

A Political Malaise

Education for Political Understandings in Australian
Curriculum: History

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Masters of Education

July 2016

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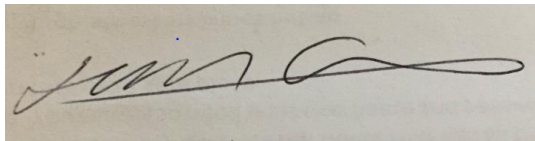
DECLARATION

This thesis, written towards a Masters of Education, comprises only the original work of the author.

Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used.

The thesis is fewer than the maximum word limit in length.

Hugh Atherton

A handwritten signature in dark ink on a light-colored background. The signature is cursive and stylized, appearing to read 'Hugh Atherton'.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the notion that Australia has entered a condition of political malaise. It seeks to find explanation for this development in a particular domain: Australian history education. Recent developments therein are assessed for the extent to which political understandings have been made available to students. On this basis the newly implemented Australian Curriculum: History is evaluated. The study employs a methodology of discourse analysis. Perspectives of politicians, experts and theorists are collected to examine contemporary political conditions. Theories regarding the manner in which history and education are harnessed for the purpose of constituting political and national identities are considered. Australian Curriculum: History is scrutinized in the context of the contestation that surrounded its creation and reception. The study posits the notion that the historical discourse has been coopted into the ideological conflicts of Australian party politics; that Australian Curriculum: History is constitutive of ideological predilections of antagonistic parties rather the historically informed critical faculties necessary for useful democratic participation.

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INTRODUCTION

On 14 September 2015 Malcolm Turnbull announced he would challenge Tony Abbott for the position of Australia's Prime Minister. This was a response to a building sense among citizens, journalists and politicians that Abbott was inadequate to the task of leadership. The following day Turnbull was sworn in as Australia's fifth Prime Minister in as many years. In the following weeks, an already lively public debate on the condition of Australian politics became more vocal.

Some commentators argued that the political system has operated effectively in ejecting leaders and governments that "were incapable of performing as expected or as promised and largely engineered their own downfall" (Savva 2015). In this reading the decisive factor in recent instability is the inadequacy of individual politicians; the institutions of politics function effectively and will continue to do so, a rejuvenated polity merely depends upon the re-emergence of capable leaders.

Others point to a deeper malaise that is intrinsic to the institutions themselves. Ex-Labor leader Mark Latham, discusses a steady post-war decline in public participation and trust in political institutions (Latham 2014). Academics like Colin Crouch and Chantal Mouffe identify a worldwide neo-liberal trend towards the interdependence of the corporate and political classes (Crouch 2000; Mouffe 2005). Former government minister Lindsay Tanner and political correspondent Lenore Taylor, draw particular attention to a decline in the complexity of language and argument because of a "shallow and voracious news cycle that struggles to hold a thought for more than five minutes" (Lenore Taylor 2015). Waleed Aly laments a combative and tribal interparty culture where self-interest has long been prioritized over the responsibility towards policy reform (Aly 2015). All the while, citizens – particularly young Australians -- withdraw from knowledgeable participation into an apolitical and uninformed "apathocracy" (Latham 2014).

In this way, a range of commentators and academics identify a variety of causes for this perceived political malaise: the decline in the quality of political communication and media coverage, the diminished potential for reform when party loyalty is prioritized over beneficent policy and reduced political understandings of citizen voters. But another explanation might be explored in a hitherto under-emphasized domain: history education in Australian schools.

It can be argued that the same antagonism that has shaped the culture of "warrior politics" (Lenore Taylor 2015) has come to define the "curriculum wars" that have shaped the selection of content and skills orientation of Australian history education in recent years. Australian history curricula can be seen as contested spaces between those who seek to shape a historical narrative to suit their own ideological predilections. A case could be made that the right wing, led by the lobbying of the former Prime Minister John Howard (1996 – 2007), has attempted to influence the narrative to positively emphasize Australian actions in war, Australia's place within a heritage of Western civilization and its supposed "Judeo-Christian" tradition. The left could be seen to have shaped a narrative that is critical of Britain's colonial endeavors and gives positive recognition to previously marginalized histories of Aboriginal Australians, immigrants and women.

In this way, Robert J Parkes has contended, “history education has been a struggle over the collective memory of the colonial past” (2014, p. 159). This “struggle” is significant in that it influences aspects of culture, values and traditions that will form the historical understandings of future Australians. It focuses on cultural identity, historically constituted, and whether that identity will find its roots in a European or a cosmopolitan tradition. In its cultural preoccupations, the “curriculum war” has contributed to the creation of a significant lacuna: education for historically constituted political understandings.

This paper seeks to explore the idea that Australia finds itself in a state of political malaise. It will examine the nature of contemporary history curricula in the context of the political conditions under which they were formed. The correlation between depoliticized history curricula and current political conditions will be discussed in order to establish the extent to which it contributes to a perceived decline in political understandings among Australian citizens who will eventually be obliged to vote, administrate or report on political matters.

The study will first discuss the features of a perceived political decline before examining education’s function in the development of political understandings among citizens. It will go on to devote particular attention to the potential “uses and abuses” (Nietzsche 1874) of history curricula in the project of influencing citizens’ political understandings. The study will then evaluate the ways in which curriculum development has been informed by the combative political discourse that has surrounded it and, conversely, the ways in which it has informed that discourse. Finally, it will discuss the outcomes of these debates in the content of Australian Curriculum: History, a 7-10 curriculum that has seen nation wide implementation since 2011. As the most broadly implemented curriculum in the history of Australian education, Australian Curriculum has considerable constitutive potential. Its content will be examined for the extent to which it provides opportunities for students to develop political understandings. Indeed, this paper suggests that this is a key constitutive priority given the political challenges that have been broadly identified in recent years.

CHAPTER ONE

A POLITICAL MALAISE

The notion that the practice of politics in Australia is ailing has become a regular feature of the political discourse. Michelle Grattan complains that, “Australia’s democratic system is like a healthy individual with a bout of the flu. It’s not seriously ill, but somewhat off color” (Grattan in Evans et al 2013, p. 3). According to Lindsay Tanner, “the forms of democracy remain but the substance melts away” (2011, p. 7).

Colin Crouch discusses a dipping trajectory of the quality of political life in which “forms of democracy remain fully in place but governments are slipping back into the control of privileged elites” (2000, p. 2). He outlines a period of relative political functionality in advanced democratic societies in the two decades succeeding World War Two in which there was “a social compromise between business interests and working people” (Crouch 2000, p.3). Mark Latham argues that there were clearer delineations of the socio-political roles of ordinary citizens and the elite governing class. A social compact existed in which working people delegated part of their citizenship “to powerful people elsewhere” (Latham 2014, p. 7) under the assumption that their interests would be faithfully represented. Respect for public institutions like the church, trade unions, political parties and government was more uncritically extended and membership of the major parties was roughly three times its current level (approximately 150 000 through the 1930s) (Latham 2011).

Commentators identify a number of factors in the “hollowing out” (Mair 2013, p. 1) of political participation and the decline of the compact between governments and the governed. The rise of mass higher education has encouraged a sense of personal agency and diminished the traditional sense of inequality with the political class (Latham 2014). In many cases people’s dependence on public institutions has declined at the same time as expectations of transparency and effective delivery of services have grown more exacting (Tanner 2011). Commensurate erosion in grassroots participation in politics has made it easier for “vested interests” to gain influence (Latham 2014). As mainstream interests withdraw to the peripheries, niche lobby groups – characterized by Latham as extreme feminists and trade unionists on left and corporate interests on the right – gain disproportionate power in advancing demands upon government (Latham 2014). Corporate influence has been a particular focus of derision (Crouch 2000). The extensive privatization of the public institutions and deregulation of economic protectionism since the 1980s that has been characterized as the project of neo-liberalism, may have contributed to a phase of economic growth, but it also contributed to a perception that government exists more as an appendage of big business than as a steward of societal improvement. Thus, it is contended that the neo-liberal era has seen a “liberalization of skill and mobility” (Latham 2014, p. 7) in a more educated and critical citizenry, an increased interdependence of government and influential business lobbyists and a commensurate decline in popular interest in the outcomes of political activity, to the point where politics, which was “once seen as an honored vocation [has become] a punching bag for public disquiet” (Latham 2014, p.7).

A focus of this disquiet and a further symptom of the neo-liberal age lies in the declining quality of communication between politicians and citizens. Much as political parties’ imperatives have become intertwined with those of business, marketing has exerted an

increasing influence on the nature of political communication. “Marketing gurus” (Tanner 2011) have been employed to manufacture “political goods” to heighten their appeal to sections of the electorate. Voters have been likened to “customers” and politicians to “shopkeepers” (Crouch 2000) as politicians and their marketers attempt to mold policy to fit the perceived preferences of the electorate. Former Liberal leader John Hewson characterized the campaigning in the lead up to Australia’s 2009 federal election as “business as usual”. An activity in which any articulation of policy was “swamped in spin and slogans” as the candidates, Tony Abbott and Julia Gillard, exploited photo opportunities to reel off soundbite ready statements that reduced political discourse to the level of simplistic advertising (Hewson 2010).

This commercialization of the political discourse has been facilitated by developments in the relationship between the political class and the media. In a recent critique Lindsay Tanner argued that this relationship is at the center of the political malaise. He outlines a situation in which media have proliferated and gained in technological sophistication while political parties have attempted to harness their promotional potential. Under “commercial pressures” to reach larger audiences media organizations “retreat into an entertainment frame that has little tolerance for complex social and economic issues” (Tanner 2011, p. 1) Politicians adapt their behavior to adapt to new “rules of the game” (Tanner 2011, p. 2). Under these rules the “creation of appearances” are prioritized over substantive discussion. Carefully scripted sloganeering, juvenile stunts, the banal and repetitive promotion of perceived achievements of governments or mistakes of opponents characterize a form of political communication that has been taken over by “media think” (Tanner 2011). According to Tanner, media “is a critical component of our democracy because genuine democracy requires an informed electorate” (Tanner 2011, p.6). But when large sections of the nation’s media reduce political communication to its most misleading and simplistic forms the understandings of the electorate weaken as a result. Moreover, when the objectives behind political communication become analogous to selling products to a market, politicians become associated more with salesmanship than good government (Crouch 2000). One of the most conspicuous sources of Tony Abbott’s unpopularity was his tendency to repeat scripted slogans about stopping refugees, national security and free trade agreements, as if spruiking the benefits of products in a television commercial. In this way, it is unsurprising that politicians have acquired reputations for untrustworthiness.

Alongside the imperative to sell one’s own political image through media, is the equally pressing imperative to denigrate that of the opposition. Antagonism between members of the polity is an intrinsic feature of politics; democracies are constituted by a plurality of voices for whom politics is the means by which differing demands might be negotiated through compromise (Mouffe 2005). Australian politics has never had a reputation for docility: the debates over the adoption of conscription during World War One, the high turnover of Prime Ministers in the late sixties and early seventies, and the constitutional crisis under Gough Whitlam in 1975, all bear testimony to an often bitterly contested political culture. But it might be argued that Australian politics has never witnessed a period of such debilitating antagonism as has been seen in recent years. Seasoned political analyst, Paul Kelly, has written about an inability of governments to achieve the inter-party consensus needed to pass reforming legislation. He characterizes the years 1983 – 2003 as a period of economic and social reforms that were afforded by a level of bi-partisan consensus (despite memorable displays of public animosity between rivals like John Howard and Paul Keating) (Kelly 2015). Since the

end of the Howard administration, reforms addressing climate policy, education, industrial relations and fiscal consolidation have become means by which political opposition might be attacked rather than issues that demand serious and impartial analysis (Van Onselen 2015). Backed by compliant media organizations political parties have campaigned to invalidate or repeal reform as a matter of political expedience. Parliamentary debate has become a forum for “warrior politics” (Lenore Taylor 2015) wherein debate has become “so thoroughly decomposed that it barely resembles its origins as the central pillar of democracy” (Aly 2015). Waleed Aly makes the telling observation that, “it’s never been easier to win politics by destroying politics” (2015).

Given the prevalence of the view that the quality of political discourse has degraded in recent times, Colin Crouch’s theory that politics in advanced societies are following a regressive arc remains relevant (2000). Mark Latham presents a similar theory with particular reference to the Australian political landscape. He perceives a regress towards a pre-democratic state in which political parties converge in “closed clubs” around “the values and language of their tribe” (2014, p. 8). In these clubs party policy is established in vague allegiance to the party’s ideological heritage. It is rehearsed and then promoted, in media friendly bite sizes, as unquestioned doctrine with limited acknowledgement of the contestability of ideas and the contingency of circumstances that are intrinsic to the pluralist nature of democratic societies. This tendency to respond to the complexities of politics in a reductive and totalizing manner is mirrored in the broader discourse surrounding politics: tribalism is evident across the society. This can be observed in the stridently ideological views of political commentators in publications like the Herald Sun or Junkee.com, in which the tenets of social conservatism and green-leftism are respectively promoted. It might even be observed in Australian universities, where to challenge prevailing green-left orthodoxy is to invite censure (Donnelly 2015; O’Neill 2014). The increasing prevalence of this polarized, unitary thinking across Australian institutions is reflected in political discourse of ordinary Australians who commonly arrive at judgments by exercising their tribal allegiance before giving due consideration to the complexities of the given issue. In this way, citizens are vulnerable to the types of totalizing appeals that place the interests of the tribe – whether relating to politics, ethnicity, class or gender – above those of all others. This is a potential source of the degradation of a democratic polity whose effective function relies on the understanding that a plurality of views must be considered, negotiated and reconciled to whichever limited degree is possible.

Alongside partisan attitudes that hamper the effective practice of politics, *apolitical* and *anti-political* behavior present additional challenges. Given the unethical, self-interested and ideological practices discussed above it is unsurprising that many citizens withdraw from all forms of political engagement aside from compulsory voting. But this gathering sense of mistrust has coincided with other apoliticizing symptoms of the neo-liberal age. It might be assumed that as citizens gain more widespread access to higher levels of education they might be equipped with the types of social understandings that encourage engagement with political issues and participation in politics. But, as Mark Latham discusses, education is just as likely to encourage the development of capabilities that foster self reliance and reduce the necessity for traditional guarantees of social support through political representation (2014). As tertiary education is seen increasingly as a utility for developing the skills for careers that will consolidate material security, the development of socio-political

understandings and responsibilities becomes an increasingly anachronistic educational activity. As cultural, recreational, commercial and entertainment opportunities become more diffuse and the means of their marketing more technologically sophisticated, political participation is just one in a crowded marketplace of pursuits. In a 2013 survey conducted by the Australia New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) it was found that, “Australian citizens are observers rather than participants in formal politics, well over half (54.7%) could not remember conducting any political activity in the last two or three years beyond the practice of voting”. Nine in ten “think they have not very much or no influence at all over national decisions and just over three quarters of Australians feel the same when it comes to local decision-making” (Evans et al, 2013, p. 6). These results substantiate notions of a system that is directed by a governing class separate from an electorate of whom the majority is acculturated in an aversion to political participation and knowledge. This might be described as a “cycle of apathocracy” (Latham, 2014), perpetuated by disreputable politicians, reductive media representations, commercial orientations and unresponsive educational institutions.

Alongside disengagement from politics, hostility towards it forms another element of the political malaise. The ANZSOG survey provides evidence that many Australians are rejecting the disingenuous nature of political communication: over 9 in 10 think, “politicians should stop talking and just take action on important problems” (Evans et al, 2013, p. 6). It might also be inferred that Australians associate the problems of politics with the shortcomings of politicians: “about 4 in 10 Australians who expressed an opinion felt that government would be better run by business people and over 3 in 10 felt that independent experts would do a better job at making government decisions” (Evans et al, 2013, p. 6). Opinion polls suggest that political leaders “are plumbing historic depths of disapproval and unpopularity” due to “socialized disgust at the cynical offerings with which voters are now stuck” (Aly 2015).

One manifestation of this disillusionment is the enduring vitality of active opposition to mainstream politics. Organizations such as the Green Left and the Socialist Alliance remain prominent on the fringes and continue to pursue a Marxist philosophy, disavowing mainstream politics and the market economy. Their promises of erasing the ‘corrupt nexus’ (Green Left Weekly 2015) of politicians, media and business are particularly appealing in diverting the political attentions of young people away from the mainstream. Indeed, the ANZSOG survey suggests that those between the ages of 18 and 25 are half as likely as over 65s to be active in mainstream political activity aside from voting (Evans et al, 2013, p. 6). These figures are indicative of political disengagement to some degree, but they do not discount unconventional political endeavor. Indeed, young Australians frequently take stances on issues that are “largely ruled out” within the realistic limits of mainstream political activity, like “the alleviation of environmental destruction” (Beck, 2001, p. 158) or the defeat of poverty and gender inequality. They are often passionately engaged in the ‘big issues’ that are relevant in a transnational context beyond the mundane pre-occupations of the local, regional and national (Farthing, 2010). Australian primary and secondary schools are home to student run organizations that advocate the importance of social justice, environmental sustainability and gay rights. In her study of “youthful anti-politics”, Rhys Farthing discusses forms of political expression that exist beyond the structures of school. She argues that “many young people live their politics”, through socially just or sustainable actions (Farthing 2010, p. 189). Unable yet to participate in elections and often disconnected from mainstream politics, “they do not vote for change they do

change” (Farthing 2010, p. 189). In this way she argues, “they are being radically unpolitical” (Farthing 2010, p. 190) in first rejecting and then circumventing traditional modes of political expression. The German sociologists Ulrich and Elisabeth Beck describe a situation in which young people are, “unintentionally acting politically by depriving politics of attention, labour, consent and power” (Beck 2001, p. 159).

There may be a certain amount of exaggeration in these portrayals – in a practical sense young people have less reason to engage in mainstream politics as they are yet to develop the levels of economic investment, cultural identification or ideological allegiance as their elders. That said these representations draw attention to important features of the political landscape. Young Australians will be the inheritors of a political system to which they are often averse or indifferent. Whether they express politics by other means, reject Australian political institutions or remain apathetic to their workings the youngest participants in the polity will be the custodians of its future. The social, economic and cultural issues of their day will need to be reconciled through political institutions and they will inherit a system that faces numerous challenges with regard to political communication, media, the potential for reform, inter-party tribalism and widespread indifference to political matters. Perhaps Rhys Farthing does not exaggerate when she depicts Australia’s youth as the “apolitical harbingers of an incipient crisis of democracy” (2010, p.181).

In this way, evidence points to the idea that the revitalization of politics in Australia has become necessary; the re-assertion of pluralism, the attenuation of ideological thinking, the inclusion of young people, the revival of political discourse, the regeneration of news media and the growth of informed popular participation in political activity would all seem to be reasonable objectives. Each objective is, of course, interconnected and the means of its achievement complex and multifaceted and any revitalization would depend upon the actions of political leaders, media figures and many others. But if the attainment of these objectives is to be realized education will be of fundamental importance.

Towards revitalized understandings of politics

It might thus be argued that curricula should prioritize the regeneration of political understandings of future voters, commentators and politicians as an antidote to the malaise. This type of curricula antidote might comprise of political theory of enduring relevance.

One of the key arguments extended in John Stuart Mill’s ‘On Liberty’ regards the idea that democratic government provides no guarantee of liberty (1859). He describes a political history in which pre-democratic societies, in their earlier more turbulent stages of development, required the direct rule of a tyrant for the maintenance of order. As political agency became more diffuse and self-rule a more common political reality (in ancient Greece for example, or through gradual political reform in Britain, as well as through the American and French Revolutions), conditions developed in which prevailing opinions within society would form the basis of the rules of conduct (Mill 1859). Having attained the capacity to self-govern, the polity was enabled to institutionalize the means by which tyranny would be prevented. But having protected themselves from the tyranny of an autocrat, societies had not necessarily protected

themselves against “the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling” (Mill 1859, p 10). In this vein, it is conceivable for a democratic system to be eroded from within if the majority fails to maintain respect for individual liberty and the negotiation of a plurality of interests through democratic institutions. Here we see a parallel in Colin Crouch’s notion of western political history as a parabola in which functional democracy arose out of feudal antecedents and might now be seen to be following a downward curve as its institutions are taken for granted and the doctrinaire programs of particular interest groups are advanced (2000).

The latter potentiality provides a disquieting source of impetus in the ‘downward curve’ of democratic history. In his 1962 polemic, ‘In Defense of Politics’, Bernhard Crick -- writing at the height of Soviet and Chinese communism -- presented a justification of democratic practices in a world where totalitarianism loomed large. Crick expanded upon Thomas Hobbes’ characterization of politics as a practical human response to the brutalities and privations of an ungoverned ‘state of nature’ -- politics might be defined as “that solution to the problem of order that chooses conciliation rather than violence and coercion” (Crick 1962, p. 28). Politics is the activity of attaining agreement among a range of disparate voices. It “arises in organized states which recognize themselves to be an aggregate of many numbers, not a single tribe, religious interest or tradition” (Crick 1962, p.14). Though its outcomes are rarely universally satisfying, it is the best means at a polis’ disposal for negotiating the reality of its diversity. According to Crick, the main challenges to effective political practice lie in ideological thinking (Crick 1962). Ideology’s attempt to “harmonize” the polis to a particular way of thinking and order its rules of conduct to that end, threatens the pluralism upon which political negotiation rests. If the ruling program of an individual or party is inflexibly total in its objectives, and the polis acquiescent, a return to tyranny may be facilitated through the manipulation of the politics that were devised to prevent it.

In their suggestibility to “ideological thinking”, it might be argued that many Australians are the unconscious participants in the decline of their democratic politics. Influenced by inherited loyalties and the manipulations of political parties and the media, there is a tendency to adopt inflexible and total ideological attitudes to the issues of the day. One inflexible worldview might be characterized by the following set of attitudes: all Muslims present a threat to Australian values and are unwelcome, gay marriage represents a threat to traditional family values and should be opposed outright and immigration should be restricted in order to preserve what is left of Australia’s Anglo-Celtic heritage. Any counter claims represent a threat to Australian values and interests and should be angrily rejected. Another typical set of attitudes might be that Australian identity is essentially multicultural, that the marriage for gays is a basic civil right and that the right to asylum is basic right thus asylum seekers should be admitted freely through all channels -- any countering suggestions are bigoted and discriminatory to the point of criminality. It is from these unyielding polarities that much of the Australian political discussion (or dispute) is conducted.

The emergent imperative here is not one that allows for the comprehension, studied consideration and conciliation of various interests but one that advances a particular worldview with hegemonic objectives. In ‘On the Political’ Chantal Mouffe warns of the potential for the hegemony of single “hyper powers” within advanced democracies (Mouffe 2005, p. 8). She identifies a recent period of idealism about liberal democracy in which “belief in the potential for universal consensus has put democratic thinking on

the wrong track” (Mouffe 2005, p. 3). The liberal desire for a “harmonious and non-conflictual ensemble” (Mouffe 2005, p. 11), runs counter to the facts of political practice in which consensus must always be based on the exclusion of some dissenting party. Disagreement, then, is intrinsic to the success of politics. Current practices suggest that such nuance may have dimmed in the political memory.

Such political theory, channeled through the curriculum, might play a useful role in developing the democratic dispositions of contemporary citizens. In the vein of Mill and Crouch, citizens might develop understandings of the historical developments of liberal democracy and be vigilant about the potential for regress towards the authoritarianism. Through Crick and Mouffe, citizens might recognize that the objective of politics is to negotiate the plurality of concerns within the political society, rather than to harmonize diverse political communities around ideology. The next two chapters of this study will examine the means by which curricula -- particularly the history curriculum -- can be constitutive of political understandings. Consistent with the relevant political theory, the use of the term political understandings will be taken to mean an understanding that is comprised of historicized conceptions of, and sensitivity to the contemporary importance of, pluralism, liberty and potential fragility of the democratic community.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONTEST OVER THE HISTORY CURRICULUM

Education and politics

Historically education has been recognized as a constitutive influence in the political understandings of citizens. In ancient Athens Aristotle argued that, “the good state is not the work of fortune but of knowledge ... the state is a plurality; it should be formed into a social unit by means of education” (Hummel 1993, p. 3). In the early twentieth century John Dewey saw schooling as a way of negotiating the development of individuals into informed participants in democratic society: “such a society must have the type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relations and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder” (Dewey 1916, p.106). Writing in the context of the emergence nationalism and war time propaganda Bertrand Russell wrote of the potential for education to indoctrinate: “the power of education in forming character and opinion is very great ... threatened institutions, while they are still powerful, possess themselves of the educational machine, and instill a respect for their own excellence into the malleable minds of the young ... they are merely so much material, to be recruited into one army or another”, and of its potential to form liberal sensibilities: “we should educate them so as to give them the knowledge and mental habits required for forming independent opinions” (1916, p. 380). In the late twentieth century, in response to a perceived rise of cultural relativism in which ‘natural rights’ were being subsumed under the assertion of minorities’ cultural rights, Alan Bloom called for a return to education in which the “sphere of rights was to be a sphere of moral passion in a democracy” (1987, p. 28) where “democratic education ... wants and needs to produce men and women who have the tastes, knowledge and character supportive of a democratic personality” (1987, p. 26).

Within the context of this philosophical concern with education and politics, contemporary educational theorists have attempted to refine understandings of the relationship. Thomas S. Popkewitz characterizes curriculum as “a disciplining technology that directs how the individual is to act, feel, talk and see” (1997, p. 132). Alistair Ross notes that curriculum plays the role of transforming the individual in “a hegemonic relationship exerted by culture through the curriculum” (2000, p. 7). A.V Kelly characterizes curriculum as “a selection of the culture” applied to “adapt and initiate the norms and values in the community” (2004, p. 49), wherein young people might be “initiated in a democratic morality” (2004, p. 90). In this way the curriculum has the ability to act as a constitutive agent in formation of the values and understandings of communities – it has been harnessed in such a manner historically, at times for the adverse purposes identified by Bertrand Russell, but also for the creation of the assortment of skills and attributes that might be seen to make up a well-developed political understandings.

The discipline of history plays a particularly important role in the constitution of a democratic disposition. The history curriculum has long provided an instrument in shaping individuals’ and societies’ understandings of their past, present and future. Australian historian Stuart Macintyre notes that, “when modern nations formed in the nineteenth century, they created histories that defined their origins, traditions, character

and destiny” often using “public education for the inculcation of patriotism” (2009, p 7). A contemporary observer of this phenomenon in the nascent Germany at the time of the Franco-Prussian Wars (1870-1871) was Friedrich Nietzsche. He claimed that constituent elements of national history might be divided into the domains of the antiquarian, the monumental and the critical (1874). A monumental understanding of history might involve the glorification of a nation’s achievements in a way that “engages the past as a kind of triumphant moral resource from which examples are drawn to guide decisions in the present” (Parkes and Sharpe 2014, p. 170). The antiquarian understanding would emphasize the preservation of the past and its distinctive cultural practices as a means of maintaining links between the present society and that of its ancestors (Parkes and Sharpe 2014). The critical approach would ensure that “aspects of the past are interrogated and challenged from the standpoint of present wisdom” (Parkes and Sharpe 2014, p. 170). Nietzsche contended that each of these three domains was subject to abuse in the event that one was promoted “exclusively, or to excess” (Parkes and Sharpe 2014, p. 170). For example in the event that the critical was ignored in favor of the monumental a propagandist glorification of a national history might be made possible or in the event that the monumental was ignored in preference for the critical a society might become unmoored from the institutions and traditions that had previously delivered reform and progress. Nietzsche thus draws attention to the malleability of history as a tool in the constitution of public understandings.

In his enquiries into ‘historical consciousness’ Peter Seixas notes that the “emerging discipline of history linked the past and the future through national narratives” (Seixas, p 2004). Emboldened by the greatness of their national history citizens might be commandeered into the patriotic projects of the present and the future. Benedict Anderson referred to the nation state – the subject of such widespread and uncritical popular acceptance in the contemporary world – as a product of the collective imaginary, devised largely through the constitutive efforts of the state in education and media (1991). In her study of the construction of French patriotism in the decades preceding the First World War, Anne-Louise Shapiro explains the influence of a “*pedagogie centrale du citoyen*” (1997, p. 113) in the creation of “a wished for version of national memories, mythicized histories that are complete, closed and at the bottom ahistorical” (1997, p. 114). These sentiments were channeled into a feeling of “restrained belligerence” (115) towards Germany that was partly responsible for France’s capacity to fight a brutal four-year war (1914 – 1918) on the Western Front.

As Stuart MacIntyre contends, the same impulse to mold, fix and adapt a historical narrative to respond to contemporary pressures is still in operation among governments and the curriculum planners that they appoint (2009): Shapiro wonders, towards the end of her essay, whether contemporary European curriculum planners have been able to “fix history” in a more responsible way than the educationists of pre-war France, in a manner that is “multi rather than univocal, with an eye to contingency not destiny” (1997, p. 127). A similar enquiry might be extended towards the development of Australian history curricula in recent decades, particularly on the point of whether curricula selections have provided for the development of political understandings among young citizens.

The contest over the national narrative

In recent years this preoccupation has been particularly topical. In 2009 the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority unveiled a national Australian curriculum that has since been broadly implemented across the years P-10. Hitherto, Australian curriculum development and implementation had been the remit of the states. Within the new curriculum the study of history as a distinct discipline (not as an interdisciplinary social studies hybrid as had often been the case under many state curricula) became compulsory until the end of Year 10. Australian governments and educators were presented with a “disciplining technology” of unprecedented influence. Naturally, the content that would be selected to shape the national narrative and the types of historical skills that would be emphasized became a topic of heated contestation. It is plausible to argue that some of the elements of the perceived political malaise played significant roles in the eventual shape of Australian Curriculum: History; its formulation appears to have been subject to the agendas of political players keen to advance their influence along the lines of their ideological predilections. The resulting curriculum might be seen as an outcome of the ongoing culture war over public perceptions of the national narrative. On the right a celebration of Australia’s cultural origins in Europe and defense of white actions on arrival has been promoted, while the left has emphasized a critique of European actions and the presentation of non-European histories. It is conceivable that as a consequence the battle over the historical antecedents of contemporary Australian culture has pushed political history to the margins.

The discussions that led to the creation of Australian Curriculum: History took place in the context of a long period of contestation over what constitutes Australian history and its influence on the contemporary shape of the Australian identity. The traditional national narrative centered around favorable representations of the European phase of Australian history, which began with arrival of Arthur Phillip’s first fleet of convicts, soldiers and settlers in 1788. These representations were arranged around a few preponderant themes. In taking possession of the continent, settlers were making good use of untilled land and any negative impacts on Aboriginal people were the consequence of unintended factors like the spread of new diseases – if they were discussed in histories at all Aborigines might have been seen as the beneficiaries of civilizing influence. Since the Federation of its colonies in 1901, the restrictions upon non-British immigration had facilitated the maintenance of orderly racial homogeneity and equal working conditions. British political institutions like Westminster democracy, liberalism, the rule of law and capitalism had guaranteed Australians freedom, order and prosperity (Windshuttle 2008). Australia existed within the broader context of the benevolent British Empire. In this way, a historical narrative was fixed in a manner that allowed Australians to uncritically appreciate their perceived political, cultural and racial antecedents while appreciating the historic achievement of the claiming and civilizing a naturally hostile continent (David Day 1997).

With the world wars Australia’s sense of cultural affiliation towards and geo-strategic dependency upon Britain began to strain with the defeats and depredations of Gallipoli (1915) and Singapore (1942). With the movement towards revisionism that characterized western historiography in the post war years, new interpretations of Australian history appeared. Russell Ward’s ‘The Australia Legend’ explored the role of convicts and working men in the emergence of a distinctive egalitarian culture, in

doing so drawing attention away from the hitherto preponderant historical form (political history) and subject (the ruling class) towards social history and the working class (1958). In a similar vein the histories of Aborigines came to receive critical attention. In 1959 Andrew La Nauze commented that Aborigines featured in “Australian history only as a melancholy anthropological footnote” (1959, p. 11). In his seminal Boyer Lectures, WEH Stanner identified a historical amnesia in relation to Aboriginal experiences and perspectives: “What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale. We have been able for so long to disremember the Aborigines that we are now hard put to keep them in mind even when we most want to do so” (1969, p 24-25). By the 1970s and 1980s history faculties had embraced “new critical histories” which sought to scrutinize the “imperial” histories of the first half of the twentieth century while documenting situations of “dispossession, exclusion and marginalization” (McKenna 1997). Authoritative works like Anne Summers’ ‘Damned Whores and Gods’ Police’ (1975) and Henry Reynold’s ‘The Other Side of the Frontier’ (1981) exposed previously marginal histories of patriarchal oppression and frontier violence. In this way subaltern histories whether female, ethnic, environmental or Aboriginal gained prominence while the moral legitimacy of European occupation became subject of revision.

Commensurately, history education began to evince the influence of this “new critical history”. The 1970s saw a movement away from the rote learning of narrative history towards a more thematic approach. Less prescriptive curricula allowed for more choice in the selections of content and assessment. In further alignment with the educational trends of the time active, student focused learning came to present an alternative to traditional teacher focused pedagogy. The controversial New South Wales senior history syllabus of 1992 presented a case study in the shift in historiography. Influenced by social history it provided “alternatives to the master narratives of famous men and pioneering settlement” (Parkes 2007 p. 385). The traditional European focus was “decentered” with a new emphasis on relations with Asia, women’s experiences and indigenous histories (Parkes 2007 p. 385). The Queensland Senior History syllabus of 1994 included similar developments in its divergence from prescribed narrative history towards a choice of themes that included critiques of colonialism and nationalism and opportunities for enquiry into other previously marginal fields.

These developments in historiography and history education were resisted by those who considered them to be a challenge to notions of national unity and the historic legitimacy of the state. As revisionist approaches gained prominence across the western world a resistant school of thought identified a ‘crisis in history’ derived from attempts to dismantle the ‘grand narratives’ of national history. In 1979 Margaret Thatcher spoke against, “those who gnaw away at our national self-respect, rewriting [our] history as centuries of unrelieved doom, oppression and failure-as days of hopelessness, not days of hope” (Thatcher in McKenna, 1997). Such sentiments also found expression in Australia: in 1985 the historian Geoffrey Blainey, delivered a controversial public lecture in which he voiced the concern that “the new critical histories” were becoming increasingly mainstream through their influence upon schools, universities and sections of the media. He claimed that the Hawke Labor government was in the thrall of a “multicultural industry” under which the Australian historical narrative was being rewritten as “a story of violence, exploitation, repression, racism, sexism, capitalism, colonialism and a few other isms” (Blainey in McKenna, 1997). With the advent of this

atmosphere of contestability, Australian history was placed in a situation of unprecedented public prominence. As political figures like Malcolm Fraser and John Howard and historians like John Hirst, Stuart MacIntyre and Henry Reynolds stridently expressed their views, a high stakes battle over the national narrative was underway (McKenna). As McKenna recounts, “there was no clearer evidence needed to demonstrate just how charged the debate over Australian history had become than the events of 21 January 1988. On this day, Aboriginal protesters hurled a copy of Professor John Molony's *Bicentennial History of Australia* into the waters of Sydney Harbour. They were unhappy with the book's treatment of Tasmanian Aborigines and the insufficient attention devoted to Aboriginal history” (1997).

This debate over the Australian historical narrative was soon co-opted into a broader political discussion over the nation's past and its future direction. Two key figures emerged who were heavily invested in influencing the outcomes of these discussions, albeit approaching them from opposing poles: Paul Keating and John Howard. Keating, Treasurer of the Labor Government from 1983 to 1991 and Prime Minister from 1991 to 1996 was particularly determined to “re-cast the Australian identity” by breaking free from “its British-centered past” (McKenna). Keating tapped into a ‘new critical’ historical narrative in which Australia's British affiliation had been unnecessarily prolonged under the long post-war government of Robert Menzies' Liberal Party (1949 and 1972). The outcome was that Australia had deprived itself of the benefits of profitable economic relations and enriching cultural interactions with its Asian neighbors – ties that the Labor government was now busily stimulating. Furthermore, the European occupants had not been the benign and civilizing stewards of the Menzian imaginary. In his Redfern Speech of 1992 Keating (Keating 1992). took the unprecedented step of recognizing European crimes whilst offering reconciliation:

The starting point might be to recognize that the problem starts with us non-Aboriginal Australians. It begins, I think, with that act of recognition. Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the diseases. The alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practised discrimination and exclusion.

In doing so Keating promoted the idea of a deleterious British heritage from which contemporary Australia might rightfully seek disassociation through the attainment of a republic. The conservative opposition was characterized as source of regress to the “gloomy cave” of Menzian anglophilia, mercantile protectionism and cultural homogeneity (McKenna). Thus, drawing from the tenets of the ‘new critical history’, Keating promoted understandings of Australian history that legitimized a multicultural present, unburdened of its imperial baggage.

With John Howard's election as Prime Minister in 1996 the politics of historical identity were to take a significant diversion. Howard had long concurred with Geoffrey Blainey's view that ‘new critical history’ had exaggerated the wrongs of Australians' British ancestors. Upon election he soon invoked Blainey in claiming that he profoundly rejected “the black armband view of Australian history” (Howard in McKenna 1996). In reference to the preceding thirteen years of Labor Government Howard (Howard in McKenna, 1996) observed that:

I think we've had too much ... we talk too negatively about our past. I sympathize fundamentally with Australians who are insulted when they are told that we have a racist bigoted past. And Australians are told that quite regularly.

In the context of the electoral success of the right wing politician Pauline Hanson's anti-Asian nationalism in 1996, Howard may have recognized the benefit of appealing to patriotic urges of the electorate (McKenna). In any case, subsequent public statements and actions would confirm the strength of his ideological convictions. During his Menzies Lecture of the same year Howard made explicit his desire to rejuvenate the reputation of the Menzies era and asserted his belief 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. In saying that, 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. But in understanding these realities our priority should not be to apportion blame and guilt for historic wrongs but to commit to a practical program of action that will remove the enduring legacies of disadvantage (1996).

Surrounding Howard was a range of commentators -- Padraic McGuinness, Kevin Donnelly and Blainey for example -- who continued to assert the idea that "a new establishment was taking hostage our national past and infecting students' minds through the use of "politically correct buzzwords" that included terms like "invasion," "genocide," "dispossession," "Aboriginality" and "terra nullius" " (Parkes 2007, p. 388). These contentions were met with responses from the likes of Henry Reynolds, Anne Cuthoys and Elaine Thomson that Howard was trying to minimize the historical role of minorities, hijack national history for populist purposes and counter balance the influence of Keating (McKenna). Thus, in promoting a neo-conservative defense of Australia's British heritage, John Howard attempted to reconstitute political understandings towards a traditional patriotism. In doing so he attempted to wrest the national narrative back from the influence of 'new critical history'.

The contest over the national curriculum

Commensurately, political pressure appears to have influenced the development of history curricula in succeeding years. The atmosphere of reversion may have contributed to a new NSW Syllabus of 1998 that saw a return to "chronological history" and a focus on civics and citizenship that "could be seen as an effort to extol a particular version of nationalism" (Parkes 2007, p. 388). This development can be seen as a backlash against the radical syllabus of 1992, "as well ... as an attempt to discredit the reformist agenda of the Left by constructing "political correctness"—here manifest as a pedagogical acknowledgement of the alternative historical perspectives of both women and Indigenous Australians—as an attack on Australian culture" (Parkes, 2007, p. 389). The "politically motivated and ideologically laden" interpretations of the "new critical histories" would be mitigated by "common sense" accounts that provided pupils with the "facts" of their past (Parkes, 2007, p. 389). In this way the "history wars" that had begun in the 1980s were now sparking debate over history curriculum in the late 1990s and 2000s by way of the debates that had been delivered to public prominence during the administrations of Paul Keating and John Howard. The shape of history

curricula, it now appeared, was subject to the influence of the two predominant ideologies.

As debates over the national historical narrative gathered pace, so too did the movement towards the national curriculum that would be a potent tool for its dissemination. Since the 1960s and 1970s attempts had been made to standardize aspects of curriculum particularly in the sciences and social sciences. However, difficulties over attaining funding and differences of educational philosophy were initial impediments (McGaw 2013). By 1989 the states agreed to ten principles for the development of a national curriculum under the Hobart Declaration (McGaw 2013). Despite this in many cases state governments and state electorates remained attached to their own curricula (McGaw 2013). Although the Adelaide Declaration of 1999 refreshed the tenets of Hobart, state reluctance endured, partly justified through the federal constitution's provision for education as a responsibility of state governments. But by the 2000s the impetus for a national curriculum continued to gather momentum. Agitation was particularly strong within the discipline of history, partly, it would seem, as result of Prime Minister Howard's historical enthusiasm and also a perception across the discipline that students' historical knowledge and understanding was being compromised by interdisciplinary courses like the Victorian Humanities 'strand' and Queensland's Study of Society and the Environment (Gregory 2007). In his report for the Howard government convened Australian History Summit of 2006, Tony Taylor voiced the concern that 'by the time [students] reach leaving age, most students in Australian schools will have experienced a fragmented, repetitive and incomplete picture of their national story' (Taylor in Gregory 2007. p 2). The objective of this summit was to ameliorate this situation by pushing for the mandatory study of history until Year 10 through a standardized nationwide curriculum.

Despite the bipartisan enthusiasm for this renewal, the fissures of the prevailing history wars soon became evident. Ultimately, the conference was characterized more by differences of opinion than any practicable consensus. Proponents of the 'new critical' school were criticized for conflating history curriculum with a platform for promoting left wing causes ('social justice' and 'ecology') (Lopez 2006) while Howard and Education Minister Julie Bishop were accused of 'stacking' the conference with "right – activists" and "center conservatives" (Rundle 2006). History remained a central tenet in John Howard's political philosophy and his Australia Day Address of 2006 provided a clear explication of his hopes for the national narrative and its delivery through education. Here Howard celebrated Australia's quality of life and history of attracting immigrants. In a culturally diverse society history would provide an important unifier: "We want them (immigrants) to learn about our history and heritage. We expect each unique individual to enrich it with their loyalty and patriotism" (Howard 2006). Australia's cultural diversity would be celebrated, "but not at the expense of ongoing pride in what are commonly regarded as the values, traditions and accomplishments of old Australia" (Howard 2006). As the ethnic and cultural composition of the society changed the "dominant cultural patterns" would be retained: these being "Judeo-Christian ethics, the progressive spirit of the enlightenment and the values of British political culture" (Howard 2006). History education needed to be revitalized for the realization of these constitutive goals. Howard mirrored concerns within the discipline over the diffusion of the subject's influence claiming that it was delivered as a "fragmented stew of themes and issues" while lamenting a turn towards the new critical approach with its "post-modern culture of relativism where any objective record of

achievement is questioned or repudiated” (Howard 2006). The continuing pursuit of this approach might put “young people at risk of being disinherited from their community” (Howard 2006). Knowledge of western traditions (the enlightenment) and institutions (parliamentary democracy) would need to be nourished to counteract socio-political fragmentation. Indeed, “we do not have to smother or apologize for our place in the Western political tradition in order to build our relations in Asia or in any other part of the world” (Howard 2006).

Ultimately though, the realities of electoral politics intervened to prevent Howard from “getting the history he wanted” (Hirst 2008). Kevin Rudd was elected to lead a new Labor government in December 2007 just as the states had finally committed to a national curriculum (McGaw 2013). Unable to exert influence on appointments Howard’s narrative of Eurocentric nationalism was challenged and supplanted. The Howard approved provisional syllabus, overseen by fellow travellers Geoffrey Blainey and Gerard Henderson, was soon dropped: Tony Taylor commented that the document was “dead as a doornail ... The prime minister’s final document was too close to a nationalist view of Australia’s past... It’s too close to nationalism, too removed from a Kevin Rudd, regional and global world view” (Taylor in Topsfield, 2008).

A further consequence of the shift in the prevailing ideology was the appointment of Stuart Macintyre, a historian who had specialized in the history of communism in Australia, to oversee the writing of the curriculum in 2008 (Windshuttle 2008, p. 30). Macintyre was critical of Prime Ministerial “interference” in previous attempts to achieve consensus. He facilitated an approach in which Howard’s Eurocentric pre-occupations were conspicuous in their absence. The orientations would be more regional, practical and global in “equipping young Australians for a future marked by globalisation, rapid technological change, social and cultural diversity, the challenge of sustainability and the growing importance of our position in the Asia-Pacific region” (Macintyre 2009, p. 6). Previous attempts to force high schools to teach 150 hours of Australian history (Topsfield 2008) were also mitigated. The curriculum would take “a world history perspective ... that takes us outside our own experience to engage with people and circumstances that are unfamiliar” (Macintyre 2009, p.10). Macintyre recognized the constitutive value of the history curriculum – “nations and cultural movements construct their own versions of the past as a cultural resource” – but not in a manner that would conserve and celebrate traditional notions of historical achievement – “if history is to be more than a form of solipsism it has to go beyond what is near and dear to us” (Macintyre 2009, p. 10). Howard’s “dominant [European] cultural patterns” would indeed be decentered in an Australian Curriculum: History. In this way ‘new critical history’, through its alignment with the modern Labor Party, had staked a significant claim in the shape of the national narrative. To use Manning Clarke’s terminology the “straighteners” of the Anglocentric Liberal tradition were made to forgo influence to the “enlargers of life” who looked beyond it (Clarke in McKenna 1997).

In this way it can be seen that two distinctive and oppositional national narratives have emerged in recent decades. These narratives had their origins in the historiographical developments of the 1970s and 1980s and exerted considerable influence upon Australian Curriculum: History having been adapted into the political platforms of the Liberal and Labor parties. It might be argued that both parties were active in their attempts to “fix history” in the manner that Anne-Louise Shapiro discussed (1997). This

endeavor had origins in genuine convictions over the aspects of the nation's history that were deserving of emphasis and the understandings that would contribute to an appropriately informed society. It is also conceivable that the adaptation of these historical narratives took place within the context of the tribalism that has been identified as an element of a perceived political malaise in Australian politics (Latham 2014). A particular interpretation of Australian history, and a particular attribution of Australian culture, was integral to the agendas and political philosophies of both political parties. Both parties claimed legitimacy as guardians of the nation's past and determined to undermine their rival's countering narrative. The national narrative became a significant weapon in the arsenal of the "warrior politics" that Lenore Taylor identified (2015). The contest to gain influence over the embryonic national curriculum was a contest to win the means by which a particular national narrative might be widely and effectively disseminated. The superimposition of ideology onto Australian history complemented the parties' polarizing and totalizing rhetoric in other aspects of government or opposition. Typical expressions of such rhetorical conflation might have taken the following forms:

- Australia is the beneficiary of its European heritage -- non-European immigration must be carefully controlled -- those non-Europeans who do immigrate must assimilate to European cultural mores -- the opposition presents a threat to historic values and contemporary order.

or

- Australians' British colonial ancestors actions were often destructive -- non-European immigration should be encouraged in order to mitigate this legacy -- questioning the validity of non-European immigration is divisive -- the opposition presents a threat to recently achieved tolerance and social cohesion.

In organizing the national narrative along these opposing polarities the parties have contributed to the obfuscation of a more complex historical reality. As with other aspects of their political projects, the parties have succeeded in reducing the plurality of voices by superimposing the bipolarity of the present political discourse upon the historical narrative. In this way, political parties have attempted to "fix" the narrative to reinforce the "ideological thinking" that political theorist Bernard Crick identifies as an obstacle to effective politics (1962). This forms another means by which the pluralism of diverse interests might be subsumed into the two dominant political entities thus degrading the diversity and quality of political discourse.

The historical domain in which this contest has been played has been largely cultural. Either party has sought to assert the legitimacy of its selections from the nation's cultural heritage and to critique those that it hopes to invalidate. In doing so they seek to provide historical justification for their constructions of the contemporary cultural identity. It might be useful to examine these endeavors through the frame of analysis developed in Nietzsche's 'The Uses and Abuses of History for Life' (1874). It will be recalled that one way in which Nietzsche conceptualized the use of history was monumental, in that it "engages the past as a kind of triumphant moral resource from which examples are drawn to guide decisions in the present" (Parkes and Sharpe, 2014. p. 170). When examining the national narrative fashioned by the Liberal Party the monuments, or cultural artifacts, that it seeks to foreground are readily apparent: British

political institutions, the intellectual heritage of the enlightenment, the Judeo-Christian religious heritage and the perceived achievements of military campaigns like Gallipoli and Kokoda. When considering the national narrative endorsed by the Labor Party it is not so much the monumental but the critical aspect of Nietzsche's analytical frame that is relevant. Labor's constitutive project is predicated more around the idea that "aspects of the past are interrogated and challenged from the standpoint of present wisdom" (Parkes and Sharpe 2014, p. 170). Their national narrative seeks to delegitimize the British colonial project through close critical scrutiny of the treatment of Aborigines, the attempt to retain Anglo-Celtic racial homogeneity and the decentering the European experience in favor of world and regional histories (Macintyre 2007). Nietzsche argued that, along with the antiquarian aspect, the critical and the monumental would optimally exist in a precarious balance. In order to avoid historical chauvinism, monumental achievements ought not be excessively celebrated and, conversely, if they were subject to disproportionate criticism a community might lose faith in its institutions, traditions and beliefs. It is reasonable then to assert that both versions of the national narrative throw destabilize this "precarious balance".

The imbalance towards the 'monumental' in the Liberal national narrative is problematic for a number of reasons. In his tract, 'The Fundamentals of History', Arthur Marwick (2015) notes that:

history is a scholarly, not a political, activity, and while, as citizens, we certainly should act upon our political views, in writing history we have an absolute obligation to try to exclude them. Most historians, like, most scientists, are motivated by the urge to *find out*.

Here Marwick highlights the problem of arranging a historical narrative with ideological objectives in mind. If the true objective of the historian -- and aspiration of the historically minded citizen -- is to understand and document the past as accurately as possible, the ideologically motivated creation of history must compromise its accurate documentation. The Liberal Party's national narrative might then be better described as a "cultural transmission and national celebration" than history (Tony Taylor 2013a, p. 227).

Having said this, if a historian's objective is to render the past accurately, it is important to recognize that this objective has its intrinsic flaws. EH Carr used the following example to emphasize the interpretative nature of history:

The facts are really not at all like fish on the fishmonger's slab. They are like fish swimming about in a vast and sometimes inaccessible ocean; and what the historian catches will depend, partly on chance, but mainly on what part of the ocean he chooses to fish in and what tackle he chooses to use -- these two factors being, of course, determined by the kind of fish he wants to catch. By and large, the historian will get the kind of facts he wants (1961, p. 23).

Fidelity to accuracy notwithstanding, in forming the past into a historical narrative the interpreter of history is selective with facts. In its attempts to enshrine and celebrate the achievements of western civilization as unassailable facts, the Liberal Party implements a historical methodology that "prioritizes the supremacy of the fact" (Taylor 2013, p. 236) and obscures the role of interpretation and selectivity in representing the past.

While E.H. Carr contends that it is “untenable” for history to be conceived as an “objective compilation of facts”, he notes that neither can it be seen as purely the “subjective product of the mind of the historian” in which case any notion of a true history might be considered invalid (1961, p. 29). He recommends a middle path in which the possibility of drawing conclusions with relative certainty and retaining awareness of the interpretative nature of historical enquiry might be held in balance.

Aside from being ahistorical in this manner, the uncritical assertion of fact implicit in Liberal national narrative is symptomatic of the contemporary political discourse. The assertion of national narrative as inarguable fact is complimentary to a political culture in which interparty antagonism and the marketing of infallible policy/product are prevailing features. E.H. Carr argued that history is an “unending dialogue between the past and the present” (1961, p. 30). Conceived as an accessory of Liberal political ideology and identity politics, history is denied this essential contingency and fixed as a narrative of facts. John Howard may have shown some acknowledgment of the potential for a critical re-evaluation of British settlement (1996) but the essence of the Liberal Party’s historical project is to implant a positive interpretation that may pay lip service to, but does not seriously countenance informed critiques and countering evidence. The monuments of the national narrative and the party’s ideological narrative are elevated beyond critical revision. The liberal political heritage, for example, becomes an article of faith through a form of top down traditional pedagogy on a national scale. Thus, it is rote learned, elevated beyond the socio-cultural milieu of its historical context and spared critical appraisal. It is presented to citizens through indoctrination rather than through a rigorous critical appraisal that would lead to active analysis of its components and deeper political understandings.

It might thus be argued that the Liberal Party’s national narrative is motivated by ideological dissemination and its formulation the product of a methodology that is problematic in its reverence of the “supremacy of the fact”. This is both symptomatic and constitutive of the ideological polarization and propagation that characterizes the perceived political malaise prevailing in contemporary Australia. In this way, while they are motivated by a desire to ‘fix’ the past, the Liberals’ endeavors in national narrative formulation are also predicated around a desire to fix the present. The Australian present of the Liberal formulation is celebrated as “culturally diverse” -- an acknowledgement of the prevailing multiculturalist orthodoxy (Howard 2006). But implied within this celebration is the threat of the unraveling of Australia’s perceived European cultural heritage. A national narrative of the celebration of the achievements of western civilization and their successful adaptation in Australia will be a binding element between a diverse present and mono-cultural past and a form of insurance against future cultural disorder. In this type of public communication, the Liberal Party expresses what Arjun Appadurai has referred to as an “anxiety of incompleteness” (2006) typical of nations transitioning from relatively mono-cultural origins to the “super-diversity” (Vertovec 2010) of the present. The consequent need to enact projects for the re-assertion of national completeness must be derived from values that are universal enough in their appeal to supersede the ethnic loyalties that threaten broader social cohesion. John Howard made much of the widespread appeal of the tolerance and freedom that have made Australia such a popular destination for immigrants (2006). These attributes, he contends, are derived from Australia’s inheritance of liberal traditions from the Western Civilization. In this way, Australia’s political heritage, and the institutions through which its democratic politics function, are promoted as cultural

unifiers by the Liberal Party in its historically constituted version of contemporary Australia. This national narrative presents Australian political institutions as cultural monuments rather than the instruments through which effective democratic politics might be practiced and maintained. Their role is more to be utilized in a contest of identity politics than to be understood and critically examined in a way that might stimulate the regeneration of political culture.

Apart from simplifying Australia's political history the Liberal Party's project of cultural conservation poses problems in that it may be seen to misrepresent the realities of contemporary society. Fazal Rizvi has written broadly on the challenges presented by emerging transnational identities and cultural diversity. He notes that, "educational institutions are required to rethink their policies to better represent the demographic make-up of the communities in which they are located" (2011, p. 180). He warns against education being "trapped within a set of nation-centric discourses" (2011, p. 186) as diverse contemporary societies encompass historical narratives that are "more complex than that captured by notions nostalgia, collective memory and desire for singular attachment" (2011, p. 187). One might think that Labor's national narrative would be better suited to representing Australia's past to its present generations given that it embraces 'new critical' history's critique of colonialism and representation of diverse histories. But close analysis also reveals problems within its constitutive project.

As has been discussed, while conservatives have been re-enforcing the 'monuments' of Australia's European heritage, progressives have been engaged in their disassembly. In the interpretations of influential curriculum developers, Stuart Macintyre and Tony Taylor, the 'monuments' of the Liberal historical imaginary have been prioritized to the point of deification in a way that is disproportionate to their real historical significance. According to Taylor the Liberal promotion of the study of Britain's gradual evolution of democratic institutions (from the Magna Carta (1215) through the English Civil War (1642 – 1651) to Glorious Revolution of 1688) is an exercise in the reverence of "glorious exceptionalist and unproblematic parliamentary progress" (2013a, p. 229); this narrative of the traditional imaginary -- sentimentally clung to by the Liberals -- must be shifted aside and diminished. In allegiance to the tenets of the 'new critical' approach, previously marginalized histories will fill the space provided. In Michel Foucault's reckoning this type of development might be part of an assertion of "reverse discourse" (1976, p. 101). Here groups that have been suppressed under the dominant culture would speak "on their own behalf to demand their legitimacy or "naturalness" be acknowledged" (Foucault 1976, p. 101). In this way the progressive national narrative provides a useful tool within the climate of interparty antagonism: it serves to delegitimize the core features of the Liberal narrative while emphasizing the grievances and gaining the political allegiance of the marginalized. Given Australian communities' continuing diversification beyond the traditional Anglo-Celtic core the electoral efficacy of this national narrative is apparent.

Whereas the conservative national narrative seeks to enshrine the beneficent traditions of Australia's European past in order to create commonalities in an increasingly fragmentary present, the progressive narrative works in the opposite direction. It seeks to enshrine a multicultural present in contrast to its historical antecedents in presenting a historical narrative of gradual progress away from antecedents of colonial exploitation and racism. The conservative narrative seeks to present a monumental history as a salve

for contemporary uncertainties while the progressive one seeks to present a monumental present as the resolution of a tarnished historical narrative. The progressive national narrative celebrates the multi-cultural present as the apotheosis of the Australian achievement, thus it presents the assortment of narratives that constitute the multicultural present: those of the attainment of 'legitimacy and naturality' for Aborigines, migrant groups and women.

In this way, the traditionally dominant and oppressive culture is resisted, delegitimized and displaced and the assertion of minority identities and interests is promoted. This national narrative, disseminated through curriculum, encourages the notion that individuals' political loyalties should be based foremost on membership in sub-communities (ethnic, religious or gendered etc) residing within the national whole. According to Alan Bloom such a scenario might serve to perpetuate a decline in the quality of democratic practices. He suggested that minorities might court not only the rights naturally held by all, but also particular powers in a manner that would advance their sectional interests (1987, p. 34). In this way, the polis might come to be defined more by sectarian jostling than the maintenance of freedom and equality based on the application of natural rights that cut across group loyalties. Bloom encourages the maintenance of natural rights "as a basis for unity and sameness" under which "daily habits or religions" and cultural affiliations are "subordinated to new principles" (1987, p. 27). He critiques the emergence of multicultural thinking as it "pays no attention to the natural rights or the origins of our regime"; it is "flawed and regressive ... open to all kinds of men, all kinds of lifestyles, all ideologies"; there is "no enemy other than the man who is not open to everything" (1987, p. 27). The concern here is that liberal principles might be replaced as the basis of political negotiation by the principle of the tolerance for all demands and practices. This latter imperative may be predicated on the desire to maintain harmony within diverse communities, but it could potentially lead to an atmosphere of relativism where even inimical demands and practices are tolerated.

Thus, in its idealization of the multicultural present as a resolution of the problems of Australia's ethno-nationalist history the progressive national narrative denies a necessary critical evaluation of multicultural thinking. It rightly seeks to present multiculturalism as a unifying force in a time of increasing cultural diversity but in doing so it imbues it with sacrosanctity. Indeed, to question this national narrative in the manner above might draw politically correct accusations of xenophobia. Much in the way that the Liberals have sought to fix a narrative of an unquestionably beneficent European civilizational heritage, the progressives have constructed sacrosanct multiculturalism, but in a way that is perhaps even more censorious of counterargument. This tendency is symptomatic of an aspect of the perceived political malaise where countering perspectives are treated scornfully to the point where they are associated with indecency or even criminality. In its unassailability as a fact of history, the multiculturalism narrative forms a key component of the Labor Party's ideological platform. In its transmission through Australian Curriculum: History this narrative serves to further degrade political understandings by foregrounding cultural histories and marginalizing content of a political nature. Indeed, the assertion of cultural legitimacy – female, Aboriginal, Muslim, Greek et cetera – comes to occupy an increasingly prominent part of the contemporary political conversation.

Within this milieu of cultural advocacy, national narrative as a component of party ideology and censoriousness as a weapon of ideological combat, it might be argued that

understandings of core democratic principles such as liberty and pluralism and institutions like the Westminster democracy are increasingly compromised. Aside from problems in the multicultural worldview the causes of this development might find further explanation in the influence of post-modern thinking on the progressive national narrative. In his attempt to define the 'Post-Modern Condition', Jean-Francois Lyotard defined the postmodern conception of history as an "incredulity towards meta-narratives" (1979). In this way, the "grand narratives" of modern intellectual movements like the Enlightenment and Marxism would be treated with incredulity. Teleological narratives – for example that human beings would benefit eventually from arranging their politics around the idea that each individual has natural rights – were ultimately untrue as they could not account for the contingency of human circumstances in different times and places under varying conditions. This philosophical disposition had considerable influence in academic and institutional circles contributing to an undermining of certainty surrounding the validity of the liberal democratic project and providing justification for those progressives who sought to delegitimize the national narratives that positively interpreted the political traditions of the west. Perhaps it is this culture of indifference that informs Stuart Macintyre's comment that "young people find Australian history boring" when that history features the strain of continuity between its heritage in the western tradition and the present (2009, p. 11). In this mindset it is not through understanding of the traditions and institutions of the west that "we will understand Australian history" but through "other places and peoples" (2009, p. 12). Through this extension of postmodern incredulity the European antecedents of contemporary Australian political institutions are less instructive to the contemporary citizen than those of say, the feudal and communist political traditions of China or the political organization of indigenous societies. The narrative of the majority is decentered and the new space occupied by the narratives of the marginal groups. Historically constituted understandings of the institutions and principles that remain key to political functionality (Westminster democracy and liberalism for example) become unavailable and fade from the collective memory.

In this way, progressives as well as conservatives have shaped national narratives and exerted influence over curriculum in a number of ways that have been problematic. Fundamentally, either side has drawn upon the prevailing antagonism and dogmatism that characterizes the broader political discourse and attempted to promulgate a national narrative that monumentalizes either a European tradition or a multicultural present. This act of enshrining a national narrative as an unquestioned element in a broader ideological project runs counter to historical methodology that is intrinsically interpretative in nature. These developments are symptomatic of the totalizing ideological agendas that guide political parties in what many consider to be a situation of contemporary political malaise. It might be argued that they are also constitutive of degraded political understandings among citizens when they are disseminated through public discourse and, particularly, education. When the Liberal narrative presents Australia's European political antecedents as an article of faith and the progressive narrative pushes it to the margins of history, citizens are denied the rigorous historicized understandings of their democracy that would contribute to its effective maintenance.

CHAPTER THREE

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM: HISTORY. TOWARDS HISTORICISED POLITICAL UNDERSTANDINGS?

Content and constitutive objectives

The antecedents to the final decisions over the contents and methodologies of Australian Curriculum: History, were complex in nature. There were the disagreements of the '70s and '80s between traditional and 'new critical' schools of thought as to beneficence of the European presence in Australia. These were co-opted into the oppositional national narratives of the Liberal and Labor parties as part of their contest over the shape of Australian identity. A push emerged from within the historical community to ensure several years of mandatory study of history for school students. There was a contest to exert political influence on the processes involved in curriculum development in which the Labor party, elected in 2007, was eventually able to create the conditions under which a progressive national narrative would be prioritized. The curriculum's draft was eventually published in 2010 and implemented from 2011 onwards. It is now relevant to evaluate the curriculum in terms of extent to which it provides students with the opportunity to develop historically constituted political understandings for their eventual participation in Australian politics.

In its "rationale" the curriculum (Australian Curriculum: History) broadly reflects the imperatives of the progressive national narrative:

The 7–10 curriculum generally takes a world history approach within which the history of Australia is taught. It does this to equip students for the world (local, regional and global) in which they live. An understanding of world history enhances students' appreciation of Australian history. It enables them to develop an understanding of the past and present experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, their identities and the continuing value of their cultures. It also helps students to appreciate Australia's distinctive path of social, economic and political development, its position in the Asia and Pacific regions, and its global interrelationships. This knowledge and understanding is essential for informed and active participation in Australia's diverse society and in creating rewarding personal and collective futures.

Immediately apparent is the prioritization of "world history". Australia must be understood within the context of the international dynamics that led to its formation and effected its development. The implication here is that the citizen should be outward looking: Australia was historically constituted by outside forces and even in the present day -- apart from "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples" whose "identities" and "culture" are given specific attention – it is defined by "its position in the Asia and Pacific regions, and its global interrelationships". Understandings of this reality will prepare citizens "to be informed and active participants in Australia's diverse society" and, one might infer, knowledgeable entrepreneurs and travellers in their region. The "rationale" does acknowledge that Australia has had a "distinctive path of social, economic and political developments" but these are best understood through broader, specifically Asia Pacific, relationships. The European derived cultural and political traditions that were so formative of the Australian historical experiences of the

nineteenth and twentieth century are in this way deprioritized, decentered and virtually absented from the Australian Curriculum: History's rationale. This coheres with the general curriculum's three cross-curriculum priorities of "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders histories and culture, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia and Sustainability" (Australian Curriculum, 2015) and, in rationale at least, aligns the curriculum with the tenets of the progressive national narrative. It also confines Australia's political history to a brief, indirectly addressed footnote.

In this way Australian Curriculum: History appears to be constitutive of a particular progressive, Labor endorsed national narrative. It is a useful tool in shaping the Australian cultural identity in a manner consistent with aspects of Labor ideology and undermining those of the Liberal opposition. Having said this, it is not – in the prescriptions of its "rationale" at least -- doctrinaire in its manner of communicating this narrative. Concerns raised in an earlier section about the use of curriculum as a means of uncritical transmission of monumental notions, are not borne out in the parts of the "rationale" that deal with methodology. Students will be encouraged to "critically analyze sources", "consider context" and "respect and explain different perspectives" (Australian Curriculum: History). Historical enquiry will follow a "structure" through which the "concepts of evidence, continuity and change, cause and effect, significance, perspectives, empathy and contestability [are] integral to the development of historical understanding" (Australian Curriculum: History). The narrative of the curriculum may have been arranged around the ideologically influenced objective of constituting a particular Australian identity, but if the curriculum's methodological prescriptions are applied, that content will be delivered to students who are able to apply critical scrutiny and evaluate perspectives on contested issues. Still, the question remains as to whether Australian Curriculum: History provides enough of a range of "evidence" and "perspectives" to sufficiently represent historical realities and develop political understandings.

In his introductory statement on the "rationale" of Australian Curriculum: History Stuart Macintyre describes it as a "carefully planned curriculum, which avoids repetition, which builds on previous study, which is systematic and sequential" (Australian Curriculum: History). Across the middle school Years of 7 – 10 students will study world history chronologically from the ancient world in Year 7 to the medieval and early modern worlds in Year 8 through the revolutionary era of 1750 – 1918 to in Year 9 to the 1918 to the present in Year 10. Each of these epochs will be analyzed through questions of broad historical significance that stimulate analytical inquiry: for example, "What have been the legacies of ancient societies?" or "How did new ideas and technological developments contribute to change in this period?" Each is split into approximately three phases in which schools may elect to study particular depth studies. These depth studies are each subject to the analysis of the key concepts of "evidence, continuity and change, cause and effect, significance, perspectives, empathy and contestability".

The first stage of Year 7's study of the ancient world involves an introduction to the methodology of history with particular regard to the use of sources to make inferences. This is to be pursued with reference to archaeological inquiries into ancient societies (particularly ancient Australian societies). The second stage is the "Mediterranean World", in which schools might select one of three possible depth studies from Egypt,

Greece or Rome. Each ancient society is analyzed in terms of “the physical features” that “influenced the civilisation that developed there”, “key groups” in society, the influence of “religion and law”, “beliefs values and practices” with a particular emphasis on one of “everyday life, warfare, or death and funerary customs”, “contacts and conflicts” with other societies and a “significant individual” (for example Ramses II, Pericles or Augustus). There is opportunity here for comprehensive and enriching understandings of life in the ancient world but there are also key limitations. In alignment with the ‘new critical’ approach political history has been decentered in favor of social history: “beliefs, values and practices” are identified but these are to be analyzed within aspects of social and cultural domains of “everyday life, warfare, or death and funerary customs”. Apart from being implicit in the prescription for the study of “religion and law” -- mechanisms through which politics were practiced -- there is no prescription for the study of political institutions and practices. It would be widely agreed that an essential starting point for any understanding of the evolution of liberal democracy would be through the study of its antecedents in Ancient Greece. This might logically be followed by attention to their adaptation in the Roman Republic, thus forming the type of “systematic and sequential” study of a key theme that Stuart Macintyre encourages. Instead, in making the study of Greece and Rome elective, and the study of political aspects of any of the three ancient Mediterranean societies implicit, the opportunity for students to develop understandings of democracy’s antecedents is diminished. The third stage of Year 7 involves the study of either ancient India or China. Very similar social history focused prescriptions are to be followed with either of these. While key socio-political figures such as Ashoka and Confucius might be studied as “significant individuals”, there is no explicit requirement to analyze their distinctive political influence, nor compare and contrast their actions and legacies with those of significant Greek and Roman individuals like Pericles or Julius Caesar.

The scope for the study of the political is somewhat expanded in the “Ancient to modern world” course for Year 8. The first of three stages involves the selection of one of the Ottoman Empire, Renaissance Italy, the Vikings or Medieval Europe. Here the political is more explicitly dealt with as these societies are studied in terms of their “social, cultural, economic and *political* achievements”, “significant developments and/or cultural achievements” and “relationships between rulers and the ruled”. These prescriptions offer opportunities to study social organization under feudal societies, perhaps the “achievement” of the Magna Carta or the “development” of the Renaissance as a part of an emerging liberal tradition in Europe (in continuity with previous studies of Ancient Greece for example). But again, as Renaissance Italy and Medieval Europe are electives and indeed mutually exclusive (as only one can be chosen), it is also possible that students will miss out on this type of cumulatively developed understanding. The second stage of Year 8 involves a choice of the study of the Angkor/Khmer Empire, Japan under the Shoguns or the Polynesian expansion across Oceania. These are approached in the manner of a rise and decline of empires framework and reflect the cross curriculum priority of “Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia”. The third stage of Year 8 involves the choice of the “Mongol Expansion”, “The Black Death in Asia Europe and Africa” and/or “The Spanish Conquest of the Americas”. These are approached with an emphasis on the historic nature of transnational intercultural exchange that is constitutive of the multicultural present. These topics, and the analytical frames of their delivery, provide enriching learning opportunities but again mainly within the domain of education for cultural

awareness. It is quite feasible that a student might miss the Medieval Europe and Renaissance sections of Year 8, as they might the Roman and Greek sections of Year 7, and therefore any notion of the evolution the liberal tradition in these eras. In contrast it would not be possible for students to miss the study of Ancient Indigenous Australia, an Ancient Asian civilization, a medieval Asian society or an example of transnational intercultural exchange.

The study of history in Year 9, “The making of the modern world”, is similarly suggestive of the decentering of a liberal political tradition. The first of the three stages, “Making a better world”, involves the selection of one of the “Industrial Revolution” (1750-1914), “Progressive ideas and movements (1750-1918)” and “Movement of peoples” (1750-1901). The former focuses on changes to technology, demographics and changing ways of the life. The latter emphasizes the movements of peoples that were stimulated by the Industrial Revolution through migration, the settlement of new territories and the slave trade. “The Progressive ideas and movements” section prescribes the study of, “the emergence and nature of key ideas in the period, with a particular focus on ONE of the following: capitalism, socialism, egalitarianism, nationalism, imperialism, Darwinism, Chartism” (Australian Curriculum: History). They are to be analyzed for the context of their emergence and short and long term impacts. While there is the opportunity for rich evaluation of each of these “progressive ideas”, none of them can be considered directly antecedent to Australia’s contemporary political culture in the way that liberalism was (although egalitarianism, socialism and capitalism were all influential).

In the second stage of Year 9, “Asia and Australia” (1750-1918), schools choose between two possibilities: “Asia and the World” and “Making a Nation”. In the former, one Asian society is studied in terms of its “social, cultural, economic and political features”, the ways in which it was subject to transnational influences and aspects of “continuity and change” that effected its development. In studying “Making a Nation” (Australian Curriculum: History) students will examine:

- The extension of settlement, including the effects of contact (intended and unintended) between European settlers in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples
- Experiences of non-Europeans in Australia prior to the 1900s (such as the Japanese, Chinese, South Sea Islanders, Afghans)
- Living and working conditions in Australia around the turn of the twentieth century (that is 1900)
- Key people, events and ideas in the development of Australian self-government and democracy, including, the role of founders, key features of constitutional development, the importance of British and Western influences in the formation of Australia’s system of government and women’s voting rights Laws made by federal Parliament between 1901-1914 including the Harvester Judgment, pensions, and the Immigration Restriction Act

This is one of the phases of Australian Curriculum: History that most explicitly communicates a national narrative. In its treatment of the nineteenth century the narrative is consistent with the ‘new critical’ school. Typical of this approach -- and a necessary focus of any comprehensive approach to nineteenth century Australian history -- is the study of the “effects of contact” between of Aborigines and Torres Strait

Islanders. Also prioritized are the experiences of “non-Australians” and social history (“living and working conditions”). Moreover, there is a decentering of the history of European inhabitants whose “experiences” are not explicitly prescribed like those of non-Europeans. The development of a narrative surrounding the continuities and changes affecting the majority of the colonies’ early population and the emerging distinctiveness of their culture is thus unavailable. Having said this, Australia’s European heritage is prioritized in the point regarding “the importance of British and Western influences in the formation of Australia’s system of government”. It is this section, presumably designed to support understandings of Federation and the extension of suffrage to women that provides the curriculum’s most explicit focus on Australia’s political development.

The choice of “Making a Nation” is, however, optional. It is conceivable that if the “Asia” component is chosen students may never study the Federation of Australia and its founding political institutions. Further, having quite possibly missed the relevant political antecedents in the ancient Mediterranean, medieval and early modern Europe, these developments could easily seem dry and meaningless due to a lack of a cumulatively developed sense of politico-historical context. There is a perception that the founding of Australia as a political entity is a “boring” topic that can be dealt with quickly before devoting more time to addressing the third stage of Year 9 -- a topic which exerts a greater level of fascination with its complex web of causation, horrific battlefield conditions and revolutionary resolution: “World War One”. Here students may develop enriched understandings of the national identity through “debates about the nature and significance of the Anzac legend” (Australian Curriculum: History) and perhaps an opportunity to compare Australia’s political culture with those of the war’s other major combatants, but the opportunities to develop useful political understandings are relatively limited.

Year 10 sees a focus on “The modern world and Australia”. Here the curriculum seeks to examine “a critical period in Australia’s social, cultural, economic and political development ... during a time of political turmoil, global conflict and international cooperation” (Australian Curriculum: History). The first stage is a compulsory analysis of the causes, course, key phases and social, diplomatic, geostrategic and humanitarian impacts of World War Two. Opportunities to develop political understandings might reside in the emergence of dictatorships, communism and fascism and restrictions of freedoms within democracies during the war, although only the latter is made explicit in the curriculum’s prescriptions. The second phase, “Rights and freedoms (1945 – the present)” addresses the manner in which “rights and freedoms have been ignored, demanded or achieved in Australia and in the broader world context” (Australian Curriculum: History). This phase presents a narrative of the gradual attainment rights of Aboriginal Australians in relation to the Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the US civil rights movement. This phase is clearly reflective of the ‘new critical’ school in its emphasis on the previously marginalized history of a traditionally oppressed group. It is constitutive of students’ political understandings as it prescribes in depth understandings of human rights and the electoral and constitutional means by which Aborigines attained equal legal status. It is constitutive of progressive multicultural worldview as it asserts a narrative of the eventual success of a minority group through the gradual delegitimizing of ethno-nationalist policies, practices and attitudes. The third phase of Year 10, “The Globalizing World” topic, sees the

opportunity for the re-enforcement of this narrative through the study of “the waves of post-World War II migration to Australia” and “abolition of the White Australia Policy”. In this way, the “Rights and Freedoms” and “Migration Experiences” form complimentary parts of the progressive multi-cultural narrative in their account of the erosion of racial exclusivism towards Aborigines and non-Whites, towards a tolerant, harmonious present. Combined with “Making a Nation” topic of Year 9 a comprehensive account of non-European national histories is provided. Students indeed have the opportunity to develop complex understandings of Australia’s history of cultural diversity.

But typical of the ‘new critical’ approach, the history of the majority Anglo-Celtic demographic is largely displaced, even absented -- the other two options in phase three are “Popular culture” and the “Environmental movement”, both typically drawing attention to previously marginal discourses. It is through this marginalization of the mainstream of twentieth-century Australian history that many significant political and economic developments are virtually ignored. There is no prescription for the study of Australia’s major political parties or the post-war creation of the welfare state and its eventual reform under the Hawke and Keating governments, nor is there any focus on influential political leaders or continuities or changes in policy and constitutional interpretation over the century (as exemplified in the 1975 constitutional crisis). Students encounter politics through the “Rights and Freedoms” and “Migration Experiences” topics, but here politics are an instrument for the attainment and assertion of the rights of minorities rather than an instrument for the negotiation of the socio-economic conditions that might affect the majority of citizens. The former function is of course important, but it is prioritized to an extent which the average young citizen will have no historicized understanding of significant mainstream political developments since Federation.

Despite this conscious neglect of the European strand in the national narrative, Australian Curriculum: History is successful in a number of ways. It provides a suitably interpretative methodology through which perspectives might be evaluated, significance might be judged, time and continuity assessed and a range of other analytical skills applied. It is a topical curriculum that responds to the super diversity of the present and future by developing complex historically constituted cultural understandings. In offering electives across most stages it allows schools to tailor curricula to their requirements – teachers might be able to create cumulatively developing narratives from the choices on offer: for example it would be possible to enrich democratic understandings through electing “Ancient Greece” in Year 7, the “Italian Renaissance” in Year 8 and egalitarianism as a “progressive idea” Year 9.

Having said this, many schools will not formulate cumulatively developing study of the liberal tradition in this manner. In explicitly identifying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island traditions, Asia and Sustainability as “cross curriculum” priorities schools are guided towards cumulatively developed understandings of Asian histories and historic intercultural interactions. It has been argued that knowledge and critical evaluation of the European antecedents of liberal democracy are useful as they might practically contribute to the maintenance and revitalization of Australia’s democratic political culture. Years 7-10 are the only years in which most Australians will formally study history and their encounters with aspects of the liberal political tradition will be largely

coincidental. The reality of Australian Curriculum: History is one of the decentering and at times absencing of the political and the European: political history has been decentered by social and cultural history; the histories of the European mainstream have been decentered those that were previously marginalized. While Australian students will be admirably culturally literate, Asia literate and knowledgeable of Aboriginal history, Europeans histories – whether those of Ancient Greece, Revolutionary France or mainstream twentieth century Australia – could become a realm of historical amnesia. This might not be so troubling if the practical implications were not so real. The institutions and ideas that are intrinsic to the nation's political, social and economic functionality are predominantly derived of European origins; to study and understand their history is to contribute towards their survival and, if necessary, reform. In this vein it might be argued that Australian Curriculum: History might prioritize a *recentering* of the nation's historical mainstream.

Debates over the re-evaluation of Australian Curriculum: History

The publication and widespread implementation of the curriculum since 2011 has not lessened the contestation surrounding it and its perceived constitutive value. It has been the subject of an inevitable backlash from members of the Liberal Party and academics of the traditional school.

In his Hasluck Lecture of 2012 Jon Howard addressed many of the key areas of conservative complaint. He contended that the curriculum had been right to emphasize Indigenous and Asian experiences but had overcompensated in this regard:

The curriculum does not properly reflect the undoubted fact that Australia is part of western civilization The laudable goals of enhancing the teaching of indigenous and Asian history could have been fully achieved by the curriculum's authors without relegating or virtually eliminating the study of influences vital to a proper understanding of who we are as a people and where we came from.

That a Western political heritage was integral in the formation of modern Australia:

The Western liberal tradition continues to infuse our public life. We have been quite clever with our legacy. In building our egalitarian society, we took the good bits - we took the rule of law; we took the parliamentary system; we took the freedom of the press; we took an essentially civil approach to political differences and political discourse - but we rejected class distinction and needless barriers to social mobility.

That absencing of Australia's British heritage from the curriculum compromises an accurate understanding of Australian history:

How these institutions developed and the individual and community struggles involved, is our history as much as it is British history. We cannot know the modern Australia well without having a proper understanding of the British story.

That cultural and social histories have been overemphasized at the expense of political and economic histories of the late twentieth century:

Those who wrote this curriculum, in their infinite wisdom, believed that ACDC and Kylie Minogue are more important to an understanding of the globalizing world since 1945.

That Australian history is optional:

The curriculum returns to Australian history in Year 9, under the heading of Making a Better World (1750 – 1914). Yet, incredibly, students will not be required to study Australian history in depth for that period because such a study is offered only as an alternative to a depth study of an Asian country.

That the decentering of the west from the curriculum's national narrative is symptomatic of postmodern cynicism:

That our Western heritage appears to be so conspicuously absent from the history curriculum reflects a growing retreat from self-belief in Western civilisation. It is as if the West must always play the villain simply because it has tended to enjoy more power and economic success than other parts of the world since 1500.

In line with these views a reevaluation of Australian Curriculum: History was soon promoted by the Liberal Party. During campaigning before his election as Prime Minister, Tony Abbott claimed that the curriculum had been politicized in its “lack of references to our heritage other than an indigenous heritage” and emphasis on a left wing political tradition (Abbott 2013). Soon after the Abbott government won power in September 2013 the Education Minister Christopher Pyne commissioned a formal review of the Australian Curriculum in January 2014. In employing two prominent conservatives in Kevin Donnelly and Ken Wiltshire to oversee the process this review was seen as a means of regaining a measure of control over the national narrative by imbuing it with elements favorable to the conservative coalition (Cullen 2014). Donnelly and Wiltshire had publicly recorded disdain for the curriculum -- “aspects of the compulsory history curriculum read more like a cultural-left manifesto than a balanced and rational view of history as a discipline” (Donnelly 2011) -- and had long aligned themselves with the traditional view of the centrality of Western Civilization in Australian history (Donnelly 2015).

The review referred to “a number” of submissions in collating its recommendations. Many, including those of the spokespersons for the History Teachers' Associations of Australia, Victoria and New South Wales, reported that the curriculum had met with positive responses from teachers and students and that its contents were representative and its methodology suitable. Some submissions, however, raised concerns over the marginalization of European experiences with particular reference to the diminution of significance of Christianity as a formative influence. In this vein, the Curriculum Review recommends a predictable realignment towards the Liberal Party's conception of a national narrative: “Western civilisation and Australia's Judeo-Christian heritage” ought to be properly recognized; “disconnected, episodic historical developments” should be linked more coherently within “an overall conceptual narrative”; Australian

history should be more comprehensively studied and “the strengths and weaknesses and the positives and negatives of both Western and Indigenous cultures and histories” require more balanced attention (Australian Government 2014).

Naturally, the Curriculum Review raised the ire of prominent progressives. Tony Taylor continued his critique of the ‘didacticism’ of the Liberal historical project, claiming again that it seeks to indoctrinate rather than encourage enquiry and critical evaluation (2013b). For Taylor, complimentary to this uncritical transmission is the use of history as a celebration rather than a critical examination of the past: “When it comes to the “achievements” of Western civilization, we are heading towards celebration rather than investigation which is not the role of a historical inquiry even at school level” (2014b). Similarly inappropriate is “the startling element of religiosity that has entered the discussion” (Tony Taylor 2014b), implying that the “religious right” seeks to commandeer the curriculum as a forum for proselytizing: “history is not about developing “spirituality” which is based on revelation, unless it investigates the spiritual as an historical phenomenon” (Tony Taylor 2014b). Another typical progressive critique surrounds curriculum as a forum for the revitalization of European cultural chauvinism. In her response to the Curriculum, Queensland University of Technology academic Deborah Henderson claimed “any pluralist would recognize that that one interpretation of civilization and its heritage should stand equally alongside any other” (Henderson in Donnelly 2014).

These progressive critiques are instructive in emphasizing continuing problems with the conservative agenda for the Australian Curriculum: History and, by extension, the shape of the national narrative. Despite years of pointed critique, conservatives persist in presenting “Western Civilization” and the “Judeo-Christian heritage” as items in a program of indoctrination in a manner that might be suitable within the educational philosophy that prevailed in the nineteenth century. While it is associated with this apparently doctrinaire project, the appropriate recentering of the liberal political tradition in history will be unappealing to moderate curriculum planners. Further, by selecting figures like Donnelly and Wiltshire with their conspicuously conservative worldviews and previous Liberal Party associations (SBS 2014a, SBS 2014b) the Review is open to accusations of politicization and ‘hijacking’ education for political purposes (Tony Taylor 2013b).

However, the claim that “only one side is fighting the curriculum wars” is also questionable (Tony Taylor 2013b). The manner in which the Australian Curriculum: History neatly fits the progressive national narrative -- being constitutive of a notion of unproblematic progress towards a multicultural present -- has been discussed above. Yet progressives seem unwilling to genuinely consider critiques of this politicized narrative. A typical progressive retaliation will conflate calls for increased emphasis on ‘Western Civilisation’ with cultural chauvinism and denial of the excesses of colonial history. While these sentiments do exist on the conservative side they still do not justify the near absenting of the European heritage from the curriculum. The chauvinist/colonialist accusation serves to denounce valid counter suggestions and stifle discussion before it begins. Another typical defense of the progressive project rests on the basis that all cultures are deserving of equal attention apart from marginalized cultures that are deserving of compensatory attention due to their historic oppression. The latter motive is valid in a project of cultural regeneration and rights promotion but not to the extent that the large portion of nation’s historical reality, and

indeed the histories of the majority of Australians are decentered as a result. It is from these progressive positions that salient critiques of the curriculum are denigrated as ethnocentric, diminishing the possibility of an informed reevaluation.

It is conceivable that Australian Curriculum: History may achieve a suitable balance somewhere between the multiculturalist and western imperatives of the parties that contest it. But that might only be possible through an ongoing process of partisan campaigning, election, politically motivated review and adjustment, not through rigorous discussions between a range of experts. In this case, history education will continue to endure its misappropriation as a tool for gaining advantage within a declining political culture.

CONCLUSION

This study has characterized Australian Curriculum: History as a symptom of and, in some sense, a cause of a political malaise. The curriculum has been described as an outcome of contestation that began within the discipline of history and spread into cultural politics and educational policies of Australia's two major parties. While the influence of the machinations of party politics has been emphasized here, it should be noted that other factors contributed to the curriculum's eventual shape. Discussions over the Australian Curriculum took place within a complex political ecosystem made up of multiple actors and institutions. Further studies might direct attention to the influence of state governments, policy makers, state curriculum agencies and other stakeholders.

This paper has also contended that political understandings of future citizens would benefit from a heightened emphasis on politics in the history curriculum. At the same time, it has been critical of conservative project of recentering the West's liberal tradition as an effort to uncritically transmit a celebration of Australia's European heritage. Further studies might explore methods of developing historicized understandings of concepts of democracy, pluralism and liberalism in an interpretative manner, avoiding a doctrinaire approach.

Moreover, the remit of history education might be prioritized as a subject of critical attention. What should be the curriculum's foci and how might they be determined? On what basis should selections of its cultural, political, national or international content be judged? What type of balance between the "antiquarian", the "monumental" and the "critical" (Nietzsche 1876) is suitable? It might justifiably be asked whether it is ethical to utilize history education for its constitutive potential in the first place. We might recall Arthur Marwick's claim that "history is a scholarly, not a political activity", that "most historians are motivated by the urge to find out" (2015). It can be observed that in the hands of state education this commitment to objectivity has often been overlooked. Australian history education has come to embody some of the dysfunction of the political conditions that surround it.

Indeed, political theory (Mill 1859, Crouch 2000, Crick 1962, Mouffe 2005) and contemporary political practice remind us that we have a tenuous grasp on the practice of democratic politics. These politics have emerged relatively recently from an illiberal past. They exist in a fragile equilibrium that rests on the free expression of a plurality of interests, a willingness to reconcile inevitable differences and a populace that is well informed about the practices and institutions through which interests are negotiated. In the event of the degeneration of these institutions and practices we may be moving towards an illiberal future.

It has been argued that aspects of the contemporary political environment in Australia might facilitate this type of decline. Many have observed a degradation in the quality of political discussion. Communication between government and the governed is increasingly filtered through media that reduce policy and ideas to sound bites and slogans. Political parties employ marketers to 'package' their message. Where citizens would be better informed through access to the full complexity of the key issues they receive trivial and commercialized political information from the popular media. Disillusioned by the inanity of political discourse and the accompanying decline in

respect for the political class citizens withdraw into apathy, hostility or subversion of the political mainstream.

In order to stimulate the interest of these disillusioned voters and retain of their traditional support bases, the Liberal and Labor parties have attempted to undermine each other's policies and propagate the benefits of their own. They have communicated through a totalizing rhetoric in which their agendas are conferred absolute beneficence and those of their opponents, inevitable disadvantage. This has modeled and disseminated a national tendency to predicate tribal loyalty, rather than the open-minded appraisal of evidence, as the criterion upon which political judgments are made. Not only does this oppositional discourse simplify the complexities of socio-economic issues within the parties' limited ideological outlooks, it limits citizens' abilities to comprehend those complexities by pressuring them towards an ideological, rather than a political, way of thinking.

It is within such a malaise that history education might provide a useful antidote: education has long been seen as an important constitutive agent in forming a democratic disposition; history education, particularly, has been formative of contemporary identities based on shared notions of national histories; history education in Australian schools has the potential to instill developed political understandings.

Evidence suggests, however, that history education has not been utilized as an antidote to a perceived political malaise, but that it has co-opted into its perpetuation. Since the 1950s Australian history itself has seen a polarization of perspective, between a 'new critical' school, which has critiqued the outcomes of European settlement and emphasized previously marginalized histories, and a traditional school which has defended the European presence. This historiographical debate was integrated into the policies of the Liberal and Labor Parties who sought to influence the shape of national conceptions of identity through typically oppositional versions of the national narrative. By extension, history curricula became a forum for this debate. The form of the Australia's first national history curriculum was the subject of intense contestation between the political parties and allied historians and thinkers.

The subject of contestation was the form of the contemporary Australian identity, historically constituted. To the conservatives this was characterized by an uncertain, culturally diversifying present that might be ordered and united through common appreciation of beneficial heritage in a liberal western tradition. The progressives saw a historical narrative of colonial exploitation and racial exclusivism that had found gradual resolution through the emergence of an ideal multiculturalism. Both were influenced by broader ideological motivations to "harmonize" popular attitudes around unitary notions – Western Civilization or multiculturalism – of national achievement.

Due to the left gaining more influence in its development by 2007, Australian Curriculum: History presents a progressive national narrative. In guaranteeing the study of the histories Asia, Indigenous Australia and the intercultural interactions of peoples it prioritizes the formation of historicized cultural literacies in young Australians. However, in doing so it decenters and at times absents the significant European antecedents. Students are not guaranteed historical understandings of the origins Australia's liberal democracy in Ancient Greece, medieval and early modern Europe or even in nineteenth and twentieth century Australia. In line with the "new critical"

approach cultural and social histories have been prioritized over the political. The curriculum's implementation has been met with debate over its suitability – the new Coalition government has recommended a recentering of the west through a Curriculum Review. Progressives have defended the core tenets of the curriculum decried its continuing politicization.

Thus, developments in history education have been symptomatic of a political malaise rather than performing a more desirable function as an antidote to it. In this vein, with its cultural pre-occupations and marginalization of the political, Australian Curriculum: History might be seen as another element in the nation's political decline. In the means of its creation and the contents of its final form it is a reflection of the political conditions of its time: symbolic of interparty antagonism, ideological and indifferent to politics. Where history education might be constitutive of complex political understandings, Australian Curriculum: History is largely apolitical. In 1974 WEH Stanner identified a "cult of forgetfulness" in reference to Australians' attitudes towards Aboriginal histories. Might that description be suitable today, when discussing political history?

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