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# **Recognizing geographic and cultural alterity through sport? Institutionalizing the Arctic Games (1967-2004)**

Sylvain Ferez

Faculty of Sport Sciences and Physical Education, University of Montpellier (France)

*sylvain.ferez@umontpellier.fr*

Sébastien Ruffié

Faculty of Sport Sciences and Physical Education, University of French West Indies (France)

Stéphane Héas

Faculty of Sport Sciences and Physical Education, University of Rennes 2 (France)

## **Abstract**

The article studies the emergence and growth of the Arctic Games on the basis of a comparison with other attempts to re-appropriate the Olympic model. How was the autonomist strategy that founds these games born? Beyond the question of access to sporting practices, the goal is to show that this strategy aims at engaging a cultural transformation through a renegotiation of the norms and values which are carried by the dominant Western sports practices. Using documents archived on the official website of the Arctic Games as well as second hand data, the analysis sheds light on the manner in which this sporting event is part of a strategy in a fight for recognition (Honneth, 1992). As a vector for cultural pride, it constitutes a call for justice (Rawls, 1971) in reaction to the minorization, or even the contempt, experienced by the populations which are native to Northern Canada.

## **Keywords**

Arctic Games, Olympics, Recognition, Pride, Justice.

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The history of sports has been marked by the seal of colonial powers, first and foremost that of England and the British Empire, but also the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Portugal and Germany. Modern sports thus constitute, more than anything, a cultural element which has spread progressively from the West towards the rest of the world, with some differences depending on the colonial government. This export is sometimes presented as an invasion, even as a cultural imposition (Stoddart, 2006). The promoters of modern sports carried values which were specific to their social classes and to their personal and professional networks. As such, both a chivalrous spirit and aristocratic values were explicitly set forward by the baron de Coubertin (Clastres, 2005). Elitism infused these reinvented modern sports. In this sense, the spreading of these new contemporary sports was not neutral from a socioeconomic recruitment, an axiological, religious, or even political point of view.

At the very beginning of the twentieth century, Pierre de Coubertin declared, 'The theory of equal rights for all human races leads to a political line which is contrary to all colonial progress. Without naturally going so low as slavery or even a softened form of servitude, the superior race is absolutely right in refusing to the lower race access to certain privileges of civilized life' (The Review of the Reviews, April 1901). The historical and symbolic weight of this Games' reformist persisted during several decades. He finally changed his mind in the 1920s by joining with the idea of 'African Olympics', as long as he perceived them as tools for 'civilization'. In fact, on a more general level, at a time when the International Olympic Committee (IOC) saw the organization of the Latin American Games (1922), of the Christian Games honoring 'Sport of the Gospel and of Peace' and when it agreed to sponsor the Central American Games (1926), Coubertin and his colleagues (often directly implicated in colonial actions) decided to take an active part in controlling the upcoming events and in creating new ones.

'In the mind of the French baron, at least, the aim was not only to allow African colonial elites to challenge each other in the stadium (...), but well and truly to associate the indigenous elites in order to culturally integrate them following the model of the British Empire. (...) Ultimately, the African Games planned in Algiers for 1923 and then 1925, and in Alexandria in 1926, never took place: the colonial governors opposed them in fear of Muslim

misbehavior and nationalistic demonstrations in the event of victories for the Europeans'. (Clastres, 2008, p. 58-59)

These 'non-segregated' Games thus did not actually take place until the 1960s, a long time after Coubertin's death, following the access to independence of African countries. Women's World Games were however organized in Monte-Carlo as early as 1921, on the impulse of Alice Milliat, founder of the French Women's Sport Federation in 1917 (Devron, 2005). In 1919, she was indeed faced with a refusal after demanding the integration of some feminine competitions into the program of the Antwerp Olympic Games (1920). Faced with the persisting reluctance of the representatives of the IOC, of the International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF) and of athletics in general, Milliat decided to name the event 'Women's Olympic Games'. The two events organized in Paris (1922) and Goteborg (1926) were not however recognized by the IOC. In failing to impose her position on women's participation to the Olympics, she set out to create her own autonomous movement.

Milliat thus had to wait for Coubertin to leave the head of the IOC, in 1925, in order for her demands to be accepted in 1928 in Amsterdam. In the same year, the Spartakiade which was created in Moscow set out as an opposition to the Olympic Games.

'These Spartakiade Games claim to be universal workers' Olympiads, as opposed to the "bourgeois" Olympics held the same year in Amsterdam, with more or less the same program'. (Bancel and Gayman 2002, p. 267)

However, they were also in opposition with the socialist Workers' Olympiad created in 1921 by the Sports International Socialist Workers, close to the Socialist International (which regrouped the Western European parties), and ended up, finally, joining with the Olympic movement (Gounot, 2002). This rallying ultimately happened just after the Second World War, at a time when Soviet sport had reintegrated Olympism (Clastres, 2008, p. 64-66).

## **Olympics, Equal Rights Movements and Autonomist Strategies**

The Second World War was a game-changer concerning the possibilities, either given or acquired, for different groups to access sports. What would become the Paralympic movement,

which found its origins at the meeting point between newly-created medical rehabilitating processes and war-wounded associations, opened the first breach. In 1948, Doctor Guttmann took advantage of the London Olympic Games to introduce games for paraplegic people in Stoke Mandeville. The latter games included only a limited number of participants, regrouping around twenty competitors from the Stoke Mandeville hospitals, as well as from the Star and Garter Home in Richmond, UK (Gold & Gold, 2007). It was not until 1952 that these meetings, which followed at the beginning the idea of rehabilitation, became international with the participation of four Dutch athletes. In 1960, these games were organized in Rome, straight after the regular Olympics (Bailey, 2008). From the 1970s onwards, the extension of the paralympic movement to people with disabilities other than being amputated and/or paraplegic played a part in the creation and development of the disability rights movement (Harvey et al. 2014, p. 79), as well as a political project of cultural transformation (Howe, 2008). On a more global level, as the decolonization ended, the 1960s and 1970s saw (with the Vietnam War as a backdrop) the development of the *rights movements*.

In 1968, Tom Waddell was a member of the American Olympic Team when he took part in the finals of the decathlon in the Mexico Olympics. He was a firsthand witness to the gesture made by Tommie Smith and John Carlos on the podium of the 200 meters in order to defend the Black-American cause<sup>1</sup> (Edwards, 1973). However, it was absolutely out of the question for him, at the time, to publicly manifest his homosexuality (Waddell and Schaap 1996). Thirteen years later, in June 1981, he was however at the origin of the *San Francisco Arts and Athletics* (SFAA), an association in charge of setting up the first *Gay Olympics* in San Francisco in 1983 (Symons, 2010).

Studies bearing on the militant uses of sports have shown the ways in which social movements could attempt to affect the organization of *mega-events* so as to question the established political and/or economic order of sports (Davis-Delano & Crosset, 2008). Recently, works have been carried out studying the incursion into sports of the movement for peace (Wilson, 2012), of the anti-globalization movement (Harvey et al., 2009), or of the environmental protection movements (Hollins, 2013). In mainly insisting on the use of sports as an instrument for mediation and for promoting a political cause, these studies hardly questioned the originality of strategies leading

1. But also to defend the workers against modern forms of slavery.

to the production of sporting events which are both autonomous and distinct from the Olympic movement (as was the case for the Women's Games in the 1920s, the Stoke Mandeville Games in the 1950s-60s or the Gay Games since the 1980s), and which aim to transform it while integrating it at the same time.

The aim here is to analyze the birth and the development of one of these events: the Arctic Games. This analysis will be based on second hand data in order to put forward the elements which can be compared to the other modes of re-appropriation of the Olympic model that are already presented in the literature. How was the autonomist strategy born, as opposed to the participant strategy, which founded the Arctic Games? How might one explain that, beyond the question of access to practices, this strategy actually aimed to trigger cultural transformations, that is to say to re-negotiate the norms and values which are carried by Western practices? Our main argument is that the growth of the event can be likened to a part of the institutionalizing process of a social movement. Institutionalization must be understood here as the progressive stabilizing of symbolic and organizational forms that are administratively framed; conducing to transform an 'informal organization' into a more 'formal organization', characterized by a level of professionalization, of division of labour/tasks, of rules objectification (Staggenbord, 1988). In this sense, it consists of codification, rationalisation of organisation and an induced legitimation (Savre, 2011). Thus, we will consider the birth of the event in the context of a social movement emerging into an institutional environment (which provides a political opportunity structure) and in relation to the resources mobilized by the actors (McAdam et al., 1996; McCarthy & Zald, 1987). We will particularly insist on the cultural and subjective factors orienting the meaning of the event (Goodwin & Jasper, 2004).

## **A Claim for Recognition and Justice**

In Canada, it was at the end of the Second World War that the indigenous populations of the North of the country accessed the right to vote. After that, it was only in the 1960s that a movement, protecting the civil rights of these populations, was developed (Lesli, 2016).

'Since the end of the nineteenth century, the political activism of the Aboriginal people in Canada is mainly evidenced by the

creation of political associations which overspill the boundaries of the band in order to defend their common interests. In the wake of the persistent political criticism exposed in 1969 in the “White Paper” of the federal government, important Aboriginal organizations, notably the Assembly of First Nations, were from then onwards recognized on the political scene and became of central importance on the national level’. (Sadik & Dyck, 2011)

It is with the pressure exerted by the protective organizations which it faced that, at the beginning of the 1970s, the Canadian federal government created the Nunavut, in the context of negotiations with groups of Aboriginals claiming property of the lands they travelled. In 1993, the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement definitely established this new territory as the Inuit’s Homeland.

‘The settlement of global claims concerning regions of Canada is usually realized through signing a modern treaty which includes a certain number of dispositions concerning monetary and territorial endowments, the authorization to set up certain forms of governmental autonomy, wildlife management rights, and the joint management of lands and resources’. (Gretchen, 2011)

Having been forbidden to practice their traditional physical activities for a long time – and even sport in some situations as can often be the case, like with colonization in Africa for instance (Bonnet & Meier, 2004) – these groups were tardy to engage in sporting exercises. Western “sport”, for a long time associated to the Other, to the colonizer, started to become an object of interest in the 1960s. Then, it seemed to participate in restoring, for them, a feeling of self-awareness of their ‘Indianness’ which expressed itself (Senghor, 1964; Fonaroff, 1964), amongst other ways, through a form of Pan-Indianism. In 1971, the creation of the North American Indigenous Games<sup>2</sup>, based on Anglo-Saxon sports, led to a certain amount of enthusiasm. The Native American Populations found in them an opportunity to reclaim their pride. A year earlier, the creation of the Arctic Games was proof, in parallel, of a rekindling of interest for practices considered from then onwards as an integral part of their ‘identity’ and their ‘culture’.

Through the study of existing second hand data and the analysis of documents archived on the official website [arcticwintergames.org](http://arcticwintergames.org)<sup>3</sup>, this article sets out to apprehend the Arctic Games as the expression of a fight for recognition (Honneth, 1992). The forms of sport which are taken on here by the expression of a cultural pride are thus conceived both as an active response to the

2. <http://www.naigcouncil.com/history.php> [Date of consultation: 31 August 2018]

3. A fundamental bias exists in this way, because the website of these Games probably levels out the positions, the conflicts, in the interests of those who carry these games and finance the website... at each period of time.

contempt experienced by certain native populations in the North of Canada (Goffman, 1975), and as a call for justice (Rawls, 1971). Within the framework of the political philosophy proposed by Axel Honneth (2000), contempt is a category which has a generating function in the history of moral progress. In this case, this category is associated to a deficiency in three forms of recognition, linked to primal relations (of friendship and love), to legal relations (based on rights), and to a community of values (or a form of solidarity). For those who produce them, do the Arctic Games not aim, by satisfying the third and last form of deficiency, to re-establish a feeling of justice?<sup>4</sup>

In the background, are these Games not also a means, for the powers in place, to stimulate a more ambivalent process of political integration? From the study of the Asian Games, which took place in Qatar in 2006, Attali (2016) demonstrated how organizing a prestigious sporting event enables, besides satisfying an exterior and global aim of increasing international influence and recognition, to meet with an internal and local goal of identity affirmation. The event thus appears as a cultural instrument which participates in imposing a model of society which has the possibility of articulating the modern aspects of sports with traditional values...At least those considered interesting by the powers in place.

### **The Arctic Games: An Expression of Geographic Specificity and Cultural Pride?**

‘Nordic Games’ were organized as early as 1901 in Scandinavian countries and ‘were presented in *Revue Olympique* as the “Scandinavian Olympiads”’ (Lindroth, 1993)<sup>5</sup> Indeed, six other editions took place in 1905, 1909, 1913, 1917, 1922 and 1926.

‘The Games were arranged by the Sveriges Central Förening för Idrottens Främjande (SCFIF) (Swedish Central Association for the Promotion of Sports)’ (Edgeworth, 1994, p. 29).

In fact, set up by Swedish military officers, especially V.G. Balck, these Games were mainly motivated by nationalistic values. They proposed not only physical activities events but also Swedish cultural events (theatre, opera, dance, folk culture, etc.). Balck was an active charter member of IOC (president of the skating federation during 30 years!): ‘He was a close personal friend of Baron Pierre de Coubertin, and a man of great influence in international sport’ (Edgeworth, 1994, p. 30).

4. Theoretically, the other forms of recognition could intervene but cannot be explored in this paper with this methodology.

5. Cited by Edgeworth 1994, 29.



After the First World War, defeated nations (Germany, Austro-Hungary) were not authorized to participate for more than one decade. Even if Balck was close to Coubertin and the Olympic movement, there was no direct relation with IOC nor official links. During these troubled times, and under the impulse of the IOC, on the one hand some 'winter sports events had been held during the Summer Games of 1908 (figure skating) and 1920 (figure skating and ice hockey)' (Edgeworth, 1994, p. 29) ; on the other hand, the great Alpine nations (notably France, Italy, and Switzerland) set up an alliance in order to organize a 'week for winter sports' in Chamonix in 1924, as a prelude to the Summer Olympics that would take place in Paris during the same year (Clastres, 2008, p. 66-67).

In 1925, the IOC officialised the creation of the Winter Olympic Games and retroactively recognized, in 1926, the week in Chamonix as the first Winter Olympics (Edgeworth, 1994). Although the creation of the Winter Olympic Games in Chamonix in 1924 extended the Olympics to a mountain environment, the Summer Olympic Games in the first part of the twentieth century were the preserve of major Western capitals, notably in North America or Europe: Athens (1896), Paris (1900), St Louis (1904), London (1908), Stockholm (1912), Antwerp (1920), Paris (1924), Amsterdam (1928), Los Angeles (1932), Berlin (1936), and London (1948). The Helsinki Games in 1952 remain the Summer Games which were held in the most northern part of the planet. In this context, a minority claim rose from this feeling of exclusion of people from the far north.

The idea of specific Arctic Winter Games sprouted in Quebec City in 1967, during the first Canada Winter Games. Noting the great disadvantage of athletes from the Yukon and Northwest Territories compared to athletes in the South in traditional sports competitions, Cal Miller, the financial advisor to the Yukon, got the idea to create games dedicated to the arctic inhabitants.<sup>6</sup>

'Also a witness of the Games, the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, Stuart Hodgson, agreed with Miller's observations. (...) In order to support the Northern teams, Cal Miller, Stuart Hodgson and Bud Orange (Deputy Commissioner of the Northwest Territories) proposed to set up a winter competition for the Northern athletes. Following this, Cal Miller called the Yukon Commissioner, James Smith, who obtained a meeting for him with Arthur Laing, the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

6. <http://www.arcticwintergames.org/About.htm> [Date of consultation: 31 August 2018]

(...) He also delivered his idea to Walter Hickel, the Governor of Alaska, who gave his absolute support to the project and helped with founding the Arctic Winter Games Corporation (AWGC) on 18 January 1968'. (Filice, 2011)

The name changed in 1992, becoming the Arctic Winter Games International Committee so as to eliminate any confusion with other Games organizations and to reflect the increasing international flavour of the Games.<sup>7</sup> The challenge was to encourage participation and provide a competitive arena for the largest possible number of athletes in Northern regions. The 1970 report concerning the first Arctic Games also gave an account of the two main goals:

'providing Northern athletes, through international competition, with the incentive to improve their skills against athletes of similar background and ability, and strengthening mutual understanding and friendship between the races of the Arctic, fostering good international relations through sports and cultural activities'<sup>8</sup>.

Autonomy and the egalitarian strategy that governed the establishment of the Arctic Winter Games served essentially a symbolic purpose in connection with issues related to claims both cultural and political. The latter were expressed in a specific context where, to meet the requests of some native populations, the Canadian government negotiated a multiculturalist model:

'Recognizing the differences of each Government and the various goals that the Arctic Winter Games may have within each jurisdiction, the Arctic Winter Games Corporation was formed with a mandate to act as the guardian of the Games and to ensure that the Games continued in the future. The creation of the Corporation also provided a mechanism for the member jurisdictions to provide political input but keep politics away from the day-to-day operations of the Arctic Winter Games'<sup>9</sup>. The Arctic Games project was well worn by politicians 'playing' off this particular socio-political climate.

Beyond this desire for equality between people of the North and South, the Arctic Games can be viewed as a will to build/strengthen the Canadian State (internal policy function). It is certainly no coincidence indeed if this idea appeared in 1967, the centenary of the Acts of British North America, which initiated the creation of the Canadian Confederation (external policy function). The aim was therefore both to secure the North, and create an identity by positioning Canada as a far North nation.

7. <http://www.arcticwintergames.org/About.htm> [Date of consultation: 31 August 2018]

8. <http://www.arcticwintergames.org> (AWG 1970) [Date of consultation: 31 August 2018]

9. <http://www.arcticwintergames.org> [Date of consultation: 31 August 2018]

### *Between Nordic and Euro-Canadian Identity*

The desire to unify the northern territories of the Canadian state in the 1950s and to make the Inuit people Canadians in their own right had important effects on populations (Dorais, 1997). Indeed, their settling and consolidation into 'communities' transformed their lifestyle (Collignon, 2001; Gombay, 2005).

In response to these changes, after the right to vote was obtained in the 1960s (Paraschak, 1997), the following two decades were marked by the search for a lost identity, followed by the growth of associations defending rights and culture (Doubleday et al. 2004). A claim, sometimes exacerbated, of 'Inuitness' developed. It is in this context marked by a process of 're-traditionalization' (Champagne, 1977; Hobsbawm, 1983), with the main claim of restitution of improperly colonized territories and a return to traditional rules of justice, that the two commissioners in the provinces of the Northwest Territories and Yukon, with the support of the Governor of Alaska, gave rise to the Arctic Games. Although primarily organized around a similar logic as the Euro-Canadian Olympic model, albeit with a two-year frequency instead of a four-year one, these games could, paradoxically, provide the impression of reclaiming lost traditional practices.

The three initiators inaugurated the first Arctic Winter Games in Yellowknife, the capital of the Northwest Territories (NWT) in 1970.

'It was decided that the first Arctic Winter Games would be held in Yellowknife, North-west Territories, in March 1970, to coincide with the Centennial Year of the NWT'.<sup>10</sup>

The presence of Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau reflected the support of the Canadian state. With about 500 participants (athletes, coaches and referees), the first Arctic Winter Games were a success for its organizers. The event was based on a mix of cultural events and competitions drawn both from 'modern sports' and from the register of traditional activities of the 'Arctic peoples' (Heine, 1995; Paraschak, 1995). Open to all communities and individuals living in the 'Arctic zone' (north of the 55th parallel), or having a 'cultural proximity' with the peoples of the North, the Arctic Games purported to offer a space for exchange between various circumpolar cultures to promote expression of a 'geographical identity'. There were, however, voices in some native populations indicating that the participation of Canada's

10. 'Arctic Winter Games', *The Uluk News*, Vol. 1, n°1, March 9<sup>th</sup>, 1970, 2 (cf. <http://www.arcticwintergames.org> [Date of consultation: 31 August 2018]).

Aboriginal population, initially highlighted, was ultimately minimal (Paraschak, 1997).

The second Arctic Games in Whitehorse (Yukon), in 1972, welcomed a delegation from Northern Quebec and Greenland. Commentators came from the Soviet Union and Labrador. In 1974 (Anchorage) and 1982 (Fairbanks), the Games were held in Alaska, while in between those dates they took place in Quebec (1976), Northwest Territories (1978) and Yukon (1980). The first events were minor, and it was not until the 1980 Games (returning to Whitehorse) that the event reached the magnitude that followed, especially regarding cultural activities (Paraschak, 1990, 1995). However, questions about the legitimacy of the Games' structure persisted. The finger was then pointed at the low representation of 'Arctic Peoples' among the organizers of this event. In 1987, politicians and sports officials asked the northern territories to include, within the organizing committee of the Games, representatives of Arctic communities and representatives of regional sports authorities. Nevertheless, this effort to change the composition of the organizing committee failed, since it would mean having to introduce more Natives to the detriment of representatives of sports associations holding a Euro-Canadian perspective on sport (Paraschak, 1997). Above all, the existence of several types of cultural events indicated different expressions of cultural difference of native populations, but also the ambivalence of some autochthone actors. In this sense, institutionalization following the Olympic model inevitably reduced the possibilities of representative voices... and could express a will of hegemony or a mimetic way of considering sport events.

#### *A Steadily Increasing Success*

In 1984, the opening and closing ceremonies of the Yellowknife (NWT) Games took place inside for the first time. The arrival of the Alaskan delegation was the occasion for another 'first' for the city: the landing of a Boeing 747. The sporting event, through its own logic, thus participated in the dynamic development and progress initiated by the West. The next Games, which took place back in Whitehorse, were the occasion for the first participation of a Northern Alberta delegation. The latter joined the International Committee of the Arctic Winter Games in 1988, during the third edition of the Games organized in Alaska, in Fairbanks.

In 1990, the Greenland delegation included 50 people. The Magadan province (Northern Siberia) sent the cultural delegation

of Russia. The first athletic participation of Russia took place two years later at Whitehorse (Yukon), where the Northern Alberta team included 200 people. In 1994, two Russian Oblasts came over to Slave Lake (Alberta) with 35 people each, whereas the Greenlanders were 70. In 1996, the Chugiak/Eagle River Games (Alaska) included 1,600 participants. It was not until 2002, during the 17th Games, that the event took place outside of the North American continent, with a joint organization between Nuuk (Greenland) and Nunavut (Northwest Territories, Canada). In 2004, 2,000 athletes from Canada, the United States, Russia and the Scandinavian countries attended the Wood Buffalo (Northern Alberta) Games.

Along with the gradual increase of the areas concerned and the number of participants in the 1980s and 90s, the Arctic Games gained visibility (Kyllo, 1987), and better representativeness. In 1990, the Games in Yellowknife (NWT) were covered for the first time on national television in Canada, another sign of a progressive institutionalization. Their budget was \$1.2 million. The involvement of the Canadian state was significant. In 2004, the Minister of Heritage granted \$200,000 to support the operation of the Games, \$100,000 in travel compensation for athletes and \$40,000 to support the cultural component of the event. This significant growth of the Arctic Games, with the support of the Canadian state, took place within a stream of national integration based on the multiculturalist model, which had developed in response to a current minority claim. The Arctic Winter Games created in the 1960s, even if they referred to the Arctic and were designed to give native athletes a chance, were part of a number of issues relating to the integration of indigenous people.

However, this situation again appeared paradoxical and ambivalent. Northern peoples were in no way homogeneous. Each had its own culture and unique history. The desire to specify practices as 'Northern', and consider the people of the North as one entity, seemed to refer to the Olympian model of Universalism. The administrative organization between Province and Territory reflected the difference in treatment and values given to each. While provinces had some degree of autonomy, particularly in terms of education, health, and law, territories had less control over decisions that affected them, and were administered as a single unit by a Canadian State which, in fact, left little room for cultural specificity, or sought to control its effects. This policy seemed to

weigh on the establishment of the Arctic Winter Games, in which the project of unification of Northern peoples was central.

In Canada, obtaining the right to vote for Aboriginals in 1960 was certainly associated with this desire to unify the country by organizing a joint event. Indigenous peoples, however, were not integrated into the organization until the 1980s. The development of autonomous Games was therefore more a political bid that actually aimed at producing and developing, using the Olympic model, 'indigenous' practices. However, just as for women's political battles and fights, ambivalence was significantly manifested in the tension between the affirmation of a desire for recognition, and reproduction of a model that, ultimately, was the cause of the rejected inequalities (Ferez et al., 2018).

## The Shadow of the Olympic Model

In the same way as the Gay Games, for instance, the Arctic Games fit the model of a social movement claiming the re-conquest of colonized space and the 'culture' associated with it. This is the case whether or not 'culture' is only an *a posteriori* reconstruction, based on a geographical location and characterized by a pre-colonial cultural heterogeneity. The Canadian state promoted reconstruction and, although it had to deal with multiple resistances after failing to impose a single national culture, resolved to build a model of multicultural policy. Adherence to the logic and promotion of Olympic identity through circumpolar Arctic Games, which were intended to emphasize the specificity of the Arctic, also attested to a strong adherence to the Olympic spirit originating from the industrialized Western side.

The Arctic Games included both traditional sports competitions (alpine skiing, cross country skiing, speed skating, curling, badminton, basketball, gymnastics, hockey, indoor soccer, table tennis, volleyball, wrestling, etc.) and 'indigenous traditional sports' such as 'Inuit Arctic sports' (single kick, double kick, airplane, jumping on one foot, savate alaskane, hand grabbed, pulling by the neck, tug-of-war, sled jump, triple jump) or 'Dene Arctic sports' (finger-pulling, hand game, snow snake, pull the stick, push the pole) (Heine, 1995).<sup>11</sup> The idea of preserving an 'aboriginal sports culture practiced for millennia in that austere territory', the phrase used by Radio Canada<sup>12</sup>, can still raise a smile when considering the recent origin of the word 'sport', and how

11. This variety of physical activities can still be seen nowadays, for instance, on a mural painting at Sherbrook; especially in the well named "Murale mosaïque nationale" (21 rue Wellington Sud). Nevertheless, the minimization of Aboriginal activities is still visible, as only three activities out of the 195 pictures represent indigenous physical activities on the background of the hurdle race painting (personal observation, July 2017).

12. Radio Canada uses this formulation in the presentation of audio archives on the Arctic Games from 1970 to 2004: [http://archives.radio-canada.ca/sports/evenements\\_sportifs/dossiers/1097/](http://archives.radio-canada.ca/sports/evenements_sportifs/dossiers/1097/) [Date of consultation: 31 August 2018]

the spread of 'modern' sports has contributed to the extinction of most traditional games (Paraschak, 1990, 1995; Joncheray, 2011). Above all, the Arctic Games, like the Gay Games or the Paralympics, reproduced the structure that organizes the Olympics, including the rhythm for the first biennial, four-yearly for the latter), symbols (the Arctic Games logo appears with three interlaced rings...), structuring rites (opening and closing) and awards winners (medal ceremonies). Both events had their own medals (the Arctic Games one is called 'Ulu'), gold, silver and bronze distinguishing the first, second and third place winners. The use of these Olympic temporal and symbolic markers confirmed the adhesion to the dominant sporting model. The attraction of this model and the positive financial repercussions it guaranteed were no strangers to this sporting acculturation. Indeed, the commercial strength of the Olympics reduced to a meager proportion the hopes for resistance and safeguard of the indigenous corporal techniques, for instance. Finally, the symbolic and mercantile attraction of Olympism contributed in rendering all attempt of opposition illegitimate, at the same time as it helped to marginalize practices which related to a painful past of territorial expropriation and, more largely, to a past and/or present of cultural domination. Of course, acculturation is not nowadays considered as a unidirectional process (Ward, 1996; Courbot, 2000). But, because of the omnipresence and omnipotence of the Olympic Games, the existence and valence of the Arctic Games risk to be marginal, and even to be considered as a part of a reified patrimonialization... The perpetual innovation in the world of human games could be a tool to preserve a positive and dynamic cultural movement (Fournier, 2013). This risk is well known: 'During the First Ministers Conference on Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian Constitution, a representative of the Inuit Committee on National Issues pointedly told the meeting that he and his people had no desire to become "pickled Eskimos" frozen in time.' (Doubleday & al., 2004, p. 201)

### **Recognition, Between Claims for Alterity and Mimetic Desire**

The Arctic Games provide a singular case for studying the strategies of creation of autonomous sporting events following the model of the Olympic Games. The feeling of contempt and the

search for recognition which founded the initiators' enterprise were not linked to an explicit exclusion of the sporting world (as was the case for women in the 1920s or for the participants to the Stoke Mandeville games after the war). Rather, they related to a cultural exclusion. In a similar manner as for the Gay Games, the autonomist strategy that presided while the Arctic Games were set up mainly aimed at a symbolic goal linked to a cultural claim. Of course, this latter implies the prior existence of a spirit of common culture.

The claims linked to this spirit were, however, only expressed at the benefit of a favorable socio-economic context. They needed to encounter a favorable sociopolitical environment in order to lead to an organization project involving extra-sporting actors, political supporters, etc. Lastly, the project had to be carried by elements who, besides their emotional resources (marked by the experience of exclusion), needed to have specific socio-cultural resources at their disposal. As opposed to the Gay Games, The Arctic Games project was not carried by a former major sportsman (using specific resources), but by elected representatives acting in a particular sociopolitical context.

In the end, this claim linked to 'a wounded identity' (Pollak, 1993) lead to ambivalent effects to say the least. On the one hand, striving for re-traditionalizing lead to reconstructing an idealized past in order to found an alterity. On the other hand, the (marginal) renegotiations of the Olympic model poorly hid a mimetic desire (Girard, 1972). Indeed, is it not first of all miming practices which vector modernity and westernization? The Arctic Games thus appear *in fine* as being torn between their dependence on the hegemonic 'Olympic industry' (Lensky, 2002, 2008) and the pragmatism of an engagement initiating, if not a moral progress (Honneth, 1992), at least the production of a consensus surrounding what is justifiable (Rawls, 1971).



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## **Authors**

**Sylvain Ferez** is an associate professor at the Faculty of Sport and Physical Education in the University of Montpellier, France. His research explores sport, health, and minorities experiences at the intersection of historical and sociological inquiry. Since 2015, Dr. Ferez is the head of the Research Team “Health, education, handicap situations”.

**Sébastien Ruffié** is a lecturer in social sciences in the Department of Sport Sciences at the University of French West Indies, Guadeloupe, France. His research explores sport and disability experiences in postcolonial context, but also the social organizations dedicated to them in this context during the second part of the twentieth century.

**Stéphane Héas** is an associate professor in sociology at the Department of Science and Technology for Physical Education and Sports of the University of Rennes 2. His research concerns sport participation and the rights and opportunities of people with disabilities and minorities to engage in sporting activity.