

Introduction

'Aussie, Aussie, Aussie!' The gathered crowd, numbering a few hundred in a section of Sydney's Hyde Park, responded as only Australians would. But this was neither a sporting event nor some pantomime moment. The occasion was a citizenship ceremony, and the rallying cry came from a young man from New Zealand as he collected his citizenship certificate. The people in the crowd, most of them waving miniature Australian flags, were there to celebrate Australia Day 2009.

Everyone watched as one by one the 18 individuals on the outdoor stage received their citizenship documents – official recognition of their naturalisation as Australians. Mostly young men and women in their 20s and 30s, they each wore their distinctiveness with pride. There was a young woman from Sarajevo wearing a traditional white, embroidered Bosnian dress. There was a man from Scotland sporting a tartan kilt. There was a man from Malaysia dressed casually in an unmistakable homage to Steve Irwin: wide-brimmed hat, short-sleeved khaki shirt and matching shorts, a pair of brown boots. All, though, were now Australian citizens. Reiterating the new bond they shared with those watching on from the lawn, the master of ceremonies called on all citizens present, new and old, to reaffirm their commitment to Australia: 'I pledge my loyalty to Australia and its people, whose democratic beliefs I share, whose rights and liberties I respect, and whose laws I will uphold and obey.' The crowd obliged. Then everyone proceeded to sing 'Advance Australia Fair'.

Elsewhere in Hyde Park, groups of friends were basking in the afternoon sun with a glass of white wine or bottle of beer. Young parents tried their best to placate face-painted children amid the rising heat. Seniors settled into their seats in the shade to listen to the Royal Australian Navy marching band; they broke into voice when

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it played 'I am Australian'. A short distance away, people gathered around the bronzed sculptures and spraying jets of Archibald Fountain, the park's central landmark. A Lebanese-Australian family posed for photos. A young Asian-Australian couple snapped some photos of their own. A trio of blonde teenage girls, caped in flags and wearing tops emblazoned with 'Australia', gossiped away. A white-haired Anglo-Australian man in his 70s sat in deep concentration licking his soft-serve icecream cone.

Relaxed, friendly, good humoured, unpretentious – if this was a day for celebrating everything great about our country, then the people at Hyde Park seemed to be doing it pretty well. The patriotism on display seemed at ease rather than pompous, agreeable rather than aggressive. Yet not all manifestations of patriotism are so benign or praiseworthy. That same Australia Day in Sydney, along the beaches in Manly, hooligans carrying the national flag and chanting racist slogans, ran amok, harassing ethnic minorities, vandalising shops and smashing car windows. All across Sydney, police arrested more than 90 people for violent behaviour. It was not the first time bigots had hijacked our national symbols. Over the last few years, episodes of white 'Aussie pride' have tarred patriotism with the stain of jingoistic nationalism. In the minds of many, Australians would do better to avoid expressions of national pride that fire the blood.

Patriotism is a Janus-faced phenomenon. There is the dark face of patriotism as vice, a dubious form of national loyalty that can verge on fanaticism. Contemporary experience seems to offer no shortage of examples of a love of country being used to justify government restrictions on individual rights, to fuel racist violence, and to support wars in foreign lands. Then there is the brighter side, patriotism as virtue, a loyalty that motivates citizens to make sacrifices for the improvement of their country. Whether it is through contributions in the form of taxes, participation in public deliberations, or physical defence of the community in time of war, a free society should prefer civic virtue over despotic coercion. Ideally,

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citizens should take pride in their country, see its public institutions as their own and readily contribute to its flourishing.

If patriotism is ambivalent in its political expression, then it is because the meaning of the term suffers from ambiguity. Is a love of one's country merely an emotion or a psychological attitude? Is it a product of the authoritative demands of tradition or of considered reflection? Is it directed at one's fellow citizens or the entity of the nation? Such questions cannot be answered with the simple pronouncement of 'For my country'. The meaning of patriotism appears to resist definitive agreement or consensus.

Many might well say that contemporary patriotism in Australia has been indistinguishable from racist chauvinism. According to this view, we have confused patriotism with an extreme form of nationalism, substituting cultural aggression for citizenship. Years of racial dog-whistling have fomented anxiety; anxiety has hardened into fear and fear into hate. All these sentiments have been given succour by a renewed sense of loving our country.

Yet a more complex picture of patriotism has recently emerged. The election of Barack Obama as US president has shown that national pride can be liberal and inclusive, not just reactionary. Record numbers of Americans turned out to cast their vote, some queuing for more than half a day, because they believed it was their duty to help change their country. When the news of Obama's victory came through, Americans spoke about being choked with tears of joy by seeing their national flag flapping in the wind. Some 2 million people turned out to fill Washington's National Mall for Obama's inauguration, while the rest of the world watched on their television screens, marvelling at the miracle of American democracy. 'Yes, we can' has become the clarion call of progressive patriotism: loving one's country means working to set it on a truer path when it has been pushed off course. Closer to home, many Australians point to Kevin Rudd's 2008 apology to the Stolen Generations as an ennobling, patriotic moment. It was perhaps the only time Australians have stopped collectively to listen to a speech

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given in parliament. Again, here was an instance of one's country being put right, of being able to feel great once more about one's country. Just as collective pride can be a force for the baser elements of our nature, so too can it inspire citizens to do what is just and good.

This is a book about contemporary Australian patriotism, and the place of identity and citizenship in Australian politics. More specifically, it is a book about how Australian progressives should be thinking about patriotism. By 'progressive' I mean very broadly those who sit left-of-centre on the political spectrum. In recent years, Australian progressives (or left-liberals) have been defined largely by their stance on issues concerning the so-called culture wars. Progressives tend to believe that reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples requires recognition of past wrongs as much as practical welfare policies. They tend to support the official promotion of multiculturalism and believe that government treatment of refugees in the past has been exceedingly harsh. They also tend to support the establishment of an Australian republic as an act of national maturity.¹ Thus understood, 'progressive' is a label that, while associated with the Left, goes beyond simple political party affiliation.

In more philosophical terms, the term 'progressive' describes a set of moral and political values, and an understanding of the proper role of the state in shaping people's lives. As I use it throughout the book, progressive politics is a shorthand for modern social democracy. It represents a commitment to values of democracy and equality, community and pluralism, reason and autonomy – guided by a belief in social justice. The progressive typically believes in the use of the state to disperse social and economic power, and to ensure that all individuals have an equal opportunity to pursue a life of dignity and fulfilment. Progressive politics is different, in this sense, from a classical liberalism, which views the role of government as strictly concerned with protecting individual liberty, the rule of law and property rights: for the progressive, government should not confine itself to procedural justice but should aim to help individuals fulfil their potential. It is different as well from a

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conservatism that views the role of government as concerned with preserving historical traditions and social moralities: for the progressive, a dogmatic adherence to custom leaves no room for the use of our reason and for the expression of cultural pluralism. And it is different, too, from a libertarianism committed to exposing all realms of social and economic life to the discipline of market competition: for the progressive, while open and freer markets are compatible with social justice, there remains a role for government to civilise capitalism when markets fail, as they inevitably do.

Some will question why it is necessary to be thinking about patriotism in Australia at this juncture. Our culture wars appear to have died down; Australians seem to have moved on. Dealing with a global financial crisis and its accompanying economic fallout is the more pressing priority. To some extent, we may even welcome a brief cessation of cultural hostilities within our public debates. Yet there are three reasons why progressives should not dismiss the importance of clarifying their understanding of patriotism.

The first concerns what could be called the challenge of solidarity. Within the West, questions of identity have gained in urgency amid unprecedented flux and social change. Global capitalism has disrupted local economies, accelerated deindustrialisation and triggered transformations in class and culture. Post-Second World War social liberalism has spawned a diversity of lifestyles and diluted social norms. Consumerism and narcissistic privatism have led to a decline in civic virtue. Perhaps most profoundly, waves of mass immigration have created multicultural societies that challenge the foundation of the nation-state – the assumption that citizens would share a collective identity based on a common ethnicity and culture. In the Australian case, the previous solidarity of a White Australia, buttressed by British race patriotism, has yet to be replaced by any equivalent unifying myth or bond.²

It is no surprise, then, that liberal democratic governments in the West have made more concerted attempts to instil a sense of shared identity. In the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Gordon Brown

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has been promoting more explicit expressions of Britishness – proposing, among other things, an official statement of British values to ‘set down the values, founded in liberty, which define our citizenship and help to define our country’.³ Shortly after he was elected as president of France, Nicolas Sarkozy established a Ministry of Immigration and National Identity, the first time such a ministry has existed in that country. Over the last decade, German public figures and intellectuals have engaged in a prolonged *Leitkulturdebatte* about the impact that immigration has made on their national culture. Here in Australia, the Howard government introduced a citizenship test for immigrants, incorporating questions about Australian history and national values. Whatever the differences in national circumstances, the concern has been much the same. We may welcome diversity, but the benefits of cultural difference can only be realised if there is an overarching sense of belonging to a national community.

Progressives cannot afford to ignore such matters. Any notion of social justice involves the redistribution of resources, or, perhaps more accurately, the sharing of resources. In a democratic welfare state, we share not only our income, our social services and our public spaces, but also a public conversation. As *Prospect* editor David Goodhart argued in 2004 in his seminal essay on diversity and solidarity, such sharing requires a set of common values, if not also a common culture:

And therein lies one of the central dilemmas of political life in developed societies: sharing and solidarity can conflict with diversity. This is an especially acute dilemma for progressives who want plenty of both solidarity – high social cohesion and generous welfare paid out of a progressive tax system – and diversity – equal respect for a wide range of peoples, values and ways of life. The tension between the two values is a reminder that serious politics is about trade-offs. It also suggests that the left’s recent love affair with diversity may come at the expense of the values and even the people that it once championed.⁴

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In other words, we cannot take our common ground for granted. In a pluralistic society its discovery and affirmation require work.

The second reason why progressives need to grapple with patriotism is more specific to the Australian experience, what I call the problem of intellectual complacency. The end of the Howard prime ministership has, for many, signalled the demise of a resurgent patriotism. During its first year in office, the Rudd government made some dramatic departures from the policies of its predecessor. As well as the apology to the Stolen Generations, there was ratification of the Kyoto Protocol. There was the abandonment of mandatory detention and the Pacific Solution. There was a summit bringing together the best and brightest of the nation's minds to deliberate upon Australia's future direction. All confirmation, you might say, of what many now regard as an iron law of our political culture: former prime minister Paul Keating's dictum of 'change the government, change the nation'.⁵ In this case, Rudd's 'new leadership' has smoothened the patriotism that John Howard sharpened during his decade in power.

Such apparent change should not lead us to believe that patriotism and the national story are no longer live political concerns. Debates about our identity never abate for very long, and they re-emerge in new forms. For all the talk about Australians becoming more relaxed and comfortable about the national identity, there remains a restless yearning for an authentic statement of what Australianness must mean today. Even now, we are still debating the true place of Gallipoli and the Anzacs in our national self-understanding. Old myths about bush pioneers and workers – the Australian legend – seem to jar with the reality of a modern, multicultural Australia. When, even whether, we will get another chance to become a republic with our own head of state remains unresolved.

In any case, Australians should not indulge intellectual apathy. It may appear that our culture wars have reached their conclusion. Apart from hardcore ideologues on the Right, few people seem interested in debating multiculturalism, national history or political correctness. But important questions remain unanswered. To what

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extent has the nation changed since Howard was voted out of office? How are we to make sense of the years of cultural conservatism just passed? Have they actually passed?

Progressives seem unable to answer these questions. They are still in search of a new national story to displace the one we were given during the Howard years. Love him or loathe him, you could not accuse John Howard of lacking a cultural narrative. Howard's critics would say he was on a crusade to remake Australia in his own conservative image, defined by the bland monoculture of the Menzies years of the 1950s and 1960s, with its old-fashioned family values and reverence for Queen and empire. For Howard's supporters, his time in office helped restore a sense of a traditional Australian national identity: Australia was a proud Anglo-Celtic country, with no need for the fashionable political correctness of elites, the Left's 'black armband' view of history, the 'navel-gazing' of endless self-loathing debates about identity or the 'mushy' and 'misguided' policy of multiculturalism. Either way, Howard's prime ministership offered a clearly defined conservative patriotism, with its own myths, heroes and defining moments.⁶ But must progressives reject patriotism if they wish to repudiate parts of the Howard legacy? There is a widespread assumption that they must, but the case is far from clear.

This brings me to the third reason why patriotism should matter to progressives: the challenge of leadership and reform. While progressives are not blind to the potency of ideology, especially the Liberal-conservative ideologies they oppose, they can sometimes overlook the importance of articulating a positive cultural vision of their own. It is not always clear to Australian progressives why a left-liberal political agenda must take an interest in cultural questions. There is a widespread attitude of dismissal: either culture belongs to a less consequential political domain or moving on from the culture wars means not obsessively worrying about matters such as national identity.

I adopt a different view. A progressive politics cannot afford to be lazy or to aspire to mediocrity. As with the rest of the

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world, we are faced with the intergenerational challenge of responding to climate change. A global economic crisis has only thrown into bolder relief a changing international economic order. The Australian economy and workforce require upgrading for a more intensely competitive marketplace. Amid the tumult and transition, Australia must catch the tide of opportunity and position itself for new realities. And this, you could say, is only possible with a clearer idea of what a future Australia should look like.

This is how culture fits into the picture. Leadership involves not merely negotiating the interests of various groups: it is more than just the *quid pro quo* bargaining that is the normal currency of politics. Leadership also involves an act of persuasion between leader and follower. Where leadership is most effective in mobilising resources – getting people to agree with change and to make sacrifices – it engages the values and identities of followers. Politics becomes elevated to a new moral plane.⁷ Yet for this to happen, leaders need to be able to tell a story to followers; they need cultural form as well as political and economic substance. It is the task of this book not just to tackle the challenge of solidarity and the problem of intellectual complacency, but also to offer the foundations of a progressive model of national identity and a cultural map for nation-building.

The patriotism I defend is one in which loving one's country is not reduced to ethnicity or race. It is rather a patriotism that demands of citizens a commitment to a national tradition, comprised of civic values and moulded by historical experience. Loving your country does not mean adhering to unquestioned myths or mindlessly repeating slogans, but being prepared to contribute to the improvement of your community and culture. The national project is something that never is but is always becoming. Understanding things this way requires some rethinking of Australian left-liberal politics. In recent years, progressives have made the error of surrendering all talk about national values to conservatives. It is important that they now reclaim patriotism as a value of their own.

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Here, I should declare my own interest. I am 26 years old and have been a member of the Australian Labor Party for more than a decade, having joined the Mount Pritchard branch in Sydney's southwest when I was 15. Throughout my teenage years, Monday and Wednesday nights were often spent at branch meetings or at gatherings of the local Fairfield–Liverpool Young Labor Association. Many weekends during high school and university were spent letterboxing leaflets across Sydney and sometimes farther afield for state and federal election candidates, all for the reward of some cheap pizza after a morning's work and the cheap thrill, if you can call it that, of being involved in a campaign. In more recent times I have worked for a Labor government in New South Wales (for Bob Carr when he was premier), and in 2007 worked on the ALP campaign in Kevin Rudd's Canberra office.

For the last five years, I have been pursuing postgraduate research at the University of Oxford in England, writing a dissertation about the political theory of patriotism. While it has in many ways been an abstract, philosophical project, my research has never been separated from questions about the kind of patriotism we should embrace. Even while ensconced in Oxford's old libraries, walking daily down its cobbled lanes and in the shadows of its sandstone towers and spires, a world apart from the Sydney suburbs of Canley Vale and Bonnyrigg Heights where I grew up, it is hard not to think about home. And as a first-generation Australian, born in France to parents from southeast Asia, bearing Chinese and Lao ethnicity, the question of whether patriotism can be liberal enough to include those from all cultural backgrounds has for me a very personal significance. Spending time away in England, and watching from afar the rise of a new cultural assertiveness in Australia, seems only to have made such questions more poignant.

To be sure, there has been no shortage of developments or events to pique my sense of patriotism. Whenever Australians do well, and not just in sport, I feel proud and want to know more. Whenever British friends or acquaintances bait me with some Aussie-bashing,