

# Captain Cook: A Catalyst for Contestation.

*What is the function of the myth of Captain Cook?*

In 1770, Lieutenant Cook led *HMB Endeavour's* voyage through the South Pacific in search of the great southern continent.<sup>1</sup> Today, for many Australians, Cook's landing at Botany Bay on 29<sup>th</sup> April, signifies the 'discovery' of Australia.<sup>2</sup> Cook is remembered as both a "giant" amongst navigators<sup>3</sup> and as "bad news for Aborigines".<sup>4</sup> These divergent slogans were employed in 1970 for the bicentennial celebrations, which marked 200 years since Cook went ashore at Botany Bay. The celebration and contestation of the significance of his ventures has become a cornerstone of Australian national identity. As I reveal in this essay, 'national identity' is not fixed but is created by citizens as they attempt to characterize a nation.<sup>5</sup> This essay will use the 1970 bicentenary as a case study to unpack the function of the 'myth' of Captain Cook. By analyzing these celebrations, I argue that the myth of Captain Cook provides a platform for interaction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians to contest the nation's past and present. These opposing views that manifest within the myth of Captain Cook allow the idea of the Australian nation to be both fractured and redefined.

Firstly, I will explore the theoretical frameworks of myths and nationhood that the remembrance of Captain Cook operates within. Secondly, I will investigate the

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<sup>1</sup> NSW Migration Heritage Centre, '1768 James Cook's Secret Instructions', *Australia's Migration History Timeline* (blog), n.d., accessed 2 November 2018.

<sup>2</sup> '200 Years of Progress', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 April 1970.

<sup>3</sup> Alan Hulme, 'Statement by the Postmaster General' (6 November 1968), Captain Cook Bi-Centenary issue of special stamps - Philatelic exhibition and telephone directory covers, Series A463, National Archives of Australia.

<sup>4</sup> 'Cook Is Bad News for Aborigines', *Aborigines Advancement League (Victoria)*, August 1970.

<sup>5</sup> Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity, 1688-1980*, *The Australian Experience*, no. 3 (Sydney: Allen & Unwin Australia, 1981), viii-x.

prominence of the non-indigenous myth; highlighting the story it tells and the truth it hides. Thirdly, I will use the 1970 celebration to unpack the Indigenous and non-Indigenous interaction with the myth and its meaning. Concluding with the lasting impacts and outcomes from the celebrations and the function the myth served.

In this essay I have chosen a diverse selection of primary sources. Whilst researching the 1970 bicentenary, the primary source that I believe depicted the state's portrayal of the myth of Captain Cook was the special collection stamps produced to mark the 200 year anniversary.<sup>6</sup> I chose this because stamps are a representation of state iconography viewed by both the state's citizens and outsiders. These stamps portray the story of Captain Cook and how the state desires to remember the myth.<sup>7</sup> I have also chosen to use E. Phillip Fox's *Landing at Botany Bay 1770* to explore its usage in other primary sources and Cook's centrality to the discovery of Australia.<sup>8</sup> These sources will also be enriched with newspaper and government reports, that give further depth to their analysis.

I turn to three key historiographical frameworks in my analysis. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* provides a useful definition of the nation and reveals how nations are inherently imagined ideas.<sup>9</sup> Richard White's *Inventing Australia* will shed light on Australia's multiple identities, and the role that the Captain

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<sup>6</sup> 'Philatelic Bulletin', *Australia Post* 17, no. 5 (April 1970): 33–55.

<sup>7</sup> Stanley D. Brunn, 'Stamps as Iconography: Celebrating the Independence of New European and Central Asian States', *GeoJournal; Dordrecht* 52, no. 4 (2001): 315–23.

<sup>8</sup> Emanuel Phillips-Fox, *Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay, 1770, 1902*, Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria.

<sup>9</sup> Benedict R. O'G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed (London ; New York: Verso, 2006).

Cook myth plays within them.<sup>10</sup> George Schopflin's *The functions of Myth and a taxonomy of Myths* will illuminate the interaction between myths and nationhood.<sup>11</sup>

Anderson argues that a nation is "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign".<sup>12</sup> The nation is imagined because most citizens will never meet one another and are disunited by inequality and exploitation, yet it "is conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship".<sup>13</sup> A nation is limited because every nation has boundary lines, even if they are "elastic".<sup>14</sup> The nation became sovereign as existing power structures were redefined with shifts away from the monarchy.<sup>15</sup> Myth and nationhood interact fluidly. George Schöpflin argues that myth "provides the means for the members of a community to recognize that, broadly, they are in the same mindset, they are much the same thought-world. Through myth, boundaries are established within the community and also with respect to other communities."<sup>16</sup> Myths provide narratives for the nation to consume, which helps inform the nation's identity.

Captain Cook is not the only myth or foundational figure that exists for the nation. Hudson and Bolton argue that "a better approach to understanding Australian achievement since 1788 is to emphasise the extent to which multiple identities have been available to Australians".<sup>17</sup> "Australia does not have a single monolithic

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<sup>10</sup> White, *Inventing Australia*.

<sup>11</sup> George Schöpflin, ed., 'The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths', in *Myths and Nationhood* (New York, NY: Routledge in association with the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Anderson, 6.

<sup>14</sup> Anderson, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Anderson, 7.

<sup>16</sup> Schöpflin, 'The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths', 20.

<sup>17</sup> Geoffrey Curgenvon Bolton and Wayne Hudson, eds., *Creating Australia: Changing Australian History* (St Leonards, N.S.W: Allen and Unwin, 1997), 1.

identity”.<sup>18</sup> The myth of the explorer is not limited to Cook. As Beau Riffenburgh argues, these heroes have justified the “expansion of the state in geographic and economic terms, embodied the collective will and hopes of the governing elite, and offered guidelines for personal and national ascendancy to a new generation”.<sup>19</sup> For a ‘new’ nation such as Australia, the foundational myths of the explorer have been plentiful. Explorers have played a part of legitimising the state’s expansion and ‘discovery’ of Australia. Whilst outside the scope of this essay, it is important to acknowledge the inherently gendered nature of these myths, as they are all male. Each hero marks key moments in Australian history that have helped inform the idea of the nation. Significantly, Captain Cook marks the first meeting between Indigenous Australians and European settlers that claimed Australia; a meeting and interaction that has been ongoing since 1770.<sup>20</sup> The purpose of this essay is not to define Australia’s national identity, nor do I argue that Captain Cook is the single foundational figure of the nation. Rather, I focus on how the myth of Captain Cook provides an opportunity for citizens to interact and debate, and thus fracture and redefine Australia’s national identity.

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<sup>18</sup> Richard White, ed., ‘Inventing Australia Revisited’, in *Creating Australia: Changing Australian History* (St Leonards, N.S.W: Allen and Unwin, 1997), 17.

<sup>19</sup> Beau Riffenburgh, *The Myth of the Explorer: The Press, Sensationalism, And Geographical Discovery* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 6.

<sup>20</sup> Maria Nugent, *Captain Cook Was Here* (Cambridge, ; Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Chris Healy, *From the Ruins of Colonialism: History as Social Memory*, Studies in Australian History (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

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Figure 1, Phillips-Fox, Emanuel. 1902. Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay, 1770. Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria.

E. Phillips Fox's painting of the landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay presents Cook as the discoverer of a nation. Fox positions Cook as the central focus of the painting and, therefore, of the possession ceremony of Australia. Australia became a federalised nation in 1901, with its own written constitution, although still under Queen Victoria as head of state.<sup>21</sup> Cook was used as the central figurehead in 1901.<sup>22</sup> Richard White argues that attempts to frame Australia's national identity aim "not merely to describe the continent, but to give it an individuality, a personality".<sup>23</sup> In

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<sup>21</sup> Australian Government, 'Federation', accessed 28 October 2018, <https://www.australia.gov.au/about-government/how-government-works/federation>.

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Gregory Gapps, 'Performing the Past : A Cultural History of Historical Reenactments' (Thesis, University of Technology Sydney, 2008), 111.

<sup>23</sup> White, *Inventing Australia*, viii.

Fox's painting, Cook is in the centre of the frame with his arm out preventing a musket from being fired at the two Aboriginal people in the background. The British flag takes a central place behind Cook, marking the founding of the country. The possession of Australia actually took place at Possession Island. Cook's approach to Indigenous inhabitants when landing at Botany Bay and other locations was to shoot muskets towards them in the hope that they would surrender.<sup>24</sup> The painting, therefore, represents the non-indigenous myth of Captain Cook as the European foundational figure of Australia, and does not engage with the dispossession that this 'discovery' signified for Aboriginal peoples. Indigenous Australians did not welcome Cook at Botany Bay and have been resisting European settlement since 1788. Within White's framework Cook helps define the settlement of the nation as a peaceful process built on empathetic leadership.

The 1970 Cook bicentennial celebrations projected the prominence of the myth. The celebrations were momentous. There was a reenactment of *HMB Endeavour's* journey; the Royal family toured Australia; literary competitions were held in each state; commemorative coins, medals and stamps were designed; and much more.<sup>25</sup> The intentions of the celebrations were explicit and widespread. The Government's aims were to remind citizens of the historical figure of Cook and promote a sense of national pride for the country.<sup>26</sup> The bicentennial celebrations reflected the nation's progress since European settlement without acknowledging with the complex

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<sup>24</sup> James Cook and W. J. L. Wharton, *Captain Cook's Journal during His First Voyage Round the World Made in H. M. Bark Endeavour, 1768-71: A Literal Transcription of the Original Mss*, Australiana Facsimile Editions, No. 188 (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1968).

<sup>25</sup> '200 Years of Progress'.

<sup>26</sup> The Australian Commonwealth, 'Captain Cook Bicentenary Celebrations - Final Report' (1970 1970), A463, 1970/2100 PART 3, National Archives of Australia.

Indigenous social and environmental structures that existed prior to settlement and the impact European presence had on Indigenous peoples.<sup>27</sup>

The press played a key role in promoting the celebrations. Anderson argues that print and language set the new stage for the modern nation and that the power of print to indoctrinate enhances the ability to influence the nation.<sup>28</sup> Newspapers reported widely on the bicentennial celebrations and advertised copious amounts of Captain Cook paraphernalia. *The Sydney Morning Herald* had a 21-page spread outlining the schedule for the celebrations, advertising the royals' visit and the re-enactment.<sup>29</sup> The motto "200 years of progress" was used to promote national pride. It reported on the 200 years of monarchs, 200 years of industry; 200 years of white Australia.<sup>30</sup> The Press attempted to frame the myth with the then current achievements of the nation's industry. The newspaper endorsement provided a connection between the myth and the present, and by doing so, the state attempted to unify the citizens within the nation by marking the nation's achievements.




<sup>27</sup> '200 Years of Progress'.

<sup>28</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 67–69.

<sup>29</sup> '200 Years of Progress'.

<sup>30</sup> '200 Years of Progress'.

The non-indigenous narrative of Cook is illustrated in the 1970 bicentennial stamp series. The series conveys a simple story of the *HMB Endeavour's* journey up the East Coast of Australia in five sequential stamps, as seen in Figure 2. The stamps portray Cook as the giant navigator of history; they pay testament to his navigational skills, his crew, and his ability to play the diplomat with Indigenous inhabitants and imply a peaceful possession of Australia.<sup>31</sup> The stamps allow the audience to consume the narrative and feel proud of the settlement of Australia.

The 30c stamp  in 30c stamp previously made, and the collection was the biggest special stamp collection the nation had ever created.<sup>32</sup> The Postmaster General justified the size of the collection with the statement “The Captain Cook issue would be marked with a larger number [of stamps] because of its great historical importance”.<sup>33</sup> The prominence given to the stamp collection demonstrates the importance of the myth, and the narrative conveyed reflects the desired identity the state wished to construct for the celebration.

A special committee was formed to design the stamp collection. The board comprised of Jim Smith of the Postmasters General as Chair, Arthur Leydon of the Stamp Advisory Committee, the writer Tom Keneally, and Ingpen, an applied artist.<sup>34</sup> The committee was chaired by a government official and from Ingpen's letter

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<sup>31</sup> 'Philatelic Bulletin'.

<sup>32</sup> Hulme, 'Statement by the Postmaster General'.

<sup>33</sup> Hulme.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Ingpen, 'Letter Concerning Stamp Design' (n.d.), Papers of Robert Ingpen, Series 4, Box 8, The National Library of Australia.



detailing the process of design for the stamps the government had considerable influence over the design process.<sup>35</sup> Stanley D Brunn argues that stamps are a form of state iconography; an image the state projects that reflects how they wish to be viewed and remembered.<sup>36</sup> Stamps serve a much larger purpose than proving their quota has been met for transport. Pictures are not necessary for the stamps' function, but states choose to design images and special collections for stamps of how they wish to be viewed externally and internally.<sup>37</sup> The design of the Captain Cook stamp collection implies that Australia wished to remember a peaceful possession of the continent, Indigenous people simply stepped aside, and the nation is under legitimate rule.

The third stamp in the series uses E. Phillips Fox's painting to position Cook as the link between European arrival and the new land, people, and fauna they encountered. It is similar to the Australian Coat of Arms, but instead of a shield containing symbols of Britain, the stamp positions Cook as the uniting bond. The Indigenous people he met are situated in the periphery of the frame, with Cook as the diplomat saving them from musket fire. A kangaroo takes up the forefront of the stamp marking the discovery of new fauna, and *HMB Endeavour* enters the frame, marking the moment of the first European arrival. The emphatic colours of *HMB Endeavour*, the kangaroo, Cook and his crew compared to the dry arid land and the distant Indigenous people emphasise the narrative of 'discovery'. While in his journal in 1770, Cook admires the vegetation and life he observes,<sup>38</sup> in the stamp the land is

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<sup>35</sup> Ingpen.

<sup>36</sup> Brunn, 'Stamps as Iconography'.

<sup>37</sup> Humphrey McQueen, 'The Australian Stamp: Image, Design and Ideology', *The Island Magazine*, n.d.

<sup>38</sup> Cook and Wharton, *Captain Cook's Journal during His First Voyage Round the World Made in H. M. Bark Endeavour, 1768-71*, 260.

depicted as lifeless. The stamp conveys a story of peaceful possession and begins the narrative of '200 years of progress.'

This peaceful possession of Australia was re-enacted for the 1970 bicentenary. The state commissioned a replica of *HMB Endeavour* to sail up the East Coast and re-enact the landings where Cook went ashore in 1770. Schöpflin argues that "the myth is the narrative, the set of ideas, whereas ritual is the acting out, the articulation of myth; symbols are building blocks of myth and the acceptance or veneration of symbols is a significant aspect of ritual."<sup>39</sup> Authenticity for the re-enactment at Botany Bay was paramount to the design committee. NSW Premier Robert Askin bragged that Australia was going to stage "one of the greatest pageants ever held in the Southern hemisphere".<sup>40</sup> The ceremony became such an affair that instead of the estimated 15,000 attendants, 50,000 people turned up to watch the ceremony at Botany Bay.<sup>41</sup> The display was momentous, finishing with a grand firework display in the celebration of the possession. The 'pageant' provided an opportunity for citizens to endorse and participate in the ritualisation of the myth and therefore accept and consume the narrative.

The re-enactment not only encouraged willing participation in the ritual, it also attracted opposition. Whilst the crowd stood by and watched the re-enactment, students dressed up in mock costumes, staged their own landing, and overtly taunted and undermined the arrival of the 'real' Cook and his ship.<sup>42</sup> The committee had expressed great importance of having a 'Turawal' descendent as part of the re-enactment, but this was challenged by Aboriginal protestors attending the

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<sup>39</sup> Schöpflin, 'The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths', 21.

<sup>40</sup> Gapps, 'Performing the Past', 123.

<sup>41</sup> Gapps, 125.

<sup>42</sup> Gapps, 122.

ceremony to throw wreathes into the sea, mourning the loss of their ancestors. Schöpflin argues that “acceptance of and participation in ritual, one of the instruments of standardisation, is vital, if not indeed obligatory, if the system is to be sustained, but belief in the ritual and the set of explanations attached to the ritual are less important.”<sup>43</sup> The participation in the ritualization of the myth is paramount to the myth taking shape and its mobilisation, and the belief in the ritual and what it truly represents is less important. Although, Schöpflin fails to identify the process of interaction with the myth from opposition, and the process of how a myth is challenged and redefined through participation in the ritual. The re-enactment of the landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay created a platform for people to support the ritualization of the myth and conversely oppose it.

Similarly, the stamp collection’s design reveals a contrasting function of the myth. Robert Ingpen states “Cook is likened to Gulliver in the Pacific, a giant who led Europeans into the colonization in the South Pacific”,<sup>44</sup> whereas the Postmaster General states “Cook is shown as a giant to emphasise his stature amongst discoverers”.<sup>45</sup> The first stamp conveys Cook as the central figure but simultaneously as a satirical figure of the Pacific. Gulliver is the protagonist of Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*; a satirical novel published in 1726 in which Gulliver sets off on a voyage to discover new lands and to civilise the people he finds.<sup>46</sup> However, the people he discovers are more civilised than himself.<sup>47</sup> In this stamp there is the effect of Captain Cook “shown as a giant to emphasise his stature amongst discoverers”,<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Schöpflin, ‘The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths’, 21.

<sup>44</sup> Ingpen, ‘Letter Concerning Stamp Design’.

<sup>45</sup> Hulme, ‘Statement by the Postmaster General’.

<sup>46</sup> Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jonathan Swift 16 (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>47</sup> Swift.

<sup>48</sup> Hulme, ‘Statement by the Postmaster General’.

but as Cook is “likened to Gulliver”<sup>49</sup> there is a subtle message that in fact, like Gulliver, he encountered countries that had inhabitants that were civilised and self-sufficient. Cook is the key focus of the first stamp and he is larger than life, indeed, larger than his ship. He appears as a sea monster emerging from the ocean, with his ship next to him. In this respect he is conveyed as like Ingpen states “a giant of the Pacific”, the stamp literally demonstrates how Cook as a person has been enlarged beyond belief into mythology. As Schöpflin contends, those who participate in the remembrance of the myth are not all in agreement with what the myth has come to represent.<sup>50</sup> Rather the myth creates an opportunity to “act together without consensus”<sup>51</sup> and, I argue, for fractures to be illuminated within the myth. The design of this stamp represents the fractures within the dialogue that on one hand sees Cook as a key historical figure for the nation and on the other as a blown up figure who has moved further away from reality into the realms of mythology. This stamp highlights a battle within the of narrative Captain Cook, which was also conveyed in the bicentennial celebrations as Cook was commemorated yet contested.

Aboriginal people used the myth of Cook as a vehicle to voice their demands. Aboriginal protestors claimed that “Cook was bad news for Aborigines” and this was the slogan of the sticker that was displayed on many cars.<sup>52</sup> Cook represented the continual effect of white settlement on Aboriginal people’s lives.<sup>53</sup> Chris Healy argues that Cook is “always and everywhere” for Aboriginal people as the white presence and the disruption to Aboriginal lives is never ending.<sup>54</sup> Cook is a symbol of

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<sup>49</sup> Ingpen, ‘Letter Concerning Stamp Design’.

<sup>50</sup> Schöpflin, ‘The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths’, 21.

<sup>51</sup> Schöpflin, 21.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Cook Is Bad News for Aborigines’.

<sup>53</sup> Nugent, *Captain Cook Was Here*, 105.

<sup>54</sup> Healy, *From the Ruins of Colonialism*, 58.

dispossession for Aboriginal people. However, the myth of Cook has created unity for Aboriginal tribes to contest their dispossession and use Cook as a vehicle for discussion. The Victorian Aborigine Advancement League Newsletter verifies this purpose with the statement “The Captain Cook Bi-Centenary celebrations were used as a medium to publicise the plight of the Aboriginal people, following the devastating 200 years of white settlement on their lands”.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, the myth of Cook conversely unifies Aboriginal Australians to contest the peaceful narrative and what his legacy has left behind.

The celebration not only acted as a catalyst to contest Captain Cook’s legitimacy, but it also provided a platform for the myth to be unpacked. Academics wrote numerous articles detailing the history of Australia that the celebration overshadows. The celebration opened the stage for discussion about Australia’s history and the rights of Aboriginal people. For instance, medical anthropologist, Lenore Manderson wrote “Before the arrival of the white man to Australia, and “the discovery of a nation”, the Australian Aboriginal lived a relatively peaceful, happy existence”, arguing that the arrival of Cook promoted anything but “200 years of progress” for Indigenous Australians.<sup>56</sup> In this newspaper article, she writes about the history of violent genocides, exploitation and dispossession of Aboriginal people. She argues that Cook undermined the Aboriginal laws of land possession and even undermined his colonial instructions to take possession of the land “with the consent of the natives”.<sup>57</sup> By emphasising Cook’s misapprehension of land possession from his home country and the country he claimed, Manderson contests Captain Cook’s

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<sup>55</sup> ‘Cook Protest’, *Aborigines Advancement League (Victoria)*, June 1970.

<sup>56</sup> ‘ABORIGINES and the BICENTENARY’, *Woroni (Canberra, ACT : 1950 - 2007)*, 22 April 1970.

<sup>57</sup> ‘ABORIGINES and the BICENTENARY’.

legitimacy as Australia's founder and diverts discussion to the prominent issue of Aboriginal land rights. The celebration provided a platform for academic analysis of the celebration and the truth that lies behind the myth, enabling facts about Australia's history to be known and interpreted by the wider public.

The awareness of non-indigenous Australians about the treatment and rights of Indigenous Australians increased.<sup>58</sup> Mark McKenna argues that this was not a “cathartic moment” but rather the beginning of a stream of consciousness that continues to this day.<sup>59</sup> University students led marches protesting the mistreatment of Aboriginal people and demanded for their land to be restored.<sup>60</sup> The protest claimed that the Cook celebrations were offensive and damaging to Aboriginal people and that we need to acknowledge Aboriginal rights and act upon their demands. This protest, along with written articles, represented the rise of non-indigenous consciousness about the treatment of Indigenous people. Therefore, in 1970 the use of the myth of Captain Cook in the bicentennial celebrations not only provided a patriotic celebration but it also acted as a catalyst for public consciousness of the treatment and rights of Aboriginal people.<sup>61</sup>

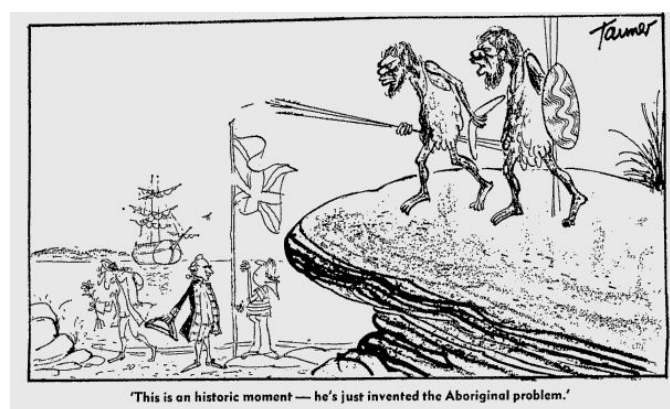


Figure 3, 'Australia, Land of Inequality, *The Age*, 29 April 1970.

<sup>58</sup> Mark McKenna, *Looking for Blackfellas' Point: An Australian History Ofplace* (Sydney, N.S.W: UNSW Press, 2002), 156–61.

<sup>59</sup> McKenna, 157.

<sup>60</sup> 'EDITORIAL', *Woroni (Canberra, ACT : 1950 - 2007)*, 22 April 1970.

<sup>61</sup> McKenna, *Looking for Blackfellas' Point*, 156–61.

Newspapers began to critically analyse the events and publish articles contesting Cook's legitimacy and reported on Aboriginal protests.<sup>62</sup> Newspapers began to cover the opposing side of the celebrations. For instance, a cartoon (Figure 3) that was published in *The Age* underneath the article "Australia, land of inequality".<sup>63</sup> The article detailed how Aboriginal people have been subject to a history of harsh treatment and dispossession and that the current "Aboriginal problem" is merely a product of its environment.<sup>64</sup> The cartoon contradicts E. Phillip Fox's representation of the interaction at Botany Bay. The cartoonist's depiction of the interaction at Botany Bay brings the two Aboriginal people to the forefront of the cartoon. They stand on a rock taking up half of the frame, clearly portraying that Cook arrived to a land that was already inhabited and that he did not 'discover' a new country, rather he placed the English flag in a ground that was already a nation. The cartoon reinterprets the interaction that took place in 1770 and contends that this was the beginning of the perceived 'Aboriginal problem', as before Cook's arrival, it did not exist. In essence, newspapers reported the contrasting myth of Captain Cook as well as endorsing the bicentennial remembrance of the peaceful starting point of a nation.

The 1970 bicentennial celebrations created a platform for the opposing views of the myth to interact. The myth of Captain Cook and the arrival at Botany Bay represents where the two histories, non-indigenous and Indigenous, meet.<sup>65</sup> The Commonwealth aimed to make a lasting impression on its citizens and facilitate

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<sup>62</sup> McKenna, 157.

<sup>63</sup> W. Machahon Ball, 'Australia, Land of Inequality', *The Age*, 29 April 1970.

<sup>64</sup> Ball.

<sup>65</sup> Maria Nugent, *Botany Bay: Where Histories Meet* (Crows Nest, N.S.W: Allen & Unwin, 2005).

endorsement for the celebrations of 'the great explorer'.<sup>66</sup> Yet, they acknowledged the celebrations failed to create a lasting impression. The government's final report stated:

"Few things the Commonwealth did in commemoration of Cook appear to have made a significant impact upon the attitudes and memories of Australian children; even less effects seems likely upon new settlers who came here in the Bi-centenary year; and no beneficial effect at all upon the status or attitudes came from the Commonwealth's contribution to the Celebrations."<sup>67</sup>

The measures that the government used to evaluate the effect of the bicentennial celebrations are not stated, so one can only assume the protests and re-interpretation of the myth demonstrated an undesired result for the celebrations. Instead of strengthening nationalism, the myth promoted protests and discussion about Australia's history. The myth of Cook as the founder of the nation and the contrasting myth of Cook as the invader of Aboriginal land were brought to light in the celebrations. The celebrations provided a meeting point between two opposing ideas of Australia's history and an opportunity for the myth of the nation to be redefined and re-remembered.

Anderson contends that the ruling class predominantly has the power to construct the nation's identity, but citizens outside this ruling class often construct their own.<sup>68</sup> White argues that these groups constructed outside the ruling class do not hold the power to create the nation's identity, but it is from these differences in beliefs that fractures in the nation's identity occur.<sup>69</sup> The 1970 bicentenary demonstrates how the

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<sup>66</sup> The Australian Commonwealth, 'Captain Cook Bicentenary Celebrations - Final Report'.

<sup>67</sup> The Australian Commonwealth, 27.

<sup>68</sup> White, *Inventing Australia*, ix.

<sup>69</sup> White, ix.



state attempted use the myth to convey a national identity of “200 years of progress”, but, as this essay has shown, the nation is not static neither is the function of the myth. The function of the myth changes depending on the perspective from which it is interpreted and retold. Captain Cook is on one side the founder of the nation and on the other the invader. Cook provides a meeting point for these perspectives and an opportunity for the identity of Australia to be fractured and redefined.

The nation is inherently imagined, and its construction is continuously reimagined and redefined.<sup>70</sup> A nation’s identity is “continually being fractured, questioned and redefined”.<sup>71</sup> The myth of Captain Cook does not provide Australia with its identity, neither is it alone in Australia’s pantheon of myths. Yet, the myth helps facilitate interaction between two contrasting beliefs about Australian history. Schöpflin argues that “Through myth ... communication within the community is intensified, making it far simpler to transmit the messages from the ruler to the ruled and enhancing solidarity, and thus trust, between the two parties” (24). Whilst from a simple observation the bicentennial celebrations of the myth intensified top down communication with the intense use of rhetoric and number of celebrations, the report and the reactions of the community verify that the myth does not simply enhance solidarity and trust. Rather, the celebration raised consciousness of the fiction behind the non-indigenous myth, and therefore the truth of the contrasting Indigenous story. Schöpflin does however, go on to argue that “in socially and particularly in ethnically divided societies, the use of myths almost invariably enhances the division, unless there are myths that unite the groups across the

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<sup>70</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 1–7.

<sup>71</sup> White, *Inventing Australia*, x.

divide”.<sup>72</sup> Whilst the two contrasting myths of Cook inevitably divide beliefs of citizens to an extent, the myths do not simply divide or unite people in the nation, they compel an interaction between divergent beliefs. Therefore, the myth provides a meeting point for contrasting views to interact and impact one another, and the ritual of the celebrations provides a platform for these interactions to be heard, through this process the nation’s beliefs and identity are gradually redefined.

The 1970 bicentenary was a catalyst for Indigenous Australians to contest the national remembrance of Captain Cook and voice their opposition. The effects of the state’s intentions to instate a sense of national pride on their citizens were limited.<sup>73</sup> Rather than telling the peaceful discovery of a nation, the celebrations created a rise in consciousness of the mistreatment of Aboriginal people and their right to land. These protests continued into the 1970s and beyond, and the 1988 bicentenary saw an even larger Indigenous movement demanding land rights. Captain Cook is still used in parliamentary discussions today as MPs such as Bridget McKenzie who mistook Australia Day celebrations with the arrival of Cook.<sup>74</sup> He has come to represent myriad Australian historical moments. He has become a vehicle to promote white Australia but conversely a vehicle to contest it. Captain Cook marks the meeting of non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians. He is recurrent and never ending because this interaction that started in 1770 is still ongoing as the fight for Aboriginal land rights continues.<sup>75</sup> Next year we approach the 250<sup>th</sup> bicentenary of Cook’s landing and it seems that the approach to these celebrations wish to

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<sup>72</sup> Schöpflin, ‘The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths’, 21.

<sup>73</sup> The Australian Commonwealth, ‘Captain Cook Bicentenary Celebrations - Final Report’, 27.

<sup>74</sup> ‘Nats MP Makes Australia Day Blunder’, *SBS News*, 25 September 2018, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/nats-mp-makes-australia-day-blunder>.

<sup>75</sup> Healy, *From the Ruins of Colonialism*, 58.

incorporate the Indigenous side of the encounters that took place in 1770. The annual re-enactment in Cooktown has begun to promote a narrative of reconciliation with the incorporation of the Indigenous perspective.<sup>76</sup> The National Museum of Australia's mission for their 2020 exhibition is to tell the story both "from the ship and from the shore" working with the Indigenous communities that Cook sighted or landed at on his journey.<sup>77</sup> Although the nation is continuously "fractured and redefined",<sup>78</sup> it is not easily destroyed and recreated. The contestation between non-Indigenous and Indigenous beliefs of Australian history manifests within the myth of Captain Cook. The interaction with the myth and the conversations that occur between non-indigenous and Indigenous Australians facilitates a redefinition of the nation. The government has proposed another multimillion-dollar memorial of Captain Cook, and key foundational moments in Australia's history such as Australia day are still tensions for debate. As I have demonstrated in this essay, the debates and perspectives that manifest themselves in the myth of Captain Cook are ongoing and for as long as the nation is fractured and redefined, these debate will never end.

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<sup>76</sup> 'Nats MP Makes Australia Day Blunder', *SBS News*, 25 September 2018, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/nats-mp-makes-australia-day-blunder>.

<sup>77</sup> The National Museum of Australia, 'Endeavour 250 Exhibition Design - DRAFT', 5 July 2018, 2, File no. 2435.

<sup>78</sup> White, *Inventing Australia*, x.

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