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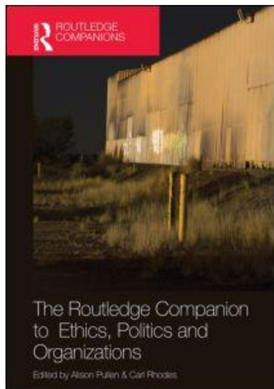

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11

Cultural encounters with sporting organization

Ethico-politics at the interface of Indigenous culture and organization

Tim Butcher and Barry Judd

> If, instead of defending human life, the forms of organization give priority to the increase and appropriation of profit, then they will not pay attention to the material needs of human beings.
>
> (Dussel and Ibarra-Colado, 2006: 501)

Introduction

The introduction of postcolonial theory to the critical study of organizations has brought with it perspectives on alterity that extend debates about identity, ethics and politics beyond familiar western-Eurocentric contexts. At the peripheries of the postcolonial world, an epistemic coloniality persists (Ibarra-Colado, 2006). This must be confronted and disrupted if ways of knowing that politically acknowledge and ethically accept difference and 'otherness' are to be found (after Dussel and Ibarra-Colado, 2006). Acknowledgement and acceptance of difference and 'otherness' being fundamental to the ability of many 'non-Western', 'traditional' and/or 'Indigenous' people' to harness their everyday engagements with 'modern' organization in their ongoing struggles to remain distinct and self-determining.

Organization is at the forefront of this ethico-political struggle (Banerjee and Linstead, 2001; Jack et al., 2011; Westwood and Jack, 2007). Western tropes of modernity such as urbanization, industrialization and globalization demand progress, and organization facilitates it (Giddens, 1991). Organization manages the flux created by constant progress through rationalization and bureaucratization (Clegg, 1990; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). The canonization of the tropes of progress driven by constant modernization has been achieved through their own colonial dissemination (Frenkel and Shenhav, 2006).

Western tropes of 'modernity' were exported to the new world with European colonialism. The lands colonized by Europe provided new and cheap resources. New technologies were developed to extract, transport and process those resources and fuel the industrialization and mercantilism of Europe (Bhambra, 2009; Bryant, 2006). In the face of such hegemonic domination, any alternate contemporaneous indigenous ideologies Europeans 'discovered' in

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the colonies were disavowed (Dussel and Ibarra-Colado, 2006). Settlers claiming land at the 'new world peripheries' to a 'distant but centred Europe' enabled western progress with little or no consideration of the environmental and human destruction wrought in the colonies. Economic exploitation and political domination of the new world was at the centre of the colonial and imperial projects of Europe that spanned the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries (Bryant, 2006).

Colonialism is not, though, of a particular time or place (Jack et al., 2011). The processes of western imperialism and globalization have witnessed colonization of the world, and its contestation and decolonization at different times in different geopolitical locations. Throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, social movements and political processes have struggled to cease colonial violence, but retain dominant western ontologies. The widespread damage wrought by centuries of colonial and imperial agendas is difficult to repair, and such frameworks of power are not easy to change or relinquish. Whether conscious or not, the history of organized exploitation continues to inform contemporary western epistemologies. Organizations, whether transnational, national or local, remain driven by a desire for progress (after Banerjee and Linstead, 2001; Westwood and Jack, 2007). They assert an organizational culture and identity that is deeply entangled in the colonial and imperial projects of the West, learned and normalized from the global history of European deployment of power and domination to create wealth and prosperity through the subordination of Others (Banerjee and Linstead, 2001; Jack and Lorbiecki, 2007).

Against the backdrop of this history, the interfaces at which Eurocentric organization meets 'Other(s)' remains highly problematic. Meanings and understandings at those interfaces differ. What, for example, is to the dominant organizational identity a space in which to be productive and generate wealth, may also be to subordinate 'Other(s)' understanding of organization as a space in which leadership and community well-being may be created. Yet subordinate voices invariably go unheard or are ignored (Banerjee and Linstead, 2001). Others' voices in organized contexts are all too often ascribed pejoratively, viewed as morally debased, immature, underdeveloped or a menace to 'Western society' and to the idea of progress itself (Prasad, 1997). Western ideas and agendas are not necessarily superior to those generated by 'Others'. The well-being of humanity that exists beyond the West demands that space must be created to rediscover knowledge systems that have been repressed, marginalized and silenced (Banerjee and Linstead, 2001; Westwood and Jack, 2007).

In order to achieve this outcome, current conceptualizations of organization must be subject to interrogation, disruption, deconstruction and reconfiguration in ways that embrace difference, give voice to 'Others' and empower their input to negotiate such reconceptualization of organization (Banerjee and Linstead, 2001; Jack et al., 2011; Prasad, 1997; Westwood and Jack, 2007). Only by understanding alternate cultural meanings at organizational interfaces between the dominant and Others can we begin to address the perpetual domination of Eurocentric ideologies, the invisibility of non-western meanings, the persistence of colonial and imperial violence, and the consequent ethico-political resistance of 'Other(s)'. Hence to address fundamental issues of difference in the context of the organization is to move beyond struggle, to seek out and stimulate the resurgence of alternate 'modernities' (Corntassel, 2012).

In this chapter we set out to problematize the organization–community interface of Australian football in the Alice Springs region of the Northern Territory. We find this to be a cross-cultural interface that exemplifies the entangled narratives of western progress and Indigenous self-determination. We first identify the histories that inform this contemporary interface and the consequent pluralistic meanings of what it is to organize and participate in this sport today. We then focus on the participation of a team from the remote Indigenous community of Papunya

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who play in an Australian football league in Alice Springs. We do so in order to understand how Indigenous people who live in remote Australian contexts 'must' engage in this sport, and their ethico-political resistance to its Eurocentric organization. By challenging the Eurocentric meta-narratives of the sport and exposing their influence on its organization today, we highlight how this sport, held up by many as a champion of Indigenous engagement, constrains participation by remote communities, undermines Indigenous struggle for self-determination and perpetuates their status at the very margins of contemporary Australian society.

We propose the need to reconceptualize this interface by recognizing alternate 'modernities' identified by Papunya Elders and discussed here. Finally we reflexively examine this proposition to assess its appeal to the discipline (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011) as a move towards decolonizing this and other organization–community interfaces. We might then begin to answer an organizational question posed by Rhodes and Wray-Bliss (2013: 46), "How do we live (and work) together in a world beset by difference?"

Postcolonial Australia and organization

In Australia the wounds of colonial and postcolonial violence are recent and remain open and unhealed. Belated acts of recognition and 'Aboriginal reconciliation' such as a national apology in 2008 by the then prime minster, Kevin Rudd, may initiate the triage and treatment of those wounds, but such political rhetoric must be translated into and reinforced with ethical interface that occur as mundane everyday actions in the world of concrete social interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Rudd's apology to the Aboriginal and the Torres Strait Islands peoples of Australia (Australian Government, 2013) came 106 years after Federation. Throughout Australia's 'postcolonial' twentieth century, the violence – substantive and symbolic – inflicted on Indigenous peoples has been extreme. With the first acts of parliament following federation in 1901 came new legislation that combined to become known as the White Australia Policy. Australian politics was driven by the agenda of 'white' nation-building which required the control and eradication of those who were seen as inferior, and a threat to the racial and cultural hygiene of an Australian society that characterized itself in terms of white racial purity (Reynolds, 2000). These national agendas gave rise to the Stolen Generation; those 'half-caste'/'mixed-race' Indigenous peoples who were forcibly removed from family as children to be assimilated into 'white society' through incarceration in state and religious institutions between 1910 and 1970 (Manne, 2001a). Meanwhile Indigenous peoples deemed to be 'full-bloods' in remote areas were corralled into 'communities' where theories of social-Darwinism suggested they would soon die out. People from different language groups were co-located in missions and new state-organized townships managed by non-Indigenous stewards commonly referred to as remote Indigenous communities (Skelton, 2010).

The precepts of the White Australia Policy began to be formally dismantled at the end of the 1960s. In 1967, Referenda to recognize Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islands peoples as Australian citizens were passed. Later the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory) of 1976, and the Native Title Act of 1993, progressively delivered civil rights, economic opportunities and social justice to Indigenous peoples (Povinelli, 2002). However, as recently as 2007, the conservative prime minister, John Howard, refused to acknowledge and atone for the violence of his political predecessors and apologize for the mistreatment and destruction experienced by Indigenous peoples in the name of white Australian 'nation-building'.

Instead, Howard responded to reports of widespread child abuse in the Northern Territory by commissioning a board of inquiry that affected all Indigenous peoples in the territory (Wild

and Anderson, 2007). Reacting by instituting a 'National Emergency Response', via a 'taskforce of eminent Australians' to intervene in the lives of urban and remote communities in the territory, the Howard government reinscribed the colonial violence of earlier decades. It did so by suspending the right of Indigenous people to live free of racial discrimination and thereby implementing race-based welfare reforms to restrict the purchase and consumption of alcohol by quarantining 50 per cent of welfare payments (Howard, 2007). Furthermore, school attendance in the territory was made compulsory, and Indigenous townships were brought under Commonwealth government control through a lease scheme and scrapping of access to land permits. Policing in the territory was also increased. Howard (2007) described the 'intervention', as it is most commonly known, as "very dramatic and significant". It has since been widely criticized by the United Nations and others as 'inconsistent' with Australia's international human rights obligations (Social Justice Report 2007 – Chapter 3, 2012), and condemned by commentators for its approach and implications (e.g. Edmunds, 2010). The 'intervention' initiated by the Howard government continues to frame Australian government policy towards Indigenous people in the Northern Territory. And so cultural pluralism and symbolic domination persist in Australian ethics and politics today. In the Northern Territory, Indigenous people are locked into a cycle of extreme poverty and disadvantage imposed upon them by the 2007 intervention. With restricted access to personal income and the wealth of their land effectively removed, social mobility is virtually impossible.

When Prime Minister Rudd apologized in 2008, the Labour government created the 'Closing the Gap' policy to provide significant national incentives and funding to break the cycle and improve Indigenous life expectancy, infant mortality, early childhood development, education and employment (Closing the Gap, 2013). Government agencies, commercial businesses, charitable organizations, social enterprises and Indigenous bodies can access funds to increase their engagement with Indigenous communities. In this neoliberal age, the extant cultural pluralism is addressed as a socio-economic opportunity; to increase institutional engagement is to increase Indigenous opportunities to participate in 'modern' Australia and 'progress'.

In the Northern Territory, where our research is situated, the most obvious exponents of Closing the Gap are the major resource industry firms and government agencies, each of which are far and away the leading employers in the territory. Their interfaces with communities are essential to their organizational prosperity in the region, whether it be articulated in terms of meeting shareholder/stakeholder needs, public service provision or corporate social responsibility.

Yet such contemporary interfaces of community engagement between organization and remote Indigenous peoples remain framed by epistemic colonialities embedded in 'modern' bureaucracy (Parsons, 2008). The colonial and postcolonial histories described above are not easily forgotten on either side of the interface. Regardless of the rhetoric or good intentions, non-Indigenous voices remain dominant influences over the lives of Indigenous people. The overarching narrative is still one of western progress and Eurocentric ideas of organization. Significant government-funded initiatives therefore commonly fail to sufficiently alleviate Indigenous disadvantage (Skelton, 2010; Tatz, 2012). Despite the best intentions of government and/or corporate officials, community engagement interfaces are bound by inter-discursive complexities (Parsons, 2008). What community engagement means to postcolonial western organization need not necessarily be the same for remote Indigenous peoples. Yet the rhetoric at the interface remains one-sided (after Banerjee and Linstead, 2001; Jack and Lorbiecki, 2007). If remote Indigenous communities 'want' support to break the cycle of extreme poverty and disadvantage, they must engage in western bureaucratic discourse and ways of being.

That is not to say that Indigenous peoples cannot engage with western ontologies and epistemologies. On the contrary, many communities and individuals are able to navigate the

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inter-discursivities and corporealities of Indigenous *and* western meanings in a way that in many respects positions them as exemplary exponents of the complex multiculturalism that characterizes post-industrial globalization. To be Indigenous is therefore not to be 'pre-modern' it is in many respects to be 'postmodern'.

The complexities of exchange between Organization and 'Other' (e.g. Banerjee and Linstead, 2001; Jack and Lorbiecki, 2007; Parsons, 2008; Westwood and Jack, 2007) allude to western meanings of time, space and capital that have little or no correlation with Indigenous ontologies. To bridge this cultural pluralism is thought to be possible, achievable and highly desirable.

Yet the corporeal experiences and discursive engagements at those interfaces are affected and sometimes overwhelmed by the weight of historical encounters between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Though organizations might well be seeking ethical legitimacy (Pullen and Rhodes, 2013) their ideologically informed modes of engagement and those of their predecessors will, we argue, engender ethico-political resistance by Indigenous communities if those encounters perpetuate (neo-)colonial social and political domination and (neo)-imperial economic exploitation.

One organizational interface that is often applauded as an exemplar of Indigenous community engagement is sport, and the code of Australian football in particular. With significantly higher than average proportions of Indigenous people engaged in amateur and professional levels of the sport, it is often perceived as a route out of poverty towards prosperity and progress. The Australian Football League (AFL) boasts that 11 per cent of elite professional players are Indigenous, and organizes various Indigenous community engagement initiatives, including national employment programmes (AFL Community Club, 2012).

The AFL is both the 'keeper of the code' of the sport Australian football, the organizer of the elite national league, state leagues and lower 'community'-level regional leagues. With this dual role come three responsibilities: to uphold and maintain the laws of the game; provide an entertaining elite league to the general public; and to promote community-level participation in the sport.

Structurally, the AFL Commission is the senior executive of the organization, with operational divisions to manage football operations (i.e. the game's code and leagues), commercial operations, broadcasting and infrastructure, and national and international development (including regional leagues and community engagement). Its interests are primarily commercial, attracting $425.2m revenue in 2012 with an operating profit of $295.6m from the commercialization of the elite league, and redistributing $289m. Profits of $200.3m were distributed to the professional clubs in the league in 2012, $36.5m to state and territory leagues, and the remainder distributed to game development grants, charitable trusts, facilities development, and other investments and expenditures. A net profit of $6.7m was made (before transfers to reserves) (*AFL Annual Report 2012*, 2013). Financially, the AFL is buoyant. As a commercial entity, it is growing year on year, with a 24 per cent increase in revenue in 2012 from the previous year, mostly attributed to increased revenue from television broadcast rights.

In the Northern Territory, the regional body of the AFL is the AFLNT (AFL Northern Territory), based in Darwin, funded directly by the AFL Commission in Melbourne, Victoria, to organize the leagues within the territory and activities to promote the sport. In 2012, AFLNT were granted $15m to build a Learning and Leadership Centre, alongside other regional projects that saw a reported 29 per cent increase in Australian football participation within the territory (*AFL Annual Report 2012*, 2013). In Central Australia, a region of the Northern Territory where our research is situated, the community-level league, which is structurally overseen by the AFLNT, is the Central Australian Football League (CAFL), based in Alice Springs.

Contrary to popular narratives, the sporting route to individual prosperity is only possible for a select few Indigenous people (after Tatz, 2012), as is the case for non-Indigenous people. For a player to travel from remote Central Australia to Alice Springs for the CAFL, to Darwin to the next level, and then to Melbourne or another major state capital city to play at the highest level is long, arduous and beset with pitfalls. Only one player has ever made that journey from a remote Indigenous community to the elite league, Liam Jurrah (Hearn Mackinnon, 2011). Jurrah's story is one of being torn between Indigenous cultural obligations in Central Australia and professional commitments in Melbourne. Despite being an extremely talented player his football career was short-lived, lasting just three seasons. Since leaving the elite game his life has spiralled back into extreme poverty and disadvantage. Despite these challenges many young Indigenous men regularly participate in the sport and continue to view it as a pathway to fame, fortune and a future in 'mainstream' Australia. Examining the histories of Australian football and a contemporary interface between a non-Indigenous organized league and an Indigenous community, we aim to understand why.

Entangled sporting histories

As the only home-grown 'indigenous' popular sport in Australia, Australian football has increasingly become viewed as 'the national game' (Judd, 2012). Since the renaming of the Victorian Football League (VFL) to the Australian Football League (AFL) in 1990 a growing and persuasive nationalist narrative has emerged that situates the playing and spectating of sport as enacting Australian national identity (Judd, 2012). The increasing entanglement between the sport and populist formulations of national identity has witnessed increased public and scholarly debate about the origins of Australian football (e.g. Blainey, 1990; Flanagan, 2008; Hirst, 2010; Judd, 2008). In Australian Sports Studies this debate has been characterized by the emergence of two key narratives about the possible origins of the Australian game. The dominant group in this debate has come to emphasize the British lineage of Australian football. Authors such as Blainey (1990) and Hibbins (1989) assert that the Australian game of football developed as an offshoot of the sporting culture of the nineteenth-century English public school – a sporting culture that married organized sport to the values of patriotism, muscular Christianity and imperial service. Others including Hirst (2010) and Judd (2008) have drawn attention to the influence that Australian Indigenous games tradition may have played in the decision to reject English rugby and association football (soccer) in favour of a home-grown form of football: 'a game of our own'.

The insecurities about national identity highlighted in formal politics during the prime ministership of conservative leader John Howard (1996–2007) situate questions about the origins of Australian football within broader debate about Australian history and culture. That broader debate focused particular attention on the historic relationship between Australia's Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. Known as the history wars such debate emerged as nationalist reaction to the 'revisionist' histories that developed in the 1970s and 1980s. Revisionist critique exemplified by the works of Henry Reynolds and Robert Manne asked fundamental questions about the collective price Indigenous people had paid (loss of country, loss of political and social autonomy, loss of language and culture, loss of children) as a consequence of the nation-building project that commenced under British colonialism and had continued as the postcolonial agenda of the contemporary Australian State (Manne, 2001b, 1998; Reynolds, 2000, 1996). In response to these questions that unsettled the legal and moral authority of contemporary Australia, nationalist replies sought to uphold the nation-building project through a defence of cultural characteristics and values they sought to frame as uniquely 'Australian'. The values

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of 'mateship' and 'a fair go' combined with a reverence for the British institutions inherited from the imperial past – democracy, the common law, the monarchy and a bundle of individual civic and political rights that could be traced to Magna Carta – came to represent 'Australian values'. Such arguments were most vehemently advanced by the journalist turned 'historian' Keith Windschuttle (2004, 2003) and the populist journalists P.P. McGuiness (editorial comment, 2002) and Andrew Bolt (Weiss, 2012). Significantly, the writings of these nationalist writers gained the public admiration of then prime minister John Howard whose own view of Australian history found accord in their renewed attempts to reinstate the virtuous triumph of Australian nation-building and its British imperial underpinnings.

In Australian Sports Studies the prevailing nationalist reverence for the British inheritance apparent in broader public discourse not only worked to position the sport of Australian football as a unique invention of Anglo-Australia and a key social practice of 'Australian values', but rendered alternate narratives that sought to tell a story of the sports origins in ways that complicated and disturbed the well-ordered nationalist versions of history as 'Un-Australian'. To posit the influence the Indigenous Australian football game known as *marn-grook* (normally translated to mean ball-foot in English) might have played in the development of Australian football is to be attacked for distorting history and dabbling in myth-making (Judd, 2012). As a result, the sport in the public imagination and dominant scholarly writings alike continues to be defined as the preserve of non-Indigenous Anglo-Australia and a key touchstone of its 'unique' cultural values and characteristics. While the academics, journalists and amateur historians referred to above argued about the origins of the sport, the governing body of Australian football, the Australian Football League, developed a position that sought to both placate the nationalist agenda of leading sports studies authors in the realm of scholarship while also entertaining alternate visions of the sport as it is played and marketed to the public. The split personality of the AFL was clearly illustrated in *The Australian Game of Football: Since 1858* (Slattery, 2008). Published by the AFL as the official history, *The Australian Game of Football* contained a single-page essay by the freelance historian Gillian Hibbins in which she dismissed all possibility of an Indigenous Australian influence in the origins of the sport as nothing more than a 'seductive myth'. Hibbins's (2008) opinion piece argues that boyhood connections between the *Djabwurrung* people of western Victoria and the man commonly attributed as the sports, inventor, Thomas Wentworth Wills, had no influence in the development of an 'indigenous' Australian football code. The inclusion of Hibbins's essay suggests that the AFL endorses the conservative nationalist history of the sport, a narrative that conveniently but troublingly seeks to remove Indigenous people from the colonial frontier of nineteenth-century Australia.

The AFL Commission's endorsement of Hibbins's version of history came after a 15-year period in which the AFL had become the most high-profile organizational supporter of national reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. As a result of public support for reconciliation the AFL had worked hard to create a historical narrative that highlighted the sport's long-term engagement with Indigenous Australia. In western Victoria, the AFL endorsed a monument in the village of Moyston to the memory of Tom Wills and the role his knowledge of Indigenous games tradition played in the advent of codified Australian football. In 2002, the AFL sanctioned the Marn-Grook Cup, a trophy that Sydney and Essendon football clubs compete for on an annual basis (Flanagan, 2008). In 2007, the AFL adopted an annual Reconciliation Round to celebrate Indigenous peoples' involvement in the sport that includes 'Dreamtime at the G' an annual match between Richmond and Essendon that has become one of the premier matches of the season. In 2005, the AFL endorsed an Indigenous Team of the Century to coincide with the hundredth year of Indigenous player participation in the League (Gorman, 2012, 2011). Significantly, during this period the AFL also became an important employer of Indigenous

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men with the number of players drawn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds increasing from a very low base in the decades preceding the 1990s to a roster in which between 10 and 12 per cent of playing personel are Indigenous people became the accepted norm. As referred to above, in 2011, for example, 11 per cent of elite players listed by professional AFL clubs were Indigenous (AFL Community Club, 2012).

The actions of the AFL to both include and exclude Indigenous people in historical narratives of the sport places the organization in an extremely difficult if not untenable position. As sports journalist Martin Flanagan noted:

> Having spent the last 20 years engendering good relations across the racial divide in a way that made it a justly proud national leader, the AFL has now endorsed a version of its own history which at one level cuts all that asunder. What exactly does the Marn-grook trophy for the Sydney v Essendon game on Sunday night mean now? If the official history is to be believed, marn grook [*sic*] has no more connection to the AFL than lacrosse . . . The AFL now has a big problem that's rapidly getting bigger.
>
> (Flanagan, 2008)

The Janus-faced character of the AFL relationship to Indigenous Australia raises significant questions about the true nature of the organization's positive engagement with Indigenous people. Hallinan and Judd (2012) and Judd (2012) have concluded that public support for Indigenous people may be viewed as an economic policy designed to reposition the Australian football 'brand' in order to further expand the market for both players and spectators. These authors have pointed to the neo-colonial–neo-imperial relationships that are engendered by the economics of this approach.

At a deeper level AFL endorsement of nationalist versions of the sports, history appears indicative of an organization that remains deeply entangled in the urban-based racial politics of Anglo-Australian nation-building that shaped national politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and became resurgent in the Howard era of the 1990s (Judd, 2012). As an organization the AFL remains one in which the cultural values and norms of white Anglo-Australian males and the tropes of western progress have remained dominant and unchallenged for over a century. It is unsurprising given this organizational context that AFL understandings of cultural diversity and the politics of Indigenous reconciliation remain limited and focus on strategies of corporate marketing. The continued absence of Indigenous people from positions of power within the organization situates the limits of AFL commitment to Indigenous Australia and reconfirms that long-standing inequalities of power between Indigenous and Anglo-Australia have not changed.

Understanding narrative and context

Bound within this meta-narrative of nation-building and symbolic domination we seek to begin to understand a local narrative set in Papunya, a remote Indigenous community 240 kilometres north-west of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory, near the geographic centre of this vast uncanny land.

We were first invited to Papunya in September 2011 to attend the Annual General Meeting of the MacDonnell District Sporting and Social Club, having been approached by the chair of the Collingwood Industrial Magpies, who first described their plight to us. The Melbourne-based coterie of mostly Collingwood Football Club supporters has had a long association with Central Australia, supporting club initiatives and fostering ties between professional clubs and

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communities in the region. Attending the meeting, we learned of the lengths people go to play football in Alice Springs, the problems it brings, and we heard ideas for alternatives. That preliminary stay also included a visit to the Alice Springs magistrates' court on a Monday morning, and discussions with local stakeholders such as the Central Australian Youth Link Up Service (CAYLUS). We have since remained in regular contact with community Elders, and hosted a reciprocal visit to Melbourne in 2012, organizing a research symposium to debate the issues we discuss here alongside key scholars and practitioners (*Wellbeing not Winning short film*, 2013). Hence we have begun an ethnographic engagement with the people of Papunya to undertake the research they see as important to make sense of Indigenous meanings of football and alternative modes of organizing it. As we aim to show through our narrative, this community project is not the first initiated to regain self-determination, and will not be the last, but it is a longitudinal project to which we are committed. We acknowledge our own individual reflexivities in this project (Butcher, 2013; Judd, 2014), yet we aim to maintain a critical perspective (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011).

As we describe it above, Australian football straddles the pluralism of Australian culture. It is characteristically hybrid, providing both Indigenous and non-Indigenous meanings, which remain contested (Hallinan and Judd, 2012). The canonization of the dominant football narrative and the subsequent resistance to it, reflect the past and present binaries between the empire and the colony, the nation and the Other (after Frenkel and Shenhav, 2006). Football as an interface between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people offers a hybrid third space where otherwise incommensurate ontologies meet (after Bhabha, 2004; Frenkel and Shenhav, 2006; Povinelli, 2001). Methodologically our narrative of Papunya's participation in organized football therefore interrogates those hybridities of both the people and the sport.

We have encountered a bricolage of corporeal intersubjectivities (Butcher, 2013; Cunliffe, 2011, 2003) in our first two years of ethnographic involvement with the Papunya community. This narrative therefore reflects the reflexivities of the past and present realities of life in remote Central Australia, and its communities' encounters with the AFL organization. This postcolonial setting characterized by extreme poverty and disadvantage, cast in the shadow of violence and domination, is not merely reflexively intersubjective, but is more so deeply contextual (after Westwood, 2006). Hence we account for the voices of 'Others' as they themselves problematize the epistemic colonialism and imperialism inherent in the organization of sport in their region (after Banerjee and Linstead, 2001; Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Jack et al., 2011). We aim to offer an alternative conceptualization of sporting organization as it is currently embodied through Indigenous peoples' attempts to disrupt and deconstruct football in Papunya (after Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011; Banerjee and Linstead, 2001; Jack et al., 2011). This reconceptualization reflexively adopts the hybrid epistemology already present; it acknowledges the fusion between the colonizer and the colonized at this important cultural and organizational interface (Frenkel and Shenhav, 2006).

Well-being not winning

In the 1930s, Indigenous people of the *Pintupi* and *Luritja* language groups were forced to leave their traditional country situated on the Western Australia–Northern Territory boundary 530 kilometres west of Alice Springs.[1] Along with people from other language groups from across Central Australia, *Pintupi* and *Luritja* people were relocated to the Lutheran Church mission of Hermannsburg and the government ration depot of Haasts Bluff (Community information, 2011). By the 1950s it was recognized that these two communities could not sustain the diversity and growth of their populations. Papunya was therefore established, with *Pintupi* and *Luritja* people

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once more displaced to this new 'community'. Papunya's population peaked in the 1970s, later declining in the 1980s with many *Pintupi* people returning to their traditional country, founding the community of Kintore in 1981 between the culturally significant hills of Pulikatjara.

Poverty and disadvantage have plagued Papunya since at least the 1970s. Poor living conditions, ill-health and tensions between language groups and clans are said to have led to the *Pintupi* migration (Community information, 2011; Skelton, 2010). Papunya's difficulties perpetuate today. Numerous government interventions before and after the Howard government welfare reforms (Social Justice Report 2007 – Chapter 3, 2012) have failed to improve quality of life there, limiting community autonomy and taking their toll on individuals' sense of self, health and well-being (Skelton, 2010). The plight of the community is so great, it was the first and only Australian community to receive non-government aid via World Vision, which again failed. Though Skelton (2010) cites corruption and clan-based politics as the detrimental forces impinging upon the health, well-being and growth of the community, Elders' leadership and collaboration with individuals such as Geoffrey Bardon and organizations such as the MacDonnell Shire and the Central Australia Youth Link Up Service (CAYLUS) have led to the development of a world-class initiative, the Papunya Tula Art Movement (Johnson, 2010) and other pathfinding projects that include a music studio, a computer room at the community centre, and the MacDonnell District Sporting and Social Club. Here we hone in on the role of sport in the community. As Papunya Elder and former guitarist with the world-renowned Warumpi Band, Sammy Butcher, said at the 2011 Annual General Meeting of the MacDonnell District Sporting and Social Club, held at the Papunya community centre: "First there was the art, then the music, and now it's Sid [Anderson]'s turn with the football" (MacDonnell District Sporting and Social Club Aboriginal Corporation Minutes of the Annual General Meeting, 2011). In this 'call to arms' to the current and future generations of community Elders is reference to the struggle of the past and the present, and yet hope for the future. Australian football promises a space in which the playing field can be an even one. What we show here is that it is not, and thus reveal why Sammy Butcher made this statement.

Under the leadership of the long-standing team coach and *Luritja* Elder, Sid Anderson, Papunya fields a team named the MacDonnell Districts Football Club in the Central Australian Football League (CAFL). The CAFL is a local administration of the AFL Northern Territory (AFLNT), which is a regional subsidiary of the AFL discussed above. Formed in 2007, CAFL fixtures have been played exclusively at Traeger Park, a purpose-built floodlit stadium with a grassed oval, in Alice Springs. Traeger Park's lush green playing surface and grandstand cannot compare with vast stadia such as the Melbourne and Sydney Cricket Grounds, where elite AFL fixtures are played in front of crowds of up to 100,000 people, but this oval oasis in the baking temperatures of Australia's red centre is an emblematic staging post for young men with dreams of leaving the poverty of the desert for a football 'career' with an elite AFL club. The weekly 480-kilometre round-trip along the corrugated dirt roads of the desert is seemingly a worthwhile one.

Colloquially known as Mac Districts (*sic*), though based in Papunya, the football club lists players from as far afield as Kintore. It represents the *Pintupi–Luritja* people in competition against teams who represent other language groups, such as the Yuendumu Magpies, a proud *Walpiri* team. Age-old tribal rivalries are today enacted on the football oval (after Hearn Mackinnon and Campbell, 2012). Fielding a team in the CAFL is culturally significant.

Illustrative of how fundamental it is to participate is the journey to Traeger Park that is endured. The logistical challenge first begins with team selection. Players are drafted from across the region and may temporarily relocate to Papunya or Alice Springs for the season. With team members so disparate, any form of training or tactical preparation is nigh on impossible. For those in Papunya to get to a typical 2 p.m. Saturday fixture, a very long day begins with an early morning

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wake-up call. Like other 'local footy' teams across Australia, players and supporters car-share to take the journey to the oval. Their 480-kilometre round-trip is mostly on unsealed, corrugated dirt roads. And unlike their AFL heroes, the team does not follow a strict dietary regime. With such an early start, few will begin the day with any sort of breakfast, let alone a healthy one. And on arrival at Traeger Park there is rarely time or money to spare for fuelling the body. This scene is mirrored by teams from other remote communities such as Yuendumu, as depicted in the 2007 film *Aboriginal Rules* (Campbell, 2007).

Remote teams' lack of preparation is reflected in the scorelines of games against the Alice Springs-based teams. The disparity in quality of life is played out on the oval. And yet, teams such as Mac Districts battle on. One reward at the end of a day's play is to commiserate a loss or sometimes celebrate a win, just like any other football team. Coming from dry communities (as a consequence of the intervention), Mac Districts players and supporters have a rare chance to enjoy a drink together.

With more liquor-licensed establishments per capita than any other town or city in Australia, Alice Springs offers temptations not available at home on-country. Sid Anderson, Sammy Butcher and other Elders talk of having a smaller and smaller pool of players to draw upon. A few drinks with friends and family in a small town overcrowded with people from multiple language groups and tribal backgrounds can lead to tensions, disputes, arguments and violence. Monday morning at the Alice Springs magistrates' court sees young men and women in football jumpers paired up with on-duty lawyers, as they nervously await sentencing. Some even say the jail time these young people inevitably experience is becoming a right of passage to a life of perpetual poverty. This is not an uncommon tale in the Northern Territory (e.g. Wright, 2009).

Yet it is the football oval where Elders such as Sid wish for their young people to learn about life, not jail. However, by being forced to play exclusively in Alice Springs, remote Indigenous people are exposed to risks that might otherwise be avoided. Sid Anderson has stated that what he wants for his team is "to play football like [he] did in the '60s", when he and others would travel "on the back of a truck" between Papunya, Haasts Bluff, Hermannsburg, and other communities to "get a game" on their own red dirt ovals (*Wellbeing not Winning short film*, 2013). Those ovals still exist and such "footy carnivals" are infrequently arranged via the bush telegraph. These events are where family and friends have a chance to see boys become men. The Australian football code is interpreted as a contemporary corroboree (Hearn Mackinnon and Campbell, 2012). Tales of untimed matches played until the sun sets, and final scores debated as alternative truths rather than scoreboard facts are common. Footy carnivals are less about winning and more about well-being; they embody culture, not competition.

Yet remote communities still also participate in the CAFL. This organized competition offers something more than on-country carnivals. It offers unrealistic hopes for a route out of poverty and welfare dependency. It does not deliver it. CAFL participation is only available as an embodiment of the elite 'national game'. So Indigenous participants must engage in western bureaucratic discourse and organization. The CAFL does not offer equity, self-determination or acknowledgement of alternate ways of being. Hence the AFL code is an ideological imposition to Indigenous interpretations, and its implementation solely within the confines of Traeger Park's lush green stadium is organized neo-imperialism.

With a two-person staff, the CAFL is not resourced to see beyond its confines. Traeger Park is at the periphery of the AFL's known world; it is a neo-colonial outpost of an organization whose investment in the game has always been more focused at its urban centre, and more latterly on discovering commercial opportunities and talent overseas. With little or no return on investment, the CAFL is more a commercial necessity than a business opportunity. It reinforces the commercially important message of Indigenous engagement, but fails to nurture talent through

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from remote communities to the AFLNT and beyond. This domination perpetuates colonial violence upon the Indigenous peoples of the region, seducing them into taking the risks they think necessary to break the cycle of deprivation on the vague promise of elite sport. Instead it accelerates and perpetuates that cycle.

In the eight short years since its establishment, the CAFL has failed to offer any meaningful participation beyond hope to *Pintupi–Luritja* people and others. Sid Anderson and Elders from across the region thus piloted an alternative competition in 2012–2013. The *Wilurarra Tjutaku* Football League (WTFL) is planned for play in the summer months so as not to overlap with CAFL fixtures in the winter. *Wilurarra tjutaku* translates from *Luritja* to *everybody on-country*. The WTFL is thus a league open to teams from remote communities across the region. It is a rediscovery of Sid and other Elders' nostalgia for how they once played football. Their transition from boys to men was played out on the oval on their own terms, not the terms of 'Other(s)'. The WTFL is rediscovery of that reality. As Sid says, it is about "wellbeing not winning" (*Wellbeing not Winning short film*, 2013). Its primary function is to demonstrate an alternative to the CAFL. On the one hand it mitigates the risks associated with Alice Springs, and on the other it promotes self-determination.

The WTFL is not an overt threat to the CAFL. It is, instead, a form of ethico-political resistance that does not explicitly position Papunya and other remote communities against the dominant AFL organization per se, and so does not jeopardize their relationship with the league and any potential future financial support from the AFL. The WTFL is an alternative interpretation of the contemporary organization of football competition. It aims to show that playing on-country is both possible and beneficial. First formally discussed at the 2011 Annual General Meeting of the MacDonnell District Sporting and Social Club, the WTFL aims in the long term for recognition as a viable alternative through the development of basic infrastructure such as AFL-certified umpires, and corporate-sponsored training facilities, changing rooms and playing kit.

Throughout the WTFL's development, Sid has consulted with the CAFL. Journeying to Melbourne to discuss its launch alongside the AFL's Community Engagement manager, Jason Mifsud, Sid has given it wider exposure (*Wellbeing not Winning short film*, 2013). If the AFL were to recognize the need for an alternative to their current organization of regional football competition, its subsidiaries such as AFLNT might develop competitions such as the CAFL to consider and uphold Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous needs. If so, this would likely be acceptable to Sid and other Elders. The WTFL is a means through which to demonstrate Indigenous perspectives of football to the AFL organization. It is an alternative interface that is informed by memories of previous ways of organizing and by the limitations of the current CAFL competition. It reconceptualizes football as an inter-community competition that promotes health and well-being to all, rather than a false journey of hope, fame and fortune for a select few talented individuals.

Demonstrating difference on-country

Initiation of the *Wilurarra Tjutaku* Football League (WTFL) as a vehicle to promote Indigenous ways of playing Australian football suggests that the Papunya Elders are acutely aware of the limitations that characterize the present relationship between their on-country based football team and the CAFL, part of a 'modern' large-scale commercial organization. The WTFL is an attempt to initiate a self-determining Indigenous league and stands in stark contrast to the CAFL, a non-Indigenous organization framed by the cultural norms, practices and agendas of 'modern' Australia.

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This is not the first of such a response by communities in the region to 'modern' outside influences. Whether it be the preservation and protection of culture (Johnson, 2010) or the promotion of health and well-being of community (Turner-Walker, 2012; Wright, 2009) remote Indigenous communities in Central Australia, particularly Papunya, have led initiatives towards self-determination. It is though the first attempt to achieve both.

Although the sport of Australian football through its organizational structures at national, state and regional levels has adopted the political ethics of Aboriginal reconciliation, a significant gap exists between the rhetoric of positive engagement with Indigenous peoples and the applied practice of building relationships with Indigenous people that are productive and mutually beneficial to both parties. As a sporting organization that embodies non-Indigenous cultural values associated with the 'elite' national game, the CAFL finds itself seemingly unable to translate the rhetoric of reconciliation and the kinds of ethical political engagement with Indigenous people it recommends to the substantive practice of building effective everyday working relationships with the people of Papunya and other remote communities in the region. Like most organizations in 'modern' Australia, the CAFL remains unknowing of and unable to politically acknowledge and ethically accept the difference and 'Otherness' that the *Pintupi–Luritja* people of Papunya represent.

Responding to the organizational limitations of the CAFL to work productively and ethically with difference, Indigenous Elders at Papunya have attempted to demonstrate how recognition and acceptance of their 'Otherness' can function to create new and exciting possibilities for the way in which organized Australian football competitions are played in the Alice Springs region. It is a reconceptualization of sporting organization as being for the achievement of community well-being rather than for commercial gain. As an on-country football league the WTFL empowers Papunya Elders to use their authority as senior men by drawing on *Pintupi–Luritja* cultural traditions set down as law since the beginning of time. As an organization the WTFL therefore functions to empower men like Sid Anderson to regulate social relations and enforce standards of acceptable behaviour in accordance with the laws and traditions of the people of Papunya. In this way the WTFL draws the attention of organized Australian football to the continued persistence and dynamism of Indigenous alterity. More than this, however, *Wilurarra tjutaku* provides the CAFL, AFLNT and the AFL Commission with a living cultural example of how Australian football can be organized and played differently to that demanded by existing league structures. In a very subtle and indirect way the creation of the WTFL by Papunya Elders may be considered as an Indigenous critique of the dominant organization of Australian football which functions to perpetuate and reinscribe relationships between non-Indigenous organization and Indigenous community that very much remain colonial and imperial in nature.

Indigenous people throughout Australia believe that being on and caring for country is inextricably linked to the health and well-being of individuals and their communities. The WTFL emphasizes such long-standing beliefs by offering a way of playing competitive Australian football that is about being on-country, connecting with country and loving country as a means to ensure that the needs of the Papunya community are listened to, considered, nurtured and cared for through an approach to organized sport that values well-being far more than winning.

The Elders at Papunya initiated *Wilurarra tjutaku* as a living demonstration of Indigenous difference and 'Otherness' in the context of organized Australian football. Like these Elders we believe that organizations such as the AFL have much to learn from observing the ongoing development of the WTFL. Investments such as the planned $15m AFLNT Learning and Leadership Centre in Darwin begin to listen to Indigenous voices such as Michael Long, a former elite player, but they reinscribe western narratives of progress and negate connections to country (AFL Northern Territory, 2013). Australia's vast geography is obviously a limitation,

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but the concept of relocating up to just 60 children and young people from different communities at any one time offers opportunity to few and cannot meet the needs of Indigenous people to remain on-country.

The WTFL and Indigenous sporting organizations like it offer the Australian football 'mainstream' an alternate way to engage with Indigenous Australia. A mode to engage that is in keeping with Indigenous cultural traditions, values and practices. A mode to engage that fulfils the ethical and political promise of Aboriginal reconciliation through the recognition, acknowledgement and acceptance of Indigenous Australian difference. A mode to engage that makes possible a re-evaluation of the way in which dominant Australian football organizations operate. A mode to engage that opens up the possibility for non-Indigenous organizations to learn from 'Other' values and ways of doing things ethically that derive from moving beyond the rhetoric of reconciliation to an applied entanglement with Indigenous people.

Concluding remarks

Wilurarra tjutaku is a sporting organization that draws deeply on traditional Indigenous concepts of well-being that link the good health of the individual and the collective to an ability to remain on-country in a connection that has significant physical and spiritual dimensions. The well-being focused agenda of this new Indigenous organization is at odds with non-Indigenous organizations whose commercial agendas are geared toward talent identification and the growth of mass markets for the consumption of elite sports. The recent advent of *Wilurarra tjutaku* provides non-Indigenous sporting organization with a rare opportunity to engage with Indigenous people in a way that is not bound by western epistemologies and opens up a dialogue for new and better understandings of the often complex interface that exists between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous organization in Australia. We believe the example provided by *Wilurarra tjutaku* and the possibility for reshaping historic understandings of Australian football as a context of the cross-racial and cultural engagements it carries has broad implications for the ways in which the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Australia are shaped and generally understood. Before new and improved understandings of this interface can emerge, however, we believe non-Indigenous organizations must challenge their own cultural understandings of difference and the Otherness that Indigenous Australia represents. In particular, we argue that the challenge to contemporary non-Indigenous organizations in Australia is to move beyond articulations of national identity that view Indigenous people as continuing to exist as outside 'Others' who need to be brought into a 'mainstream' Australia defined by its Anglo origins and cultural traditions. Instead, newer, more subtle and complex understandings of postcolonial Australian society are required (after Jack and Lorbiecki, 2007; Jack et al., 2011; Westwood and Jack, 2007). More able to accurately reflect the postcolonial reality of twenty-first-century Australia, such understandings articulate the postcolonial as a context in which productive and ethical engagements between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people through a process of ongoing dialogue open up the possibility for new commonalities that exist across racial and cultural difference to be found. In other words, we believe substantive improvement in the interface between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous organization requires an acceptance on the part of non-Indigenous people that postcolonial Australia is not characterized by impervious frontiers that separate 'native' from 'settler' but rather is shaped by a dynamic and creative hybridity where boundaries of race and culture are always open to the possibility of being crossed (after Bhabha, 2004; Frenkel and Shenhav, 2006). Recognition of cultural and organizational hybridity therefore opens up a space whereby non-Indigenous Australians and their organizations might learn from and be influenced by Indigenous cultural traditions to create

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new, innovative and more productive ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples can work, play and simply be together in the context of Australian football and other forms of organization.

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Note

1 A map of the region, detailing these locations, can be found here: http://goo.gl/maps/P7ucY. This is a region mapped using different references by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people for different purposes. Here we merely depict the community settlements referred to above to illustrate the span of movement *Pintupi–Luritja* people have been forced to undertake.

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