often, history, along with other subjects in the humanities, has succumbed to a postmodern culture of relativism where any objective record of achievement is questioned or repudiated."<sup>31</sup>

To some the slogan 'one people, one destiny' might draw some distasteful connotations to *'Ein Volk, ein Reich'* but it did describe Howard's desire to mould one nation with one dominant culture and one set of overriding values. These values were encompassed in the 'Australian way' which Howard was prone to remind people of at every opportunity. The skirmishes of the history wars took place throughout the 1990's and elements such as the veracity of the 'stolen generations' were largely settled when Kevin Rudd made his apology to the Indigenous peoples on behalf of the parliament and people of Australia in 2008. Other contested issues such as frontier violence and Aboriginal genocide continue to generate debate today but the salient point relevant to this thesis is that the history wars helped Howard to popularise and simultaneously denigrate the concept of 'political correctness' which resonated with Howard's political constituency. It provided these constituents, the mainstream Australians with a convenient scapegoat to alleviate the economic hardships of deregulation and globalisation. It also attracted voters from the traditional Labor supporting areas. This turn of phrase proved to be an unqualified electoral winner.

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<sup>31</sup> Michelle Grattan, "The Age: Howard Claims Victory in National Culture Wars" [Theage.com.au](http://Theage.com.au), 2006.



During 2001 Howard's government had performed badly in many opinion polls and in the by-elections of that year, largely due to an economic downturn and consequent lack of business confidence. The ALP was confident it would be able to defeat the government in the 2001 election but international events intervened. These events furnished the opportunity for Howard to consolidate his political legitimacy by again promoting his version of national identity. These events revisited the premises on which Australia was federated; racial homogeneity, border protection and state sovereignty, but now the crude language of nineteenth and early twentieth century politicians was replaced by Howard's rhetoric of protecting 'mainstream Australia.'

## 6 Conclusion

In this chapter Howard's political skills illustrate the premise of my thesis which proposes that the 'need' for an in-out dynamic is more pressing in times of weak social cohesion. That is, when national identity is not adequately providing its function. Howard sensed this during the 'history wars' debates and his rhetoric emphasising pride in past achievement which was code for the 'white' achievement of the dominant in-group. He anticipated the mood of the electorate and possessed a populist antennae as his ploy in associating his opponents with an elite minority and with Asia (the traditional out-group) proved. Unlike Keating, Howard recognised latent racism of 'mainstream Australia' and was not afraid to tap into this. Howard's identified his 'other' in his politically astute attacks on his opponents, those mainly cosmopolitan urban elites who supported multiculturalism.

Furthermore, his position on the republic referendum, where he emphasised his conservative national identity and affection for the British Monarchy, seems to prove Anthony Smith's point that national identities are only imagined to an extent. The bedrock of common ethnic bonds and traditions are difficult to change. Curran's view that in the 1960s 'the belief that Australians were part of an 'organic' worldwide community of British peoples – united by blood, history, language and tradition'<sup>32</sup> came to an end, was challenged by Howard; in contrast, he wished to re-assert them.

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<sup>32</sup> James Curran, "Visiting Scholars' Lectures -Curtin University," 2004.

Howard's rhetoric on mainstream values fed the demand for the in-out dynamic of national identity. As Howard's main political opponents also pursued a neo-liberal agenda, the salience of national identity discourse was enhanced. He could then occupy the vacuum created by populist perceptions of multiculturalism and what he considered as biased historical scholarship which emphasised the negative aspects of the nation's history.

# Chapter 7

## Indigenous Affairs & Imagined Invasions

### 1 Stolen Generations

In 1954 Australia signed the *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*.<sup>1</sup> As a signatory to this convention and the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Australian public policy had to take account of its international legal and moral obligations (for example accommodating a UN agreed number of asylum seekers or refugees). In 2008 similar pressures culminated with the Australian Government's official apology to Aboriginal Australians for the 'stolen generations' and 'for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians.'<sup>2</sup>

However, Howard refused to apologise for the 'stolen generations' whereas Keating in his 1992 *Redfern Park Speech* had memorably stated:

...the starting point might be to recognise that the problem starts with us non-Aboriginal Australians... We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the diseases. The alcohol. We

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, "Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees Geneva, 28 July 1951 . Entry into Force 22 April 1954," n.d.

<sup>2</sup> Kevin Rudd, "Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates Hansard House of Representatives," 2008.

committed the murders. we took the children from their mothers. We practised discrimination and exclusion. It was our ignorance and our prejudice.<sup>3</sup>

Howard remained obstinate. Furthermore, in 1997 the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission published its *Bringing Them Home*<sup>4</sup> report which confirmed that:

Indigenous families and communities have endured gross violations of their human rights. These violations continue to affect Indigenous people's daily lives. They were an act of genocide, aimed at wiping out Indigenous families, communities and cultures, vital to the precious and inalienable heritage of Australia.<sup>5</sup>

Although every Australian state legislature passed motions apologising to the Indigenous Australians, Howard steadfastly refused to apologise, although he did support a motion of reconciliation in 1999. Howard believed that the policy that resulted in the 'stolen generations' was a well intentioned mistake 'I do not exclude or ignore specific aspects of our past where we are rightly held to account. Injustices were done in Australia, and no-one should obscure or minimise them'<sup>6</sup>but his government's meagre attendance at the first *National Sorry Day* confirmed his sceptical view of some historians' views of the nation's history.

John Howard acknowledged some of the injustices inflicted on the Aborigines by the government and pioneer white settlers but he did not support the idea of apologising

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Keating, "Transcript of the Speech by the Hon Prime Minister, P J Keating MP Australian Launch of the International Year for The World's Indigenous People Redfern, 10 December 1992" (Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, n.d.).

<sup>4</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, "Bringing them Home Report (1997) Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families April 1997," Text, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> "Bringing Them Home - Community Guide Conclusion" (Indigenous Law Resources Reconciliation and Social Justice Library, n.d.).

<sup>6</sup> John Howard, "Sir Robert Menzies Lecture Trust. The 1996 Sir Robert Menzies Lecture The Hon. John Howard MP Prime Minister of Australia The Liberal Tradition; The Beliefs and Values Which Guide the Federal Government," 1996.

for actions carried out by previous generations. In 1997 he explained 'Australians of this generation should not be required to accept guilt and blame for past actions and policies over which they had no control.'<sup>7</sup> Conversely, he did support taking pride in the achievements of his forbears through commemorating Anzac Day and Australia Day. Howard in effect used the aspects of Australia's history that complement his political agenda. For example at a speech to his party colleagues in 1998 he proclaimed:

...the art of good statecraft is really to strike a balance between preserving those values of our past and those values of our culture and our history that continue to serve us well and continue to remain relevant for our future, and to be willing to defend those values and those cultures with great tenacity. But by the same token, to be ready to challenge and to change, fundamentally if necessary, those practices and those attitudes that really have no place in the future Australia that we want to build into the 21st Century.<sup>8</sup>

To Howard the future of Australia in the twenty first century meant a continuance of the free market policies began under the Hawke and Keating governments to such a degree that this ideology would become the default economic position of his government.

Howard abolished the peak body that represented the interests of Indigenous Australians in 2005. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was not replaced with another similar organ, as Howard considered that Indigenous interests were sufficiently represented in parliament. Instead his government placed the ATSIC's tasks in another department, introduced market based remedies to the visible problems affecting the Indigenous population. A development programme (Community Development Employment Program) was extended to encourage Indigenous citizens to seek employment, start their own enterprises and acquire land. These measures

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<sup>7</sup> John Howard, "Transcript of the Prime Minister the Hon John Howard MP Opening Address to the Australian Reconciliation Convention Melbourne," 1997.

<sup>8</sup> John Howard, "Transcript of the Prime Minister the Hon John Howard MP Speech to the New South Wales Division of the Liberal Party &#146;S Second Anniversary Dinner Sydney" (Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 1998).

helped promote the idea that individual effort when coupled with freedom to operate in the marketplace would reap rewards. The individual Indigenous Australian could now become an integral part of neo-liberal ideology. In 2001 Howard had placed the emphasis on this and similar programmes under the slogan 'Australians Working Together' on mainstream employment.<sup>9</sup>

This ideology did not have much in common with traditional Aboriginal values such as sharing and mutual support and here we see an attempt by a political elite to invoke elements of national identity to influence a section of the population. The slogans used clouded the contradiction between free market ideology and the national characteristic of mateship.

## 2 Wik & Native Title

The concept of *terra nullius* meant that Australia had never entered into a treaty with the original inhabitants, in contrast to some other settler societies in the Pacific rim.<sup>10</sup> In Howard's first year in office the High Court handed down the Wik native title decision. This decision when taken together with the *Mabo* decision of 1992 (which repudiated *terra nullius* and established the concept of native title under the common law) which itself led to the establishment of the *Native Title Act 1993* (which gave the Federal Court authority to determine if native title existed) had ramifications for pastoralists (leaseholders of large tracts of land) which Howard determined to minimise. The Wik decision in effect said that pastoral leases did not extinguish native title and that they could co-exist. Howard proposed a '10-point plan' in 1997 to resolve the situation by allaying the fears of mining companies and pastoralists who had earlier opposed the recognition of native title and who feared the impact it would have on land use arrangements. The Native Title Amendment Act 1998 placed some restrictions on native title claim particularly the clauses allowing State governments to obviate Native Title concerning crown lands for matters of 'national interest' and the

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<sup>9</sup> F. Morphy and W. Sanders, *The Indigenous Welfare Economy and the CDEP Scheme* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2004), iii–iv.

<sup>10</sup> New Zealand, Canada and the United States all signed treaties with their respective indigenous peoples.

federal government to manage land, water, and air issues in any site. Despite the Wik decision's generous concessions to mining and pastoral interests in that the High Court 'specifically protected all existing valid land use, making native title rights secondary.'<sup>11</sup> Howard's actions on his political constituents' behalf in the form of the 10 point plan drew a rebuke from the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination as the Australian Government 'failed to meet its obligations under the international convention.'<sup>12</sup> Moreover, throughout the debate the government refused to negotiate with Indigenous representatives. Howard's arguments during the Wik controversy were again indicative of his 'mainstream' values. In a televised speech to the nation Howard was at pains to strike a balance between the injustice suffered by the Indigenous population and the national interest of a well performing agricultural and mining sector.

Tonight I would like to talk to you about striking a fair and decent balance in this very difficult debate about Wik or Native Title...I think we probably also agree on some other things, for example, the Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander people of Australia have been very badly treated in the past and we must continue our efforts to improve their health, their housing, their employment and their educational opportunities. And in doing that we should always remember that the Aboriginal people of Australia have a very special affinity with their land. I think we would also agree on how important the rural and mining industries are to the future of our country. Between them they contribute 63 per cent of Australia's export income and that helps generate a lot of wealth which in turn enables us to help the less fortunate within our community.<sup>13</sup>

He then went on to implant the imagery of the Australian battler in the guise of the hard pressed farmer, struggling to scratch a living in Australia's arid land by declaring

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<sup>11</sup> Jane Robbins, "The Howard Government and Indigenous Rights: An Imposed National Unity?," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 2 (2007): 319.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> John Howard, "Transcript of the Prime Minister the Hon John Howard MP Speech WIK Statement - Address to the Nation ABC Television Prime Minister - Howard, John Speech - 30 November 1997" (Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 1997).

his admiration for farmers. His language is reminiscent of the individual frontier version of the bush legend. Howard here identified the farmer with the battler, an appropriation from the radical nationalists version of the battler which was typically depicted as the worker against the squatter or the boss.

Australia's farmers, of course, have always occupied a very special place in our heart. They often endure the heart-break of drought, the disappointment of bad international prices after a hard worked season and quite frankly I find it impossible to imagine the Australia, I love, without a strong and vibrant farming sector.<sup>14</sup>

Howard's message in this speech is contradictory if not equivocal. The Aborigines have a special relationship with the land and have been harshly treated but they must subordinate their interests to the heirs of those whom inflicted the injustice in the first place. Here Howard's language is put into service to garner support for his policy by deferring to broadly recognisable symbols of national identity – the battler and the bush. As another commentator neatly summarised:

The policy decisions made by the Howard government on this issue were strongly influenced by a concept of national identity that discounts the different history and cultural entitlements of Indigenous people.<sup>15</sup>

### **3 We will decide who comes here**

What became known as the *Tampa* and the 'children overboard' crises began in August 2001 when a Norwegian ship rescued refugees fleeing from the Middle East from their sinking boat in the Indian Ocean. The ship then entered Australian waters despite being refused entry by the government. The refugees were taken to security holding camps in the Pacific while their eligibility for political asylum was assessed. Shortly afterwards yet another refugee laden vessel, the *Olong* was assisted by an Australian Navy ship and

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Robbins, "The Howard Government and Indigenous Rights," 319.



it was reported that the asylum seekers threw their children overboard in desperation (the reports were later proved to be false), presumably to convince their rescuers to allow them into Australian territory. This was soon followed by the events of 9/11, when in September of the same year al-Qaeda terrorists flew hijacked commercial airliners into the World Trade Centre in New York and into the Pentagon, the US Defence Department headquarters in Washington. Another plane crashed before nearing its apparent target, the White House. John Howard, then in Washington visiting President Bush, agreed to support the United States in what became known as the 'war on terrorism.'

The timing of these events was fortuitous for Howard as he had called an election for November 2001. Moreover, these events afforded the opportunity for Howard to profile himself as a strong leader by protecting Australia's territorial integrity from asylum seekers and terrorists. The image of the asylum seeker had to be divorced from the positive image of the post war refugee if the ordinary Australian was to appreciate Howard's stewardship of the national interest.

The language used in his discourse resulted in merging the two threats into one by describing asylum seekers as criminals, economic tourists and sometimes as terrorists, and Howard was also to use the catch phrase 'illegal' to his political advantage. Asylum seekers were stigmatised by the Coalition with the descriptions, 'illegal,' 'queue jumper,' 'illegal refugee' or 'illegal arrival' and this language was eagerly taken up by a compliant popular press and electronic media.<sup>16</sup> As the then Minister Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs stated in parliament:

The people on board MV Tampa are not refugees, they are occasional tourists, who have contracted criminal elements or crime gangs who are often involved in the transportation of drugs to our shores... It is offensive to those who are genuine refugees who have come to this country and experienced the generosity that this nation has without a doubt offered them.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Clyne, "The Use of Exclusionary Language to Manipulate Opinion: John Howard, Asylum Seekers and the Reemergence of Political Incorrectness in Australia," *Journal of Language & Politics* 4, no. 2 (2005): 181.

<sup>17</sup> Gary Hardgrave (*Hansard*, 30 August 2001) *Ibid*.

Howard was quoted in one newspaper thus, ‘children overboard affair: Genuine refugees don’t do that... I don’t want people like that in Australia.’<sup>18</sup> It was of little consequence to Howard that the children overboard reports proved to be false and that there were suspicions that the government knew this, yet remained mute on the issue so as not to jeopardise its chances of re-election. The image of the ‘illegal immigrant’ had resurfaced in Australia’s political culture just as strongly as it was in the nineteenth century, when pejorative caricatures of Asians were published in *The Bulletin* and when border controls, the dictation test and other exclusionary instruments were implemented to keep Australia safe from the Chinese.

The most potent avowal ever uttered concerning the arrival of ‘illegal’ asylum seekers was the previously cited ‘We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come.’ This was a statement affirming that Australia’s national sovereignty was in the safe hands of John Howard, and the Coalition’s election success in 2001 confirmed as much. It also added to Howard’s growing reputation for political toughness. Some analysts have concluded that the issue of immigration was a significant factor in voting behaviour during the 2001 election:

The 2001 election might have been characterised as the ‘Tampa election’ but, on the evidence of the AES...the main issues were not refugees and terrorism but immigration and terrorism.<sup>19</sup>

Assuming this analysis has some validity then it could be seen as evidence that immigration weighed on the mind of most Australians irrespective of party loyalties. Howard’s appeals to ‘one nation’ and his election slogan ‘For all of Us’ therefore was more likely to resonate with the ‘mainstream’ and indicates that Howard’s political references to Australian values produced a favourable political outcome in this period. His winning of the ‘Tampa’ election bears witness.

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<sup>18</sup> Clyne, “The Use of Exclusionary Language to Manipulate Opinion,” 182.

<sup>19</sup> Murray Goot and Ian Watson, “Explaining Howard’s Success: Social Structure, Issue Agendas and Party Support, 1993–2004,” *Australian Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 2 (2007): 268.

## 4 Coalition of the Willing & Border Protection

In October 2002 terrorists detonated bombs at a nightclub in Kuta (Bali, Indonesia) killing 202 people, nearly half of them Australian. The outrage felt by Australians and the fact that asylum seekers (boat people) used Indonesia as a transit point before sailing on to Australia may have conjured up images of the (Asian) invasion fear embedded in the nation's collective memory since the nineteenth century. This also helped Howard to further build up his reputation of toughness and by joining the 2003 'Coalition of the Willing'<sup>20</sup> and subsequently deploying Australian forces to Iraq and Afghanistan, he consolidated this reputation. He could also cite terrorism as a justification to strengthen border controls and imply that asylum seekers were undesirable.

The world changed on 11 September 2001. And on 12 October 2002, the terrorists murdered innocent Australians close to home. We have had to adjust our thinking to deal with terrorism and the new threats of the twenty-first century. We've also had to take the fight to international criminals who traffic in drugs and people and who threaten our borders.

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Howard had no hesitation in making funds available for military memorisation projects and he had often invoked the Anzac spirit as a mainstream value and this indicated that his sense of national identity was built on the pride of the military exploits of Australians in the two world wars. As one newspaper column noticed: 'No other prime minister has taken such a personal interest in promoting military history and thus shaping a past to serve the present, a past that is called upon to unify, to inspire patriotism, to make us proud.'<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Press Release "Who Are the Current Coalition Members?" <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/>, George W. Bush White House Archives, n.d., <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/iraq/news/20030327-10.html>.

<sup>21</sup> John Howard, "Address to the Enterprise Forum Lunch Getting the Big Things Right: Goals and Responsibilities in a Fourth Term" (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> Marilyn Lake, "The Howard History of Australia," 2005.

Border protection measures and military actions were visible responses to the imagined threats from Asia and since 9/11, these threats were heightened by the added spice of Muslim terrorism.

His idealisation of the mainstream ordinary bloke, the law abiding moral citizen battling to provide security to his family who did not jump queues or use his children to blackmail the legitimate order, was a more subtle way of positioning his personal values into the nation's identity. Howard's preferred Australian citizen follows the rules implied in the concept of the 'fair go' and the 'illegal refugee' did not play fair, and therefore had to be excluded. Considering the construction of Australia's national identity was predominately based on racial exclusion, mateship and pride in its military exploits, the emphasis Howard placed on these values paid a handsome dividend toward his political goals as his electoral success bears witness.

Despite Howard's apparent political success, his appropriation of traditional Australian values for political ends came at a cost to the liberal values for which he had fought as a young aspirant parliamentary candidate in the 1960s. He expressed his admiration for the party's founder Sir Robert Menzies on many occasions and in one of his *Headland Speeches* Howard reminded the audience that the Liberal Party espoused and acted according to liberal principles, he stated:

It was a Liberal National government that ended the White Australia Policy. It was a Liberal National government that sponsored the 1967 referendum which removed any presumption that the Constitution could discriminate against Aborigines. It was a Liberal National government that extended the humanitarian hand which saw so many Indo-Chinese refugees received into this country. I cite these examples only to ensure that, in looking to address the current and future social policy challenges, the past is not misrepresented.<sup>23</sup>

To one Liberal Party grandee it seemed the past was not misrepresented, but Howard's policies on immigration caused Malcolm Fraser to reveal in his political memoir (in 2010) that his disillusionment with Howard's policies grew to the point that

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<sup>23</sup> John Howard, "Fair Australia: John Howard Headland Speech," 1995.

he considered resigning from the Liberal Party. In answer to a question about what was at the heart of his attitude to John Howard, Fraser replied:

I don't like the march to the right...If we want a cohesive society, if we want people that are prepared to respect others who are different in our society, I think a number of the race-related issues have been handled in ways which I really abhor. <sup>24</sup>

Howard's efforts to woo the mainstream by his intransigent stance on asylum seekers seems to have come at the cost of depleting part of the liberal idealism instilled in the party by his predecessors. Howard's intransigence when it came to issues of immigration may have irked some people, including the previous Coalition Prime Minister whom Howard had served as Treasurer. However, not all of his predecessors were as successful as Howard was at the ballot box.

## 5 Conclusion

When national identity is solid there are high levels of social cohesion. This situation is typified by relatively few moments of national identity crisis or national self doubt. In this chapter we saw the emergence of internal and random circumstances which then fed into Howard's nationalist rhetoric. The higher public profile of the 'stolen generations' brought about by the publication of the 'Bringing Them Home' report. When this report was coupled with the *Wik* (and the earlier *Mabo*) decision, the in/out dynamic became blurred by creating a measure of national self doubt. The entrenched elements of Britishness and whiteness were thus threatened. To allay this self doubt Howard appealed to a more solid era of national well-being. Howard's rhetoric included references to recognisable characteristics of national identity; the pastoralists were seen as the incarnation of the 'pioneer legend' and in Howard's view their interests and those of the national economy trumped the interests of the traditional owners of the land; the Indigenous peoples.

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<sup>24</sup> Malcolm Fraser, "Malcolm Fraser Produces His Memoirs," 2010.

Howard's reluctance to participate in the *National Sorry Day* and his begrudging acknowledgement and refusal to apologise for the 'stolen generations' on the grounds that the present generation was not obligated to atone for sins of the past generations, also alluded to a more stable era when national identity was solid. That is, when the out-group of the Indigenous population was not considered part of Australia's national identity; at a time when national identity was solid and relatively uncontested.

Furthermore, John Howard profited from some external and random shocks which made the general population more receptive to his national identity rhetoric. The *Tampa* affair and 'baby overboard' events gave Howard the platform to demarcate the line between the in-group of Australians subscribing to mainstream attitudes, and the out-group of 'queue jumpers,' 'illegals' and 'people like that' who threaten to throw their children overboard for selfish reasons. These latter images were the antithesis of the 'fair minded Australian' embedded in the more solid notion of national identity which was prominent until the mid 1960s, when multiculturalism largely superseded the British element (or at least diluted it, thus creating a void) in the nation's identity.

The 'War on Terror,' and more particularly the Bali bombing, served to clearly identify Islamic terrorism as the 'other' (Asian, non-white). Consequently, it transformed the conceptual 'other' which was for so long kept at a distance by restrictive immigration policy, into a more actual 'other.'

Howard's appeals to national identity was more effective as there was now a clear demarcation in the lines of 'us' and 'them.' The function of national identity could now more clearly distinguish the in-group from the out-group and therefore foster social cohesion for the dominant in-group.

It is no coincidence that some of Howard's most derisory yet politically effective comments emerged in the discourse over the arrival of asylum seekers. His phraseology ('people that that') was not only a clear marker that reinforced the concept of 'us' and 'them,' it also illustrated that a set of random circumstances can arise which could then enable an enterprising politician to manipulate national identity. John Howard was nothing if not resolute in exploiting such circumstances.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

After weighing the evidence, my thesis concludes that John Howard's political success was in no small part due to his being an incredibly skilled politician. His populist antennae sensed the mood of mainstream Australia and Howard exploited this mood by reinforcing the traditional anxieties of the 'yellow peril' by cloaking these anxieties in the language of national identity. Furthermore, a set of historical circumstances that accrued in the period leading up to and including the Howard years, made his appeals to national identity more resonant to the electorate. These circumstances included: the end to restricted immigration based on race (which threatened the essence of whiteness in Australia's national identity), the uncertainties resulting from economic globalisation, the need to replace the Britishness element of national identity caused by the ethnic diversity of multiculturalism, the pressure to recognise white Australia's past injustices committed against the Indigenous peoples, the arrival of (illegal) non-white asylum seekers and the fears generated by international terrorism. To alleviate these fears and changes, John Howard's speeches stressed Australian achievement, typified by struggle against adversity (the harshness of the outback, Anzac) by invoking images of national identity. He personified the nation's identity through the Aussie battler; the ordinary bloke who just wanted a fair go for himself and his family. He correctly estimated that mainstream Australians valued domestic stability above international moral obligation.

This then poses the problem of why Howard employed the notion of national

identity as his instrument of national unification. I proffer the view that it was relatively easier than other methods and that it had always been a successful instrument of national social cohesion. Moreover, the salience of national identity rhetoric served to enhance the differences between Howard's main political opponent Paul Keating, due to the perceived narrowing of other policy differences. Both pursued a neo-liberal economic agenda and the latter held prominent pro-Asian and anti-British views.

My thesis has attempted to account for the Howard's success by proposing a theory that national identity performs a particular function of facilitating social cohesion by delineating the in-group from the out-group.

Throughout Australian history, the concept of national identity had fulfilled its unifying function exceptionally well, arguably better than many other countries in the world. National identity was performing its function of distinguishing 'us' from 'them' so well, that people felt secure enough to identify with multiculturalism. Multiculturalism was so successful, in fact, that Australians invented their own flavour of confident multiculturalism as opposed to an 'insecure or guilt-multiculturalism' to atone for the racism of the White Australia policy. The integration of white Europeans did not weaken the in/out dynamic.

My theory suggests that as national identity recedes in public importance, so will social cohesion, and this creates a vacuum or void and to fill this void national identity eventually made a strong re-appearance in Howard's rhetoric.

I maintain the premise that whiteness was both an essential and entrenched element to national identity throughout all periods of Australia's post European settlement history. The Anglo-Celtic cultural element was similarly important but proved it to be more fluid as the population adopted more distinctive Australian symbols and characteristics. These two elements ensured that Australian national identity was generally solid, with high levels of national social cohesion and with few instances of crisis or self doubt. At this point in the national story the in and out-groups were clearly demarcated.

Although the potential for this social cohesion to be disrupted had always existed (Protestant versus Catholic manifested in conscription and state aid for faith based schools, class based antagonisms in the 1890s, the 'yellow peril'), national identity was



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not unduly weakened. It was not until John Howard took office that the potential for disruption fully materialised. This occurred when the stability of Britishness and whiteness elements in national identity were weakened and the need arose to re-assert its social function. John Howard's appeals to national identity and mainstream values was coded language invoking the virtues of disappearing Britishness and whiteness. This process began with mass immigration after 1945, leading to many constituent parts of Britishness to become redundant as the new multicultural society took root. This 'celebratory multiculturalism' diluted the Britishness element of the nation's identity but significantly, it also preserved the whiteness. Moreover, it afforded Australia the confidence to officially dismantle the White Australia policy. *The Racial Discrimination Act 1975* and the introduction of the *Human Rights Bill 1973* finally breeched 'the global colour line' by removing race as grounds for restricting immigration. For the first time since Chinese immigration in the 1850s, Australians were then confronted with small numbers of non-white fellow citizens in their social sphere. The historical out-group could now enter the dominant in-group, thus blurring the in/out group dynamic; national identity could not perform its social function of providing cohesion and John Howard filled this void.

Most aspects of Australia's national identity leading up to the twenty first century may have been fluid and dynamic as most of the theorists on nationalism would acknowledge. However, Howard's references to the most stable constituent parts of Australia's national identity, racial and British cultural homogeneity, were entrenched and harked back in history to the nineteenth century.

Howard realised that the nation in the words of Connor 'is tied inextricably to ethnicity: a belief in or an intuitive conviction of a common descent'<sup>1</sup> Howard incessantly referred to historical British-centric aspects of national identity, albeit with an accentuated Australian component.

Most nations experience some level of cultural diversity while also having a dominant cultural pattern running through them. In Australia's case, that dominant pattern comprises Judeo-Christian ethics, the progressive spirit

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<sup>1</sup> Walker Connor, "The Timelessness of Nations," *Nations and Nationalism* 10, no. 1-2 (2004): 36.

of the Enlightenment and the institutions and values of British political culture. Its democratic and egalitarian temper also bears the imprint of distinct Irish and non-conformist traditions.<sup>2</sup>

Howard's speeches tended to highlight the above elements much more than cultural diversity.

The 'ordinary bloke' was code for anyone from Anglo-Celtic stock, if not, he was likely to be of European descent, Christian and white. He was idealised as a battler who was entitled to the 'fair go' which was not forthcoming from Howard's politically correct opponents.

When faced with in his view, the unwanted arrival of asylum seekers, he was quick to externalise them through the language of exclusion, 'illegal,' 'boat people' and 'people like that.' This language and Howard's resolute stance on immigration and border protection was a barrier erected against non-white refugees and as such could be construed as a racist concept nationalist identity. Howard's view of national identity was certainly based on a version incorporating racial homogeneity but this element was linked to nationalism rather than class or political ideology. It differs from Anderson's view which argues that racism is class based and not linked to nationalism.<sup>3</sup>

The introduction of citizenship tests under Howard tied the citizen to the nation and was contingent upon knowledge and the acceptance of 'Australian values.' This citizenship conferred the common privileges and responsibilities on all its members which is a feature stressed by Anthony Smith in his definition of national identity in the modern nation-state.

Ernst Gellner<sup>4</sup> also highlighted that the role of 'pervasive high cultures' underpinned by systems of communication and standardised literacy and Anderson also stressed the role of media in influencing national belonging, although he was referring to the development of printing. John Howard used the contemporary media technol-

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<sup>2</sup> John Howard, "John Howard's Australia Day Address to the National Press Club," *AustralianPolitics.com*, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Benedict R. O'G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed (London[202F?]; New York: Verso, 2006), 149: "The dreams of racism actually have their origin in ideologies of class, rather than in those of nation:".

<sup>4</sup> Ernst Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 54.

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ogy to engender a sense of civic ideology based on his version of Australian values. The icons of Australianness manifested themselves in Anzac commemorations, speeches and references to the mainstream battler and these received extensive coverage in the electronic media. Howard's political advantage was that he had a supportive 'free press' which encouraged some journalists to publicise Howard's version of Australia's national identity. This was never more evident than during the 'children overboard affair' and in opinion pieces covering the history wars.

The common ancestry and kinship features included in Conner and Smith's definitions were the entrenched elements of identity that served as an anchor of social cohesion. Howard's rhetoric directed at past achievement was tied to the common ancestry of the dominant in-group. The historic territory or homeland aspect is more contentious as Australia is a modern nation of immigrants and the territory was owned by the Indigenous inhabitants, as the *Mabo* and *Wik* decisions of the High Court confirmed. However, Howard accentuated the common myths and historical memories (Anzac, bush and frontier legends, battlers) to manufacture a common (white) sense of belonging to the territory.

Prior to John Howard coming to office Australia had constructed, inherited and adapted notions of national commonality that were largely founded on Anglo-Celtic ethnicity and nineteenth century concepts of white solidarity. In most cases these traits then continued to evolve (mateship, the fair go) and some remained more entrenched, as in the case of restricted non-white immigration. These notions were national as evidenced by the almost uniform anti-Chinese legislation enacted by the various colonies prior to federation. The images invented to distinguish Australians from the non-white populations in Asia and the Pacific became an integral part of Australia's national identity until mass European immigration led to a more diverse cultural mix in the 1970s, when non discriminatory immigration laws were passed. John Howard's legacy is that he reversed this trend toward non discrimination.

In line with most of the theory, Australia's national identity evolved to take account of changing economic, social and political circumstances. In 1788 Australians identified themselves initially as Britons. Whether convict or gaoler, they had in common the membership of the British Empire and the characteristics of belonging

to the 'white' race. The physical geography of Australia produced a sense of isolation which intensified this belonging and formalised their interaction with the non-white nations of the region whose populations were objectified as the 'other' in the fear of invasion manifested in the notion of the 'yellow peril.' The defence mechanism to deal with these issues was centred on the perceived necessity of racial and cultural homogeneity. The Indigenous population was nearly eradicated and for most of the nation's history non-white immigrants were excluded. The nation's symbols emphasised some distinguishing features to put some distance between British white men and Australian white men, diggers, itinerant bush labourers, frontier settlers and the ANZAC soldier. The identity that began in 1788 as British, evolved to independent Australian Briton, then in the 1990s it became multicultural Australian. Women, non-British born, Chinese gold diggers and merchants, Kanaka labourers and Aboriginal contributions to Australia's national identity were underplayed or largely ignored in the national iconography.

By excluding non-white asylum seekers Howard drew attention to a group that did not belong to mainstream Australia, thereby deflecting the electorate's attention from the economic consequences of his economic rationalisation. John Howard entered the story when non-white immigration threatened the status quo and when he left office Australia had been consolidated as a white nation protected by strong border controls. Howard convinced mainstream Australia that the exclusion of asylum seekers was legitimate.

The irony was that Howard's liberal ideology was based on individualism yet his most recognisable appeal to mainstream Australian values was made in the name of 'mateship,' a word which stresses the concepts of fellowship and egalitarianism. Howard's association with the perceived Australian value of 'loyalty' had more to do with allegiance to the British crown than to one's mates or fellow workers. His strand of national identity consisted of a strand stressing the collective and another emphasising the individual. Howard's rhetoric combined moral conservatism with a free market philosophy.

John Howard engaged the discourse of national identity as a 'history warrior' who as we saw in chapter three, surreptitiously weaved individualism into his conception

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of mainstream Australia. Moreover, Howard's version was replete with national achievement and the military exploits of white men who epitomised the values Howard so often praised in his speeches, 'The Anzac legend has helped us to define who we are as Australians.'<sup>5</sup> and which Howard conveniently applied to the ordinary Australian bloke.

The emphasis on 'mainstream' values was code for the values imbued in Howard by his personal circumstances, his upbringing and his political ambitions. The emphasis on family values and home revealed his social and moral conservatism which was reminiscent of the conservative rhetoric used in Britain and the United States at the time. His language was often reproduced in 'sound bites' or slogans ('We will decide who comes here') which had also proved as effective as those used in Thatcher's Britain and G. W. Bush's America. Some have dubbed his use of coded language as 'dog whistle politics,' designed to capitalise on the latent racism and invasion fear of the mainstream voter.<sup>6</sup> These circumstances account for the voters' acceptance of Howard's political use of the nation's history, values and identity.

Howard was by most definitions himself a member of Australia's ruling elite. He occupied a position of economic, political and symbolic power which he used to great effect. He did not identify his view of national identity as Gellner suggested with 'a public, high urban culture' rather he directed his language toward the more general 'mainstream' culture. In fact Howard targeted his opponents as 'out of touch' members of the elite. In so doing he successfully drove a wedge between his opponents and the mass of mainstream Australians. Howard convinced the masses that he was one of them, he offered stability during a time of global change. In this sense Howard consciously used his power as a member of the political elite to influence how the masses perceived their common values. His placing of the 'individual' battler on a pedestal was every bit as successful as Menzies' 'forgotten people' of the 1950's or Richard Nixon's 'silent

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<sup>5</sup> Cited here in "The Age 'Howard Says Anzac Legend Defines Nation,'" 2005 "The original Anzacs could not have known at the time that their service would leave all Australians with another enduring legacy - our sense of self... The Anzac legend has helped us to define who we are as Australians. ...Anzac Day was a chance to reflect with pride on what it meant to be Australian and the values Australians held dear - determination, courage, compassion and resourcefulness."

<sup>6</sup> Robert Garran, *True Believer: John Howard, George Bush, and the American Alliance* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2004), 17-18.

majority' of the late 1960s. Howard's 'ordinary Australian bloke' persona was not lost on one well known journalist who opined in 2000 that he had turned this 'ordinariness' into a political virtue and claimed, ...a special relationship with the Australian people.<sup>7</sup>

Howard's affinity with the 'ordinary bloke' is perhaps best left by utilising an observation of Walker Conner's, who in disagreeing with aspects of Anthony Smith's concept of the nation, coined the following definition:

Definition: The nation is the largest group that shares a sense of common ancestry. Corollary: The nation is the largest group that can be influenced/aroused/motivated/ mobilized by appeals to common kinship<sup>8</sup>

The group encompassing mainstream Australia was the largest enfranchised group within the nation with a common kinship and Howard's identification with this group represented the largest political constituency that could be tapped for electoral purposes. The much emphasised Australian values of Howard's rhetoric were clearly identified with the largest kinship group. This group also constituted the in-group.

This study of the Howard years illustrates that Conner's observation that 'Identity does not draw its sustenance from facts but from perceptions; not from chronological/factual history but from sentient/felt history'<sup>9</sup> seems to concur with Howard's own view, 'You don't write down what it means to be an Australian. You feel what it means to be an Australian.'<sup>10</sup> Yet with all due respect to Walker Conner, who also argued that 'nationalism is a mass – not an elite – phenomenon,'<sup>11</sup> after weighing up the Australian situation I believe that John Howard showed, despite his rhetoric aimed at the masses, that Australian national identity is, when the right circumstances exist; malleable as

John Howard did not so much construct national identity, rather he manipulated it.

Even prior to Howard taking office the adoption of multiculturalism had weakened the social function of distinguishing the in from the out-group and national identity

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<sup>7</sup> Michelle Grattan and Michelle Grattan, *Australian Prime Ministers* (Frenchs Forest, N.S.W.: New Holland, 2000), 438–439.

<sup>8</sup> Connor, "The Timelessness of Nations," 37.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>10</sup> John Howard, "Transcript of the Prime Minister the Hon John Howard MP Speech to the Chinese Chamber of Commerce Perth Western Australia," 1998.

<sup>11</sup> Connor, "The Timelessness of Nations," 36.

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became more malleable and stringently contested. The arrival of asylum seekers, the demands for Indigenous rights and the international terrorism served as the focus for the out-group; the 'other' who could be utilised to distance 'mainstream' Australia's attention from domestic policy. This reaped a significant political dividend for Howard.

The verdict on John Howard's political career is relatively straight forward. He was a master manipulator, astute political operator and he possessed the tenacity of the battler to whom he so often alluded. A simpler explanation for Howard's political success is that his time had come. After being on the receiving end of Keating's vitriol and suffering setbacks within his own party for much of his career, international trends and domestic circumstances contrived to facilitate his success. He stepped into the void in the in/out group dynamic created by the decline of Britishness and the threat to whiteness created by the reversal of restrictive immigration. The resultant appearance on Australian city streets of non-white immigrants and refugees confronted many mainstream Australians with a feeling of uncertainty which Howard sought to alleviate by invoking a more stable national identity. His rhetoric stressed (white) national achievement won through battling individual pioneer settlers, Anzac sacrifice and kinship with the global force for good-the British Empire. He demarcated the line between 'us' and 'them' and reaped the political reward. Moreover, Howard's projected imagery of fiscal responsibility and social conservatism aided by the predominance of neo-liberal economic ideas in the policies of both left and right governments in the Anglo-sphere, the uncertainties engendered by international terrorism after 9/11, and the fears peddled by populist politicians also contributed to Howard's electoral appeal.

After winning four elections, Howard lost his seat in the 2007 election. An uncharitable political opponent might argue that Howard was indeed ordinary, but as this thesis has hopefully shown, John Howard was the consummate politician, who recognised the value of the nation's history and identity in securing his political goals. For John Howard's electoral success, a set of fortuitous circumstances, tenacity and the in-out group dynamic of national identity mattered.





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