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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Rethinking Neo/liberalism and the Australian Citizenship Test: A History of Regulating Difference

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## Abstract

While the rise of neoliberal discourse in Australia during the term of the Howard government (1996–2007) has long been recognised, its relationship to changing understandings of citizenship is rarely theorised except in terms of economic ideology. However, neoliberalism can also be conceived as a political rationality whose logics are ultimately concerned with the regulation of human conduct. This article contends that the Australian Citizenship Test can be understood as part of such a process of regulation, and that analysing it in terms of neoliberal and liberal (neo/liberal) political rationalities demonstrates the extent to which the Howard government's multicultural policy was actually enabled by its predecessor, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of how the test came to be a meaningful solution to the 'problem' of difference.

## Keywords

**multiculturalism, Australian citizenship test, liberalism, neoliberalism, John Howard, Bob Hawke**

## Introduction

The years spanning the Hawke–Keating government (1983–1996) and Howard government (1996–2007) have often been identified as a transformative period in Australian political culture with the advent of neoliberalism and the subsequent decline of social liberalist logics.<sup>1</sup> It was in this period that neoliberalism gained both a political and cultural foothold, acquiring rapid legitimacy as an economic project while also reconfiguring the role of government in its rearticulation of market behaviour. This period also saw an increasingly strident debate regarding national identity and the ‘problem’ of difference within Australian society, driven by the conflict between the economic imperative for immigration and the challenge this posed to a nation that had historically been imagined as racially and culturally homogeneous.<sup>2</sup> This conflict played out most explicitly in the engagement with Australian citizenship which, in accordance with modern understandings of the institution, was by this time formally nondiscriminatory, or ‘inclusive’. The migrant policy of the period was thus intimately concerned with reconciling this commitment to inclusive citizenship with particular conceptions of cultural difference and national cohesion, a tension that was addressed through the discourse of multiculturalism.

It is the contention of this article that these conceptions form part of the political rationalities of liberalism and neoliberalism and that citizenship comes to be considered as inclusive or exclusive according to these logics. It is thus important to acknowledge the ways in which these political rationalities were deployed over this period to reconfigure citizenship as ‘inclusive’ under the rubric of multiculturalism, in order to better understand its particular regulatory effects. In particular, it wishes to reconsider the introduction of a citizenship test by the Howard government in 2007, which the existing literature contextualises as a particular political strategy of the Howard government rather than a product of contemporary political discourse more broadly.<sup>3</sup> Thus, while neo/liberalism occupies much attention in other studies of Australian politics, its relationship to the Australian Citizenship Test and exclusive citizenship practices generally has been under theorised, largely because it is considered only in terms of economically motivated policies either driving, or driven by, socially conservative and racially discriminatory agendas.<sup>4</sup>

The limits to this approach become apparent when we consider the points at which the economic imperatives of neoliberalism and racialised exclusion *fail* to intersect. To take a prominent example, Jon Stratton offers the most in-depth account of neoliberalism and its intersection with racial exclusion in Australia, but his analysis is limited by a narrow conception of neoliberalism in terms of its economic concerns alone and, as a result, implies rather than theorises the link between the two logics. Stratton’s critique is based on the claim that neoliberalism has brought about an ‘exclusionary order’ in which:

The state’s relationship with its members, whether citizens or not, is founded on an idea of an economic, rather than social, contract. The most excluded are those who, from the economic point of view of the neoliberal state, have the least to offer.<sup>5</sup>

Following Margaret Somers, he explains the rise of nationalism as the result of this ‘contractualisation’ of citizenship, which empties it of civic identity and leaves only ethno-cultural identity in its place.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, he points to this death of the social contract as evidence of a growing individualism.<sup>7</sup> Where in this schema can we place Howard’s increasingly blatant appeals to national family and unity?<sup>8</sup> This contradiction is never addressed directly by Stratton, but he does suggest that the xenophobic nationalism surrounding asylum

seekers was a 'manufactured crisis' which justified the imposition of neoliberal economic policies:

the engineering of the Australian population's anxieties and fears around race and immigration, which was a crucial factor in the election of the Coalition in 1996, and which were embodied in asylum seekers, served the same purpose for the 11 years the Coalition was in office.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, even when scholars focus explicitly on neoliberalism, they explain its implication in, as well as divergence from, a racialised nationalism by turning to personal political agendas and biases. This understanding of neoliberalism as an economic ideology promoted by political actors does not account for the complex ways in which it interacts with and adapts to the logic of exclusive citizenship.

Moreover, this approach obscures the continuities in logic that might exist even between ideologically opposed actors and, in the same vein, treats liberalism and neoliberalism as discrete rationales without considering how the one has been foundational to the other. In particular, the dismantling of multiculturalism is often attributed to John Howard's neoliberal, socially conservative agenda without an acknowledgement of the extent to which it built upon the terms set by the Hawke government's multicultural policy and its construction of a British-derived, uniquely liberal Australian national identity.<sup>10</sup> While critics of liberal multiculturalism such as Stratton do link the implicit privileging of Anglo-Australian culture in earlier multicultural policy with the Howard government's more blatant nationalist rhetoric, they examine this continuity in terms of Australia's racist heritage and the prejudices it has instilled in the core 'white' nation.<sup>11</sup> Turning again to Stratton, he suggests:

In this new exclusionary order based in economic obligation the assumption ... was that non-market, socio-cultural considerations such as race, ethnicity, religion would disappear, at least in the economic world ... This turned out not to be the case; I am tempted to add: of course.<sup>12</sup>

This 'of course' and what it implies does not account for *how* the exclusivity of citizenship is reconfigured or made intelligible by neoliberalism, but simply assumes such exclusion, racial or otherwise, is an unchanging process compatible with and therefore perpetuated by neoliberalism. It seems clear that neoliberalism *is* compatible with racial exclusion and socially conservative logics, *despite* economic imperatives that would suggest this should not be so. For this reason, it is important to consider the ways that '[n]eo-liberal logic redeploys these regimes of race and ethnicity while simultaneously *transcoding* them into the terms of its own, seemingly racially unmarked, economies of morality and value'.<sup>13</sup>

To do so, neoliberalism must be scrutinised as something more than an economic rationale but as a political rationality that, 'while foregrounding the market, is not only or even primarily focused on the economy; it involves *extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action*'.<sup>14</sup> Thus, while neoliberalism can certainly be understood in terms of the desire for state protection of free markets, and liberalism likewise as the desire for individual freedom from state control, these rationalities are also worth theorising in terms of the assumptions that underwrite these desires, which are concerned with individual and collective human behaviour and the need for their regulation by the state. In these terms, citizenship is capable of defining membership in a nation not only through the designation of formal rights but also through its production of subjects in whom the right to inclusion within the imagined national space is made natural (and therefore invisible and uncontested) or provisional (and therefore

open to regulation). Exclusion is thus conceived as an effect of discursive *limits*, or the ways in which political rationalities determine the grounds on which citizens are re/produced.

In this schema, neo/liberalism has a genealogy, it is a rationality with a particular (racist, colonialist) history, and its operative terms of freedom, culture and difference are likewise born of this history. This approach has proved fruitful for other studies of exclusion, particularly surrounding race and immigration.<sup>15</sup> These works, in their sensitivity to the genealogies of these terms, are able to theorise ‘how histories of racial domination continue to shape difference today, why, how, and by whom liberal values are determined to be superior ... and how the state regulates various modalities of difference’.<sup>16</sup> This article seeks to contribute to a growing body of work that considers these questions in the context of citizenship,<sup>17</sup> with one point of difference: such tests, as techniques of regulation, produce ‘included’ as well as ‘excluded’ subjects and it is important not to forget the former in understanding the operation of the latter. As this article demonstrates, the regulatory power of Australia’s ‘inclusive’ multicultural citizenship has implications for all its citizen-subjects.

It is this article’s contention that the Australian Citizenship Test belongs to such a process of regulation that extends back to the Hawke government and its development of Australia’s first official multicultural policy, and that analysing this process as a product of neo/liberal discourses, with their attendant notions of individual freedom and cultural difference, provides a more nuanced understanding of the political conditions in which the Test came to be a meaningful solution to the ‘problem’ of difference. It thus focuses not on the Test’s content but on what its implementation can tell us about how governments have viewed the act of governing and the properties of the governed, and thereby to understand how they have governed difference. To this end, it will consider the multicultural policy papers produced by the Hawke and Howard governments, and analyse the discourses at play within them to interpret the ways they intersect with a formally inclusive citizenship to regulate difference and reproduce exclusion. Furthermore, approaching these policy papers as products of a neo/liberal political rationality *specifically* reveals a continuity towards the question of difference—despite personal or party ideology—that has often been obscured in historical accounts. In these terms, the discourses engaged by the Hawke and Howard governments can be understood as contributions to the same neo/liberal framework in which difference came to be regulated and exclusion justified.

This framework was co-constituted by several moves, which this article will examine in turn. First, it considers the Hawke government’s *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* and its privatisation of culture and depoliticisation of difference. It then turns to the Howard government’s *A New Agenda for Multicultural Australia*, which built upon its predecessor by more explicitly placing collective cultural difference outside the scope of the political sphere. It also traces how this was supplemented by the depoliticisation of national identity; to the extent that liberalism was invoked as a limiting framework, and this framework presented as culturally neutral, the ‘core’ of Australian national identity remained off the table of political contestation. The article then considers how this depoliticised Australian identity formed the heart of the *New Agenda*’s next move, which was to naturalise the capacity for self-regulation to ‘native’ Australians (articulated in terms of ‘core’ values), a move that necessarily implicated the migrant and legitimated calls for their integration into a homogenous Australian culture. Finally, the article turns to the implementation of the Citizenship Test, which was positioned within this framework as a tool for assessing the capacity of potential migrants to become suitably self-governing and, as a result, justified their regulation in the defence of a free Australian society. The argument being made is thus two-fold: first, both governments were

implicated in the reproduction of an exclusive cultural hierarchy through the rubric of an inclusive multicultural citizenship; and second, this rubric was a product of neo/liberal political logic. As such, any study of its effects must be considerate of these logics.

## Privatising difference

Since its official inception as policy by the Fraser government (1975–1983), multiculturalism had received bipartisan support under its terms of social justice and equal opportunity as defined in the 1978 Galbally Report. However, the question of immigration was brought to the fore in the 1980s and with it questions regarding Australian national identity and what place, if any, multiculturalism had within it. In 1984, historian Geoffrey Blainey launched an attack on what he characterised as elite social engineering which preferred Asian immigration and encouraged immigrants to remain apart from mainstream Australian culture; multiculturalism thus threatened the social cohesion of the nation by ‘turning Australia into a nation of tribes’.<sup>18</sup> Shortly after came the release of the FitzGerald Report, a government-commissioned inquiry into immigration that was highly critical of multiculturalism, identifying it as harmful to immigration policy due to its confusing and divisive nature. The FitzGerald Report was primarily concerned with immigration’s role in increasing Australia’s economic competitiveness and, to that end, it made recommendations both to change selection criteria in favour of economic utility and to ameliorate the damaging effect of multiculturalism by reinforcing the value of citizenship. According to the report, multiculturalism ‘did not seem to have enhanced the two-way commitment which is so essential to immigration’s success’.<sup>19</sup> The report identified this lack of commitment as a threat to national solidarity since it devalued citizenship; it thus made an explicit connection between cultural difference, national cohesion and the obligations of citizens to the nation. In response to the FitzGerald Report, the government produced the *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia: Sharing Our Future*, a policy paper that attempted to reconcile the concern for national cohesion with the maintenance of individual liberal freedoms. The most apparent aim of the *Agenda*—and the one most directly tied to the criticisms made by the FitzGerald Report—was the reframing of multiculturalism as a policy for ‘everyone’. The *Agenda* sought to counter claims that multiculturalism was both divisive and driven by special interest groups through the construction of difference as diversity, privatising difference by circumscribing it to the individual and configuring it as a commodity for national cohesion.

The *Agenda* was a product of the growing conflict between the incumbent political rationality of social liberalism and the newer logic of neoliberalism (which in fact hailed back to certain classical liberal precepts). There was a continual tension between opposing concepts of the national good, in neoliberal terms defined as economic efficiency driven by privatisation and in social liberal terms as state intervention guaranteeing equal access to some broadly conceived notion of ‘the good life’.<sup>20</sup> This tension was reconciled in the *Agenda* through an emphasis on individual rights as the site on which difference could be acknowledged and thus acted upon by the state. Furthermore, these rights were figured not only in terms of access to resources but also in the recognition of identity:

Fundamentally, multiculturalism is about the rights of the individual—the right to equality of treatment; to be able to express one’s identity; to be accepted as an Australian without having to assimilate to some stereotyped model of behaviour.<sup>21</sup>

The inclusion of cultural identity has been singled out as a particular innovation of the *Agenda*, signalling the advent of multiculturalism as a distinct political strategy.<sup>22</sup> Yet the

paper's articulation of cultural identity was largely indebted to certain liberal conceptions of culture and individual identity as necessarily limited to the private sphere.<sup>23</sup> Crucially, the right to the maintenance of cultural identity came with a proviso at the outset of the *Agenda* where, as one of the dimensions of multiculturalism, it was defined as 'the right of all Australians, within carefully defined limits, to express and share their individual cultural heritage'.<sup>24</sup> These limits were later defined as 'the Constitution and the rule of law, tolerance and equality, Parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech and religion, English as the national language and equality of the sexes'.<sup>25</sup> Culture was thus figured as *individual* identity and its expression circumscribed within the private sphere; insofar as this cultural identity was privatised, it remained under the purview of individual liberal freedom. Yet this freedom had a limit; there was an implicit suggestion in this construction of culture that cultural difference as a *collective political force* posed a threat to the core tenets of Australian culture—which had at their heart the defence of individual freedom—and it is for this reason that the imposition of a limit to cultural difference was not only justified, but justified under the terms of freedom itself. As Geoffrey B. Levey notes of the policy:

Cultural minorities qua groups have no entitlement. This qualification is of the utmost importance. It means that Australian multiculturalism remains committed to the liberal idea that the ultimate unit of moral worth is the individual, and it avoids one of the traditional liberal concerns about group and cultural rights; namely, that the interests and rights of the individual may be jeopardised in the interests of the group.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, despite the *Agenda's* insistence that Australian identity 'evolves and changes over time',<sup>27</sup> it also ultimately reaffirmed the limit to this change in redefining Australian culture, which was articulated as a matter of safeguarding freedom:

Multiculturalism does not mean that we should dismantle or repudiate our institutions in order to start afresh. Our British heritage is extremely important to us ... *It has created a society remarkable for the freedom it can give to its individual citizens* [emphasis added].<sup>28</sup>

## Depoliticising difference

This particular configuration of culture and difference was subsumed within the discourse of diversity, which privatised and commodified difference in order to depoliticise it, thereby ameliorating its potential political antagonisms and securing national cohesion. This depoliticisation was achieved by the *Agenda* in two ways: it first produced a split between good and bad diversity and, in doing so, both reproduced and regulated difference, as well as legitimating the need for its management. The differentiation between good and bad diversity is located in the underlying function of the discourse of diversity as 'a rationality of integration: it ceases to be a divisive force when it is good, and anchored in shared values'.<sup>29</sup> This concern with division was central to the *Agenda*, whose primary aim was to defend multiculturalism against the criticism of divisiveness, which it attempted through an emphasis on 'sharing' and signalled overtly in its subtitle, 'Sharing Our Future'. According to the *Agenda*: 'Multiculturalism is concerned to encourage all Australians, including those from non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, to share their diversity of cultures, rather than excluding one another or being forced into separate enclaves'.<sup>30</sup> However, this celebration of shared cultures was qualified as one which had to be subsumed under the broader umbrella of 'Australian' culture, as implied by the statement 'there is overwhelming support for the maintenance of

cultural traditions providing they are shared with the rest of the community and that they become part of Australian life'.<sup>31</sup> Thus, difference was framed as acceptable for the role it played in constructing a collective and unifying Australian identity: 'the richness of our diverse origins can contribute—as indeed they are already—to an evolving, but distinctive Australian culture'.<sup>32</sup>

Through this privatised construction of difference (what Ahmed describes as its fetishisation), the discourse of diversity commodified cultural difference, producing a static, non-contingent view of culture that was presented as freely available for individual consumption.<sup>33</sup> This conception of culture divorced it from its historical formation together with the unequal power relations formed with it.<sup>34</sup> Difference, then, far from signalling these inequalities, became an expression of individual identity. It was through diversity's privatisation of difference that it was effectively and attractively depoliticised: the threat posed by culture as a mark of group affiliation was erased in the suggestion that it was not fixed but could be taken up or discarded according to the desire of the individual.<sup>35</sup> By implication, 'the diverse subject cultivate[d] the competencies necessary to live with difference understood as a set of variegated characteristics, but not as relations of power'.<sup>36</sup> This assumption is evident in the *Agenda's* claim that:

Different perceptions, values and modes of behaviour can contribute to social tension. There is an obligation on both sides to try to understand the other ... There is a need for opportunities to develop cross-cultural understanding.<sup>37</sup>

'Good' diversity was thus that form of difference which, in being adopted by the individual, contributed to their ability to live with others (and thereby served national interests); by implication, it was the adoption of 'bad' diversity that produced conflict. Difference was considered a valuable commodity only insofar as its consumption did not threaten some existing national framework, while political conflict arising from difference was reduced to acts of individual transgression.

Diversity was thereby figured in neoliberal terms as a resource, both economically and socially, and the government positioned as the manager of this resource 'for everyone'. It was thus framed as a facilitator of 'opportunities', implicitly suggesting that the proper management of individuals would result in their acquisition of cultural competency and thereby secure social harmony. This articulation of the state as a neutral manager reflected the neoliberal moralisation of efficiency and productivity over and above the defence of particular interests (including ethical ones). This rhetoric of management was profoundly depoliticising in its emphasis on objective knowledge and calculated outcomes. In particular, it presented the regulation of difference in terms of good and bad diversity as an apolitical process; the normative framework against which these terms were defined—the paradigm in which good and bad diversity could make sense—remained unchallenged. In doing so, difference as diversity was stripped of its political significance and instead placed in service to the reinforcement of a no-longer-threatened national framework.

Ultimately, then, it was the construction of cultural difference as individual, private identity that allowed for its reconfiguration as diversity, a commodified resource which located national cohesion in individual competence and thereby justified state intervention in the management of this resource. This in turn depoliticised political conflict as the failure of individuals to acquire cultural competency and legitimated their regulation for the national benefit.

## Subordinating difference

The later years of the Howard government were marked by several significant events—the *Tampa* affair and the 9/11 attacks which preceded the Howard government's re-election in 2001, the 2002 Bali suicide bombings and the Cronulla riots of 2005. These moments are often identified as catalysts for the growing preoccupation with national identity and border protection that characterised the politics of the decade. However, such analysis tends to obscure the continuity in the Howard government's political logic which, if it is acknowledged, is generally attributed to the personal political agenda of Howard himself.<sup>38</sup> The multicultural policy of this period is thus analysed in terms of either social conservatism or economic neoliberalism, *but not their intersection*. This kind of analysis is incomplete because it fails to articulate the continuity in the relationship between liberalism and difference in the multicultural policies of the Hawke and Howard governments. Attempts to justify the privileging of Anglo-Australian culture have always underlined the rationality of multicultural policy in reconciling difference with national identity; both the Hawke and Howard governments sought to negotiate it in their multicultural policies by appealing to the universality of liberal democratic principles as a uniting, culturally neutral framework. In particular, the Howard government's emphasis on a united Australia cemented by core Western values built upon the earlier multicultural policy's terms of individual freedom, privatised culture and depoliticised difference within a neo/liberal framework. With the advent of the 'war on terror', however, the popular narrative of Islam against the West brought increased visibility to this framework and its particular entrenchment in Western culture. This allowed for a much more explicit assertion of the cultural hierarchy underlying earlier iterations of multiculturalism, which was expressed in terms of Australian values.

Although Howard was notoriously disapproving of multiculturalism and actively avoided using the term, a year after the Coalition's successful bid for government saw the establishment of the National Multicultural Advisory Council (NMAC), whose primary task was to recommend a policy framework 'aimed at ensuring that cultural diversity is a unifying force for Australia'.<sup>39</sup> This new focus on multiculturalism as a source of unity was a reiteration of Howard's longstanding position that multiculturalism could only be tenable if it was underpinned by a common (British-derived) Australian ethos, rather than upholding difference. This insistence on a united Australia, with its underlying code of cultural hierarchy, was clearly at play in the reconfiguration of multiculturalism attempted by the council through *Multiculturalism: The Way Forward*, a discussion paper outlining the NMAC's terms of reference, and *Australian Multiculturalism for a New Century: Towards Inclusiveness*, a report of the council's findings. The NMAC's reconstruction of multiculturalism as a 'unifying force for Australia' involved two distinct moves: subsuming multiculturalism under the umbrella of liberal democratic citizenship and rebranding this new type of citizenship 'Australian multiculturalism' by linking such democratic institutions specifically to British-Australian culture. In order to do this, and thereby ameliorate the 'divisiveness' of earlier multicultural policy, the legitimacy of state recognition of collective cultural difference was negated through an emphasis on formal equality, most bluntly in the report's denial of structural inequality when it stated 'our society does not guarantee equal outcomes'.<sup>40</sup> The Howard government's conception of multiculturalism followed its antecedent in targeting individual freedom but went further than previous policy in depoliticising difference, denying completely the political recognition of collective cultural difference due to its characterisation of individual freedom as homogeneous treatment. Collective cultural difference was now completely removed from the public sphere.



It was this privatised construction of difference that underpinned the government's defence of multiculturalism as an evolution of Australia's political traditions:

The freedom that our democracy guarantees gives space for the cultural diversity in Australian society, so it is our democracy and our expectation that 'citizens' respect and adhere to its principles that are the key ingredients of a unifying Australian tradition which Australian multiculturalism retains.<sup>41</sup>

Diversity here was a *result* of individual liberal freedoms since, being depoliticised, it could be constructed as compatible with these freedoms instead of a threat to them. Thus—echoing the *National Agenda*—the report asserted the place of multiculturalism as subsumed under a liberal democratic framework:

While Australian multiculturalism values and celebrates diversity, it is not an 'anything goes' concept since it is built on core societal values of mutual respect, tolerance and harmony, the rule of law and our democratic principles and institutions.<sup>42</sup>

This repositioning of multiculturalism as an inevitable (and laudable) result of liberal freedom allowed it to be framed as an inclusive and unifying force, since it was now absorbed into a uniquely Australian citizenship whose universal appeal provided the social 'glue' of the nation: 'The values of Australian multiculturalism form one dimension of the values which make up Australian citizenship which is built on a set of common civic values, rights and obligations that can unify Australians.'<sup>43</sup>

It was this linkage of liberal democracy, nominally a universal institution, to Australian identity *particularly* that formed the core attempt of these papers to affirm the unifying capacity of multiculturalism; hence its rebranding as 'Australian multiculturalism' (what has been termed the 'culturalization of secular liberalism').<sup>44</sup> This tension between the apparent universality of liberal freedoms and the desire for a uniquely Australian identity is evident in the claim: 'These basic principles—freedom and openness—define some common ground. They are, in one sense, timeless but in practice they derive from Australian experience.'<sup>45</sup> The desire to ground liberal democracy in the Australian nation was achieved through an emphasis on the British origins of these institutions, which were afforded a central role in constituting the Australian identity. While the Hawke government's multicultural policy also noted the legacy of British institutions to Australia, this was taken much further in the NMAC report, which not only identified this British heritage but suggested it bestowed a cultural privilege to those of British descent:

Australians whose origin is wholly or partly from Great Britain and Ireland can take special pride in their heritage, for its substantive contribution to the development and success of Australian society. This is exemplified in the underlying philosophy and principles and the essential components of Australia's democratic system, which is the foundation on which our society has been built.<sup>46</sup>

A cultural hierarchy was established here in which the cultural identities of the 'non-British', migrants or otherwise, were subordinated to that of the Western-coded native core, who was inherently and exclusively vested with the capacity to unite the Australian nation through its historical relationship to Australia's political values.<sup>47</sup> The discussion paper exposed this implicit cultural privileging when it noted:

not all community standards and values are or can be enshrined in legislation. It is also important to recognise that law is not simply a matter of legislation; ultimately it is a matter of morality, of values and standards.<sup>48</sup>

The apparent universality of the political framework uniting the nation was here revealed to be culturally specific.<sup>49</sup> This characterisation of the unity of the nation maintained its foundation in a British heritage, in line with the previous policy of assimilation, merely shifting the significance of this heritage from a racial to a political one. Thus, the attempt to particularise multiculturalism as a specifically Australian form of liberal democratic citizenship engaged with a kind of ‘new nationalism’ that was coded in a cultural hierarchy.<sup>50</sup>

## Regulating difference: the Australian citizenship test

This emphasis on ‘core’ Australian values increased in the later years of the Howard government. In the wake of the 2005 London bombings, Howard claimed that immigrants had ‘an obligation to ... unconditionally embrace and imbibe the attitudes of this society’ and that failure to do so would legitimate a revocation of their citizenship.<sup>51</sup> The Cronulla riots, which were prompted by white Australians looking to ‘cleanse’ Cronulla Beach of Middle Eastern men, provided a new opportunity to reinforce the language of values. Reflecting on the violence, Howard declared, ‘all Australians have a civic responsibility to support the basic structures and values of Australian society which guarantee us our freedom and equality’.<sup>52</sup> While the rise of this ‘values’ discourse is often studied as a product of these events, we might reverse the order of analysis to consider instead how the discourses analysed so far in the policies of both the Hawke and Howard governments produced a context in which ‘core’ Australian values, having been linked to supposedly universal standards of liberal democratic freedom, were effectively depoliticised; that is, they were placed above political contestation because they were said to be universal. As a corollary, ‘other’ cultures were constructed as lacking these values, thereby justifying the exclusion of any collective political identity that was not aligned with the ‘core’ or mainstream Australia. The innovation of the Howard government’s articulation of this values discourse was in yoking it to the neoliberal technology of responsabilisation, locating the guarantee of liberal democratic freedoms not in the state but the virtuous citizenry and their private relationship to the nation, a configuration which particularly implicated the migrant and justified the regulation of their ‘commitment’ to national values.<sup>53</sup> It thereby rationalised a citizenship test—exclusive by definition—on the grounds of its capacity to foster inclusion.<sup>54</sup>

The notion of virtuous citizens securing the public benefit is not a new one and indeed, according to Brett, has always been a cornerstone of Australian Liberal political thought.<sup>55</sup> However, this earlier form of the virtuous citizen was conceptualised in terms of individual moral duties towards others within a community. Its reappearance during the Howard years constituted a similar moralisation of citizenship seeking to emphasise individual obligations over rights, but it was distinct for its vertical conceptualisation of such obligations as flowing from the individual to the state rather than horizontally between members of a community, reflecting the neoliberal construction of individual virtue in terms of independence from state aid. It is for this reason that in its more recent iteration, individual obligations were directed specifically towards the nation, as defined through private attachment to national ‘core’ values. This reconfiguration of citizenship was evident both in the government’s rhetoric leading up to the introduction of the Citizenship Test and in the policy documents produced after its implementation. For instance, the Test resource booklet *Becoming an Australian Citizen*

contended '[m]odern citizenship also rests on sentiments of nationhood and enduring attachment to what Australians hold in common'.<sup>56</sup> It was on this affective level that liberal freedoms could be secured, and social cohesion consequently became the result of individual emotional compliance.<sup>57</sup> There was thus a conflation between public acts and private values, which is evidenced by the constant slippage between the two, such as Howard's assertion that 'all Australians have a civic responsibility to support the basic structures and values of Australian society which guarantee us our freedom and equality'.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, according to Andrew Robb, Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration, this private dimension had a public function:

This sense of shared values is the glue that binds our nation together. It involves the maintenance of a shared national identity ... A shared identity is not about imposing uniformity. It is about a strong identification with a set of core values.<sup>59</sup>

Once more, values were presented as things to feel 'strong identification' with on a private level, in order to serve a public good, with the implication that failure to do so was a public transgression: 'A sense of shared values is our social cement. Without it we risk becoming a society governed by coercion rather than consent'.<sup>60</sup> This, ultimately, was the proposition of the discourse of values: liberal freedoms were guaranteed not by an interventionist state but by the affective dimensions of the polity. It was only through the private adoption of particular values that individuals could be considered capable of the kind of self-governing that ensured the functioning of a 'free' society in the neo/liberalist terms of minimal state interference.<sup>61</sup>

The Howard government's defence of a citizenship test was always centred on the claim that it would aid migrants to more fully participate in Australian life and thereby secure social cohesion. As the discussion paper *Australian Citizenship: Much More than a Ceremony* claimed: 'An understanding of the Australian way of life ... will better equip migrant and refugee settlers to build new social links', adding '[s]uch an understanding will assist social cohesion and successful integration into the community'.<sup>62</sup> By implication, migrants *specifically* were charged with the responsibility for acquiring these values (since Australian citizens were by definition inherently endowed with it) and were therefore responsible for social cohesion, with the corollary that social divisions too were a result of their failings. It was in this way that calls for integration were justified; this particular construction of migrants implied that they lacked the kind of values which were inherent to Australians and which were integral to the safeguarding of national cohesion. As Robb suggested:

new and emerging communities, who increasingly come from cultures far different to our Australian culture, are effectively being told that they have no obligation to do their best to become 'Australian'. Advocating the equality of cultures, or a community of separate cultures, fosters a rights mentality, rather than a responsibilities mentality. It is divisive.<sup>63</sup>

Here, the maintenance of other cultures was presented as a threat because they were necessarily 'divisive', suggesting that these cultures were incompatible with Australia's own. More visibly than its predecessors, this discourse articulated a private, static notion of culture as the container of essential values—where Western culture was uniquely endowed with the values of liberal freedom—and thereby created a necessarily antagonistic relationship to cultural difference. Howard made this oppositional stance clear:

We know what our enemies think and what they are capable of. They hate our freedoms and our way of life. They despise our democratic values. They have nothing but contempt for a diverse society which practises tolerance and respect.<sup>64</sup>

In this Othering of non-Western cultures and their construction as inherently oppositional to an Australian one, cohesion was possible only through the insistence on a shared identity of 'core values' which, in their close identification with Western culture, necessarily enforced a cultural hierarchy. The rhetoric of values was thus a more visible expression of the discourses at play in earlier migrant policy. Through their reinforcement of a cultural hierarchy, these discourses created a division between those in whom the capacity to be self-governing was naturalised and those in whom it was not, and whose regulation by a citizenship test was thus justified under the terms of freedom itself.

The Howard government's configuration of cultural difference was thus an extension of the earlier discourse of diversity, which privatised and depoliticised difference. However, this discourse was now articulated through a particularly neoliberal framework, with two particular implications. First, in its valorisation of formal equality it doubly removed collective cultural difference from the public sphere. Second, by depoliticising difference in this way it was able to more clearly assert both the place of multiculturalism as subordinate to a liberal democratic framework and the close relationship of this framework to Australian culture and its 'core' values. As a result, migrants became targets for regulation, which was effected through a citizenship test that placed the responsibility for national cohesion on their adoption of private values.

## Conclusion

This article has been concerned with both discerning the terms by which a neo/liberal political rationality deals with the problem of difference and how these terms were able to accommodate the implementation of a citizenship test within the rubric of an 'inclusive' multicultural Australian citizenship. In the very act of delimiting a political (and national) body, the institution of citizenship is necessarily engaged in a process of exclusion. In order to reconcile this with an increasingly diverse Australian population, the Hawke and Howard governments both deployed the discourses of a neo/liberal political rationality which claimed to be universally inclusive, but which also accommodated the assertion of a core Western-coded Australian identity. In particular, continuity was identified in the constructions of citizenship by both governments, in their privatisation and depoliticisation of cultural difference and reaffirmation of the primacy and incontestability of a core Australian identity. It was due to this particular configuration of 'universal' liberal values as the 'core' values of Australian national identity that both governments were able to insist on the necessity of their adoption by migrants in order to promote social cohesion. Moreover, this affirmation was depoliticised and configured not as an act of cultural imperialism or political domination but as an inclusive articulation of citizenship. Both governments, in their attempts to address difference, contributed to a framework which constructed a particularly liberal notion of the problem of difference, including the tension inherent to this problem between individual freedom and collective cultural difference. Within this framework, Australian culture was uniquely capable of producing 'good' neo/liberal subjects and, in this way, migrants became specific targets for regulation in order to secure national cohesion. The Citizenship Test thus came to be a legitimate solution to the problem of difference as a tool for promoting inclusion and, likewise, its regulation of migrants was configured as an inclusive act in the

name of individual freedom. Exclusion was thus perpetuated despite the development and affirmation of a formally inclusive framework. This contradiction suggests that, in order to theorise the ways in which citizenship and national identity work to produce exclusion, it is critical to first interrogate the norms against which such exclusion is defined. Doing so makes clear the problems inherent to accounts of Australian citizenship that assume a simplistic division between the Hawke and Howard governments, between liberal politics and neoliberal economics, and between inclusive and exclusive constructions of citizenship.

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45. NMAC, *Multicultural Australia*, p. 9.
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47. A discourse which likewise worked to erase Aboriginal sovereignty. A key implication of this article is that simplistic treatments of liberal citizenships as 'inclusive' elide the ways in which these citizenships erase Indigenous sovereignty. See Aileen Moreton-Robinson, 'Towards a New Research Agenda?: Foucault, Whiteness and Indigenous Sovereignty', *Journal of Sociology*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2006, pp. 383–95.
48. NMAC, *Multicultural Australia*, p. 9.
49. As Fortier notes, 'the sanctity of the universal ... is deeply wedded to the power of an unmarked whiteness'. While she suggests that multiculturalism's investment in the universal is used to erase white Britain's shame over its colonial past, I would note that this has always been a feature of liberal rationality and predates multicultural citizenship: Anne-Marie Fortier, *Multicultural Horizons: Diversity and the Limits of the Civil Nation*, Routledge, London, 2008, p. 37.
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51. John Howard, Conference to Discuss Extending Counter-terrorism Laws, Interview with Barrie Cassidy, *The Insiders*, ABC, 2005.
  52. John Howard, 'A Sense of Balance: The Australian Achievement in 2006', address to the National Press Club, 25 January 2006, Canberra.
  53. I am in a sense pre-figuring Fortier's argument regarding British multiculturalism, which considers multiculturalism as a 'politics of feeling' and suggests that neoliberal citizenship relies upon the regulation of intimacy between citizens.
  54. It is in this sense that the 2007 Citizenship Test is distinct from the dictation test of the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*—the latter was based on a specifically racist logic which assumed social cohesion on racial grounds. The virtuous citizen of the 2007 test, while also broadly 'exclusionary', used a very different set of logics based on affective commitment to the 'nation'.
  55. Brett, p. 190.
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  57. For more on neoliberalism and affective citizenship, see Berlant; Anne-Marie Fortier, 'Proximity by Design? Affective Citizenship and the Management of Unease', *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2010, pp. 17–30.
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