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Does Curriculum Fail Indigenous Political Aspirations? Sovereignty and Australian History and Social Studies Curriculum

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Abstract • Through analysis of curricular materials (syllabus documents and supplementary readers) from the late-nineteenth century to the present, this article explores the role of school curriculum in shaping understandings of Indigenous political aspirations in the Australian context. It juxtaposes curricular materials with significant occasions of Indigenous political activism in Australia since the late-nineteenth century: the Coranderrk campaign of the 1870-80s, the Wave Hill Walk Off in 1966, the establishment of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in 1972, and the Bicentenary protests of 1988. From this analysis, five narrative sub-themes were developed—Invisibility, Benevolence, Obfuscation, Innocence, and Acknowledgement—which captured the ways that Indigenous sovereignty, nationhood, and political legitimacy had been represented. In drawing out some continuities and changes to curricular representations of First Nations' and settler sovereignty, nationhood, and political legitimacy over a one hundred year period, this article highlights the uneven ways that curriculum has, and continues to, represent political possibilities on the Australian continent. This article offers insights for Nordic contexts where there are also contests about legacies of colonialism in the public sphere, including in education.

Keywords • Indigenous education; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education; settler colonialism; Indigenous politics; history education

Introduction

There is a groundswell of concern surrounding ways that curriculum, school-based and beyond, can address justice and truth in the present. In Australia, there is growing momentum for meaningful curricular reform expressed, for example, in the Yoorrook Justice Commission's recent call to "overhaul history curriculum" in the state of Victoria.[1] This imperative in Victoria is likely to be echoed in the four other Australian jurisdictions where treaty processes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Australian states and territories—which incorporate truth commissions—are underway or proposed.[2] In late 2023 there will be a national referendum on whether to establish an Indigenous 'Voice to parliament' in the Australian constitution, a body

1 First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, "'Tyerri Yoo-Rrook' (Seed of Truth): Report to the Yoo-Rrook Justice Commission," June 2021.

2 Following Australian convention, we capitalise Indigenous. We use this term to refer to Indigenous people internationally, and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' in Australia. When the distinction is necessary, we use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, First Nations' people, or refer specifically to the Indigenous Country or Nation. We use 'Aboriginal' in contexts where Aboriginal, rather than Torres Strait Islander people, are the dominant population group.

which would support processes of treaty and truth-telling.[3] After several decades of distracting 'history wars' and conservative dissension about history curriculum, the political climate appears primed for meaningful curricular reform.

However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have long pointed to the failures of school curriculum, particularly history curriculum, to accurately represent their experiences and enact social transformation.[4] This raises questions about the decolonial potential of history curriculum. Curricular reforms tend to be complex struggles between powerful groups and social movements to legitimate their knowledge, and generally result in compromises favouring the powerful.[5] In the case of Canada's far-reaching curricular reforms following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of 2009–2015, scholars have shown how Indigenous knowledges, including histories of state-sponsored violence such as Residential Schools, have been enclosed in ways that do not disrupt or decolonise the political unit of 'Canada' as the unquestioned frame of reference giving sense to the story of the nation.[6] Challenging these limited approaches to history curriculum is also a prescient concern in the Australian context, and in Nordic contexts—including in Sweden, Finland, and Norway—where truth commissions are ongoing and which are likely to have significant implications for the education sector.

In this article, we examine of how school curriculum has constructed understandings of sovereignty, nationhood, and political legitimacy on the Australian continent across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We focus on significant occasions of First Nations' political activism in Australia since the late-nineteenth century. Following First Nations' scholars and activists, we recognise these as meaningful expressions of enduring First Nations' sovereignty and self-determination.[7] Then, we juxtapose these moments against Australian school curricular materials (syllabus documents and supplementary readers) used at and around the time. Inspired by a recent, large-scale study of representations of First Nations' political aspirations in Australian news media from 1972 to 2017, we draw attention to the role of school materials in shaping understandings of First Nations' political demands and aspirations in the Australian context.[8] By analysing the stories, discourses and narratives about sovereignty, nationhood and political legitimacy embedded in curriculum, we explore curricula as contested artefacts amidst current debates over treaty, truth-telling, and decolonisation.

3 Referendum Council, "Final Report of the Referendum Council," June 30, 2017, 31.

4 See, for example, Anita Heiss, ed., *Growing Up Aboriginal in Australia* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2017), 14, 88, 117, 122, 137; Referendum Council, "Final Report of the Referendum Council," June 30, 2017, 17, 19, 32; Doris Paton, "Walking in Two Worlds," *Independent Education*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 2012.

5 Michael W. Apple, *Official Knowledge: Democratic Education in a Conservative Age*, third edtion (New York: Routledge, 2003).

6 James Miles, "Curriculum Reform in a Culture of Redress: How Social and Political Pressures Are Shaping Social Studies Curriculum in Canada," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 53, no. 1 (2021), 47–64.

7 Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); John Maynard, *Fight for Liberty and Freedom: The Origins of Australian Aboriginal Activism* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007).

8 Archie Thomas, Andrew Jakubowicz, and Heidi Norman, *Does the Media Fail Aboriginal Political Aspirations? : 45 Years of News Media Reporting of Key Political Moments* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2020).

Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination

In 1770, Captain James Cook and crew of the British *Endeavour* 'claimed' the eastern portion of the Australian continent taking possession for the British crown. In 1788 the First Fleet under command of Captain Arthur Phillip invaded the land of the Gweagal clan of the Dharawal nation at Kamay (Botany Bay), and shortly after, the colony of New South Wales was formally proclaimed. This was the first of many illegal claims across the Australian continent grounded in *terra nullius*, the fiction that land "belonged to no one." That claim was grounded in a Westphalian conception of sovereignty and a Western ontological system of extractive, possessive relations. The failure to negotiate with or recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as "distinct political communities with an inherent right to sovereignty and self-government" has "structured the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the Australian state."[9] Today, the Australian state remains the only former British settler colony to have no treaties with Indigenous peoples.

Our analysis centres Indigenous sovereignty as enduring, dynamic, and distinct from the British, Westphalian conception of sovereignty asserted upon invasion. On the Australian continent there are multiple Indigenous polities with self-determining rights distinct from the wider settler body politic. Indigenous scholars in the Australian context, including Goenpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson and Amangu Yamatji historian Crystal McKinnon for example, have theorised Indigenous sovereignty as ontological—ways of being—that are "inextricably connected to being in and of our lands" and not reducible to a Western legal framework.[10] Fiona Nicoll explains Indigenous sovereignty is "less a desire for European concepts, institutions and values" than it is a "refusal to recognise the legitimacy of the sovereignty in the name in which their [European] invasion continues to be justified." This makes sovereignty a "challenge to the legitimacy of non-Indigenous habitation and governance."[11] As Tanana Athabascan scholar Dian Million has explained, "Indigenous people pre-exist nation-states and reject nation-state authority to grant them a right to a political self-determination that they have never relinquished."[12] Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination remain vexed realities for settler states that expose their tenuous political legitimacy.

These historically troubled relations between Indigenous polities and nation states also characterise the Nordic region. In Finland, Norway, and Sweden, there are no treaties with the Indigenous Sámi people of Sápmi. There are Sámi Parliaments in each state that do not provide self-government, but which afford varying degrees of consultation and mechanisms for the oversight of Sámi interests.[13] Kalaallit Nunaat

9 Alison Whittaker, Harry Hobbs, and Lindon Coombes, eds., *Treaty-Making – 250 Years Later* (Alexandria: The Federation Press, 2022).

10 Crystal McKinnon, *Striking Back: The 1980s Aboriginal Art Movement and the Performativity of Sovereignty*, *Routledge Handbook of Critical Indigenous Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2021); Moreton-Robinson (2015).

11 Fiona Nicoll, "Defacing Terra Nullius and Facing the Public Secret of Indigenous Sovereignty in Australia," *Borderlands* 1, no. 2 (2002), 1.

12 Dian Million, *Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013).

13 Nordic Policy Centre, "Sámi Parliaments," *The Australia Institute,* accessed 22 Oct 2022, https://www.nordicpolicycentre.org.au/Sámi_parliaments

(Greenland) was a Danish colony until 1953, when it was incorporated into the Danish Realm as an autonomous territory, notably, without consultation. Today, Greenland is a self-governing country within the Danish Realm with a large majority Indigenous Inuit population, yet key aspects of Greenlandic politics remain under Danish control including foreign policy and security. As noted, there are truth commissions currently ongoing in Norway, Finland, and Sweden concerning the treatment of the Sámi people, and following the Greenlandic Reconciliation Commission (2014-2017), in June 2022 a large-scale investigation into Danish wrongdoings in Greenland was announced, with Danish cooperation.[14]

History and social studies curricula has been a favoured tool of Australian governments to legitimate white possession. From the nineteenth-century through to the 1960s, instruction in history and civics was intended to develop citizenship and patriotism, and conveyed a white settler-national master narrative of benevolent progress.[15] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been campaigning since at least the late-nineteenth century for a truthful acknowledgement of dispossession and colonial violence in curriculum and beyond, as part of a broader suite of political aspirations including land repatriation and treaty-making. First Nations scholars have urged these be understood as expressions of Indigenous sovereignty and not only as responses to colonial domination.[16] The Australian settler state has ignored, engaged, and failed those aspirations in countless ways.

In the Nordic states, self-determination, in and through education, has been an important priority for Sámi people and communities. Histories of education have been important for establishing truths about systemic wrongdoing directed towards Sámi people in the past. This includes histories of missionary education for Sámi children since the 1600s, as well as post-1800 efforts at nationalisation and associated racialized and assimilatory schemes, such as the 'nomad school' system of compulsory boarding schools for Sámi children in Sweden and state policies of 'Norwegianisation' operative in Norway from roughly 1850 to 1980.[17] Education schemes with assimilatory effects have been the subject of recent truth and justice processes in the Nordic states including the contemporary commissions.[18] The status of Sámi education, including

14 Martin Breum, "The Largest Ever Probe into Possible Historical Danish Wrongdoings in Greenland is About to Begin," *Arctic Today*, accessed 22 May 2023, https://www.arctictoday.com/the-largest-ever-probe-into-possible-historical-danish-wrongdoings-in-greenland-is-about-to-begin/

15 M. Keynes, "History Education, Citizenship and State Formation," in *Handbook of Historical Studies in Education*, ed. Tanya Fitzgerald, Springer International Handbooks of Education (Singapore: Springer, 2020).

16 Crystal McKinnon, "Indigenous Music as a Space of Resistance," in *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity*, ed. Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 255–72.

17 Daniel Lindmark, "Sámi Schools, Female Enrolment, and the Teaching Trade: Sámi Women's Involvement in Eduation in Early Modern Sweden," In *Sámi Educational History in a Comparative International Perspective,* ed. Otso Kortekangas, Pigga Keskitalo, Jukka. Nyyssönen, Andrej Kotljarchuk, Merja Paksuniemi, and David Sjögren (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 13–26; Charlotta Svonni, "The Swedish Sámi Boarding School Reforms in the Era of Educational Democratisation, 1956 to 1969," *Paedagogica Historica*, (July 5, 2021), 1–19; Henry Minde, "Assimilation of the Sami – Implementation and Consequences," *Acta Borealia* 20, no. 2 (December 1, 2003), 121–46.

18 Daniel Lindmark and Olle Sundström, *The Sami and the Church of Sweden: Results from a White Paper Project* (Möklinta: Gidlunds förlag, 2018).

representations of history, language and political aspirations in current national school curricula, differs across the Nordic states.[19] While a full summary is not possible here, research on representations of Sámi people and culture in national standards has been largely critical. For instance, Charlotta Svonni's analysis of the 2011 Swedish national curriculum found Sámi knowledge, including history, culture, and contemporary perspectives, was marginalised,[20] while research on Norwegian social studies textbooks and curricula has found essentialist, stereotypical, and othering representations of Sámi people therein.[21]

Sources and methods

School curriculum materials are a powerful heuristic for considering the positioning and privileging of certain stories, and the tensions and anxieties surrounding sovereignty, nationhood and the state's legitimacy. We adapted the 'story-discourse-narrative' approach to discourse analysis. This approach focuses on identifying the immediate 'story' told in representations of Indigenous peoples, and comparing it to contemporaneous Indigenous representations to analyse how a settler or Indigenous standpoint generates a particular lens in texts (Thomas et al., 2020). We adapted this comparative aspect to juxtapose actions of sovereignty and self-determination of (Australian) national significance and importance to the Aboriginal polity with how curriculum has been used to construct and legitimate white settler conceptions of sovereignty, nationhood, and political legitimacy. We undertook an initial round of deductive coding using these three overlapping themes. We then explored the discourses called upon in the curriculum—understood as ways of knowing and talking about people and ideas that are both products of, and produce, the realities of Indigenous-settler relations. Lastly, we considered how these discourses developed broader national narratives about Australia.[22] Through that process, we identified five repeated and overlapping narrative sub-themes that capture how Indigenous sovereignty, nationhood, and political legitimacy had been represented: Invisibility, Benevolence, Obfuscation, Innocence, Acknowledgement (see Table 1). Our analysis draws attention to the ways that curriculum has been troubled by enduring Indigenous sovereignty.

We concentrated on popular and readily accessible curriculum materials used in the state of Victoria. Our aim was not to find a quantitatively representative sample of curricular materials, but to zoom in on an instructive case that can prompt broader investigation across both the Australian and Nordic contexts. The primary sources

19 Pigga Keskitalo, "Timelines and Strategies in Sami Education," in *Indigenising Education and Citizenship*, ed. Torjer Andreas Olsen and Hilde Sollid (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 2022), 33–52.

20 Charlotta Svonni, "At the Margin of Educational Policy: Sámi/Indigenous Peoples in the Swedish National Curriculum 2011." *Creative Education* 6, no. 9 (2015), 898–906.

21 Kristin Gregers Eriksen, "Teaching About the Other in Primary Level Social Studies: The Sami in Norwegian Textbooks," *JSSE - Journal of Social Science Education* 17, no. 2 (2018), 57–67; Kristin Gregers Eriksen, "The Indigenous Sami Citizen and Norwegian National Identity: Tensions in Curriculum Discourses." *Human Rights Education Review* 1, no. 2 (2018), 25–45; Eimi Segarra Segarra, "Representation of Indigenous Peoples in the Education Curriculum in Norway and Alberta, Canada A Postcolonial Analysis," Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Iceland, 2019.

22 Archie Thomas et al., 2020.

analysed in this article include state-produced supplementary reading materials—the *Victorian Readers* (1928-1950s), the *School Paper* (1896–1971)—and official syllabus guideline documents produced by the Education Department.[23] We begin our comparison with a key moment of sovereign activism in Indigenous politics—the 1880s Coranderrk campaign—and close one century later with the Treaty '88 campaign and the (re)articulation of Indigenous political aspirations. The methodological approach is necessarily shaped by the historical contexts of curriculum, as explained within each section.

Table 1

Sub-Theme	**How sub-theme is reflected in narratives**	**Engagement with impacts of colonisation on Indigenous people**
Invisibility	Indigenous people are either not mentioned at all, or are imagined as disappeared	None
Benevolence	The state and setter individuals are portrayed as paternalistic, and/or progress and enlightenment is represented as 'naturally' unfolding due to white 'civilisation'	Colonisation is considered beneficial for Indigenous people
Obfuscation	State and individual settler violence is obscured, elided, minimised, and/or made to seem natural or necessary	The impacts of colonisation are considered inevitable
Innocence	Injustice/violence is positioned as past and temporal distance between past violence/dispossession is emphasised	The impacts of colonisation are considered regrettable yet fixed
Acknowledgement	Distinct Indigenous aspirations, sovereignty, nationhood, political legitimacy are acknowledged	The impacts of colonisation are acknowledged with an emphasis on damage/survival. Acknowledgment of Indigenous refusal/resilience/self-determination is rare.

Protectionism and the Coranderrk Campaign

In 1861, the colony of Port Philip (later the state of Victoria) established a system of reserves for Aboriginal people. The colonial government held the erroneous view that Aboriginal people would soon 'die out' and decided to confine Aboriginal people on reserves and missions under the authority of 'protectors' in a series of policies and legislation which has collectively become known as 'protectionism'. Coranderrk, one of the six main reserves, was established in 1863 and was located closest to the growing city of Melbourne on the land of the Wurundjeri people. Like many of the other reserves, the site for Coranderrk was selected by Wurundjeri leaders, on fertile country in the Yarra Valley. It was a successful and productive farm that, by the early 1870s, was highly coveted by settlers who exerted pressure on the government to open

23 Victoria Education Department. *The Victorian readers,* 1928–1930; Victoria Education Department. The *School Paper for class III,* 1896–1911; Victoria Education Department. The *School Paper for grades V and VI,* 1912–1968; Education Dept. of Victoria, *Meteor*, 1969–1971; Education Dept. of Victoria, *Orbit*, 1969–1971.

the land up for purchase. The government coerced residents at Coranderrk to relocate elsewhere, leading to a worsening of conditions and increasingly restrictive rules controlling Wurundjeri peoples' lives.[24] The community at Coranderrk campaigned to protect the reserve and stop further dispossession. They drew on the support of influential white supporters, wrote letters and petitions to government ministers and newspapers, and sent deputations to Melbourne over several years, in an early example of organised resistance centred on land-rights and self-determination. It culminated in the 1881 Parliamentary Coranderrk Inquiry ('*The Board Appointed to Enquire into, and Report upon, the Present Condition and Management of the Coranderrk Station'*) held in Melbourne and at Coranderrk.[25]

The Coranderrk community's campaign and their success in securing an inquiry drew sustained attention to Indigenous political aspirations for land and for the end of protectionism. Unfortunately, it afforded no lasting guarantees for the residents. The government eventually sold off and closed Coranderrk in 1924 after passing new highly restrictive legislation with assimilationist intent. Importantly, the Inquiry has created a lasting public record of Aboriginal activism and testimony that continues to be significant for Aboriginal communities in Victoria and more widely.[26]

Early twentieth century curriculum

In the twenty-odd years between 1872 and 1895, shortly after the passage of the Constitution Acts, Education Acts were passed in the six Australian colonies. These were known popularly as the 'free, compulsory and secular' acts and purported to extend elementary education to all, regardless of gender, religion or race. The immense bureaucratic effort of implementing the Acts meant that compulsory elementary schooling rolled out slowly throughout the next century. Common educational materials used in colonial Port Philip and later Victoria, for instruction in reading, spelling and comprehension, included the *Royal Readers* (1877-1928), *Victorian Readers* (1928-1950s), and *School Paper* (1896-1968). These materials have received extensive scholarly attention as important sources for understanding how the state sought to shape children as British subjects and Australian citizens.[27] Largely, readers oriented learners as members of the British Empire and used history to legitimate the actions of state-builders as part of a racialised and gendered narrative of progress.[28] The *School Paper* provided a supplementary 'Australian flavour' to the imported reading books from Britain, and first emphasised Australia as an outpost of Empire and then

24 Giordano Nanni and Andrea James, *Coranderrk: We Will Show the Country* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2013).

25 Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Victorians: A History since 1800* (Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin, 2005), 166–181.

26 Jennifer Balint et al., "The 'Minutes of Evidence' Project: Creating Collaborative Fields of Engagement with the Past, Present and Future," in *Settler Colonial Governance in Nineteenth-Century Victoria*, by Lynette Russell, ed. Leigh Boucher (Canberra: ANU Press, 2015).

27 Phillip Anton Cormack, "Children's School Reading and Curriculum Innovation at the Edge of Empire: The School Paper in Late Nineteenth-Century Australia," *History of Education Review* 42, no. 2 (2013), 153–69; Sianan Healy, "Race, Citizenship and National Identity in The School Paper, 1946–1968," *History of Education Review* 44, no. 1 (2015), 5–22.

28 Rosalie Triolo, "'Our War and the Pacific': Allies and Enemies in Victoria's Education Department Publications, Australia, 1914–18," *History of Education Review* 39, no. 2 (2010), 14–23.

a place of economic and 'racial' progress.[29] Scholars have identified themes such as Empire, noble deeds, adventure, exploration, race, honour and duty as common to these texts throughout the first half of the twentieth century.[30] We develop this work to explore how the materials represented Aboriginal sovereignty, nationhood, and legitimacy, through discussion of three sub-themes: obfuscation, invisibility, and innocence.

Events such as the closure of Coranderrk, and the political campaigning of the residents to challenge restrictive and racist legislation, did not register in curriculum documents throughout the twentieth century. Instead, curriculum documents largely reflected the sub-theme of the obfuscation (and justification) of settler violence. For example, materials routinely depicted white settlers as experiencing extreme adversity and seeking to 'tame' the hostile landscape and its owners. An extract from George Essex Evans' poem 'The Nation Builders' in the *Victorian Reader* VIII from 1929 illustrates this:

> A handful of heroes scattered to conquer a continent—
> Thirst, and fever, and famine, drought, and ruin, and flood,
> And the bones that bleach on the sandhill, and the spears that redden with blood.
> And the pitiless might of the molten skies at noon on the sun-cracked plain,
> And the walls of the northern jungles shall front them ever in vain,
> Till the land that lies like a giant asleep shall wake to the victory won,
> And the hearts of the Nation Builders shall know that the work is done.[31]

Here, the struggle of 'pioneers' against the landscape, climate, and Indigenous people are romanticised as a necessary, heroic battle on multiple fronts that ought to be recognised by the greater populace. In these struggles against adversity, settler violence is positioned as a 'natural' response, a view which ties into obfuscation as well as themes of innocence and invisibility. The naturalisation of this violence was bolstered by Whiggish conceptions of history as a march of progress and related eugenicist 'dying race' theories. A prominent example of this is 'The Last of His Tribe', a poem first published in 1864 by Henry Kendall and long published in the *Victorian Readers*.[32] As the title implies, the poem depicts the lonely death of a sole Aboriginal man, lamenting the loss of his family, culture and community, presumably as a result of colonisation. The 1930 publication of the *Victorian Readers: Fourth Book* contains a one verse-poem by Mary Gilmore, 'The Lost Tribes,' that closely echoes Kendall's: "Never again from the night, the night that has taken/Shall ever the tribes return to tell us their tale/ They lie in a sleep, whence none shall ever waken/ To make a shadow at noon or follow the quail."[33]

29 Cormack (2013), 157.

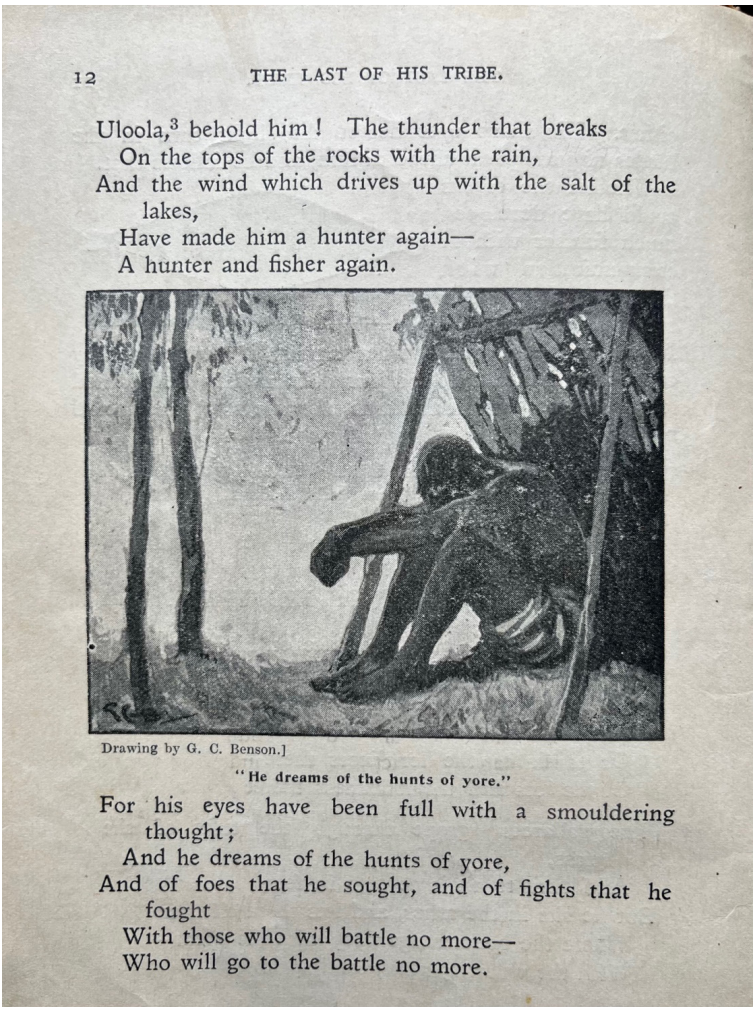
30 Cormack (2013); S. G. Firth, "Social Values in the New South Wales Primary School 1880–1914: An Analysis of School Texts," *Melbourne Studies in Education* 12, no. 1 (1970), 123–59; A. R. Trethewey, "Social and Educational Influences on the Definition of a Subject: History in Victoria, 1850–1954," in *Contemporary Studies in the Curriculum*, ed. Peter William Musgrave (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1974), 95–112.

31 *Victorian Reader: Eighth Book*, (Education Department Victoria, 1929).

32 Henry Kendall, "The Last of His Tribe," *Victorian Reader: Eighth Book*, (Education Department Victoria, 1929) 10–11. The poem was first published in *The Poetical Works of Henry Kendall,* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1923).

33 Mary Gilmore, "The Lost Tribes," *Victorian Readers: Fourth Book* (Education Department Victoria,

Open violence against Indigenous people was ongoing during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, and a range of overtly oppressive legislation sought to control Indigenous people while claiming to 'smooth the pillow of the dying race.'



12 THE LAST OF HIS TRIBE.

Uloola,[3] behold him! The thunder that breaks
On the tops of the rocks with the rain,
And the wind which drives up with the salt of the lakes,
Have made him a hunter again—
A hunter and fisher again.

Drawing by G. C. Benson.]

"He dreams of the hunts of yore."

For his eyes have been full with a smouldering thought;
And he dreams of the hunts of yore,
And of foes that he sought, and of fights that he fought
With those who will battle no more—
Who will go to the battle no more.

Figure 1
Photo reproduced with permission of Mati Keynes

Other narratives centre on imminent violence between settlers and Indigenous people. Paternalistic sentiments are also common throughout, reflecting the theme of benevolence. For example, 'A Black Heroine' from the September 1954 *School Paper* describes a response of a group of Aboriginal people to several white settlers travelling up a river. The narrator explains, a "white man slowly raised his gun to his shoulder."

1930 25).

After a young Aboriginal girl diffuses the potential for violence, the white man with the gun claims it was a joke:

> It was then that the stranger lowered his weapon and spoke quickly to his dark companion. "I would not have shot any of them," he said. "I just wanted to see what they would do; but it was a mean joke to play. Tell them, Tommy, that it was only a joke. I'll leave them this bit of tobacco and sugar, to let them know how much I admire the little girl's courage." And that, surely, is one of the stories of the white man's meeting with the blacks that is worth the telling.[34]

School materials also routinely objectified Indigenous people using offensive racial stereotypes and homogenous descriptions. These devices were used to create emotional distance between the presumed audience of these texts (white teachers and learners) and Indigenous people. They worked to legitimate violence and dispossession as racially sanctioned and reflect the themes of innocence and obfuscation. A piece describing the discovery of "a few scattered stones," titled 'The Old Inhabitants' and authored by renowned war correspondent CEW Bean, illustrates some of the ways that temporal distance was used to legitimate white possession and so-called 'civilisation'. It noted:

> Those stones spoke of an age before the dawn of history. On the spot where we stood, we knew that someone—some one in the blank, utter darkness before Australian history began, some human being belonging to a time of which no history will ever be written, nor yet even the bare outline of it will ever be known—some women in a long-forgotten camp must have knelt there and polished those flat stones with the grinding to powder of the fruit of the nardoo, the blackfellow's poor equivalent of flour.[35]

Finally, and perhaps surprisingly, materials from this period also routinely and explicitly acknowledged settler dispossession of Indigenous lands, a move which implicitly acknowledges Indigenous sovereignty and which reflects the theme of acknowledgement. For example, in a reference to the reserve system and government protectionist policies, the 1911 edition of *The School Paper* for Class III, a piece titled 'How the Australian Blacks Lived' noted:

> There are several centres in Victoria where the few blacks that remain now live. Houses have been put up for them by the Government, and they are given clothes and food, and kindly treated. In spite of the care that is taken to make them comfortable, I think they were, perhaps, happier before the white people came and took their country from them.[36]

From assimilation to self-determination: the 1966 Wave Hill Walkoff and the

34 Victoria Education Department, *The School Paper for grades V and VI,* February 1954.

35 CEW Bean, "The Old Inhabitants," *Victorian Reader: Eighth Book*, Education Department Victoria, 5–8, first published in *The 'Dreadnought' of the Darling* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1956).

36 Some forty years later, this implied recognition of sovereignty remained evident: in Feb 1951, *The School Paper* serial "Billy Bear and the Aborigines" noted matter-of-factly that "Bill meets a dark-skinned boy and girl-their tribes once owned our land."

1972 Tent Embassy

From the 1930s, there was a marked rise in organised Aboriginal political activity in south-eastern Australia. This included the formation of the Aborigines Progressive Association and the Australian Aborigines League, marked by key protests such as the Day of Mourning in Sydney in 1938 and the Cummeragunja Walk-Off in 1939. Leaders such as Bill Ferguson and William Cooper drew on a range of broader political discourses of rights to campaign for land rights, political representation, and the vote. Cooper's protest against the Nazi government of Germany was likely intended to also draw attention to the persecution of Aboriginal people by Australian governments.[37] In the post-war era, as the atrocities of the Holocaust contributed to growing awareness in Western societies of the dangers of racial discrimination, Australian governments and society became increasingly uncomfortable about the position and treatment of Indigenous people. While there were some moves to extend greater citizenship rights to Indigenous people, increasing unfavourable international interest in the rights of Indigenous people contributed to state and federal-level debates over citizenship rights, including the vote.[38] At the same time, a policy shift occurred—at different times in different states—towards the cultural and economic assimilation of Indigenous people.[39]

Figure 2: "Aborigines day of mourning, 26 January 1938," Q 059/9 Mitchell Library (Printed Books Collection).][40]

37 Gary Foley, "Australia and the Holocaust: A Koori Perspective," in *The Power of Whiteness and Other Essays: Aboriginal Studies Occasional Paper* (1) (Melbourne: Centre for Indigenous Education, University of Melbourne, 1999), 74–87.

38 John Chesterman and Brian Galligan, *Citizens Without Rights: Aborigines and Australian Citizenship* (Canbridge: Cambridge University Press: 1997), 161–62.

39 Anna Haebich, *Broken Circles: Fragmenting Indigenous Families 1800-2000* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2000), 439–43.

40 Reproduced with permission of the Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Q 059/9 Mitchell Library (Printed Books Collection).

The momentum of Aboriginal political movements grew during this period. The 1965 Freedom Rides (modelled on those in the US) through NSW, and the fight to retain the sole remaining Aboriginal reserve at Lake Tyers reserve in Victoria in the same year, exposed the incongruity of assimilation legislation that claimed to enable Aboriginal people's access to economic and social 'equality' with the desire of Aboriginal people for self-determination.[41]

During this period, organised campaigns for land, often using union tactics and supported by unionists, were taking place across the country, with increasing frequency and publicity. In 1965 in the Northern Territory, a move by the North Australian Workers Union to amend the agreement on working conditions for pastoral workers to remove discrimination against Aboriginal workers was opposed by pastoralists, and although the government agreed to the amendment, they delayed implementation for three years. In 1966, Vincent Lingiari, a Gurindji man upon whose lands the Wave Hill cattle station was located, led a strike in protest of the poor working conditions the Gurindji people endured under the control of the Vestey Brothers, who owned the station. Ostensibly a campaign for working rights, it became a struggle for control over the land. The strikers remained for seven years as illegal 'occupiers' of their own land. During this period the Gurindji people campaigned for their land to be returned to them, sending a petition to the British Crown's representative in Australia—the Governor-General—who rejected the claim. The strikers sought publicity for their cause and gained support from around the country before a change of federal government in 1972. In 1973, the station lease was surrendered and divided between Gurindji and the Vestey Brothers. In 1975, Prime Minister Gough Whitlam visited and ceremonially handed back a small parcel of land to the Gurindji, captured in a famous image of Whitlam pouring sand through Lingiari's hands.[42]

A successful federal referendum in 1967, following Indigenous campaigning, gave the federal government the power to overrule states and make special laws for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, the referendum made "very little obvious difference in the years immediately following."[43] Then in 1971, the Yolngu land rights case (known as the Gove case) was defeated and the idea of Aboriginal native title to land rejected. As the conservative federal government continued to stall on land rights and the states clung to assimilationist policies, sections of the Aboriginal rights movement turned to radicalism.

In January 1972, four Aboriginal men set up a camp on the lawns of Parliament House, Canberra. They named themselves the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, to symbolise the Aboriginal claim for sovereignty, and demanded native title in Australian cities as well as national land rights legislation, immediate compensation of $6 billion, and for an Aboriginal state across the Northern Territory.[44] The protest grew swiftly, and

41 On the Freedom Rides, see Charles Perkins, *A Bastard Like Me,* (Ure Smith, 1975); Ann Curthoys, *Freedom Ride: A Freedom Rider Remembers* (Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin, 2002); for the fight for Lake Tyers, see Sue Taffe, "Fighting for Lake Tyers," *The La Trobe Journal*, 85 (2010), 157–70.

42 See Charlie Ward, *A Handful of Sand: The Gurindji Struggle, After the Walk-Off,* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2016).

43 Jennifer Clark, *Aborigines and Activism: Race and the coming of the sixties to Australia* (Crawley, WA: UWA Press, 2008), 211.

44 Kevin Gilbert, *Because A White Man'll Never Do It* (New York: HarperCollins, 1973).

the Embassy sent its 'diplomats' all around the country to protests. By May 1972, the government attempted to shut the protest down, but the government's efforts only helped to grow the movement as more supporters joined in attempts to defend the Embassy from police. These Embassy protests sparked over two decades of sustained campaigns for land and treaty rights across Australia.

Mid-twentieth century curriculum

While there was a plethora of First Nations'-led campaigns for rights and self-determination during the 1960s, these events did not penetrate the school curriculum significantly. Instead, in the post-war era until the late-1960s, school materials reflected subtle shifts in Australian politics and society, with the themes of obfuscation, innocence and invisibility remaining dominant in materials. The growth of Australian economy and industry become increasingly prominent in historical narratives of pioneers conquering the harsh landscape, under threat from dangerous weather and animals, with the theme of obfuscation enduring through the positioning of Indigenous people as 'hostile' to white settlement. Take this example from, 'The story of sheep in Australia' from the September 1954 *School Paper*:

> You must remember that the pioneers encountered great hardships….there were floods, followed by droughts; there were hostile aborigines [sic], and others who were not hostile but who, like the "jolly swagman", thought that the "wooly kangaroos" were meant to be eaten.

First Nations' people were excluded from the increasingly affluent white Australian society in the post-war period. When First Nations' people were represented in school materials, it was as being outside modern Australia, both physically and culturally, in contrast to white man's 'achievements', themes which reflect the themes of innocence and benevolence. In late-1960s materials there was a heavy emphasis on representations of foreign cultures and on understanding students from far off places. This reflected the UNESCO-driven agenda of developing 'international understanding' as part of a post-war concern with combating racial intolerance, as well as Australia's increasing intake of migrants from Europe, receding British influence, and emphasis therefore on assimilation of racialised 'others' into the white nation.[45]

During this period, Australian governments became increasingly sensitive to international scrutiny regarding Indigenous people and to racial discrimination more broadly. Representations of colonial-era violence shifted from being characterised by inevitability to include sentiments of reticence and regret by the mid-1960s, reflecting changing moral attitudes to violence in the post-war era. This is clear in changing representations of early colonisers in the school materials. For example, in 1929, colonial 'explorers', such as Scotsman Angus McMillan, had been described in the *Victorian Reader* as such:

45 Education Dept. of Victoria, *Meteor*, 1969–1971; Education Dept. of Victoria, *Orbit*, 1969–1971; Matilda Keynes and Beth Marsden, "Ontology, Sovereignty, Legitimacy: Two Key Moments When History Curriculum Was Challenged in Public Discourse and the Curricular Effects, Australia 1950s and 2000s," *History of Education Review* 50, no. 2 (2021): 130–45.

> If any men were ever worth your knowing, these are they: and, if you once get to know them intimately in their own records, you will have men to remember and admire all your life.[46]

By 1951, McMillan was described in the *School Paper* as being "[a]lways a friend of the natives" and was "made protector of the local aborigines [sic] and stood very high in their regard."[47] In a 1965 issue, however, the poem, 'Croa-jingalong' more accurately depicted the violent, exterminatory actions of McMillan, who "strode through wilderness that has become the busy Orbost road."[48] The poem explicitly acknowledged McMillian's participation in a massacre of an Aboriginal community, however, it justifies his action. The poem showed that "strong Black warriors" had "raided Peter Imlay", "speared Peter's cattle" and "killed a white cook" (real-life events that took place as part of the rescue of a kidnapped Aboriginal girl). The poem described the "white man's vengeance", "how settlers armed with shot-guns wiped out the Doora tribe", before declaring that "All this is ancient history."

In distinction from the early twentieth century materials, these did not acknowledge dispossession. Instead, they constructed First Nations' people as invisible in contemporary society, and belonging to a past time, while positioning settlers' wrongdoings as "ancient history." This reflected the assimilationist notion that there were no Aboriginal Victorians remaining, albeit underpinned by sentiments of regret. Yet at this time in the 1960s, Aboriginal civil rights movements were growing in prominence and awareness of both the impact and ongoing effects of colonisation was increasing. Declaring a colonial massacre "ancient history" creates division between past and present in a political context where Aboriginal people were using sophisticated methods to organise large-scale protests and collective actions for self-determination.

Reconciliation and the 1988 Bicentenary Protest

The attitude of many Aboriginal people towards the federal government had increasingly soured in the lead up to the 1988 Bicentenary of British invasion. Then-Prime Minister Bob Hawke had failed to deliver on his promise for national land rights while simultaneously pushing for Aboriginal involvement in Bicentenary celebrations. The leaders of the Aboriginal movement saw an opportunity to pressure Hawke while the world watched.[49] Preparations for the celebrations had been in place for nearly a decade. As a privately funded re-enactment of the First Fleet sailed into Sydney Harbour on January 26, 1988, alongside the government sponsored parade of 'tall ships', First Nations' protestors from all over the country were there to greet it. The protests were led by the Treaty '88 campaign. In their statement of principles, they declared Australia had been invaded by a foreign power with no treaty, but that "legal and political channels have been exhausted" within Australia and the future for treaty-making was in international law.[50]

46 *Victorian Reader: Eighth Book*, (Education Department Victoria, 1929), 95.

47 "Explorers and Pioneers: MacMillian and Strezlecki," *The School Paper*: Grades V&VI, August 1951.

48 "Croajingalong," *The School Paper*: Grades V&VI, 1965; Beth Marsden, "'The System of Compulsory Education is Failing': Assimilation, Mobility and Aboriginal Students in Victorian State Schools, 1961–1968," *History of Education Review* 47, no. 2 (2018), 20.

49 Lorena Allam, "'Like Writing in the Sand': Media Discourse, the Barunga Statement and the Treaty '88 campaign" in Archie Thomas et al, (2020), 87–98.

50 "Aboriginal Sovereignty – Treaty '88 Campaign," 1988, *Reason in Revolt* [website], accessed 31 Jan 2022, https://www.reasoninrevolt.net.au/bib/PR0000385.htm

The problem in Australia had been that 'the thief is the judge', reflecting the disappointment at the failure of the legal challenge to British sovereignty in 1979 (the Coe case). Later in 1988, the Barunga statement was delivered to Hawke at the Jawoyn community in Barunga by Wenten Rubunjta and Galarrwuy Yunupingu, the outcome of extensive Aboriginal discussions. The statement's demands included self-determination, land rights, compensation for land loss, protection of sacred sites, the return of remains, linguistic and cultural rights, and the rights enshrined in the UN Declaration of Human Rights. It called for laws for a national elected Aboriginal body, national land rights, and recognition of customary law by police and justice systems.[51] It concluded by urging the Australian government to support international law-making in support of Indigenous rights, and to negotiate a Treaty. Famously, Hawke signed the statement, and his last official act as Prime Minister was to hang the Barunga statement in Parliament House—however, his government made little progress on the statement's goals.

Late-twentieth century curriculum

The latter decades of the twentieth century saw growing public awareness of Australia's foundation in frontier violence and racism, owing largely to successful campaigning of First Nations' people. At the same time, the school history curriculum was characterised by intense contestation. From the late 1980s, the curriculum policy landscape shifted considerably in Victoria. The curriculum was slowly devolved from being educator-controlled and brought under the influence of new managerialist bureaucracies.[52] During the 1990s, history in the compulsory years remained entirely subsumed within an integrated social studies curriculum, making it difficult to know what was taught as history.[53] However, in the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) 1991 senior Australian History syllabus we found a distinctively revisionist discourse that, for the first time, engaged closely with nationhood and legitimacy as contested concepts. In this final section, we analyse that new syllabus and its subsequent revisions between 1991-1999, amidst broader political backlash to acknowledgement.

The representational character of the history discipline itself was foregrounded in the 'Introduction' to the syllabus, which noted that "History is" both "the study and practice of making meaning of the past" and the "study of issues and problems of establishing and representing that meaning." As Cairns has argued, "students were encouraged to challenge the notion of history as definitive, and to question how and for what purpose it becomes established and legitimated."[54] The syllabus emphasised

51 Allam (2020).

52 Craig Campbell and Helen Proctor, *A History of Australian Schooling* (Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin, 2014), 224–26. The Blackburn report of 1985 argued that upper secondary courses, originally designed for a minority, were now unsuited to the wider range of abilities of students, which led to the recommendation of the Victorian Certification of Education (VCE), finally introduced in 1991.

53 The SOSE Key Learning Area comprised the subjects of history, geography, economics, as well as Aboriginal Studies, Asian Social Studies, Studies of Religion and work education. See; Catherine Harris and Colin Marsh, "SOSE Curriculum Structures: Where to Now?" (ACSA Biennial Conference, Melbourne, 2007), 5. Rebecca Cairns, "The Representation of Asia in Victorian Senior Secondary History Curriculum" (Ph.D. thesis, Deakin University, 2017), 101, https://dro.deakin.edu.au/eserv/DU:30107919/cairns-therepresentation-2018.pdf.

54 Cairns (2017), 112.

concepts such as power, race, gender, class and ideology and was quite explicitly 'bottom up' in its orientation.[55] The national story was critiqued for its silences concerning women and Aboriginal peoples' contributions to national life. The study commenced with conceptions of history and historical revisionism, stating that "Australian history has often been represented as a single collective memory which functioned to shape the past into a cultural tradition."[56] It also noted:

> Australian cultural identity […] had been seen by some as an actual reflection of Australian people, and by others as a galvanising mythology […] more recently [it] has been perceived as an artificial imposition upon diverse cultures and identities, relying on constructions of the 'other' and the denial of difference.

In drawing explicit attention to the contested construction of Australian national identity, the syllabus unsettled the role of history curriculum itself in constructing representations of nationhood and explored its political and social implications.

Notably, the syllabus made explicit reference to "displacement", "invasion" and "exclusion" in reference to Indigenous-settler relations, reflecting the theme of acknowledgement.[57] In distinction to earlier materials, the syllabus highlighted examples of Aboriginal resilience and self-determination noting: "Aboriginal people responded [to European economy and British law] by adapting their cultural practices and finding new ways of maintaining and expressing identity." It noted the "displacement of Aboriginal modes of production and people" because of "European invasion." The syllabus was intended to work as a framework to be elaborated at school level. This represented a considerable focus on the effects of and responses to colonisation compared with both prior, and later, more content-driven syllabus documents. The syllabus also maintained a sustained attention to the representational character of history, in three of four depth studies. This emphasis was gradually removed from later documents.

Finally, the syllabus also explicitly historicised the imposition of European modes of governance and political legitimacy, and the ongoing exercise of power and authority, including implications for Aboriginal people. It noted, for example:

> The Europeans brought with them traditions and practices about the way power and authority should be organised, controlled and distributed. These practices reflected political values and beliefs about decision making, citizenship, participation and law enforcement which provided the basis for the way society developed and its relationship to the existing Aboriginal society.

In addition, reflective of the theme of acknowledgement, it also listed Aboriginal people as one of the "groups who advocated changes to the organisation and distribution of

55 Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Board, History: Study Design. (Carlton, Vic.: Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Board, 1990), 2. The 'Aims of the study' were broad and wide-reaching, comprising both specific skills (such as 'responding to historical evidence') but also far-reaching goals (such as 'develop an understanding of the importance of social memory and the role of history in society').

56 Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Board, 1990, 47.

57 Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Board, 1990, 48–50.

power" and directed students and teachers to consider their arguments. This is a rare example of curriculum explicitly engaging Aboriginal political activism and aspirations.

Sweeping changes to Victorian education followed the election of the neo-conservative Kennett government in 1992.[58] At the same time, in 1991, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody delivered its final report, making 339 recommendations for reform. This included recommendation number 290:

> That curricula of schools at all levels should reflect the fact that Australia has an Aboriginal history and Aboriginal viewpoints on social, cultural and historical matters. It is essential that Aboriginal viewpoints, interests, perceptions and expectations are reflected in curricula, teaching and administration of schools.[59]

In 1992 Prime Minister Keating explicitly acknowledged, for the first time, the culpability of white settler descendants for the harm caused by British colonisation and its legacies. However, the Victorian Curriculum Standards Framework (CSF) for primary and secondary schools in the compulsory years was published in 1995. It recommended reform of teacher training, TAFE, adult and pre-school education to suit a new focus on standardisation. The mid-1990s also marks the acceleration of the discourse around so-called "black armband" history—a label adopted by critics to dismiss revisionist accounts of national history for their challenge to settler narratives.[60] Conservative historians and politicians targeted 'postmodern' history in a sustained attempt to deny the violence of Australian colonisation.[61]

Subtle changes are evident in the 1994 senior history syllabus. References to the construction of Australian history as a single collective memory were removed. References to "European invasion" were replaced with "British Settlement", a change made at the Kennett Government's request.[62] References to the "Displacement of Aboriginal people" were retained as was their "exclusion from political participation."[63] However, by 1996 the Aims of the study had been pared back, and excluded "race, gender, class and ideology" and the "implications" of historical representations. Recognition of a dominant construction of Australian history was reframed as the search for identity, labelled neutrally as "a continual

58 Amanda Watson, "Recent Curriculum Developments in Victoria," in *Honing the Craft: Improving the Quality of Music Education; Conference Proceedings of the Australian Society for Music Education, 10th National Conference* (Australian Society for Music Education. National Conference, Hobart Tasmania: Artemis Publishing, 1995), 6–7.

59 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, "Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: National Report" (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1991), http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/rciadic/.

60 Anna Clark, "History in Black and White: A Critical Analysis of the Black Armband Debate," *Journal of Australian Studies* 26, no. 75 (2002), 1–11.

61 Geoffrey Blainey, "Sir John Latham Memorial Lecture, Appeared as 'Drawing up a Balance Sheet of Our History,'" *Quadrant* 37, no. 7–8 (1993): 10–15; Keith Windschuttle, *The Killing of History: How a Discipline Is Being Murdered by Literary Critics and Social Theorists* (Paddington: Macleay, 1994).

62 Ruth Learner and Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, *History: Victorian Certificate of Education Study Design* (East Melbourne: VCAA, 2004), 62; Cairns (2017), 126.

63 In the Koori History Syllabus, reference to invasion was removed and replaced with settlement. The concentration on "Invasion, Occupation, Resistance" was replaced with "Koori response to British colonisation" and the significant semantic qualifier added that noted "their [Koori] *perception* of that occupation as an invasion" (emphasis mine).[6] See Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Board, 83.

theme in Australian history." A thematic focus on culture, economy, social life and power was replaced with a chronological approach from the colonial period to 1920, and a concentration on "everyday life" during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the subsequent 1999 iteration, colonisation and settlement were used in place of invasion, and dispossession was described as "possession of the land." The syllabus noted that "For Aborigines [sic] the impact of colonisation was devastating" and cited "the introduction of new disease, competition over resources, frontier violence and cultural misunderstanding" as leading to "increasing strains on traditional lifestyles and cultures."[64] The chronological approach in 1996 and 1999 saw the return of familiar developmental narratives in the syllabus including the return of the theme of benevolence contained in the idea that "Australia's history is characterised by expansion."[65]

The 1999 syllabus stated that "Aborigines [sic] continued to be marginalised in Australian society" during the twentieth century and noted the "erosion" of Aboriginal peoples' political rights. This marked a shift away from "exclusion" to more agentless forms of expression reflecting narratives of benevolence and obfuscation. In Unit 4, 'Everyday life in the twentieth century: 1901-1945', the syllabus noted that "Government policy towards the Aboriginal people continued to marginalise and discriminate against these Australians. Aborigines [sic] were not recognised in the official census, and reserves and missions controlled the daily lives of these people." Compared with the emphasis in 1990 on "displacement", "invasion" and "exclusion", there was a clear shift towards more benign language, and consolidation of the narratives of benevolence, innocence, and obfuscation. Importantly, the 1999 syllabus noted for the first time that "In the 1980s and 90s, moves were made towards a policy of reconciliation with Australia's indigenous [sic] people."[66] This development was framed within a paragraph focused on how international migration and the emergence of multiculturalism reshaped Australian society in the post-war period. The syllabus also listed "the Mabo and Wik decisions" and for the first time, "the Stolen Generation", as part of a list of events leading to "public debate and division."[67] Example learning activities provided in the syllabus treated directly with colonial injustice, but largely framed these using benevolent and agentless language. For example, suggested activities included: "discuss the impact of European arrival on Aboriginal people and consider the changing nature of the European-Aboriginal relationship over time", and "undertake a short mapping activity focusing on the spread of settlement."[68] The preference for words such as "arrival" and "spread" mark a clear departure from earlier agentic language. The revisions to the original 1991 VCE syllabus consolidated a backlash to the revisionist and progressive quality of the original syllabus. Established conceptions of settler nationhood and political legitimacy were gradually reinstated and by 1999 the theme of acknowledgment has been drastically diminished.

64 Board of Studies, *History Study Design* (Carlton, Vic., 1999), 110–16.

65 Board of Studies (1999), 116.

66 Ibid, 116.

67 Ibid, 116.

68 Board of Studies (1999), 124.

Concluding discussion

In this article, we have examined how school curriculum has constructed understandings of sovereignty, nationhood, and political legitimacy on the Australian continent across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the early twentieth century, as residents at Coranderrk campaigned for self-determination and rights despite being subject to highly restrictive policies, school materials conveyed narratives of British exceptionalism and nationalism and affirmed settler political legitimacy by positioning Aboriginality as 'primitive'. Notably, materials also explicitly acknowledged white theft of land. By the mid-twentieth century, amidst a background of increasingly sophisticated and widespread First Nations' political activity, school materials shifted to reinforce Australian conceptions of nationhood and political legitimacy (rather than British) and emphasised, for the first time, the inclusion and understanding of non-white, racialised 'others' (but not Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people). These moves were reflective of increasing consciousness and international pressure concerning racial intolerance and state violence. Yet, themes conveying the backwardness and invisibility of First Nations' people were strengthened in materials during this period, while acknowledgement of dispossession was omitted. Finally, a new history syllabus in the early 1990s contained the first sustained acknowledgement of Aboriginal political aspirations and the impacts of colonisation, but the backlash was swift and fierce. While the 1991 history syllabus did not go so far as to acknowledge First Nations' sovereignty, contested conceptions of nationhood and political legitimacy were reflected in both the content and the form of the syllabus. The backlash that followed indicates the power inherent in 'unsettling' national narratives by questioning the ways settler legitimacy and nationhood are constructed in and through curriculum, vis-à-vis Indigenous nationhood, political legitimacy, and potentially, also sovereignty.

Since 2010, with the introduction of the national curriculum, it has been compulsory to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives across all subject areas and levels. This 'cross-curriculum priority' was deemed an item of national significance.[69] Revisions to the subject area of history from 2010 included new emphases on histories of injustice such as forced child removal and Indigenous campaigns for rights.[70] The Year 10 depth study 'Rights and Freedoms' focused on human rights since 1945, includes "the struggle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for rights and freedoms." This includes a focus on the Stolen Generations and forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from their families well as the significance of various civil rights movements including: "1962 right to vote federally; 1967 Referendum; Reconciliation; Mabo decision; Bringing Them Home Report (the Stolen Generations), the Apology."[71] While these are undoubtedly significant moments, they are also all instances where the settler state accommodated some of the political aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Myriad instances of First Nations' self-determination that have been opposed or ignored by settler governments have not been included.

69 Jacinta Maxwell, Kevin Lowe, and Peta Salter, "The Re-Creation and Resolution of the 'Problem' of Indigenous Education in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cross-Curriculum Priority," *Australian Educational Researcher* 45 (2018), 161–77.

70 Keynes and Marsden (2021).

71 *Australian Curriculum: History*. Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2010.

The selection of these moments shows the metanarrative at play in the inclusion of histories of injustice and First Nations' campaigns for rights and freedoms. In extending selective rights to First Nations' people, the national story is presented as progress towards tolerance, and past injustices are cleaved away from the present and positioned as errors on the pathway to greater enlightenment. This process in the 2000s was occurring at the same time as discourses of apology and 'closing the gap' sought to inaugurate a new era of reconciled nationhood while working to decouple a policy focus on Indigenous 'disadvantage'.[72] This temporal positioning of increasing state benevolence demonstrates how settler legitimacy is reinforced through disavowal of Indigenous sovereignty in curriculum. The effect of this is consolidated in other parts of the history curriculum by placing Indigenous peoples' status and rights alongside those of migrant groups. In the Canadian context, Miles called this the "embedding of multicultural discourses" where the settler nation-state is exalted "as the only sovereign actor" and colonialism is represented as "just another example of historical injustice faced by a minority group on the path to recognition and acceptance in a multicultural state."[73] In this way, the history and present of First Nations' sovereignty and self-determination continues to be largely excluded from school curriculum.

There are three main ways that our historical analysis in this article might be useful for scholars and policymakers in Nordic contexts and beyond. The first is political. In this article, we have chosen to centre significant occasions of First Nations' political activism in Australia, which we recognise as meaningful expressions of enduring First Nations' sovereignty and self-determination. In juxtaposing these with representations in the school curriculum, it becomes apparent how educative materials have consistently failed First Nations' political aspirations. The second is methodological. Our story-discourse-narrative approach and the analytic sub-themes we developed—Invisibility, Benevolence, Obfuscation, Innocence, and Acknowledgement—could potentially be utilised in Nordic curricular analyses and compared for similarities and differences. Finally, our analysis in this article stimulates an insight which might be useful in the Nordic region where processes of historical truth-telling and debates about how to represent historical injustices in, or 'decolonise' curriculum, are ongoing. As we have shown in this article, one hundred years of continued political campaigning and agitation of First Nations' people in Australia, including some that have utilised state-sponsored political processes such as the Coranderrk Inquiry, has made little impact on how school curriculum has conveyed deep narratives of nationhood, political legitimacy, and sovereignty. Our historical analysis has shown that there is a clear tendency for curriculum to adhere to narratives that, despite some subtle shifts in emphases, remain centred on legitimating *settler* nationhood, political legitimacy, and sovereignty. While there is considerably more emphasis on the inclusion of Indigenous histories and cultures in the contemporary curriculum, so long as these fail to acknowledge Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, they will continue to legitimate settler colonialism.

72 Matilda Keynes, "Rhetoric of Redress: Australian Political Speeches and Settler Citizens' Historical Consciousness," *Journal of Australian Studies* (2023), online first: https://doi.org/10.1080/14443058.2023.2217824

73 Miles (2021), 13.

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