# Settler Colonialism, Multiculturalism and the Politics of Postcolonial Identity

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# Settler Colonialism, Multiculturalism and the Politics of Postcolonial Identity[1]

In this paper I explore the politics of national identity in settler states, with particular reference to settler colonial and multicultural ideologies of national identity in Australia. My starting point is the idea that discourses of national identity are powerful in settler colonial polities and, moreover, that discourses of national identity have significant implications for the operation and influence of more general ideologies about the world and politics and for the implementation of policy.

This paper has four main sections. In the first section I outline the challenges of constructing national identities in settler colonial states. I make the case that recent political disputes over understandings of national identity in Australia have centred on competing ideologies of national identity. The two most important of these ideologies can be broadly classified as settler colonialism and multiculturalism. The second and third sections of the paper map the core belief systems and policy implications of settler colonial and multicultural ideologies of national identity. These sections clarify the underlying values or assumptions of these ideological positions and their roles in political debate.

In the final section of this paper I make the normative claim that national identity should be based on postcolonial notions of identity rather than upon settler colonial principles. I use a concept of postcolonial identity to evaluate the politics and ideologies of identity in Australia. In particular, I argue in this section that settler colonial ideologies are problematic because they provide a justification for both coercive and colonial forms of politics between settler and indigenous citizens. An attempt to develop postcolonial identities, on the other hand, opens up a sphere for interrogating and challenging simplistic notions of identity and for initiating debate over visions for the nation's future.

## *National Identity and the Settler Colonial State*

The most important ideologies of national identity in the Australian situation operate in the context of Australia's settler colonial history. Australia is a state which has institutionalised and normalised settler colonial norms. It is, therefore, able to be described as a settler colonial state and faces the challenges of constructing national identities within the context of a frequently invisible commitment to settler colonialism. In this section of the paper I describe and contrast two important ideologies of national identity in the Australian context: settler colonialism and multiculturalism. But first I will clarify what I mean by the settler colonial state and ideologies of national identity.

A state is a settler state when settler colonial forms of politics are its normal basis for evaluating political ideas and administering policy. My use of the notion of a settler

colonial state is, therefore, one that is based not just on historical description but also on the usefulness of the category of settler colonial state as an analytical or explanatory concept. In other words, Australia can be understood as a settler colonial state because it has a history of settlement and colonisation but also, and more importantly, because its politics and governance continues to be substantially based on settler colonial institutions and ideas. A depiction of a state as settler colonial does not necessarily exclude the depiction of that same state in other ways. For example, many settler colonial states, including the United States, Canada and New Zealand would more commonly be described as liberal democratic states. A discussion of how settler colonial and liberal democratic politics might be related is discussed later in this paper.

Settler colonialism is a form of politics which generally has both structural and ideological elements. The institutional and economic structures of the settler colonial state are reinforced, constructed and legitimated by ideology or discourses about identity. Structural aspects of a settler colonial politics include the replacement of indigenous forms of economics, society and politics with those of the settler group. This is most apparent in laws of land and property ownership and the privileging of settler forms of government. Settler colonialism can therefore be distinguished from imperial activities designed to secure access to the markets and merchandise of other civilisations (McMichael 1984, 8-9; Johnson 2003, 59-63). The ideological aspects of a settler colonial politics justify the decline, elimination or assimilation of indigenous populations (Pearson 2001; Veracini 2007; Wolfe 1999).

In a settler colonial state, ideology, discourse and argument are the most effective tools of indigenous people. Indigenous people can rarely use economic tools – such as a threat to withdraw labour – as leverage for political purposes as their labour is superfluous to the economy. In these situations ideology is frequently the best tool with which to influence the settler state (Wolfe 1999, 2-3). Discourses of national identity are particularly important because official and public understandings of national identity can influence the political direction of a state and the vision for the future. The ability of indigenous people to resist assimilation usually relies on their ability to challenge settler colonial ideologies of national, settler and indigenous identity.

The ultimate goal of an ideology of national identity is to institutionalise a particular conception of national identity and to develop a sense of national identity as immutable and unchanging. However, in reality national identity is a site of considerable and frequent contestation in both settler colonial and non-settler states. There is generally little room for compromise over competing visions of the national character because national identities can be used in powerful and strategic ways to construct and legitimate the political system and to legitimate the views and actions of particular actors. In relation to the political system, narratives of national identity explain and justify particular forms of privilege and particular policy programs. It is therefore unsurprising that national identities are frequently a site of ideological or discursive conflict.

In a settler colonial state, conceptions of national identity might be considered to be particularly open to contestation. National identity is usually conceptualised as a form

of identity or character which has survived intact across history and which provides strong connections to like-minded nationalists of the past (Anderson 1991, 204-206). However the need for a sense of continuous national character is problematic for a settler colonial state. These states have trouble imagining itself as 'natural' or historical because their origins are fixed in time (i.e. at the commencement of settlement) whereas many nations can draw on a history of imagined continuity stretching back to antiquity.[2] For the settler state the 'antiquity' of national appeal must be based on either the colonial settling power or indigenous society, but there are feelings of ambiguity about claiming either of these histories as the foundation of the national character. For example, recent republican sentiments in Australia have emphasised the incompatibility of the (long accepted) dual British/Australian identity. Similarly, the adoption of indigenous foundations for national identity are also problematic because only a small number of people claim indigenous heritage and because the institutions of Australian society and government are overtly settler rather than indigenous.

The settler colonial state is, therefore, a system in which ideologies of national identity are likely to be important and also seriously contested. In the remainder of this paper I draw on the Australian case and consider two broad ideological groupings of Australian national identity. The first of these ideologies of national identity is the ideology of settler colonialism whilst the second is the ideology of multiculturalism.[3] Settler colonial and multicultural ideologies have competed in the Australian public sphere in an attempt to become the normal form of political interaction and national identity. Moreover, different federal governments have endorsed different directions in national identity. The Labor governments of Bob Hawke and Paul Keating (1983-96) emphasised multiculturalism. In contrast, the Liberal-National coalition government under John Howard (1996-) was less enamoured of multicultural visions of national identity and sought to dismantle multiculturalism as official policy. The beliefs, narratives and policy implications of these two ideologies of national identity are discussed below.

## *Settler Colonial National Identities*

Settler colonialism is an example of an institutionalised or normalised (and therefore mostly invisible) ideology of national identity. Settler colonial ideologies have significant similarities to ideologies of whiteness in the Australian context.[4] White people are able to define whiteness as normality and to position themselves as full citizens whilst pushing non-white people (including migrants and indigenous people) to the margins or even outside of the boundaries of citizenship. Whiteness is largely an unconscious and invisible form of identity. However, it authorizes white people to

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[2] Settler states may, however, be among the older of states in political terms. The Australian political system is now more than a century old and therefore older than the state structures of many of the decolonised states of Southeast Asia and Africa, for example.
[3] Categorising any collection of ideas into ideologies is in some ways an artificial process as the real use of ideas rarely resembles academic theories about 'ideology'. However, I hope this process is justified by the explanatory value of considering ideas about national identity in the context of settler colonial and multicultural ideology.
[4] Here I draw on the field of whiteness studies which considers the discursive use of the notion of whiteness in racial politics.

speak legitimately on behalf of the nation, to set the rules for the governance of the nation and even speak for and about non-white people (Moreton-Robinson 2001, 164, 2004, 208-211). Similarly, settler colonial ideologies of identity define settler colonial identities as normal and authorize the settler majority to define indigenous identity. I choose to use settler colonialism rather than whiteness as a description of national identity because I think it better expresses the merger of racial and cultural aspects that form part of the settler logic.

The state is frequently considered to be both a political and cultural entity, and is expected to provide a sense of cultural unity for its citizens (Kumar 2006, 1). In the settler situation, this cultural unity is achieved by emphasising the settler foundations of the state and denigrating indigenous understandings of national identity. Australian perceptions of nationhood have shifted from a concern with biological or racial nationhood in the White Australia policies of the early twentieth centuries to a more recent understanding of national cohesion as one based on cultural solidarity (Moran 2005, 170-172, 178). The main goals of this settler colonial ideology have been to maintain the distinction in Australian politics between settler and the indigenous or non-white other. When the distinction between settler and 'other' is maintained then multicultural or indigenous contributions to Australian discussions are considered as the contributions of self-interested outsiders rather than as legitimate Australian viewpoints. The citizenship of indigenous Australians is marginalised and the authority of white settler Australia to speak for and govern indigenous people is reaffirmed.

Settler colonial ideologies rely upon a number of assumptions or beliefs about indigenous inferiority and settler superiority. During the nineteenth century, depictions of indigenous people emphasised the racial inferiority and primitiveness of indigenous people and discourses predicting the inevitable extinction of the aboriginal race became popular. 'Extinction' theories are a frequent aspect of settler colonial ideology and have often manifested themselves as rather romantic descriptions of indigenous peoples as 'the dying race' and 'the last of his tribe' (Wolfe 1999, 3). In the Australian case, indigenous people were expected to either be bred out through interbreeding with white people or to naturally succumb because of biological inferiority and an inability to function in the modern (settler) world (Moran 2005, 169; McGregor 2007, 163; Trainor 1994, 82).

Settler colonial ideologies update colonialism for the late twentieth and early twenty-first century by using arguments about culture as well as race. Arguments about racial extinction have been mostly replaced by culture-based arguments about indigenous inability to adapt to modern Australian life. Negative representations of indigenous culture as hopeless and inadaptable and indigenous governance or management as prone to failure and corruption are key features of settler colonial discourse. These representations of indigenous identity lend authenticity to stereotypes of indigenous people as stupid, lazy, irresponsible, untrustworthy, primitive and degenerate (Stokes 1997, 165). Maintaining a dichotomy between settlers and indigenous people remains a crucial part of any settler political discourse because the 'failure' of indigenous people acts as a counterpoint to and affirmation of the superiority of settler society (Wolfe 2006, 389)

Settler colonial ideologies of national identity draw on colonial understandings of settler and indigenous identity to develop a narrative of Australian history and a narrative of the 'natural' future of the Australian state. The 'quasi-mythical' settler narrative of national identity justifies the settler colonial state by characterising the settlement of Australia as a peaceful and unopposed process (Veracini 2006, 139, 443-447). If the settlement of Australia is understood by Australians as a peaceful process, then indigenous claims for compensation or justice can be depicted as unreasonable and greedy. Moreover, if the process of settlement was unopposed, than it would be possible to make the argument that indigenous people consented to being incorporated into the Australian nation and benefited from the process.

The settler colonial vision of the future is one in which settler Australia achieves its destiny as an embodiment of the best of the Old World of Europe and a bastion of liberal democracy. As I mentioned above, settler colonial states must resolve the feeling of ambiguity they have towards the colonial power that established them. The Australian settler colonial narrative achieves this by emphasising Australia's British heritage but arguing that the Australian landscape and settler condition bring out especially heroic attributes. The settler colonial narrative can acknowledge Britishness but emphasises the unique strength of the settler spirit in narratives of Australian pioneers who battle against the alien forces of Australian land and weather (Curthoys 1997, 120). This draws on early twentieth century depiction of nationhood as simultaneously British and Australian and on the role of Australia as a trustee of British civilisation in the Pacific (Meaney 2003, 132-133; Curran 2004, 4-6). The idea of the "Aussie Battler" has been used in recent times by Prime Minister John Howard to refer to hard working Australians trying to improve themselves (Nicholson and Koutsoukis 2004). In the context of negative representations of indigenous Australians, Howard's 'battlers' probably refer to his main electoral base – settler Australians.

The settler colonial narrative of Australian destiny celebrates the British heritage of its majority population but is also expansive enough to incorporate many non-British migrants into its conception of national identity. It accomplishes this by using the idea of liberal democracy as a form of cultural identity. This has the strategic benefit of maintaining the sharp distinction between settler and indigenous Australians whilst simultaneously providing a method for the incorporation of non-British migrants into Australian citizenship. The concept of liberal democracy is not innately British so can be expansive in terms of accepting new migrants (including some non-white migrants) into notions of Australian liberal democratic citizenship and identity. However, the settler colonial use of this term includes connotations of liberal democracy as the product of centuries of western civilisation and progress and this can be quite exclusionary towards indigenous Australians. Indigenous culture and governance are frequently represented as primitive and corrupt and therefore the opposite of liberal democratic civilisation. The use of liberal democracy in the settler colonial context is used to reinforce the settler/indigenous dichotomy in Australian politics whilst simultaneously resolving some of the ambiguity about Australia's British heritage.

Settler colonial ideologies of national identity have implications for both national and indigenous policy. The argument that Australians are superior to indigenous people

and unique amongst other nations appeals to nationalist sentiments and can be used in a strategic way to gain electoral support for political leaders. John Howard's federal Liberal/National government frequently uses settler colonial assumptions about indigeneity in a strategic way.  The assimilatory policies of the Howard Government have been well documented and are beyond the scope of this paper (for example see: Dodson 2004). However, it is worth observing the recent strategic use of ideologies of Aboriginal cultural dysfunction to justify colonial policies. A recent press release from Mal Brough, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, responded to the *Little Children are Sacred* report on child abuse in the Northern Territory by describing Aboriginal communities as a 'crisis area' and the area of indigenous affairs as a 'national emergency'. The settler colonial intent of these comments was confirmed by the proposed policy responses; paternalistic welfare policy, the forced acquisition of leases on Aboriginal land, the abolition of the requirement of permits for non-indigenous access to Aboriginal land and prohibitions on alcohol and pornography (Brough 2007). The assumption that Aboriginal people need to assimilate into settler Australian culture to succeed is a belief in a form of cultural extinction (Wolfe 2006, 201-202).

A common problem for the settler colonial state is that decolonisation appears to be a step backwards rather than progress. The settler colonial vision for the future involves a continued colonisation and assimilation of indigenous people (Veracini 2007, 20). Negative representations of indigenous people can be used to justify this assimilation. For example, a 2006 report from the Menzies Centre blamed aboriginal culture for the poor performance of Aboriginal children at school and argued that schooling Aboriginal children in Aboriginal languages and living on remote communities on ancestral Aboriginal land was harmful to the wellbeing of children (Johns 2006, 22-26). By describing aboriginal culture as pre-literate and characterised by a poor work ethic the report reproduced settler colonial representations of indigenous people as primitive and lazy. The stance against aboriginal language and communities was strongly assimilatory.

Settler colonial ideologies of Australian national identity are powerful because they are often accepted as a matter of common sense within settler states. The invisible nature of settler colonial narratives of identity can also lead to the unwitting reproduction of these ideologies even where there is no strategic benefit for the actors involved. People who are working from a genuine position of good will towards indigenous Australian citizens can create colonial, coercive or paternalistic forms of policy as they have unknowingly absorbed colonial descriptions of indigeneity as 'fact'. The next section of this paper contrasts the settler colonial ideologies of national identity with multicultural ideologies of national identity.


### *Multicultural National Identities*


Multicultural ideologies of national identity sought to provide a different narrative of the 'natural' progression or development of the Australian state. They also attempted to reveal the often invisible assumptions of settler colonial ideologies of national identity as inequitable and unsuitable to a modern nation. Whereas settler colonial ideologies of national identity have generally been held unconsciously (no one self-

identifies as a settler colonist), multicultural ideas and policies were consciously supported, elaborated on and argued for by political elites and a wider policy community. In this paper I conceive of multicultural ideology in a broad sense to include pluralistic attitudes towards Aboriginal citizens as well as attitudes towards non-white/non-British migrants. An alternative approach to this paper would have been to explore the influence of discourses of Aboriginal self-determination and reconciliation. However I believe that multicultural ideologies have been more influential in the Australian situation and have come the closest to displacing settler colonial forms of ideology and national identity. Moreover, multicultural ideologies have frequently collapsed the rights of indigenous and migrant Australians into a general multicultural category and so it is sensible to use the concept in this way.

The development of multiculturalism as an ideology of national identity occurred in the context of changing norms in Australian society during the twentieth century. Australian policy in the first half of the twentieth century expected both Aboriginal people and immigrants to assimilate and take on the language, culture and religion of the British settler population. These 'White Australia' policies were a reflection of an ideological commitment to the development of a mono-racial national community (Collins 2000, 307-308; Evans 2004, 106-111). In the 1960s and 1970s Australia started to move away from a racially based conception of national identity and began incrementally dismantling White Australia policies. The removal of the Dictation Test from the Migration Act in 1958 was an early indication that restricting immigrants on the base of race and culture was becoming officially unacceptable. Moreover, important anti-discrimination laws came into operation. The first of these was in South Australia in 1966 and a federal Racial Discrimination Act made discrimination on racial grounds illegal in 1975 (Jupp 1989, 278-281). These developments and many others responded to a changing cultural demographic but also demonstrated a changing normative vision for Australian society and identity.

Many of the policies of White Australia could be said to have already been dismantled well before multiculturalism became a prominent ideology of national identity. The civic rights movements of African-Americans in the United States and indigenous people in Australia may have been important vehicles for this important shift away from racially based policies. In Australia, indigenous people led concerted campaigns for civil and indigenous rights. A successful referendum in 1967 resolved to count indigenous people in the national census and provide the Liberal federal government (rather than state governments) with the ability to enact laws for indigenous people (Stokes 1997, 164-167). Other successes for civil rights included the award of equal wages for aboriginal pastoralists in the Northern Territory in 1968 and the 1978 Land Rights Act in the Northern Territory. Across the second half of the twentieth century the Australian population shifted from a predominantly white British population to a population which includes significant non-British minorities. Australian census data demonstrates this demographic shift. In 1947 10% of Australians were born overseas but by 2005 this figure had risen to twenty four per cent. Most of these migrants emigrated from the United Kingdom and New Zealand but Italy, China, Vietnam, India and the Philippines are the next most common countries of birth (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007). It was in the context of these major demographic and policy shifts that multicultural ideologies of national identity became significant.

Multicultural ideologies of national identity are based on a belief that a diverse collation of cultural identities was beneficial to the Australian nation and that shared liberal democratic values were sufficient to provide a sense of shared Australian identity. Multiculturalism stated that cultural diversity was an asset to a democratic nation and that government policy needed to address the linguistic and cultural needs of migrant citizens on equity grounds (Lopez 2000, 3; Jupp 1989, 1). The vision of multiculturalism as a national identity and a face to present to the rest of the world was most strongly the programme of the Labor Party during the governments of Bob Hawke and Paul Keating. In 1987, during the government of Prime Minister Hawke, both an Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs and an Office for Multicultural Affairs were established (Jupp 1989, 278-281). In 1989 the Hawke government published an official statement of its support for multiculturalism in its National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia. An important aspect of this report was that official multiculturalism was considered a necessary response to the cultural diversity of Australian society (Office of Multicultural Affairs 1989, 1-5).

In accordance with a more pluralistic account of contemporary Australian identities, multicultural ideologies resulted in narratives of history which sought to emphasise the contributions of people from many backgrounds to building the Australian nation. The study of history has become heavily politicised as settler colonial narratives of peaceful settlement challenge – and are challenged by – multicultural histories of British migrants, non-British migrants and indigenous people. In recent decades historians have sought to document the survival of indigenous identities and cultures and have considered the adaptability and survival techniques of aboriginal people (Veracini 2006; Robbins 2007, 316-319). Much of the historical scholarship has been aimed at expanding the scope of historical experiences which are considered Australian and therefore have formed part of a multicultural politics.

The idea of liberal democracy was important to both settler colonial and multicultural ideologies of national identity but in very different ways. As I mentioned above, settler colonial ideologies considered liberal democracy to be an example of progress and a further example of how settler Australia was more civilised than indigenous Australia. In contrast, liberal democracy in the context of multicultural ideologies was a sort of basic standard for the cooperation of people of diverse backgrounds and cultures (Soutphommasane 2005, 402). The Prime Minister Paul Keating argued, for example, that Australians were committed to "… democracy, freedom, justice, fairness, our love of the land and our best institutions and traditions". However, "we should resist the temptation to say that one individual or group has a monopoly on these things" (Keating 1993). Liberal democracy was considered to be a widely applicable set of values for Australian political interaction but not the preserve of British Australians.

Multicultural ideologies of national identity had a number of implications for policy. Obviously immigration and migrant support policies were a key aspect of multiculturalism but there were also implications for foreign affairs and trade policy. Part of the vision of multicultural nationalism was for Australia to take its place in the Asia Pacific region. In one speech, for example, Prime Minister Bob Hawke emphasised the increasing role of Australia as part of Asia. He argued that

assertions that "Australia's future lies in Asia" had become common place but that finding Australia's "true place in Asia" would be one Australia's most important challenges (Hawke 1988, 3). Prime Minister Keating continued this vision of Australia's future when he acted as a driving force for the establishment of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC) in the early 1990s (National Archives of Australia 2007). The multicultural vision for Australian society was, therefore, a vision of pluralism and cultural diversity as the catalyst for economic growth and more intimate relations with Australia's Asia-Pacific neighbours.

Multicultural ideologies created both possibilities and limitations for the dismantling of settler colonial institutions in society and government.
The advantage of multicultural politics is that indigenous and migrant viewpoints, histories and ideas became more acceptable as part of Australian political discourse. The disadvantage, however, is that while the Keating and Hawke governments supported policies of indigenous self-determination the progress on these issues was slow. The political will may have existed. Prime Minister Keating's famous Redfern speech argued that it was

> …reasonable to say that if we can build a prosperous and remarkably harmonious multicultural society in Australia, surely we can find just solutions to the problems which beset the first Australians – the people to whom the most injustice was done" (Keating 1992).

But the politics of land rights, treaty and reparation for colonial policy seemed to be a greater challenge than expected and impeded by economic rationalist members of the Hawke-Keating ministries (see Foley 2007).

The ability of multiculturalism to address indigenous concerns depends on the degree to which notions of multicultural pluralism accept difference from the dominant culture. The practice of multiculturalism tends to privilege the settler culture and this is reflected in the structure of the society and political system (Seth 2001, 73-77). This is not to say that multiculturalism could not, in theory, address these issues. Canadian liberal Will Kymlicka, for example, has theorised about the need for special rights for indigenous and minority groups to provide equal protection for their freedoms in nation-building Western states (2004, 10-13). The politics of multiculturalism in the Australian situation is constrained by the circumstances of the settler colonial state and may not fulfil the full potential of multicultural theory.

Just as settler colonial ideologies of national identity seek to normalise key settler beliefs and narratives, multicultural ideologies sought to institutionalise multicultural visions of national identity. Towards the end of the Keating Labor government the original proponents of multicultural policy were advocating that the term be phased out of official use for varying reasons. These reasons ranged from a concern with the awkwardness and pompousness of multiculturalism as a term, to the belief that multiculturalism was such a success that policy was no longer required (Galligan and Roberts 2003, 10).  At least in part, the calls for a name change were based on attempts to rid multiculturalism of its elitist connotations and institutionalise its values in Australian policy communities and society.

***The Politics of Postcolonial Identity***

The main purpose of this paper has been to describe the competing ideologies of national identity in settler colonial Australia. The paper up to this point has treated settler colonial and multicultural ideas separately as part of its attempt to provide an analytical framework for looking at recent ideas of Australian national identity. It argued that settler colonial ideologies of national identity have sought to justify the historical settlement of Australia and the continued privileging of institutionalised forms of settler privilege. Multicultural politics, in contrast, have sought to challenge the centrality of whiteness and Britishness as the defining aspects of Australian political identity. In the remainder of the paper I attempt to consider how these ideologies of national identity relate to each other and the degree to which the politics of Australian identity might be described as a postcolonial form of politics.

In earlier sections of this paper I argued that ideologies about identity and national identity are heavily contested ideas within settler states. These ideologies contain elements of historically significant ideas about identity, Britishness and race, for example, but are essentially contemporary ideologies that are suited to the procedures of Australian politics in a postcolonial world. Globally, the rights of indigenous people have sparked considerable debate. For example, in September 2007 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples after several decades of debates over indigenous land rights, sovereignty, self-determination and rights to involvement in government (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs 2007; Stokes and Jull 2000, 67-68). The global discussion of indigenous rights and sovereignty has meant that justifications for colonial forms of government, such as those embodied in settler colonial ideologies of national identity, have had to become more sophisticated.

The four states who voted against the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – Australia, the United States, New Zealand and Canada – could all be considered settler colonial states (United Nations 2007, 2). These four countries considered that the declaration would provide too many rights to indigenous people and would clash with domestic laws on land rights and resource management (Hoge 2007). The Australian government's response to the declaration drew on settler colonial ideology and nationalist sentiment to ridicule the notion that the declaration could apply in an Australian context. Indigenous Affairs Minister, Mal Brough, for example argued that the declaration would privilege indigenous customary law over Australian law and would therefore enshrine "practices that are not acceptable in the modern world" (Nason and Franklin 2007). This sort of rhetoric emphasises the primitiveness of Aboriginal laws and governance and demonstrates the degree to which settler colonial ideologies are reproduced in political rhetoric. The concerns over land and property rights and rights to mining resources demonstrate that there are institutionalised and structural aspects of colonialism which underpin and reinforce settler colonial ideology and discourse.

A consideration of postcolonial arguments about identity and culture can provide further insight into the way that settler colonial ideologies reproduce discrimination and colonialism. Postcolonialism is a field which studies colonialism and colonial discourses. Settler colonialism can be shown to be part of a larger collection of

colonialisms around the world that function through ideology, representations of the colonised and exclusion from political processes. This field of postcolonial studies was shaped by Edward Said's concept of Orientalism. Said argued that discourse – including narratives and stories – were central to the production of the European concept of the orient. Western representations of the non-European people of the east were considered 'truth'. This form of truth became hegemonic and was a justification for the exploitation and colonial rule of non-European people. Most importantly, a series of dichotomies between the West (or Occidental) and the Orient laid the foundation for the construction of both imperial and, later, modern identities such as the nation-state (Hall 2000, 14-15). As I have demonstrated in my description of settler colonial ideologies in the Australian context, settler states form a dichotomy of identities by emphasising differences between settlers and indigenous people. The foundation of settler nationhood relies on differentiating the superior settler race or culture from the indigenous race or culture (See also Russell 2006, 2). This form of national identity becomes a process for reproducing colonial discourses and ideologies and fostering exclusion and discrimination against citizens whose presence or activities confront popular settler understandings of national identity.

The appeal of the settler/indigenous dichotomy has had implications for discussions of national identity in Australia. Most importantly, the multicultural agenda, as supported by the political elites of the Labor party, was the cause of fierce debates in the public sphere. In 1988 submissions to a government report demonstrated widespread distrust of multiculturalism, a concern that immigration to Australia would be divisive and a belief that immigrants would lack a proper commitment to Australia (Committee to Advise on Australia's Immigration Policy 1988, 2-3). This criticism of multiculturalism has its source in the concept of a nation as the expression of the political goals of a single race or culture and scepticism amongst the Australian community about moving towards plural understandings of national identity. However, it is worth noting that the 1988 report summarised submissions and may have provided a skewed sample of public opinion. In contradiction of the 1988 report, a 1996 survey found that 61% of people agreed with multiculturalism when it was defined as permitting migrants to become Australians without having to give up their own culture (National Multicultural Advisory Council 1999, 37).

Under the settler/indigenous dichotomy, migrants could be absorbed into a notion of settler Australia but the boundaries between settler and indigenous Australians were not really challenged. The preference for a cohesive national community is a sentiment to which conservative politicians such as John Howard have been able to appeal (Hage 1998, 19). Howard encapsulated the feeling that multiculturalism was unable to provide a sense of Australian unity in a 1988 speech when he argued that multiculturalism could not possibly be an '…all-embracing national cement' for Australia (SBS Television 1988). John Howard used the public ambivalence towards multiculturalism strategically to gain support for his leadership of the Liberal Party and to 'shatter' the cross-party consensus on the value of multiculturalism (Galligan and Roberts 2003, 9). Prime Minister John Howard's coalition has governed federally for eleven years and he and his ministers have employed settler colonial ideas more often than multicultural ideas during this time.

One of the practical challenges of multicultural ideas about national identity was to break the settler/indigenous dichotomy and develop more pluralised conceptions of what Australian identity might be. For many Australians of British heritage multiculturalism was seen only to apply to people who were 'ethnic' and was not a spontaneous expression of their personal identity. Whiteness and a British-Australian identity shape the lives and opportunities of settler Australians but this influence is invisible because much of Australia's legal, social and economic system institutionalises the culture of the majority settler population (Hage 1998, 18-21). Rather than break the settler/indigenous dichotomy, multiculturalism in practice tended to emphasise the differences between white Australians of British heritage and everyone else (migrants and indigenous people). This resulted in the grouping of indigenous and migrant people together under a banner of shared difference or 'otherness' from the settler population (Galligan and Roberts 2003, 7). It is true that migrant and indigenous Australians share some experiences in common. Both migrants and indigenous Australians need to operate daily in a white settler society. The classification of Aboriginal Australians as one of many multicultural groups downgrades their status by assuming Aboriginal people have no political rights beyond the rights of multicultural pluralism (Docker 1995, 409-413). This makes it difficult to secure indigenous rights to self-determination and land rights or to address the problems of colonialism.

My purpose in this paper, however, is not to be pessimistic about the possibility for a multicultural or postcolonial condition. My initial motivation for this paper was to consider how multicultural ideologies of national development were a very positive development in the context of the institutions of settler colonial Australian statehood. However, the need to develop an analytical framework for considering Australian ideas about national identity became apparent and ended up being the primary purpose of this paper. In the final paragraphs of this paper I would, however, like to contribute a few ideas about the role of multiculturalism in the development of a postcolonial politics of identity in Australia. These are by no means conclusive but rather a starting point for further research.

Firstly, I would argue that a multicultural politics can make incremental inroads against the settler/indigenous and settler/other dichotomy in Australian politics. These incremental changes are, I believe, necessary to the development of more postcolonial understandings of identity. Postcolonial theory argues that a postcolonial identity is one which emphasises plural and fluid forms of identity. Some postcolonial scholars have argued that rigid dichotomies between identities such as settler and indigenous are not only simplistic but also irrelevant to some people. Lynette Russell, for example, describes herself as both indigenous and non-indigenous and has considered what this 'third space' would look like (Russell 2006, 12-13). A significant theorist in this area is Homi K. Bhabha who has argued that cultural 'purity' is a false concept and that the third space – the space of cultural hybridity and fluidity – can be a productive space for developing new identities. From this perspective, a postcolonial narrative is one which can counter dominant discourses of national identity and avoid fixed notions of identity and citizenship

(Russell 2006, 3-4; Bhabha 1994, 36-39).[5] Earlier I mentioned that multiculturalism had not been able to completely break down dichotomous understandings of identity because many Australians saw multiculturalism as applying only to 'ethnic' people. However, I believe that the introduction of the multicultural notion of multiple histories as part of the Australian story can provide a starting point to move away from rigid and highly regulated settler colonial representations of settler and indigenous identity.

Secondly, multiculturalism can provide an alternative to the negative representations of indigeneity in a settler colonial politics. Depictions of indigenous people as lazy or corrupt or easily led have strong rhetorical force in settler colonial politics. The celebration of culture counters negative descriptions of indigenous culture and makes legitimises the voices of indigenous contributors to public debates. It may also be able to provide a political space in which indigenous claims can be made from within the context of the national community rather than from the position of outsider.

Thirdly, if we consider the development of a postcolonial politics in terms of the process of politics rather than just its content, a multicultural politics might contribute to reflexive forms of thinking about Australia's identity. A society might be considered postcolonial if the spirit of its political discourse is mature and reflexive, and if it incorporates acknowledges that non-western ways of thinking can contribute to ethical politics (Grovogui 2002, 53-54). In Australia's case, a postcolonial politics should involve an attempt to grapple honestly with the problems of colonialism. I would like to think that multiculturalism reveals the logic of settler colonial ideology so that it is no longer considered 'common sense'. This would bring settler colonial values into the realm of public debate where they could be evaluated for their usefulness (or lack of usefulness) as an underlying philosophy for Australian nationhood. Of course, part of the process of bringing this debate into the public realm is that overt use of settler colonial ideology would actually increase. Perhaps this is what is currently occurring in the discussion of indigenous rights and policies during the Howard government.

Multicultural ideology has been able to contribute to postcolonial identities in Australia. Settler identity was fixed around concepts of whiteness, the British subject and Anglo-Australian liberal democratic culture. Multiculturalism has the potential to expand the range and fluidity of identities which would be considered authentically Australian.

## *Conclusion*

The issue of how Australia's colonial past (and present) ought to be understood and represented to Australians and to the rest of the world is a crucial issue that needs to be resolved as part of discussions about Australian national identity. In this paper I

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[5] However, some Aboriginal people might deny the value of cultural hybridity and emphasise the important of asserting a fixed form of indigenous identity as a form of defence against colonialism and assimilation by the settler culture.

have sought to demonstrate how settler colonial and multicultural ideologies have described Australian politics, history and future and how these ideas have developed within the structural framework of a settler colonial state. I would have liked to explore the interactions between these two ideologies in greater depth but this is a matter, I think, for further research and would involve an analysis of specific case studies.

Settler states are distinguished by the fact that they suppress the political sovereignty and identities of indigenous peoples and privilege the institutions and ideologies of the settler elite or majority. The emergence of settler colonial and multicultural ideas about Australian identity demonstrates the contested nature of national identity in settler states. The analysis of these ideologies is also a good starting point for considering the possibilities for postcolonial politics and identities. It is difficult to displace settler colonial structures and ideologies. But, if we consider multicultural ideas about identity as a positive development, in spite of its limitations, then we can start to consider what a postcolonial politics might mean within settler colonial states.

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