

**The Sydney 2000 Olympics Bid and its impact on the process
of redefining Australian national identity**

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CERTIFICATE

I certify that this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being submitted as part of candidature for any other degree.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me and that any help that I have received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

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Abstract

When in 1993 Sydney was awarded the rights to host the Olympic Games in the year 2000, the Olympic Bid was hailed by the media and governments alike as a milestone in the development of Australia as a nation. Throughout the Olympic Bid the question of civic pride and identity (as a culturally diverse nation) seemed to transcend with ease the traditional boundaries/inhibitions of social and political divisions in Australian society. Although initially conceived by the New South Wales State Government as a local venture Sydney's Bid soon developed into a project of national importance boasting the active involvement of wide cross sections of Australian society, including both major political parties, unions, industry and commerce, ethnic and indigenous community groups. In a time of uncertainty and change, the successful Olympic Bid appeared to offer a reaffirmation of Australia's achievements as a nation and was highlighting the potential of the Sydney Olympics as an agent for 'national reconciliation and reconstruction'.

This thesis sets out to examine the phenomenon of the Sydney Olympic Bid within the current debate on national identity in Australia. How, if at all, did the Olympic Bid impact on the nation building process in Australia? There are no exact terms of measurement for the status of a nation's identity hence it is not aimed to quantify statistically a possible impact of the Bid. The main objectives of the research are twofold. First to identify and critically analyse the theoretical/philosophical and historical processes that delineate the phenomenon of the Olympic Bid. Second to establish a framework of relationships that connect those processes. How do they interact?

It is argued that the concept of national identity as a sense of collectivity is centred upon an act of imagination within the spheres of subjectivity. Although being an abstract concept that is often likened to quasi religious observance, the nation is set in and subjected to the power relations of the socio political framework within a bounded territory. The imagined community of nation does not occur naturally, it requires an active process of communication that relies on symbolic representations such as flags,

anthems, a history of heroic acts, and collective experiences. It is within the context of symbolic representations and imagination that the Olympic Bid operated and ultimately, however temporarily, impacted on Australian nationhood. Undoubtedly, the Olympic Bid has given a grand promise of a collective identity that is based on an all inclusive membership. However, it is argued that the bid operated predominantly through projections of an idealised future that imposed versions of Australianness, namely multiculturalism and reconciliation with the indigenous people, which by no means can be considered as fully developed or resolved within the current process of redefining Australian identity.