

SUMMARY

Anzac Day and the Representation of History and National Unity in the Age of Neo-Liberalism

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The aim of this essay is to locate the ongoing resurgence of Anzac Day in the context of neo-liberalist culture since the late 1980s. Approaching to the centenary years of the First World War, the Anzac tradition is capturing the interests as a subject of historical studies. Some historians argue the narrative surrounding Anzac Day works as a 'civil religion' to substitute Christianity in the secular, multicultural society, while others criticise the growing nationalistic attachment to the Anzac legend, allegedly promoted under the Howard government, as the 'militarisation' of Australian history. This essay focuses on the bipartisan social consciousness to use the Anzac myth as a source of national unity, with the rise of neo-liberalism from the Hawke labor government to the Abbott liberal government.

The discursive shifts concerning Anzac Day over the last three decades demonstrate how the representation of history has been inclined to be more inclusive in terms of generation, ethnicity and cultural backgrounds. Various agents of memory, such as politicians, ex-servicemen, or academic historians, participate in constructing the cohesive memory which would incorporate non-Anglo-Celtic minorities in the diverse population including indigenous Australians. This apparently harmonious process of myth-making, however, came as a psychological retreat from the confronting debate on colonisation and the 'frontier wars'. In some cases, the emphasis on the indigenous war service offers a symbolic 'reconciliation' through the Anzac tradition. That fits the political correctness in the multicultural society and mediates the fragile sense of community under neo-liberalism. But, as shown in the protest on Anzac Day in Canberra, the incorporation of indigenous history into the dominant nationalist narrative is still problematic and traumatic. In this sense, the recent revival of Anzac Day symbolises the ambivalent attitude to history and national unity in Australia.