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# Beyond equality: the place of Aboriginal culture in the Australian game of football

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*Abstract: This paper provides an overview of Aboriginal interventions in the sport of Australian (Rules) Football in the period since the formation of the Australian Football League (AFL) in 1990. Recalling several pivotal events that have defined and redefined the relationship between Aboriginal people and the Australian game of football, this paper finds that the struggle to end on-field racial vilification in the 1990s attracted widespread support from the overwhelmingly non-Aboriginal public because these actions were consistent with the political principle of equality. The key actions of Nicky Winmar and Michael Long gained general appeal because they demanded that Aboriginal people be treated as though they were Anglo-Australians. In this regard, the 1990s fight against on-field racism in the AFL was a continuation of the Aboriginal struggle for rights associated with Australian citizenship. As the 1967 Commonwealth referenda on Aborigines demonstrated, most Anglo-Australians understood and supported the political principle of equality even though the promise of citizenship in substantive improvements to social and economic outcomes almost 50 years later remains largely unfulfilled.*

*Nevertheless, in the recently concluded 2015 AFL season, Adam Goodes, the most highly decorated Aboriginal man to play the sport at the highest level, was effectively booed into retirement. Goodes became a controversial and largely disliked figure in the sport when he used the public honour of being 2014 Australian of the Year to highlight the disadvantage and historical wrongs that continue to adversely impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities. This paper argues that Goodes effectively sought to shift the paradigm of Aboriginal struggle beyond the sympathetic notions of racism and equal treatment to issues of historical fact that imply First Nations rights associated with cultural practice. Goodes' career initiates a new discussion about the place that Aboriginal cultures, traditions and understandings might have in the sport today. His decision to perform an Aboriginal war dance demonstrates that the new paradigm we propose is primarily about the political principle of difference, not equality.*

Adam Goodes' actions on and off the field have consistently argued for the right of Aboriginal peoples to remain culturally different and the right for these differences to be recognised and accommodated, if not embraced, by the Australian game of football. The cultural frontiers Goodes pressed in the elite Australian Football League (AFL) competition reflect a growing reality in lower-level football competitions, where Aboriginal peoples are increasingly demanding they play the game according to what we describe as an *Aboriginal football ethic*, which embodies and celebrates distinctive Aboriginal cultural values and practices.

In this paper we argue that the ethico-political responses of Nicky Winmar and Michael Long to racial vilification in the formative years of the AFL inform the recent moves by Adam Goodes to assert an Aboriginal football ethic. We show that Anglo-Australian notions of equality, although a key construct in the Australian public's acknowledgment of Aboriginal players' participation in the sport, severely restrict that participation. The case of systematic public booing of Goodes underlines the continued inability of the Anglo-Australian public to understand the ethico-political demand of Aboriginal people for the recognition of cultural difference.

### **Background and context**

Since the formation of the AFL in 1990, Australian (Rules) Football has increasingly pressed its claim to be the national game. Now played in every Australian state and territory, the recent expansion of the AFL has positioned the Australian game of football as the most popular and lucrative sport in Australia today. While widespread popularity and ubiquitous media coverage, combined with a geographic range that spans the continent, strengthen the national claim of the sport, such claims are intensified by its status as Australia's only Indigenous popular sport.

Since the early twentieth century, advocates of Australian Football have promoted its benefits according to the political agenda of Australian nation building and the search for a uniquely Australian national identity. In 1908 then Prime Minister Alfred Deakin (cited in Cashman et al. 2001:111–13) argued that as a purely Australian invention, the Australian game of football

reflected more perfectly than any imported code Australian values and ideals. According to Deakin, the game had an important role to play in both building and strengthening the nation. By the end of the twentieth century the sport for many Australians had indeed become a touchstone of the Australian nation, saying much about national cultural values and national identity. The salient narratives of the game that emerged during this period inextricably linked the concept of Australian nation to the racial construct of whiteness and the cultural construct of an Anglo-Australian culture explicitly British in origin. The national values and identity evoked therefore came to celebrate only the archetypes of an idealised Anglo-Australia. In other words, the foundational narratives and mythologies that frame the Australian game of football functioned to exclude Aboriginal people and to define them as existing both outside the game and outside the nation despite their presence in both.

During the past two decades the expansion of the AFL into a national competition has been accompanied by official endeavours to broaden the popular appeal of the sport by attracting players and spectators from non-Anglo-Australian backgrounds. To achieve this, the AFL developed and implemented strategic initiatives to engage with both multicultural and Aboriginal Australia. In seeking to engage with Aboriginal Australia, the AFL brand closely aligned itself with the politics of Aboriginal reconciliation, becoming a national advocate for the process. In supporting this process the AFL espoused the belief that the Australian game of football could function as an effective social forum in which reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples might be achieved and maintained through the practice of playing and spectating football. Overrepresentation of Aboriginal participation as players in the AFL is often cited as substantive evidence of this success.

Although prevailing narratives continue to be discursively underpinned by exclusive racial notions of whiteness — and their cultural counterpart, Britishness — in practice the sport has increasingly come to reflect the racial and cultural diversity that is characteristic of contemporary Australian society. The AFL has yet to resolve the inherent tensions that exist between the prevailing


narratives of Australian Football, which locate its national credentials in the historic role the sport played as a marker of Anglo-Australian exclusivity and uniqueness, and the contemporary claims of Aboriginal peoples whose skilful excellence in the sport has made the game an inherent part of their contemporary cultures and identities throughout significant regions of the continent.

### Purpose

In this paper we find that the tension that exists between the nationalist mythology of Australian Football and the contemporary beliefs of Aboriginal peoples — who play, spectate and support the game that belongs to them — remains unresolved. We believe these tensions lie at the heart of much of the conflict that exists between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal Anglo-Australians in the context of Australian Football. In making these assertions we argue that Aboriginal struggles in the Australian game have now moved beyond the contained and clear-cut battles against on-field racism that were fought in the 1990s to a much deeper, complex, undefined and perhaps ongoing series of controversies that concern the cultural meaning of the sport. In other words, we believe that recent controversies involving Aboriginal players in the AFL are not about the issue of racism as such, but concern much broader questions about the position Aboriginal people occupy in the Australian game of football. Such questions are fundamentally about who owns the game and the ways in which the game can and should be used as a marker of racial and cultural identity and by whom.

Invariably, questions about ownership and the use of Australian Football eventually lead to questions about who owns the country on which the game is played. Aboriginal people who play Australian Football believe they do so *on Country* and in recent times some have given public voice to this assertion (Butcher and Judd 2015). Extending far beyond the struggle of Aboriginal people to oppose racism in Australian Football, this new paradigm has shifted debate to the extent to which the Australian game of football can fruitfully be exploited by Aboriginal peoples to transmit and replicate uniquely Aboriginal cultural values and their own national identities.

To restate our argument in somewhat different and perhaps more political terms, whereas previous bounded and highly targeted struggles to end racism sought to assert the right of Aboriginal peoples to participate in football as though they were Anglo-Australians according to principles of civil equality, contemporary struggles seek to assert the right of Aboriginal people to be recognised as culturally distinct groups within the Australian game according to the principles of political difference.

Recent Aboriginal interventions within the elite national competition of the AFL have demonstrated the shift in the way Aboriginal people understand Australian Football. To demonstrate this we draw on our personal observations of the ‘booing saga’ that enveloped the final playing years of recently retired Sydney Swans player Adam Goodes. Following this story through both the mainstream sporting media and on social media sites dedicated to Australian Football, it became clear that the football public did not come to cast Goodes as a villain of the game simply because of his longstanding and very public stance against racial vilification in sports. Rather, the mass booing of Goodes that reached fever pitch in the 2015 season was justified as socially acceptable crowd behaviour by both the Australian Football public and many ‘respected’ commentators of the game because Goodes had dared to insert Aboriginal cultural meanings, including Aboriginal understandings of history, into the national game. Many non-Aboriginal Australians who believed that football should reflect *their* values, identities and political agendas were not happy with Goodes’ assertion that wherever he played football, he played on Aboriginal land; he was on the Country of a particular Aboriginal people. Goodes’ decision to respond to crowd booing by performing an Aboriginal war dance during the opening match of the 2015 Indigenous Round in Sydney defines his attempts to infuse Australian Football with meaning and values drawn from Aboriginal culture and **understanding** of history. 

The so-called ‘Goodes saga’ and the controversial reactions that characterised this episode are indicative of what might be called the ‘culture wars’ within Australian Football. These culture wars have emerged as Aboriginal people, for the

first time in the history of the sport, assert their right to infuse the game with what we term an *Aboriginal ethic of Australian Football*. Such an ethic, we propose, declares the right of Aboriginal peoples to play the Australian game of football in ways that draw explicit inspiration from their own stories and cultural traditions, that perpetuate and strengthen distinctively Aboriginal identities, and, most importantly, that maintain and reinforce connections to Country, while invigorating and advancing the game.

Before detailing Goodes' intervention and the resulting controversy originating in the racial and cultural fears of non-Aboriginal Australians, it is essential to explore the historical period that immediately preceded contemporary attempts to infuse an Aboriginal ethic into the Australian game of football. In doing so we retrace in some detail the foundational efforts of key Aboriginal players to create a space in Australian Football that was free from on-field racist attack.

### **The battle for equality: outlawing racism in the AFL**

In 1990 the AFL was established, replacing the Victorian Football League (VFL) as the premier Australian Football competition. During 1896–1989 only a small number of Aboriginal men played in the VFL. Some of these men chose to play their VFL careers without reference to, or promotion of, their racial and cultural identities as Aboriginal men — such figures include Joe Johnson, Graham 'Polly' Farmer and Barry Cable (Judd 2008). For others, whose Aboriginal identity was an inescapable fact of their bodies, racism became a normalised part of their participation in football. When a young Doug Nicholls (later to be Sir Douglas and Governor of South Australia) turned up to train with VFL club Carlton in the late 1920s, his potential teammates refused to share the change rooms with him. His Aboriginality, they claimed, made his body dirty and made it smell bad (Tatz 1995). In the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s Syd Jackson, Robert Muir, and Jim and Phil Krakouer had to contend with constant racial vilification directed at them from opposition players and spectators throughout their careers (Gorman 2011; Judd 2008; Tatz 1995). Robert Muir and Jim Krakouer, in particular, often responded physically. Their careers were

severely curtailed as a result of the on-field (in addition to the inescapable off-field) racism they experienced. In the premier competition during the period 1896–1989 the racial vilification of Aboriginal peoples became a socially acceptable tactic used to put Aboriginal players 'off their game'. Racism became entrenched in the culture of the Australian Football played at the highest level. Judd has argued elsewhere that the sanctioned racial vilification of Aboriginal men in the VFL reflected the values and ideals of an Anglo-Australia that the Australian game of football sought to reinforce in the realm of sport (Judd 2008, 2015). Lacking a critical mass of players to challenge this situation; Aboriginal men remained outsiders within football, a situation that mirrored the politics of Australian citizenship for much of the same period (Chesterman and Galligan 1997; Davidson 1997; Rowse 1998).

This situation changed during the 1990s when the AFL replaced the VFL. The transition from a state-based to a national league witnessed an influx of new Aboriginal players who quickly became a noticeable group within the competition. For the first time there existed a critical mass of Aboriginal players at the elite level of Australian Football. In this respect the AFL differed significantly in appearance from the VFL competition it had succeeded. Despite these changes, the cultural values and ideals that underpinned Australian Football and the old VFL remained unchanged. Racism directed at Aboriginal men in the sport remained a defining characteristic of the game.

In 1993, the International Year of the World's Indigenous People, the longstanding place of racism in Australian Football became a controversial talking point. In a match played between St Kilda and Collingwood football clubs at Collingwood's notoriously parochial home ground, Victoria Park, on 17 April 1993, St Kilda's star Aboriginal player Neil 'Nicky' Winmar decided to take a stand against racism in Australian Football. In doing so Winmar created history, providing a platform from which other Aboriginal players would launch new fights in their struggle against racism in the sport. That day St Kilda ended a 17-year losing streak at the ground. Winmar and his Aboriginal teammate Gilbert McAdam were awarded 'best on ground'. The combined brilliance of their play that day had

been the difference between the two teams. The Collingwood supporters were aware of this and subjected both men to racial taunts. When the match ended with St Kilda 22 points in front, the abuse of Winmar and McAdam from the grandstands continued. Winmar responded by lifting his St Kilda guernsey and, facing the hostile crowd, pointed to his chest to declare, 'I'm black and I'm proud'. The image of Winmar making this highly symbolic gesture was captured by Wayne Ludbey and John Feder and published in the Melbourne newspapers the *Sunday Age* and *Sunday Herald Sun*. Those photographs produced intense debate and forced the AFL, the Australian Football public and the nation to confront the issue of racism that targeted Aboriginal peoples in a way rarely seen before. For Aboriginal Australia the image of a proud and defiant Winmar was as important as the Black Power salute of Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics had been for African-American political struggle in the United States of America in the late 1960s. As Gilbert McAdam would later recall, 'it reinforced that our people around Australia are proud of who we are and how far we've come' (Klugman and Osmond 2013:151). For those who supported the twin concepts of a multicultural Australia and national reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples, the symbolism of the Winmar image was not lost.

At the level of federal politics, Australian Labor Party Senator Nick Bolkus, then Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, embraced and celebrated Winmar's actions in taking a stand against racism. Australia, noted Bolkus, was an 'unsettled nation' struggling with widespread racism that needed to be eliminated before a 'fully Australian identity' could be developed (Klugman and Osmond 2013:152). By declaring himself proud to be black, Nicky Winmar 'stood for the way ahead in Australia', with Australians having a responsibility to 'tear down' racial barriers (Klugman and Osmond 2013:152). According to Klugman and Osmond (2013), 'Winmar himself felt excited that his gesture might lead to change. "Yes!" he exclaimed when he saw the photos, glad that finally it seemed like "there is someone out there that is thinking like I am thinking, just give us a chance".' The first response of the AFL, however, was defensive. It wanted to avoid controversy rather than focus on its failings. The AFL

Commission stated that its members 'abhorred racism' but at the same time did not believe any changes in the rules or processes were necessary. Nor did Winmar's own employer, St Kilda Football Club, want to be 'distracted' (Klugman and Osmond 2013:153).

The responses of the AFL and St Kilda were consistent with the dominant cultural attitudes of Australian Football and the national values and ideals originating in the early twentieth century that continued to be reinforced and perpetuated in the game. Collingwood captain Tony Shaw (cited Klugman and Osmond 2013:94) summed up those values and ideals when he admitted:

It's a business out there...I'd make a racist comment every week if I thought it would help win the game. If I think I can say something to upset someone, then I'll say it. I couldn't give a stuff about their race, religion or creed. If they react, you know you've got them.

Many agreed with the sentiment of Shaw's comments. Former Essendon champion and columnist in *The Age* Simon Madden agreed that racist sledging of Aboriginal players was simply part of the game — 'The question for the footballer is not how to stop [the abuse] but how do you handle it?' (Klugman and Osmond 2013:160). Such sentiments found ready support from members of the public who believed that the racial vilification of Aborigines was part of the fun and entertainment that watching Australian Football on a Saturday afternoon provided spectators:

Shouting out abuse was just part of footy, supporters of all clubs did it, and the players should be able to cope with it...As reporters from both *The Age* and the *Herald-Sun* discovered the weekend after Winmar's gesture, fans of all teams seemed to routinely yell out racist abuse...One 74-year-old woman and long-time Western Bulldogs supporter, Mary Millard, was happy to confess, 'Of course I sing out "black bastard", but I don't mean it. It's all part of being at the footy on a Saturday arvo. Such supporters were in agreement with Allan McAlister, the Collingwood president, who had dismissed the racist abuse as just 'ballyhoo' because 'no one is fair dinkum'. (Klugman and Osmond 2013:159–60).

If most were happy to admit that the racial vilification of Aboriginal players was acceptable because it was part of Australian Football culture, few went as far as Allan McAlister in unmasking the notion of Aboriginal racial and cultural inferiority that gave it an air of acceptability. Speaking on Channel Nine's *Wide World of Sports*, the Collingwood president claimed that his club had nothing against Winmar or Aboriginal people in general, but added the following proviso: 'As long as they conduct themselves like white people, well, off the field, everyone will admire and respect them.' When asked to explain what he meant, McAlister made his position even clearer: 'As long as they conduct themselves like human beings, they will be all right. That's the key' (McAlister cited in Klugman and Osmond 2013: 160–1). McAlister's remarks, intended to diffuse the situation, confirmed the fact that racist ideology that denigrated Aboriginal people was pervasive in the culture of the Australian game of football. As a key cultural touchstone of Anglo-Australia, it was hardly surprising that the AFL did nothing to end the type of racial attacks on Aboriginal players that had prompted Winmar to point out in public his personal pride in being an Aboriginal man.

The issue of racial vilification did not end with Winmar. Just two years later during the 1995 Anzac Day match between Essendon and Collingwood the **issue again** become a national headline. This time Michael Long, the champion Essendon player, was racially vilified by Collingwood ruckman Damian Monkhorst. The incident occurred late in the match when Long tackled Monkhorst and forced a stoppage:

As the umpire blew the whistle for a ball up Monkhorst turned to Long and said, 'Will someone get this black cunt off me.' Incensed, Long turned to the umpire who apologized, explaining that he could do nothing because there was no law against racial vilification. It was the moment that Long decided to make a stand against this type of discrimination. The incident with Monkhorst was not the first time Long had experienced vilification either on or off the football field. Instead, it was the confluence of many incidents he had had to deal with... (Gorman 2011:148)

The actions of Winmar in exposing the ugly racism that pervaded Australian Football and starting a national conversation about the place racism had in sport and society provided Michael Long with a platform from which to push the AFL further on the matter. As sports journalist Martin Flanagan (2015:48) has noted, 'Nicky Winmar pointing to his skin at Collingwood in 1993 provided the issue of racial abuse with an iconic image but it was Michael Long, in 1995, who forced the political change'.

The change that Long was able to force took the struggle against racial vilification in sport down a legal avenue. Long had the support of his club, including the much-respected Essendon Football Club coach, Kevin Sheedy, and the club's president, David Shaw. On 1 May that year, Essendon Football Club lodged a formal complaint with the AFL seeking redress over the incident. In response the AFL established a mediation process that would bring Long and Monkhorst face to face to settle the issue. Long wanted a personal apology from the Collingwood player. Monkhorst refused; instead, he told Long, 'You took it the wrong way mate' (Monkhorst cited Klugman and Osmond 2013:185).

In its haste to declare the matter resolved, the AFL called a press conference for 5 May to bring the matter to a speedy conclusion. Despite the lack of an apology, AFL Chairman Ross Oakley announced that the matter had been successfully resolved. Long had been silenced as part of the mediation 'settlement' but the AFL had failed to impose any penalty on Monkhorst. Racism that targeted Aboriginal players remained permissible, or so it seemed. Long, however, had other ideas. Not happy with the outcome of the initial mediation, Long worked hard in pushing for the matter of racial vilification to finally be taken seriously by the AFL. Critically, Long was supported by his club president, coach and a number of high-profile non-Indigenous teammates, including James Hird. On 9 May the AFL's response was to direct its communications manager, Tony Peek, to consult with Indigenous players in the league. Peek reported that racial vilification of Aboriginal players was widespread, experienced on a regular basis and perpetrated by a number of serial offenders. As a result of the determination of Michael Long to see change, on 30 June




1995 the AFL implemented 'Rule 30: a rule to combat racial and religious vilification'. Rule 30 represented a seismic shift in Australian sports. For the first time in history the governing body of a professional sport in Australia had prohibited competitors from racially abusing opponents. (Gorman and Reeves 2012:14-22). Importantly:

implementation of Rule 30 charged umpires with 'reporting instances of abuse', taking the burden away from Indigenous (and other) players to report it themselves. The new rule set in place a process of confidential mediation for disputes in the first instance, overseen by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. If mediation failed the complaint could proceed to the AFL Tribunal. But despite the agitation of Long and others, players would not be fined. Instead, clubs would be liable for up to \$50,000 in penalties if the complaint was proven at the tribunal...Aboriginal players welcomed the initiative despite the removal of fines. Long said 'It's great that the AFL has done something about it...I'm very happy something has been done about it. It's been a long time coming'. (Klugman and Osmond 2013:192-3)

The change was significant. Martin Flanagan (2015) considers Long's intervention as the 'Mandela moment' in Australian Football. Flanagan argues that Long was able to facilitate change because he brought the Australian public with him in his crusade against on-field racism.

The era of Winmar and Long occurred at a time of transition as the old parochialism of the state-based VFL gave way to the continent-spanning aspirations of the AFL, which aggressively sought to position itself as the national game. The interventions of Winmar and Long were about the specific issue of racial vilification of Aboriginal people in the context of Australian Football, and their stand against racism focused on very particular and bounded incidents of racism. Nicky Winmar's iconic gesture lives on as a symbol of the turning point in public acknowledgment of this entrenched problem in football, while the quasi-legal actions pursued by Long led to the prohibition of on-field racism through the rules of the game.

Due to their targeted actions and powerful argument for a very specific institutionally sanctioned outcome, the ending of racial vilification in Australian Football, both individuals gained widespread support from the non-Aboriginal Australian public. Flanagan (2015) has asserted that the persona of Michael Long was such that he succeeded in bringing the Anglo-Australian mainstream with him. Both Winmar and Long spoke with efficiency where the media was concerned. They tackled racism with a quiet and resolute defiance, steadfast in their belief that it was they who held the moral high ground. Fundamentally, we believe, both men seemed content to let the Australian media and public consider the issues they raised without seeking to impose themselves at the centre of this national debate. In this, the approach both men brought to the politics of race has been characterised as drawing on distinctly Aboriginal traditions (Beckett 2014; McCoy 2008; Musharbash 2008; Rowse 2000). The dignified defiance of both Winmar and Long found ready comparison in the old and revered men of the Aboriginal rights movement, like Sir Douglas Nicholls, who dedicated his life after Australian Football to achieving Australian citizenship for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and was rewarded by Anglo-Australia with a knighthood, an Order of the British Empire and the governorship of the State of South Australia (Broome 2015; Clark 1965; Tatz 1995). It was an approach that the overwhelmingly non-Aboriginal sporting public found conciliatory, non-threatening and, therefore, politically palatable 

While it may be true that the public personas of Winmar and Long as 'likeable men' may have enabled the Australian public to more easily follow and support their leadership, we believe that the Australian public came along with Winmar and Long because their struggle against on-field racial vilification was fundamentally about equality and the right to be treated as if they were Anglo-Australians. In this respect, the actions of Winmar and Long can be seen as contiguous with the struggle for Aboriginal citizenship, and thus extend that history, which stretches back to the 1860s and arguable further (Attwood and Markus 1999, 2004; Arnold and Attwood 1992; Chesterman and Galligan 1997; Davidson



1997). The overwhelmingly white Australian public came to sympathise with Winmar and ultimately to back Long against the AFL, a nationally recognised institution and cultural icon of Anglo-Australia, because the racial vilification of Aborigines in the Australian game of football had by the 1990s become a glaring inconsistency with their formal legal status as Australian citizens and was out of touch with the core Anglo-Australian mythologies of equality and a fair go for all. In the period since those pivotal events, Rule 30 of the AFL code has become a non-negotiable part of the game because it seeks to ensure all who play the game are treated as equals.

Freed from the curse of on-field racism, Aboriginal players began to prosper like never before. Throughout the 2000s, the number of players from declared Aboriginal backgrounds has consistently hovered between 9 per cent and 11 per cent of all playing personnel at the elite level in the league (AFL Community n.d.; Gorman 2011; Hallinan and Judd 2009; Judd 2010). This is a significant achievement given that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples constitute just over 2 per cent of the Australian population and no other Australian institution can boast comparable numbers of Aboriginal people in its employ. The over-representation of Aboriginal players was a direct outcome of the battles of Winmar and Long in the 1990s. Their actions and the conversation about race and culture they opened up contributed to greater AFL engagement with Aboriginal communities across Australia.

Based on the new culture of inclusiveness in the Australian game of football that actively encouraged and embraced Aboriginal participation, the AFL introduced an annual reconciliation round to celebrate the role that Aboriginal people have played in the sport's history. The showcase match dubbed 'Dreamtime at the G' ('G' being shorthand for MCG, the Melbourne Cricket Ground) is now established as one of more popular and most anticipated of the regular home and away season. In addition, the AFL has sought to actively encourage an ongoing relationship with Aboriginal Australia, establishing targeted community engagement programs to support the development of Aboriginal talent. At the elite level, the AFL, the AFL Players Association and clubs established dedicated positions to foster relationships and

provide improved support for Aboriginal players and their families. More controversially, the AFL also sponsored historical investigation of the possibility that the Australian game of football, first codified as the Melbourne Rules in 1858, may have Aboriginal influences derived from the Kulin (most notably, Djabwurrung and Woiwurrung) game of *marn-grook* (in English, ball-foot). Tacit support of this historical theory has been forthcoming in the form of an AFL-sponsored monument at Moyston, Victoria, that celebrates the 'Aboriginal connection'. An annual match between Sydney and Essendon, played for the Marn Grook Trophy, has also received official sanction (Hallinan and Judd 2012; Judd 2012).

As a result of these initiatives, the AFL became widely known as a leading institutional supporter of national reconciliation. In Aboriginal Australia, the AFL became a preferred career destination where Aboriginal men might achieve their ambitions as elite professional athletes. Nevertheless, although the introduction of Rule 30 created an environment in which Aboriginal players were welcomed as individuals, the battles of Winmar and Long in the 1990s did nothing to make the Australian game of football inclusive of Aboriginal culture and traditions or the different understandings of the sport these cultural differences were likely to embody (Gorman and Reeves 2012a; Reeves et al. 2016). It was in this context that the career of Aboriginal player Adam Goodes was played out.

### **Beyond racial vilification: Adam Goodes as cultural warrior**

According to his playing record, Adam Goodes is the most highly decorated Aboriginal man to have played Australian Football at the highest level. Goodes is a dual winner of the Brownlow Medal (2003, 2006), dual premiership player (2005, 2012), four-time All-Australian team member (2003, 2006, 2009, 2011), three-time winner of the Bob Skilton Medal (2003, 2006, 2011), three-time leading goal kicker for the Sydney Swans (2009, 2010, 2011), winner of the AFL Rising Star award (1999) and member of the AFL Indigenous Team of the Century (Gorman 2011). Goodes also holds the record for most games played for his club (South Melbourne/Sydney Swans, 372 games) and was honoured for his community



development work with Aboriginal youth as recipient of the Australian of the Year Award (2014). Given these outstanding achievements, Goodes should be celebrated as an AFL hero in the same way as Barassi, Coleman, Jesaulenko, Matthews and many others have been; but this is not the case. Instead, Goodes is now commonly remembered for the ‘controversies’ that came to characterise the twilight of his playing career.



It is normal that AFL seasons past are recalled in history according to the premiership-winning team. In 2015 the premiers, Hawthorn, completed the rare feat of winning three grand finals in a row. History, however, will remember the 2015 AFL season as the year the overwhelmingly non-Aboriginal public effectively booed a champion player, Adam Goodes, into retirement. Throughout the season, Goodes became the target of persistent crowd booing on every occasion he represented his club, the Sydney Swans. Goodes had been booed in previous seasons because he possessed the ability to change the course of a match, more often than not winning it for his team. This, however, was different. Across the 2015 season, Goodes was simply booed for being Adam Goodes.

Opposition crowds booed Goodes at all grounds he played at, but were particularly unsporting and vehement in Perth. After a match against the West Coast Eagles at Subiaco Oval, on 26 July, Goodes was forced to take leave from the game. Commenting on the behaviour of the Subiaco crowd, highly respected ABC sports commentator Gerard Whateley described the booing of Goodes as a disgrace:

‘Make no mistake, this is one of the most shameful episodes in the game’s history, the way Goodes is being booed at the moment’...

‘At its heart here there is a racist element. Not everyone booing is a racist but you are covering up the racist element.

‘If you are not booing for racist grounds, stop, because it never used to be part of your day at the footy.

Stop, and let the racists boo and then call them out, because this is disgusting...

‘Adam Goodes has never been booed in such a manner at Subiaco before — keep in mind that the Swans and West Coast have the

great rivalry in the competition when Goodes was a central figure to it’... (ABC News 2015)

In direct response to the Subiaco crowd, 150 Australian institutions published a joint press release in which they called for renewed efforts to stamp out racism in sport and everyday life, stating, ‘Australia must and can be better than this’. (Australian Human Rights Commission 2015). Aboriginal Senator for the Northern Territory and former Olympic gold medallist Nova Peris said Adam Goodes was booed because ‘he speaks out for Indigenous people...He’s spoken out and it’s made people feel uncomfortable’ (Schubert 2015). Whateley agreed: ‘people are pretending it is because he slides or he plays for a free kick. The truth is it is because he has called out racism’ (ABC News 2015).

When Goodes himself revealed to the media that he felt the booing was motivated by racism, the AFL, as well as most leading football journalists, called for crowds to stop. The booing, however, persisted and Goodes was effectively forced into early retirement. Shortly after he announced the end of a brilliant career, following the Sydney Swans’ semi-final loss to North Melbourne, he rejected the invitation of the AFL to participate in a lap of honour at the 2015 Grand Final, as is the norm for retiring players. Goodes, instead, promptly left Australia for an extended overseas holiday.

The controversial circumstances that plagued Adam Goodes’ season in 2015 exposed the endemic problem of the game’s association with ideological notions of Anglo-Australian dominance. Australian Football is a contemporary popular sport in a multicultural country that had in recent decades prided itself on its stance in systematically outlawing on-field racism and engaging in a high-profiled advocacy of national reconciliation with Australia’s Indigenous peoples. Despite the pleas of journalists, sports commentators, politicians and public figures to cease what many regarded as a shameful practice, coupled with Goodes’ own public statement that he had become the target of a racially motivated public attack, the booing continued for the duration of the season.

Those who continued to boo strenuously argued that race and racism had nothing to do

with why the overwhelmingly non-Aboriginal Australian public had come to target Goodes in this way. Comments to online forums moderated by the Melbourne *Herald Sun* newspaper are representative of how the public justified the booing while at the same time rejecting the practice as racially motivated. Most said the ‘problem’ was Adam Goodes the individual. ‘Tiger’ for example, said:

Why doesn’t the media give some real attention to other football players that go out there week after week and play as part of a team? I’m getting so sick and tired of these solo star attention seeking sooks who think the game revolves around them and only them. (28 July 2015, in *Herald Sun* 2015a)

‘Paul’ (28 July 2015, in *Herald Sun* 2015a) found the accusations of racism difficult to understand: **‘Please answer this. If everyone is so racist at the footy: why don’t they boo the other 71 indigenous players in the AFL.’**

In a similar argument, ‘Andrew’ reiterated that the ‘problem’ lay in Goodes’ personal inability to cope with crowd reactions:

I booed Adam Goodes because he or members of the media made an issue out of it. And now we are told it is affecting him I will boo him even more. That is part of football. We boo or scream out sledges in the hope of putting a player off their game. Most players don’t get booed constantly because it doesn’t seem to have an effect. After a few rounds it stops. If a player being booed complained about it or did some sort of gesture on the ground to show their frustration I would then boo them even more. The media attention on it this week will make people boo him even more. As for Adam Goodes’ legacy. Is that to be known as a whinge(r) [sic] because people dared boo him? Had he ignored it it would have blown over by now. But instead Adam and other players comment on it and so it becomes bigger. If players during a game are noticing or commenting on it then it has an effect because that means they are not 100% focused on their game. And that is the whole point. (29 July 2015, in *Herald Sun* 2015b)

‘Elizabeth’, too, thought the ‘problem’ was Adam **Goodes denying** the booing had anything to do with race:

The media desperately wants this booing to be about race, which it really isn’t. Goodes could be white, black, blue, green or polka-dotted, and this booing would still be happening. It’s just him! He’s one of the AFL’s darlings, playing for the AFL’s pet team, and the way he prances around and begs for free kicks, while whacking players and never being sanctioned...He’s just another kind of villain, which footy has always had. Then we have the incident with the kid in the crowd, for which Goodes is named Australian of the Year. Spare me! The A. Goodes Show is just nauseating — and it goes on and on! (29 July 2015, in *Herald Sun* 2015b)

West Coast supporter ‘Susan’ said, ‘I don’t boo and I don’t believe in it, but this booing is NOT a racial issue’; she went on to explain that:

It is entirely directed at Goodes’s on and off field behaviour. He gets frustrated and lashes out like he did to Schofield and Yeo, and I for one, have never forgiven him for disrespecting the Australian of the Year Award. If he didn’t respect it don’t accept it and he needed to take himself out of the running before the award was announced. Karl Langdon said he was booed every time he got the ball. Was it racist? Ben Cousins was booed by opposition supporters. Was this racist? And the list goes on. Come on media IT IS NOT A RACIAL ISSUE!!! (28 July 2015, in *Herald Sun* 2015b)

‘Lynda’ perhaps summed up better than most why the public had come to boo Adam Goodes:

There have been various incidents involving Goodes that have accumulated over time, both on and off the field. However, the two that probably brought the whole issue to a head were these. When Goodes was appointed Australian of the Year he claimed that as a licence to direct his bitterness regarding our history, at the non indigenous [sic] people of Australia, citing all as racist. Australians are pretty laid back and accommodating people, but when push comes to shove they will not tolerate being


accused of something they are not guilty of. Goodes had the opportunity to use his appointment [as Australian of the Year] to build a bridge and unite, instead he lacked maturity and allowed bitterness to dictate his stance and he, himself, took the mantle of racism. The incident on field, calling out the young girl [an incident of racial vilification directed at Goodes from the crowd at a 2013 AFL fixture, which we discuss later] for making a comment he deemed offensive and in doing so, exposed that child not only to the people in the stadium but the whole nation on tv. [sic] coverage. I believe a lot of people thought his reaction in that matter completely over the top and exaggerated. Those incidents, I believe, promoted Goodes as being self obsessed and concerned with his own importance. There is no denying Goodes has made massive contributions in his football career. However, latterly with the simulated spear throwing incident which was blatantly an ‘up yours’ toward the Carlton fans which Goodes decided to claim under his indigenous heritage cloak. The public are pretty astute and were not convinced of the validity of the gesture. It is sad, given Goodes is coming to the end of his football career that he has attracted such disrespect from some of the public. However, now Goodes want(s) the slate wiped clean so he can finish on a high. It is a pity that Goodes did not have the maturity to temper his comments, see the bigger picture and put himself above the racist calls and set himself as the indigenous statesman he could and should have been. With hindsight, there could have been a totally different ending, but Goodes chose his path and has made his own history. (28 July 2015, in *Herald Sun* 2015b)

The comments outlined above are both indicative of the public critique of Goodes and of the consistent attempt to disavow any racist underpinnings to the widespread booing. Despite this, most comments posted to the *HeraldSun*, *Facebook* and other online forums and social media sites dedicated to Australian Football invariably (but inadvertently) almost always drew attention to the racial dimensions of the dislike the public had come to have of Adam Goodes. Goodes’ racial identity as an Aboriginal man was

not ‘the problem’; rather, the problem was the way Goodes had begun to conduct himself in the public domain. Goodes, it seemed, spoke and acted in ways that were considered inappropriate to large sections of the overwhelmingly non-Aboriginal public. The offence that Goodes caused seemingly hinged on three decisive events that public commentary, including the comments above, repeatedly cited as ‘evidence’ that his actions and attitudes both on and off the field had increasingly become unacceptable, offensive, provocative and, worst of all, ‘un-Australian’.


On-field it was Goodes’ strong actions against racism that placed him off-side with the public. In 2013 during the opening match of the annual AFL Indigenous Round, Goodes was racially vilified by a 13-year-old girl in the crowd. Leaning over the boundary fence, the girl called Goodes an ‘ape’. Goodes heard this and took offence. He immediately requested that the security team eject the teen from the ground, which was in line with the Melbourne Cricket Ground’s policy of ejecting individuals reported for anti-social behaviour. The following day Goodes spoke to the media and referred to the 13 year old as the face of racism (Windley 2013). The public came to interpret Goodes’ response to the teen as an over-reaction, not understanding why he took offence at being described as an ‘ape’. Many also viewed his response to the girl as heavy-handed and some considered it an act of bullying. This was typified by on-air comments by the highly influential Collingwood Football Club president and popular media personality Eddie McGuire; on his Triple M radio show he suggested Goodes might promote the release of the stage play *King Kong*. McGuire made a public apology later that day. Problematically, it was described by the then AFL chief executive Andrew Demetriou and the media as merely a ‘gaff’, attributed by McGuire to tiredness (ABC News 2013).


During the corresponding match two years later, as described above, Goodes responded to the widespread booing that had by now become a defining feature of his playing career by performing an Aboriginal war dance. As the dance concluded, Goodes threw an imaginary spear into a section of the crowd occupied by opposition supporters. The public reacted to Goodes’ display of Aboriginal culture as a provocative act that

was openly hostile to non-Aboriginal Australia. Goodes' war dance caused a national furore as the issue came to dominate debate **on sport-**  
 **ing** pages of the national press and social media. Few commentators, professional or amateur, believed that there was a place for such displays of Aboriginal culture and identity in Australian Football, not even during the AFL Indigenous Round. Contrasts were made between Goodes' war dance and the New Zealand rugby team's Haka, which is ceremonially performed prior to each match they play. Typically, opinion was that while the Haka is scheduled into a fixture's organisation, Goodes' war dance was spontaneous and unanticipated. Again, McGuire felt the need to proffer his opinion, stating that the crowd 'should have been warned' (Hogan 2015). Interestingly, the AFL Commission hesitated in responding to the events that were unfolding. Its chairman (and Rhodes Scholar), Mike Fitzpatrick, and its chief executive, Gillon McLachlan, were seemingly unable to exercise decisive leadership, neither supporting Goodes nor the baying crowds. McLachlan issued an official statement, following an emergency meeting of the commission that took place several days after the events at the Subiaco ground:

Racism has no place in our game, and while I respect that people may have different views about what is happening to Adam, it is impossible to separate this issue from the issue of race. The booing of Adam Goodes is being felt as racism — by him and by many in our football community and, as such, I urge our supporters to understand the toll this is having, the message it is sending, and that it does not reflect well on our game (Le Grand 2015).

In this statement and others, the AFL Commission did not and subsequently has not explicitly attributed the booing to racism. However, the Sydney Swans came out in support of Goodes. The Swans chairman, Andrew Pridham, in his opening address prior to the following fixture stated, 'Adam Goodes has been booed relentlessly because he is an Aboriginal and because he has had the courage to stand and speak about matters close to his heart' (Le Grand 2015).

Off the field, we argue, it was Goodes' advocacy on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that put him offside with the Australian Football public. As the 2014 Australian of the Year, Goodes became a high-profile advocate for Indigenous Australia. He called on all to respect Indigenous peoples' history and ongoing cultural difference. He said all needed to recognise the past and present contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that make Australia a better place to live. Goodes reminded the Australian public that we need to do more to 'close the gap', pointing to the abysmal health, education, employment and life expectancy outcomes that continue to be experienced by Indigenous peoples. Goodes, however, caused offence when he used his Australia Day acceptance speech to remind the nation that Indigenous Australians, including himself, continue to experience the negative effects of racism every day of their lives. He reminded Australia of the challenge **fac**  
 **ed** to overcome racism:

Growing up as an **indigenous** Australian I have experienced my fair share of racism.  While it has been difficult a lot of the time, it has also taught me a lot and also shaped my values and what I believe in today. I believe racism is a community issue which we all need to address and that's why racism stops with me...I believe we are all connected whether we like it or not. We are all equal and the same in so many ways. My hope is that we as a nation can break down the silos between races, break down those stereotypes of minority populations, indigenous populations and all other minority groups. I hope we can be proud of our heritage regardless of the colour of our skin and be proud to be Australian.

I'm not here to tell you what to think, or how to act to raise your children. All I'm here to do is tell you about my experiences and hope you choose to be aware of your actions and interactions so that together we can eliminate racism. I'm so grateful for this award and this honour, however the real reward is when everyone is talking to their mates, to their families and their children, having those conversations and educating others about racism. What it looks like, how hurt-

ful and how pointless it is and how we can eliminate it. The ultimate reward is when all Australians see each other as equals and treat each other as equals. To me, everything is about people and the choices we make. I believe it's the people and the interactions between us that makes this country so special. Thank you so much and have a great Australia Day. (Australian of the Year Awards 2014)

This speech became a focal point for public dislike of the way Goodes behaved in public off the field. Few had actually read it and instead of being seen as a call for national unity in the fight for racial equality, it became often misquoted as a call for Aboriginal separatism and an open attack on the inherent racism within non-Aboriginal Australia (see Sharwood 2015, Bolt 2013, *Herald Sun* 2015c).



According to **these** public commentaries, Goodes' advocacy of Indigenous rights and willingness to revisit the link between the racism he and other Indigenous people experience on a daily basis and the unsolved historical issues of colonisation and dispossession brought the position of Australian of the Year into disrepute. The problem many had with Goodes was that he admitted when receiving the honour that:

He says he finds it hard to buy into a celebratory notion of Australia Day 'because of the sadness and mourning and the sorrow of our people and a culture that unfortunately has been lost to me through generations'.

Goodes grew up believing Australia was founded on a summer's day in January 1788 when Governor Arthur Phillip staked the flag of the British kingdom in the sand of Sydney Cove.

'I've obviously learnt different since then,' he says.

Nevertheless, he finds cause for optimism. 'We are still here, we've got a lot to celebrate about being here and that we have one of the longest-serving cultures still alive and kicking.' (Wood and Elliott 2014)

Goodes' use of the position for this purpose was deemed by some to be highly inappropriate and many believed that he had acted in an exemplary 'un-Australian' way — a perspective that

was made absolutely clear when former A-League goalkeeper and media worker Griffin McMaster tweeted, 'Adam Goodes calls Australia Day invasion day...Deport him...If you don't like it leave.' When later challenged on this, McMaster responded, 'Disrespect this country and you cop it. I'm not happy with the way he's going about things.' (cited in Mannix 2015).

In attempting to make sense of the negative public reaction to Goodes, we assert that Goodes has become characterised as a problematic and divisive figure in the Australian game of football because he has consistently and influentially insisted that Aboriginal cultures have a place in the national game. The 'controversies' that the public repeatedly cited as 'evidence' of his 'unacceptable' on and off field behaviours may each be read as the failure of non-Aboriginal Anglo-Australia to accept Goodes' assertion of Aboriginal cultural belonging that has its basis in the historical fact of Aboriginal cultures, traditions and ties to Country that pre-date the contemporary Australian nation-state by countless millennia. In making these assertions Goodes made himself unpopular with the overwhelmingly non-Aboriginal Australian public. We believe that Goodes' actions on and off the field have increasingly been informed by a growing personal awareness of his Aboriginal identity and the historical facts that have impacted his own immediate and extended family networks, as evidenced in his participation in the SBS television documentary *Who do you think you are?* (2014), where he can be seen learning firsthand for the first time who his ancestors are, where they are from, and what their history is. Throughout the documentary, we see Goodes' embodiment of Aboriginality grow and his desire to learn cultural practices flourish. Goodes has, in our opinion, come to the view that as First Nations peoples whose historic presence pre-dates that of non-Aboriginal Australia, both he (as an Aboriginal man) and the cultural traditions (that are coming to inform his own identity position) claim not only a valid place within the Australian game of football but a priority over non-Aboriginal Australia. Stated somewhat differently, Goodes has increasingly become mindful of the fact that wherever he played AFL football he did so on the Country of an Aboriginal nation, and that whether through the ancient history of

*marn-grook* or the recent history of Indigenous over-representation, he also came to consider the Australian game of football to be a central part of contemporary Aboriginal culture and identity.

When Goodes called the 13-year-old girl a racist it was she who was forced to leave the MCG. Goodes, a welcome visitor to the Country of the Wurundjeri people, remained on the field, a space where tradition says men of the Kulin Confederation met to play *marn-grook* (Hallinan and Judd 2012; Judd 2008, 2012). When Goodes decided to perform an Aboriginal war dance during the Indigenous Round, he did so secure in the knowledge that the Sydney Cricket Ground stood on the Country of the Cadigal people, a people who had always been prepared to dance with strangers as an important symbol of welcome and mutual respect. When Goodes accepted the honour of being Australian of the Year, pointing out (though not in his acceptance speech) that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people did not find much to celebrate on a day that commemorates the foreign occupation of their homelands, he did so in a way that reconfirmed Aboriginal connections to Country and their First Nations right to persist as distinctive cultures within an overwhelmingly non-Aboriginal contemporary Australia. In each case, Goodes' actions indicate his belief that Aboriginal culture belongs in Australia and occupies an unquestionable position within the Australian game of football. In our view the booing of Goodes and the incapacity of the AFL to respond effectively signified the immaturity and fragility of non-Aboriginal Australia and its inability to come to terms with the facts of its own history, as well as the unwillingness of many within the Australian game of football to acknowledge, accept or even countenance the possibility that an Aboriginal football ethic exists and has taken root in the AFL.

Public reaction to Goodes appears difficult to explain, given the fact that his statements of historical fact and demonstrations of cultural pride both on and off the field have, in our view, never been forcefully argued and have long been expressed in the public domain. Indeed, in the context of Aboriginal society, Goodes is a political conservative as indicated by his public advocacy of the Australian Government-sponsored Recognise campaign (RECOGNISE News 2014).

Yet in broader society, Goodes' assertion of Aboriginal cultural belonging in the Australian Football has been regarded as radical and controversial and has been condemned as unacceptable, provocative and un-Australian by the overwhelmingly non-Aboriginal public.

Goodes' views on football and the place of Aboriginal peoples and cultures within it were articulated long before the booing controversy. In 2008 he outlined his position in *The Australian game of football since 1858*, a publication sponsored by the AFL to celebrate 150 years of the sport: in an essay titled 'The Indigenous game: a matter of choice' (Goodes 2008), which was framed as a personal and subjective engagement with the history of the sport, Goodes considers the Djabwurrung and Woiwurrung cultural practice of *marn-grook* and its possible role as a forerunner of the contemporary sport that was first codified in 1858. In concluding, Goodes says, 'I don't know the truth, but I believe in the connection. Because I know that when Aborigines play Australian Football with a clear mind and total focus, we are born to play it' (Goodes 2008:185). Later, during an appearance on *The Marngrook footy show* on the National Indigenous Television (NITV) channel, aired 15th May 2008, Gillian Hibbins, the AFL-endorsed historian, claimed that Goodes' understanding of Australian Football and the place of Aboriginal peoples within the sport was 'racist'; Hibbins (in Morrissey 2008) explained her accusation, saying, 'If you define racism as believing a race is superior in something, this is basically what he [Goodes] was doing'. The disproportionately critical reaction of Hibbins, a conservative non-Aboriginal historian, to the notion that Aboriginal people believe the Australian game of football exists as an artefact of their culture, confirms Goodes' status as a cultural warrior.

### **Concluding remarks**

Goodes has effectively shifted the paradigm of debate about Aboriginal people in Australian Football beyond the discourse of racism and anti-racism to new and more controversial discussions about the place Aboriginal culture has in the game. Goodes' belief in the *marn-grook* thesis, his self-assured stand against racism and willingness to dance in celebration of cultural identity are highly

significant acknowledgments that he played the Australian game of football on the Country of an Aboriginal nation, be it Cadigal, Wurundjeri or Noongar. The negative public reaction to Goodes is not the result of his personality but, rather, is based in his insistence that Aboriginal culture be recognised and acknowledged as having a place in both the national game and the Australian nation. Beyond the many unconvincing excuses offered by his (overwhelmingly non-Aboriginal) critics, Goodes became a controversial and unpopular figure in Australian Football because he sought to remind the public that Aboriginal cultural difference persists and, furthermore, has a right to persist as an integral part of contemporary Australia. Goodes' advocacy of the Aboriginal right to be different can therefore be seen in the context of a general resurgence in Aboriginal political struggle within Australia, a struggle that is increasingly turning its attention to the business of Indigenous nation building through a grassroots movement of cultural renewal and revival — a struggle that is also increasingly vocal in pressing claims of Indigenous sovereignty to be recognised in Australia as a prerequisite to treaty-making processes. In doing so, Goodes' assertion of cultural difference on the football field extends far beyond the battle for racial equality that characterised the experiences of Aboriginal footballers in the twentieth century. Goodes' struggle for the recognition of Aboriginal difference points to a reframing of the national game and the nation in ways that require a rethinking of Western political liberalism and echo those proposed by thinkers as diverse as John Rawls, Will Kymlicka, Larissa Behrendt and Noel Pearson (see Behrendt 2003; Kymlicka 1995; Pearson 2011; Rawls 1993). As the overwhelmingly negative reaction to Goodes in season 2015 suggests, the idea of a persistent and, indeed, resurgent presence of the racial and cultural difference of Aboriginal peoples in Australia, underpinned by ideas of sovereignty, Indigenous nationhood and the possibility of treaty making, remains a concept that Anglo-Australia is unwilling to admit.

In pointing out the difference represented by Aboriginal Australia, Goodes reminded non-Aboriginal Australia that as First Nations peoples, Aboriginal peoples possess a compelling right to cultural difference that is based on the irrefutable

historical fact that their occupation of the continent pre-dates the contemporary Australian State by thousands of years. In doing so, he reminded the overwhelmingly non-Aboriginal public of these historical facts and in response they booed and called for his deportation.

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