

# Australian Nationalism and Globalization: Narratives of the Nation in the 2000 Sydney Olympics' Opening Ceremony

Teresa Heinz Housel

*This paper examines how the Sydney Olympics Games' opening ceremony presented images of a linear, multicultural, and chronological narrative of Australian history. However, the ceremony's attempts to manage difference produced multiple narratives of the Australian nation. Textual analysis of the Australian Channel 7 broadcast and newspaper coverage of the Olympics show how the ceremony's narrative of a united Australian nation responds to the increasing disintegration of nation-states' boundaries in the context of globalization.*

*Keywords: Australia; Olympics; Multiculturalism; Nationalism; Globalization*

On September 15, 2000, Australia's Channel 7 joined other networks worldwide to broadcast the Olympic Games held in Sydney. The opening ceremony depicted a multicultural country in which different groups were united under a banner of Australian nation, culture, and identity. Flanked by icons of Australianness such as the national flag, the ceremony staged Australian history as a linear, chronological, and multicultural narrative. The fact that Australian print journalists contested this linear narrative in their Olympics coverage suggests how the ceremony's attempts to manage difference produced competing narratives of the Australian nation at the subnational, national, and transnational levels. Textual analysis of the Channel 7

---

Teresa Heinz Housel is an assistant professor of Communication at Hope College. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2001 National Communication Association convention, where it received the top Student Paper and Top Four Paper awards in the International & Intercultural Division. The author thanks Dr. Michael Curtin at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, for guidance on early drafts; and Ross Arnold, sales researcher at the Olympic Television Archive Bureau in London, and Stephen Kime, library archivist at Channel 7, for assistance in securing television recordings. Correspondence to: Teresa Heinz Housel, Hope College, Department of Communication, Martha Miller Center for Global Communication, Room 126, Hope College, Holland, MI 49423, USA. Tel: +1-616-795-7268; Email: housel@hope.edu

broadcast and newspaper coverage of the Sydney Olympic Games shows how the ceremony's narrative of a united Australian nation responds to the increasing disintegration of nation-states' rigid boundaries in the context of globalization.

Homogenizing processes such as the circulation and consumption of popular culture occur within and across nations. Nonetheless, Giddens (1997) suggests, globalization does not move in a uniform direction, for example, from West to East. Within globalization the nation-state is neither completely united nor culturally homogenized. Instead, global society is a "field of social relations in which many specific systems" exist in global, national, and local contexts (Shaw, 1997, p. 32). The formation of multinational corporations is one characteristic of globalization (Sklan, 1996). Yet, the activities of multinational corporations may conflict with state interests (Shaw, 1997, pp. 31, 35). Globalization is thus defined by interconnectedness and dependency between the global and local (Thompson, 1995).

One way that nation-states react to globalization is by intensifying existing national and ethnic divisions (Nicol & Townsend-Gault, 2005). During the 1990 Albertville (France) Olympic Games, the use of nationalistic symbols (such as the French flag) against the backdrop of European flags reflected a "restoration of the national culture after gestures toward the regionally 'supernational' (the European Union) and the global (the Olympic phenomenon)" (Tomlinson, 1996, p. 598). Tomlinson's (2005b) analysis of the opening ceremonies of the 1998 Nagano and 2002 Salt Lake City Games suggests how the "claimed universalism" of the Olympics "can be appropriated into a particular nationalist cause and merged with a set of national values" such as ambition and hard work (p. 83). In both cases, the Games' transnational characteristic mediated the "tensions of a changing and threatened world order" (Tomlinson, 1996, p. 600) that were apparent in the parallel staging of nationalism through national icons such as flags.

Bhabha (1990) emphasizes how nationalism involves a construction of linear narratives of nation, culture, and identity. In other words, this process of "narrating the nation" occurs when people negotiate relationships with a particular nation by constructing narratives that define their boundaries. In Australia's case, current external and internal penetration of the nation-state's imagined boundaries is producing a narrative of the nation. Uncertainty about what it means to be Australian results from threats to the nation from global capitalism's economic forces, the global market's integration, and the country's increasing ethnic pluralism (Danforth, 2001).

### **Using Colonial Ideas of Nation and Race To Interpret Australian Multiculturalism**

The debates about what comprises Australianness mobilize institutional multicultural discourse. After World War II, to ease the labor shortage and help build up the young country, the Australian government subsidized a major immigration program to attract settlers and skilled workers (Schmortte, 2005). Multiculturalism emerged as a policy issue in Australia in the 1970s to accommodate the massive immigration of the 1950s and 1960s (MacLeod, 2006; O'Regan, 1994). By the 1980s,

as Australia became more linked to Asia, Australia's multicultural policy created cultural and economic projects, such as a national broadcast network (SBS) for ethnic minorities, equal employment opportunity programs, and quotas for skilled immigrants.

Institutional multiculturalism asserts a seamless multicultural nation or a "poly-ethnic Australian reality" (O'Regan, 1993, p. 107). But, critical multiculturalism critiques this assertion, noting that this reality is grounded in colonial Australian conceptions of nation and race. Until Australia's federation in January 1, 1901, its six colonies were separate political entities, each responsible to the Colonial Office in London (Birrell, 1995). White colonial elites differentiated themselves as superior to the White lower classes and Aborigines. To the early White settlers, Australia was viewed as a "waste land or terra nullius [no person's land]," an empty land that lacked any non-White history (Partington, 1997, p. 272). Actually, the White settlers found hundreds of Aboriginal nations. Many White settlers compared Aborigines to the "dark-skinned African Negroes" (De Lepervanche, 1984, p. 49), who were likewise perceived as socially inferior. Using "racist" notions of color or blood (Rickard, 1992, p. 60) influenced by social Darwinism and eugenics (Partington, 1997), race was socially constructed to rationalize the Anglo-Whites' dominance in the colonial nation-state. Australianness (and implicitly nationhood) was thereby defined through a rubric of Anglo-Celtic Whiteness.

Whiteness and nationalism continue to dominate notions of the nation and citizenship in Australia as the country struggles to reconfigure its identity as a former penal colony. Aborigines were not recognized as citizens until 1967 (Macintyre, 1991). Racialized cultural mores define Australia's ideological borders as an imagined community (Anderson, 1991). Racialized ideology was particularly reflected in Australia's White Only immigration policy; non-White immigration was prohibited from 1901 to 1973 (Danforth, 2001; Hage, 2003).

After World War II, the political and economic environment in which the White Australia policy emerged rapidly changed. New concerns in the early 1950s included national independence in Asian and African countries; lingering fears about nationalist forces in Asia; Australia's need for skilled migrants; and Australia's increased economic ties with Southeast Asia. These required Australia to build closer, friendly relations with non-European states or risk alienating Asian and international opinion (Jordan, 2006). Australia's Prime Minister Harold Holt agreed in March 1966 to admit some non-Europeans as migrants. By this time, British immigration to Australia had also decreased, as Britain's postwar economy improved. Australia lifted the White Only policy and created institutional multiculturalism to manage the immigrant populations in the early 1970s (Danforth, 2001; Hage, 2000). The immigration process traditionally emphasized "assimilation and integration" in which only some people (Europeans) "were held capable of adopting the 'Australian way of life' and becoming members of the Australian national community" (Danforth, 2001, p. 367). This integration policy promoted smooth integration into mainstream Australian culture, thus upholding Anglo culture as the dominant power position (Hage, 2000, 2003). Although institutional multiculturalism posits a

rhetoric of national harmony, ethnic pluralism, and unity, it is a discursive practice that seeks to regulate the nation's boundaries through a rubric of Whiteness (Hage, 2003; Tomlinson, 1991).

Multicultural rhetoric became salient during the 1996 federal election of Prime Minister John Howard, a member of the conservative Liberal Party. The Liberal Party's election to government coincided with the rise of Pauline Hanson's ultraright One Nation Party (Hage, 2000). Appealing to the "Australian values" invoked by Howard, Hanson described herself as an "ordinary Australian": a fish and chip shop owner and single parent who "has had her share of life's knocks" (Hanson, 1996, p. 1). Her sentiment echoed the discourse of "Anglo-decline," "which bemoans what it sees as the attack on the core British values of traditional White Australia and where the figure of the ordinary 'mainstream' Australian . . . is perceived as a victim" (Hage, 2000, p. 20). Hanson rhetorically asserted her (White) ordinariness to identify with a mass, working-class audience and to marginalize Aborigines and non-English speaking immigrants as deviant and against national interests. Hanson's notion of ethnicity rests on the same theoretical ideas underlying institutional multiculturalism. Although it claims cultural diversity, Australian multiculturalism is a discursive rhetorical structure that smoothes over social anxiety regarding the solidity of national boundaries. Hanson's White Australian ethnicity is not positioned with change, but with "power and aggression, violence and mobilization, as the older forms of nationalism" (Hall, 1996, p. 119). As a result, Hanson and other politicians' search for scapegoats against which to legitimize a historical Australia and create an ideologically White nation was predictable (Anderson, 1991; Young, 1995).

Since the late 1990s in Australia, Whites' paranoia has focused on a more global threat: Muslims and Islam (Hage, 2003). Several events intensified the debates around Muslims, Australian nationalism, and immigration. In 2001, news reports claimed that gangs from Lebanese Muslim suburbs were raping White Australian girls. Around this same time, Afghan asylum-seekers on a sinking Indonesian ferry were rescued by a Norwegian ship near Christmas Island, an Australian territory northwest of Australia. They were not permitted to have their claims for refugee status determined on Australian soil. Against those who accused the government of inhumane treatment, the Australian Minister of Immigration and the Prime Minister claimed that the asylum seekers were criminals. September 11 further mobilized the stereotypes that Muslims are "predisposed towards crime, rape, illegal entry to Australia, and terrorism" (Hage, 2003, p. 68).

These sentiments remain entrenched in Australian multicultural discourse. Hage (2000) notes how "White multiculturalism works to mystify, and to keep out of public discourse, other multicultural realities in which White people are not the overwhelming occupiers of the centre of national space" (p. 19). The Olympic Games' opening ceremony's multicultural theme was embedded in a colonial discourse of Anglo-Whiteness that attempted to manage difference.<sup>1</sup>

### **Narrating the Multicultural Nation in the Opening Ceremony**

The Australian Channel 7 coverage (the exclusive broadcaster in Australia for the Sydney Olympics) was chosen for analysis for several reasons. First, the Australian broadcast was important in communicating the tensions of the Australian nation in a global society to national and even international audiences. For a postcolonial country “about to celebrate its centenary, yet still struggling to reconcile with its indigenous peoples, the Olympics provided a probably unprecedented forum for appraising and assessing contemporary ‘Australianness’” (Rowe & Stevenson, 2006, p. 197). Broadcast presentations of the Games provide not only “insights into national and cultural self identity,” but also better understanding of “different ways of seeing global events and issues in the broader schema of international and intercultural relations” (de Moragas Spà, Rivenburgh, & Larson, 1995, p. 3). In fact, during the bidding process, Sydney had been represented as a “multicultural city in a multicultural nation, fit to host a multicultural event” (Sinclair, 2000, p. 37). Second, foreign broadcasters such as the US-based NBC supplemented their pictures and commentary with international feed from the host broadcaster (The Sydney Olympic Broadcasting Organisation). As a result, some footage shown on Channel 7 was also broadcast by NBC and other networks.

Scholars often find that reconciliation and nationalism are themes in Olympic ceremonies. In the parade of nations at the beginning of the Sydney Olympics, for example, the Australian announcers’ observations that North and South Korea were marching together were juxtaposed against their use of phrases such as “people of Australia,” “Australian way of life,” and “we all” (as Australians) (Seven Network, 2000). These phrases suggest the Olympic Games’ “communicated sense of togetherness and locality” (Wilson, 1996, p. 604), which parallel multicultural discourses of national unity. Multicultural discourse fits neatly into the opening ceremony’s dismissal of Australia’s sociopolitical fragmentation across ethnic, gender, and class lines. In delineating Australianness to an (inter)national audience, the opening ceremony attempts to manage difference under a rubric of a singular, White-dominated, and colonial-influenced Australian narrative. The broadcast narration in Olympic opening ceremonies formed the background of the Games as a productive site of national narratives. Referring to the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics’ opening ceremony, Tomlinson (1996) noted that a national narrative “marginalizing minorities and celebrating the dominant culture” emerged from spectacular images of a linear and “simple, untainted and yet retrievable past” (p. 592).

Entitled “Deep Sea Dreaming,” the opening ceremony used theater and dance to narrate Australian history. It began with a depiction of Aboriginal culture followed by White settlement, farming, and exploration; early (White) suburban life; and finally, the contemporary, mainstream (White) Australian society of suburbia.<sup>2</sup> The ceremony began as 120 stock horse riders galloped into a formation of Olympic rings. After the riders left the bowl, Channel 7 commentator Garry Wilkinson (who did most of the talking) introduced the performance as a staging of the “evolution of Australia from its ancient Indigenous origins to a modern 21st century society”

(Seven Network, 2000). In the next segment, a young, White Australian girl (the actress Nikki Webster) pretended to fall asleep on a makeshift beach. The performance then shifted to a representation of Webster's dream, which depicted the Aboriginal origin myth followed by the country's gradual development into an industrialized society. Aspects of the performances will be discussed in more detail below.

The ceremony recounted Australian history as a chronological story. White (1981) describes narratives as a "story with a beginning, middle, and end" (cited in Danforth, 2001, p. 364). Within this form such stories are "given 'a structure, an order of meaning, which they do *not* [emphasis in text] possess as mere sequence" (White, cited in Danforth, p. 364). Using Bhabha (1990) and Handler's (1988) analysis of the nation as narrative, Danforth discusses how such narratives often begin with the nation's " 'birth,' proceed through its 'coming of age,' and end when it reaches 'maturity'" (p. 363). The narrative "gives significance, coherence, and continuity to a series of events" (Danforth, p. 364). Consequently, the narrative naturalizes certain constructions of reality as possessing meaning and truth. In the present case, then, with its upbeat and optimistic tone, the ceremony depicted the transformation of ancient Aboriginal culture to modern society as inevitable and natural. White infiltration and its companion, industrialization, were represented as a natural, ever-flowing, unstoppable tide that subsumed "ancient" Aboriginal culture. After describing White invasion as an "irresistible force" that "disturbed" "Australia's ancient revelry," Wilkinson added, "but of course Australia is an ever-changing land, and what began as a trickle in 1788 became a flood" (Seven Network, 2001). The performance put Aborigines in the past and marked them as socially beneath Anglo-Celts, who have "more status, more power, and more mobility simply because they are further along the path of modernization" (Curtin, 1999, p. 52). In this way, the performances privileged the "narrative of traditional Australian ethnic nationalism" in which "Australia is a former British colony" "dominated by a White English-speaking majority" (Danforth, 2001, p. 365).

The ceremony's White perspective was further enacted through the broadcast's production elements. At one point, a body-painted Aboriginal man (symbolizing the Great Spirit of the Kimberley people in Western Australia) walked on stilts. The Australian announcers were silent during this scene, but Webster's head was superimposed on the top left side of the screen, looking down on the man. In fact, many scenes were shot from behind Webster's head to simulate her gaze. The camera therefore simulated the White girl's visual perspective and told the narrative of Australian nationhood through her dream.

In the public space of the multicultural ceremony, difference was managed and depoliticized, and the sociopolitical status quo was maintained. Although many stories can be told about a nation (Danforth, 2001, p. 363), the ceremony privileged one story that was recounted from a White perspective. This choice confirms the pattern of basing multicultural policies "on a trivialized conception of culture which is limited to the quaint and colorful, to folklore, heritage, and traditions" (Castles, Kalantzis, Cope, & Morrissey, 1990, cited in Danforth, p. 363). For example, the

Aborigine on stilts reflected this folklore-oriented theme made circus-like in the ceremony's genre of media entertainment. Within the ceremony's spectacle, Australian history was "reduced to a series of shifting illusions, marginalizing minorities and celebrating the dominant culture" in a display of "energy, fun and apparent harmlessness and innocence" (Tomlinson, 1996, pp. 592–593). Wilkinson frequently referred to Australia's history of multicultural immigration that helped build the country into the "vibrant" "multicultural society we have today under the southern skies" (Seven Network, 2000). Neither the broadcast commentary nor the performance referred to the country's past history of penal colonies, violence toward Aborigines, or the immigration policies prohibiting non-White immigration. Olympic planners certainly did not want the opening ceremony to be negatively perceived by audiences; more to the point, multicultural discourse attempted to silence any opposing narratives of nationhood. In one of the ceremony's final segments, Australia's culminating mature stage was performed by White dancers with hard hats who, Wilkinson said, recreated an urban "new Australia of concrete and steel" (Seven Network, 2000). Many White Australians enjoy the economic, political, and cultural privileges (industrialization, middle-class suburbia, education, and fine arts) that were visually represented in this modern, industrial stage of the suburban Australian "good life." This situation differs from many Aborigines and other ethnic minorities' everyday experiences of social marginalization. Nor did the dancers' Whiteness reflect Australia's immigration, a theme which would detract from the "continuity and purity of the nation" (Danforth, 2001, p. 363). The performance culminated with images of a White, suburban "Australian" city that is "unmarked." In this way, the opening ceremony's multicultural theme managed difference in a way that did not threaten naturalized social hierarchies and the Anglo-White narrative of nationhood.

This management of difference was especially evident in one of the ceremony's last segments, which featured dancers from Australia's major immigration and ethnic groups. The performers wore ethnic markers such as kimonos and body paint. The scene was akin to a multicultural fair, "where the various stalls of nearly positioned migrant cultures are exhibited" around the "real" White Australians in the center (Hage, 2000, p. 118). Toward the end of the segment, an aerial shot revealed the dancers forming the outline of the Australian continent. This image also occurred in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics' opening ceremony, when men and women in evening attire formed a human outline of the map of America (Tomlinson, 1996). The Australian map outline literally created an image of national boundaries in which ethnic minorities comprise the margins.<sup>3</sup> As Hage (2000) suggests, multicultural tolerance "is a strategy aimed at reproducing and disguising relationships of power in society," thus allowing "symbolic violence in which a mode of domination is presented as a form of egalitarianism" (p. 87). Yet, despite the Olympics' multicultural imagery of a singular nation, the performance was a site of struggle in which difference in Australia was negotiated through competing narratives of nationhood.

The flame-lighting sequence at the end of the opening ceremony similarly offered a narrative of unity. As early as 1997, Australian journalists had wondered who would light the flame. Many predicted that Australian Olympians Dawn Fraser or Betty Cuthbert, who both competed in the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, would be chosen (Masters, 2000, p. 12). The formal announcement came just as Aboriginal sprinter Cathy Freeman stepped onto the Olympic bowl's track to receive the torch from former Australian Olympic champion Debbie Flintoff-King. Like the opening ceremony, the torch relay theatrically staged social inclusiveness by traversing urban and rural Australian regions and most of the South Pacific island regions (Sinclair, 2000). Freeman ran the stadium lap of the torch relay with other famous Australian athletes before lighting the flame, thus reasserting the ceremony's emphasis on multiculturalism, ethnicity, and reconciliation themes (see Tomlinson, 2005a, p. 13).

Despite the flame-lighting sequence's multicultural narrative, Freeman's participation in the Olympics as an athlete and role in the flame-lighting ceremony were fraught with political tension. As the Games approached, some Aboriginal activists pressured Freeman to withdraw from athletic competition because of the Australian government's inadequate efforts to rectify the social problems resulting from the dispossession of indigenous peoples (Rigney, 2003). In contrast, other Aboriginal leaders saw Freeman's participation as a way to "connect symbolically Aboriginality and national pride, and to draw global attention to Australian Aboriginal cultures and peoples" (Rowe & Stevenson, 2006, p. 202). Freeman, who described herself as very shy, said after the Olympics that she was excited to light the flame, but felt "really embarrassed" to be in the spotlight (Powers, 2000, p. G5). Freeman repeatedly emphasized her pride in being both an Aborigine and Australian; she asserted that she did not wish to be at the center of the political debates ("Freeman," 2000, p. 34). She told one newspaper interviewer: "I don't want this to be stressful. I do run for myself because I really enjoy it. . . . I don't like to pass comment on any political issues" (Powers, p. G5). The Sydney Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games' (SOCOG) choice of Freeman to light the flame "was a climax to the theme of reconciliation" in the opening ceremony (Rowe & Stevenson, p. 197). Through these performances that were broadcast globally, the social conflicts in Australia were "made to retreat behind inclusive symbols of Australian-ness" (Sinclair, 2000, p. 39).

### **Narrating the Nation Through Sport to Media Audiences**

Sport is a "fertile site for narrating the nation" (Danforth, 2001, p. 363). Similar to literature, sport is central to the imagining of communities. Sporting events have historically "provided opportunities for the expression of jingoism, xenophobia, and racism" (p. 369) because they help define the "boundaries of moral and political communities" (MacClancy, 1996, p. 7).<sup>4</sup> In the Sydney Olympic Games, sport was a site of struggle between multiple narratives of the Australian nation.

Channel 7's coverage of the Olympics played an important role in communicating Australian nationhood to Australian audiences. As de Moragas Spà et al. (1995) point out, televised Olympics ceremonies are constructed identity narratives created

through a national lens for each national network's own audience. The universal value of the "Olympic ideal" is reworked through the application of "particular histories and cultures" within the ceremonies' celebration of national culture and values (Tomlinson, 1996, p. 590).

In fact, the use of spectacle to represent unified nationhood was central to Sydney ceremony's performance of multiculturalism. As early as 1998, members of SOCOG publicly argued with the National Indigenous Advisory Committee (NIAC), an advisory group that reported to SOCOG, about how Australianness would be depicted during the opening and closing ceremonies. The NIAC predicted a "Black boycott" of the Games if Aborigines were not adequately represented in the Olympics' logo, ceremonies, and surrounding events (Godwell, 2000). Australian Ric Birch, who also produced the opening and closing ceremonies in Los Angeles (1984), Barcelona (1992), and Torino (2006), was the executive producer of the Sydney ceremonies. In 1996, Australian journalists, politicians, and many members of the public criticized Birch for stereotyping Aborigines during a preview of the Sydney Olympic Games performed at the closing ceremony in Atlanta ("Games," 1996, p. 2). Among other stereotypical Australian representations previewed in Atlanta were inflatable kangaroos and images of "sparsely clothed Aborigines dancing around a fire to the tunes of a didgeridoo" (Godwell, p. 248).<sup>5</sup> In response to the criticism, SOCOG designed a logo for Sydney that incorporated Aboriginal elements.<sup>6</sup> Indigenous people were also appointed as managers for the Festival of the Dreaming, an indigenous cultural festival that was the first of four Olympics arts festivals leading up to the Sydney Olympics Games. In Channel 7's broadcast of the opening ceremony, the popular Aboriginal actor Ernie Dingo helped narrate segments featuring Aboriginal history.<sup>7</sup> SOCOG, however, refused to appoint an indigenous person to its board (Evans, 1998, p. 8).

Similar debates occurred during the 1988 Australian Bicentenary, which was "marked by a general inability on the part of many Australians 'to find substantial agreement about what to celebrate as a nation'" (Kalantzis & Cope, 1993, p. 137, cited in Danforth, 2001, pp. 366–367). Television often emphasizes a national culture by positing "uniformity over diversity, replication over innovation, and the national over the local" (Curtin, 1999, p. 5). SOCOG hoped that some viewers of the Olympics would later visit Australia as tourists, so the ceremony needed to create community, entertainment, and "good television" (Wilson, 1996, p. 609). The opening ceremony's theme of national unity thus portrayed a favorable image of the Australian nation to domestic and global audiences.

Despite the presentation of a unified Australia, the boundaries of the postcolonial Australian nation-state are no longer rigid in the context of globalization (see Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1996; Tomlinson, 1991). In fact, the Olympics Games also reflected transnational narratives of Americanization and a global capitalist economy (Danforth, 2001), in which Australia is a subsidiary of countries such as the United States and former European colonial powers. By presenting a strong and unified nation through a White-centered narrative, the opening ceremony promoted Australia's economic and political strength in a global system of power hierarchies

among nations (Hargreaves, 1992). However, the tensions *between* overlapping and multiple narratives of ethnic, national, and transnational identities reflect how people “live meaningful lives as members of a wide range of different communities” (Danforth, p. 365) in the nation’s changing conception in a globalized world.

### Competing Narratives in Australian Newspaper Coverage of the Olympics

In contrast to the opening ceremony’s multicultural rhetoric, competing and overlapping forms of Australian identity emerged in Olympics coverage in *The Australian*, *The Age*, and *Sydney Morning Herald* (all national newspapers) during September and October 2000.

Australian newspapers frequently commented on the Olympics’ images of social inclusiveness that were explicitly staged for media coverage. Indeed, one journalist commented that SOCOG selected the flame’s arrival site at Uluru and made its initial receivers and torchbearers all Aboriginal Australians “no doubt with a mind not just to the media, but to neutralize any Indigenous threat to disrupt the Olympics” (Sinclair, 2000, p. 42). Eccleston’s (2000) article in *The Australian* directly addressed the Olympics’ appeal to multiculturalism: “Was it just a good public relations exercise that disguises the truth?” (p. 4).

Although Freeman did not wish to characterize herself as an activist, most journalists focused on her as a focal point of the Aboriginal tensions. Some reporters portrayed Freeman as a symbol for both Australian and Aboriginal identity. Hedge’s (2000) *Age* article described her as “Australia’s best-known and best-loved athlete,” who also represented the “struggle for Black Australia when she ran” (p. 2). Many articles used phrases such as “proud to be Australian and proud to be an Aboriginal Australian” (Hedge, p. 1); “two peoples” (Connolly, 2000, p. 2); and the competition between “Australia and Freeman” (Connolly, p. 2). Connolly described Freeman’s gold medal in the 400-meter race in the *Age*: “Sitting on the hard track just below the finish line, as alone as her Aboriginal people, [she was] being showered with love by the nation that has traditionally ignored” Aborigines (p. 1). Keeping with these same themes, coverage of her 400-meter win in *The Sydney Morning Herald* mentioned Aboriginal spectators who held up Australian flags with the Union Jack cut out and replaced by the Aboriginal flag (Gordon, 2000, p. 2).

Other articles about Freeman’s win emphasized an Aboriginal nationalistic narrative that contrasted to the opening ceremony’s narrative of the White-dominated multicultural nation. Following her 400-meter Olympic win, Connolly (2000) noted in *The Age* that “[Freeman] carried the nation’s flag along with the Black, red and yellow banner of the Aboriginal rights movement. Black for the people, red for the earth, yellow for the sun” (p. 2). Elsewhere *The Age* (“Dancing,” 2000) referred to Freeman in a context of Aboriginal identity, arguing that the “indigenous segment at the Olympics opening ceremony” was part of an “ongoing story of indigenous identity” (p. 1). By portraying Freeman as a symbol of a separated and marginalized, but vibrant Aboriginal nation, journalists offered accounts that sharply differed from the opening ceremony’s portrayal of Aboriginality as rooted in the past.

The articles pointed to how an Aboriginal nationalistic narrative is an opposing narrative to White-dominated society. Even more importantly, the fact that each newspaper and even individual articles such as Connolly's (2000) contained *different* nationalistic discourses reaffirmed the fragmented nature of nationality in contemporary Australia. For example, after describing how Freeman carried the Australian and Aboriginal flags, Stephens (2000) noted that Freeman "sang the national anthem with the biggest accompanying choir ever assembled in Australia" (p. 1). Some newspaper articles used Freeman to support the open ceremony's multicultural theme. To this end, the *Sydney Morning Herald* ("With Australia," 2000) described the Games' function to "dissolve differences and bring Australians closer together" (p. 1) through Freeman's 400-meter win and the ceremony's staging of Australian multiculturalism. The tensions among different discourses of nationhood were especially evident in the Australian newspapers' interpretation of how the Sydney Olympics were globally perceived. For example, in the course of providing an overview of the global media coverage of the Olympics, Negus (2000) asked BBC reporter Keith Bowers about the political significance of Freeman's competition. Bowers replied, "To be honest, the Aboriginal issue hasn't really surfaced much here" (p. 2). That is, Bowers implied that the British press had not focused as much as the Australian media had on the political controversies surrounding Freeman's role in the opening ceremony. However, Bowers added that the British press would focus on the Aboriginal issue once Freeman actually ran her race. Indeed, as Negus noted, it did.

The circulation of Australianness in the global media sphere was further complicated by Knightley's (2000) description of a BBC announcer's reaction to Freeman's win: "He momentarily lost his patriotic fervour and shouted, 'We feel she is part of us in Britain. She is ours, too'" (p. 1). Interpreting the announcer's statement, Knightley added that the "bottom line" is that "the Games helped to convey that modern Australians are not inhibited by class or deference, not tied to history from changing what needs to be changed" (p. 2). In both articles above, Freeman as a symbol of the unified Australia was transferred onto the global level, where she also represented a global multiculturalism where difference is subsumed in the name of a singular global narrative of community.

The newspaper articles, therefore, pointed to the multiple narratives at the transnational level (the unitary image of Australianness as presented and contained in global discourse); the ethnic, subnational level (Aboriginal activism); and the national level (the ceremony's multiculturalism that emphasized an Australian nationalism in which non-White ethnicities were managed and depoliticized). Not only did these articles evoke the debates about the nature of the Australian nation, but such debates were also intensified by Aboriginal political protests prior and during the Sydney Olympics. Although it has been ignored historically by the government and the mainstream media, the Aboriginal resistance movement has existed in Australia since the 1920s. It intensified in the 1960s (Garton, 1989, p. 196).<sup>8</sup> Through political protests and print, broadcast, and Internet media, Aborigines are fighting for their social and political rights in contemporary Australia. This activism contested the dominant Australian nationalism evoked by the Olympics. According

to Danforth (2001), the “ambivalence and the power of the nation as narrative” (p. 2) enables people to use “different narratives of the Australian nation” to serve “their different political and economic interests” (p. 363). The opening ceremony’s position as a site of struggle over questions of nation, identity, and culture reflected the complexities of Australian nationhood in the globalization debate.

## **Conclusion**

In the end, struggles over narratives of nationhood point to the malleability of the nation as a narrative strategy. Nationalism is mobilized by “very different political positions, at different historical moments” and reflecting the “traditions, discourses and forces with which it is articulated” (Hall, 1993, p. 355, cited in Danforth, 2001, p. 366). When viewed through this theoretical framework, the Aboriginal activism and dominant Australian national narratives are two central points of conflict in the opening ceremony and newspaper coverage. The narrative of the nation is imbued by “constantly shifting meanings and definitions,” which are assigned to categories such as “‘ethnic,’ ‘national,’ ‘multicultural,’ and ultimately even to the category ‘Australian’” (Danforth, p. 366). This theoretical and political slippage ultimately enabled SOCOG’s nationalistic, multicultural attempt to erase difference in the opening ceremony. In contrast to the ceremony’s narrative of unity, the Australian newspaper coverage of the Olympics highlighted a fragmented Australian identity and nation.

Complex flows across borders, cultural hybridity, and the disintegration of rigid national borders are all characteristics of the global condition. The nationalistic rhetoric of multiculturalism in the opening ceremony revealed contemporary anxieties about national belonging. In Australia, more specifically, anxieties about what defines its borders are rooted in colonial notions of nation and race. The opening ceremony therefore was a neo-colonial space where racial and national boundaries were erected to quell White “fears and anxieties” about the Other (Macintyre, 1991, p. 214).

The rise of such nationalism underscores how globalization is essentially uneven. Although economic homogenization exists, the spaces and gaps in culture are sites of struggle concerning questions of identity, locality, and the nation. As Tomlinson’s (1996) analysis of Olympic ceremonies points out, these events provide spaces for ritual and performance of “new national and ethnic demands” (p. 588) in the face of uneven globalizing processes. Giddens (1991) similarly discusses the dialectic of the local and the global, in which the process of configuring one’s self-identity against the “supraindividual forces which situate one precariously” lies at the heart of modernity (p. 184).

In the opening ceremony and Olympic competitions, the process of “rooting for the nation, in the context of a global discourse of competitive sport” (Sugden & Tomlinson, 1994, pp. 10–11) reflects this paradox. By displaying the ceremony’s “cultural expression of the persisting crisis of modernity and globalization” (Tomlinson, 1996, p. 601), the Channel 7 broadcast and Australian newspaper

coverage played a central role in both expressing and attempting to resolve the paradox between localization and globalization. Such tensions and competing narratives of the nation are pertinent to the globalization debate, which interrogates the nation's place when culture circulates within the global, national, and subnational spheres.

## Notes

- [1] This cultural conflict exists in other Australian sports events. Australian soccer reflects national, ethnic, and transnational narratives (Danforth, 2001, p. 370). For instance, Greek and Macedonian soccer clubs "define the nature of these communities, delineate their boundaries, and situate them in relation not only to the Australian nation, but to the Greek and Macedonian nations as well" (p. 365). These multiple narratives, Danforth continues, are "increasingly being imagined on a transnational scale" that also parallel their reinscription as "subnational or ethnic narratives" within Australia (p. 365).
- [2] Tomlinson (2005a) concisely provides an excellent description of the Sydney opening ceremony's sequences in the context of regionalism, nationalism, and globalization.
- [3] This chronological performance of Australian history was likewise similar to the LA Olympics, whose opening ceremony's outline of US history ranged from the settlement of the West (through a display of covered wagons), African American culture (through a display of paddle steam boats of the South and the "indigenous" culture of jazz), and contemporary urban dancers (Tomlinson, 1996, pp. 590–591).
- [4] Danforth (2001) defines ethnic nationalism as a process in which the nation "is defined as a unified, homogeneous, and closed cultural community" (p. 366). Multicultural narratives, on the other hand, are based on a "civil nationalism in which the nation is defined as a more open community of culturally diverse people who all participate in the same political, economic, and social systems and who are all citizens of the same state" (p. 366). Moreover, narratives of cultural hybridity emphasize heterogeneity and difference as the nation's defining features. Danforth suggests that multiculturalism and cultural hybridity attempt to blur the boundaries of the homogeneous national community (p. 366). Taking a somewhat different approach, I analyze how multiculturalism itself is a narrative strategy to delineate a national community through the management of difference. Danforth views multiculturalism as a counternarrative to Australian ethnic nationalism that emphasizes a "homogeneous, White, English-speaking nation" (pp. 377–378). I view such difference as subsumed under the White-dominated, colonial-embedded Australian narrative that is privileged in multiculturalism's version of the nation.
- [5] Birch also produced the opening and closing ceremonies for the Commonwealth Games in Brisbane in 1982. He was responsible for the huge mechanical kangaroo named Matilda that disgorged several joeys from its pouch.
- [6] SOCOG explained the logo: "The boomerangs and suggestions of sun and rocks, together with colors of the Harbour, beaches and red interior invoke the unique Australian landscape and its original inhabitants" (in Godwell, 2000, p. 248).
- [7] The Australian Channel 7 commentators had the script for the opening ceremony. Using the script, they announced titles of the different segments and read brief descriptions about each segment. They were silent at other points, sometimes letting the footage roll with background sound; they ad-libbed other parts of the commentary. Occasionally, they joked about elements (such as corrugated steel roofs) that were used. However, the Australian commentators never challenged or undermined the ceremony's version of multiculturalism and historical seamlessness. In contrast, Bob Costas and Katie Couric, the US broadcasters, relied heavily on the media guide provided by Sydney Olympics media relations personnel;

they directly told viewers they were doing so. Unlike the Australian commentators, the US broadcasters briefly mentioned the political tensions between White Australians and indigenous people. After using the script to introduce the Aboriginal dance segment, Costas added his own commentary: “The question of how to reconcile 400,000 Aborigines with Australia as a whole remains a challenge. Understandably, Aboriginal activists are going to use the Olympics as a stage for protest” (NBC, 2000).

- [8] The Native Title debate over Aboriginal ancestral ownership of land accompanied the increasing numbers of Aborigine-owned newspapers, magazines, and television and radio stations since the 1980s (Scholtz, 2006). Some indigenous activists in the Native Title debate have categorized themselves as a “subgroup with special needs” (Reid & Ng, 1999, p. 120) to “appeal to a superordinate categorization that encompasses both mainstream Australian identity and Aboriginal identity” (p. 120). This rhetoric helps release them from the multicultural category of Australian, which “subsumes other Australian ethnic groups” (p. 130) and undermines their attempts to gain power (see also Young, 1995).

## References

- Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities*. London: Verso.
- Bhabha, H. (1990). *Nation and narration*. London: Routledge.
- Bhabha, H. (1994). *The location of culture*. London: Routledge.
- Birrell, R. (1995). *A nation of our own*. Melbourne: Longman.
- Castles, S., Kalantzis, M., Cope, B., & Morrissey, M. (1990). *Mistaken identity: Multiculturalism and the demise of nationalism in Australia*. Leichhardt, Australia: Pluto Press.
- Connolly, S (2000, September 27). *Freeman's win echoes around the world*. Homepage of *The Age*. Retrieved October 15, 2000, from <http://www.theage.com/frontpage>
- Curtin, M. (1999). Connections and differences: The spatial dimension of television history. *Film and History*, 2(3–4), 50–61.
- Dancing the ongoing story of indigenous identity. (2000, October 13). Homepage of *The Age*. Retrieved October 15, 2000, from <http://archive.fairfax.com>
- Danforth, L. M. (2001). Is the “world game” an “ethnic game” or an “Aussie game”? Narrating the nation in Australian soccer. *American Ethnologist*, 28(2), 363–387.
- De Lepervanche, M. M. (1984). The “naturalness” of inequality. In G. Bottomley (Ed.), *Ethnicity, class and gender in Australia* (pp. 49–71). Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- de Moragas Spà, M., Rivenburgh, N. K., & Larson, J. F. (1995). *Television in the Olympics International Research Project*. London: Libbey.
- Eccleston, R (2000, June 9). Cynics outrun on day of symbolism. *The Australian*, p. 4.
- Evans, M (1998, November 30). Perkins slams SOCOG “token.” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, p. 8.
- Freeman a symbol of Aussie unity. (2000, September 27). *The Australian*, p. 34.
- Games chief attacks Sydney. (1996, August 9). *The Daily Telegraph*, p. 2.
- Garton, S. (1989). Aboriginal history. In J. Walter (Ed.), *Australian Studies* (pp. 189–205). Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens, A. (1997). The globalizing of modernity. In A. Sreberny-Mohammadi, D. Winseck, J. McKenna, & O. Boyd-Barrett (Eds.), *Media in global context* (pp. 19–26). London: Arnold.
- Godwell, D. J. (2000). The Olympic branding of Aborigines: The 2000 Olympic Games and Australia’s indigenous peoples. In K. Schaffer & S. Smith (Eds.), *The Olympics at the millennium: Power, politics, and the Games* (pp. 243–257). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers.
- Gordon, M (2000, October 13). A brand new day. Homepage of *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved October 13, 2000, from <http://www.olympics.smh.com.au>
- Hage, G. (2000). *White nation*. New York: Routledge.

- Hage, G. (2003). *Against paranoid nationalism*. London: The Merlin Press.
- Hall, S. (1993). Culture, community, nation. *Cultural Studies*, 7(3), 349–363.
- Hall, S. (1996). Minimal selves. In H. Baker, M. Diawara, & R. Lindeborg (Eds.), *Black British cultural studies* (pp. 114–119). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Handler, R. (1988). *Nationalism and the politics of culture in Quebec*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Hanson, P (1996) Maiden speech: Australian House of Representatives.
- Hargreaves, J. (1992). Olympism and nationalism: Some preliminary consideration. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 27(1), 119–135.
- Hedge, M (2000, September 27). *Marketers and politicians leap on Freeman bandwagon*. Homepage of *The Age*. Retrieved October 15, 2000, from <http://www.theage.com.au/frontpage>
- Jordan, M. (2006). The reappraisal of the White Australia policy against the background of a changing Asia, 1945–67. *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 52(1), 224–243.
- Kalantzis, M., & Cope, B. (1993). Republicanism and cultural diversity. In W. Hudson & D. Carter (Eds.), *The Republicanism debate* (pp. 118–144). Kensington, Australia: New South Wales University Press.
- Knightley, P (2000, October 13). The wizards of oz. Homepage of *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved October 15, 2000, from <http://www.olympics.smh.com.au>
- MacClancy, J. (Ed.). (1996). *Sport, identity and ethnicity*. Oxford: Berg.
- Macintyre, S. (1991). *A colonial liberalism*. Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press.
- MacLeod, C. L. (2006). *Multiethnic Australia: Its history and future*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co.
- Masters, R (2000, September 14). Finally, the answer to that flamin’ question of who will light the cauldron. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, p. 12.
- NBC (2000, 15 September). *Opening Ceremony of the 2000 Olympics in Sydney*. New York: NBC.
- Negus, G (2000, October 13). *Two messages for the world*. Homepage of *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved October 15, 2000, from <http://www.olympics.smh.com.au>
- Nicol, H. N , & Townsend-Gault. (Eds.). (2005). *Holding the line: Borders in the global world*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- O’Regan, T. (1993). *Australian television culture*. St. Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin.
- O’Regan, T. (1994). Introducing critical multiculturalism. *Continuum*, 8(2), 7–12.
- Partington, G. (1997). *The Australian nation*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Powers, T (2000, September 20). Aboriginal symbol: Cathy Freeman knows she cannot outrun Australia’s national debate about her people. *The Gazette*, p. G5.
- Reid, S. A., & Ng, S. H. (1999). Language, power, and intergroup relations. *Journal of Social Issues*, 55(1), 119–139.
- Rickard, J. (1992). Aborigines. In G. Whitlock & D. Carter (Eds.), *Images of Australia* (pp. 61–74). Queensland, Australia: University of Queensland Press.
- Rigney, D. (2003). Sport, indigenous Australians, and invader dreaming: A critique. In J. Bale & M. Cronin (Eds.), *Sport and postcolonialism* (pp. 45–56). Oxford: Berg.
- Rowe, D., & Stevenson, D. (2006). Sydney 2000: Sociality and spatiality in global media events. In A. Tomlinson & C. Young (Eds.), *National identity and global sports events* (pp. 197–214). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Schmortte, J. (2005). Attitudes towards German immigration in South Australia in the post-Second World War Period, 1947–60. *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 51(4), 530–544.
- Scholtz, C. S. (2006). *Negotiating claims: The emergence of indigenous land claim negotiation policies in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States*. New York: Routledge.
- Seven Network . (2000, September 15). *Opening ceremony of the 2000 Olympics in Sydney* [Television broadcast]. Sydney: Seven Network.
- Shaw, M. (1997). The theoretical challenge of global society. In A. Sreberny-Mohammadi, D. Winseck, J. McKenna, & O. Boyd-Barrett (Eds.), *Media in global context* (pp. 27–36). London: Arnold.

- Sinclair, J. (2000). More than an old flame: National symbolism and the media in the torch ceremony of the Olympics. *Media International Australia*, 97(12), 35–46.
- Sklan, C. (1996). Peripheral visions: Regionalism, nationalism, internationalism. In A. Moran (Ed.), *Film policy* (pp. 234–248). London: Routledge.
- Stephens, T (2000, October 13). Pride of the land. Homepage of *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved October 15, 2000, from <http://www.olympics.smh.com.au>
- Sugden, J., & Tomlinson, A. (1994). Soccer culture, national identity, and the World Cup. In J. Sugden & A. Tomlinson (Eds.), *Hosts and champions: Soccer cultures, national identities and the USA World Cup* (pp. 3–12). Aldershot, UK: Arena/Ashgate.
- Thompson, J. B. (1995). *The media and modernity: A social theory of the media*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Tomlinson, A. (1996). Olympic spectacle: Opening ceremonies and some paradoxes of globalization. *Media, Culture & Society*, 18, 583–602.
- Tomlinson, A. (2005a). Magnificent trivia: Olympic spectacle, opening ceremonies, and some paradoxes of globalization. In A. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Sport and leisure cultures* (pp. 9–27). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Tomlinson, A. (2005b). Picturing the Winter Olympics: The opening ceremonies of Nagano (Japan) 1998 and Salt Lake City (USA) 2002. *Tourism, Culture & Communication*, 5(2), 83–92.
- Tomlinson, J. (1991). *Cultural imperialism*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- White, R. (1981). *Inventing Australia: Images and identity 1688–1980*. St. Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin.
- Wilson, E. (1996). What is an Olympic city? Visions of Sydney 2000. *Media, Culture & Society*, 18, 603–618.
- With Australia all aflutter, PM endorses Cathy's two flags . Homepage of *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved October 15, 2000, from <http://www.olympics.smh.com.au>
- Young, R. (1995). *Hybridity in theory, culture and race*. London: Routledge.

Copyright of *Critical Studies in Media Communication* is the property of National Communication Association and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.