

SHAPING A DECOLONISED SPORT HISTORY CURRICULUM THROUGH THE NATIONAL QUESTION

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Abstract

A renewed interest in decolonising the university curriculum in South Africa was sparked by the student protests of 2015. University faculties and departments throughout the country responded. Sport Science departments, the home of sport history modules, remained, however, aloof and removed from this development. This paper attempts to rupture this silence by addressing decolonisation of sport history at a conceptual curriculum level through the lenses of the National Question. After an introduction, a discussion of decolonisation and decoloniality is presented. This is followed by a conversation on sport history curriculum. Finally, I venture to suggest theoretical underpinnings for a decolonised sport history curriculum.

Keywords: Curriculum; Decolonisation; National Question; Sport history; Sport historian.

Introduction

Alexander (2002:9) and Saunders (1988:2) state that the first attempts at partial or total descriptions of the history of South Africa were written from a completely Eurocentric and white point of view. These include the following sources: Theal (1895), Cory (1965), Theal (1964) and Muller (1974). The history writing of South African sport is not different. To date, only one sport history text book, in Afrikaans (Van der Merwe, 1999) and in English (Van der Merwe, 2007), exists for South African students. None exists in the vernacular languages. The current textbooks are presented in the sport scientific-historical mode, with no critical analysis of the relationship between Western European imperialism, colonisation and sport. Recent developments around themes of decolonisation necessitate a search for epistemologies and pedagogic practices that depart from the scientific-historical mode of writing and teaching.

Curriculum change starts with a political and ideological intent and gets implemented as assessment and policy statements. This article hones in on

the long-standing and diverse political and ideological traditions of thought associated with decolonialism. In the South African context, it is associated with African nationalism, Black Consciousness and non-racialism. African nationalism grew out of a disgruntlement among Africanists with the African National Congress (ANC) for the manner in which whites and other non-Africans were “misdirecting and aborting” the energies of the organisation. This gave rise to the establishment of the Pan-African Congress (PAC) in April 1959 (Mothlabi, 1986) and was vocal in calling for the Africanisation of society. The PAC president, Robert Sobukwe, indicated that to the African youth, education meant service to Africa (Mothlabi, 1986:87-88). The prime mover of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in South Africa was the South African Student Organisation (SASO) under the leadership of Steve Biko, which was established in Marianhill in December 1968. SASO defined the BCM as one that rejects all value systems that sought to make blacks foreigners in their own land (Mothlabi, 1986:107, 109). SASO and its fellow organisation, the Black People’s Convention (BPC - established in December 1971), were banned by 1977. In April 1978, the Azanian People’s Organisation (AZAPO) was established as a direct successor to BPC and SASO. Mothlabi (1986:276) asserts that the BCM’s education programme was aimed at the destruction of imperialist, racist, tribalist, sectionalist, colonialist and neo-colonialist ideas and practices. The non-racial tradition is associated with the Non-European Unity Movement of South Africa (NEUM), later the New Unity Movement (NUM) that traces its historical involvement to the efforts of Stalinists and Trotskyists to form united-front-type organisations, namely the National Liberation League (founded 1935) and the Non-European United Front (founded in 1938) (No Sizwe, 1979:54). Although the NUM was not a visible force to be reckoned within the FMF movement, the NUM claims that it worked:

... tirelessly for true decolonisation of education since the mid-20th century ... and that the momentum presented by the FMF movement should be embraced. However, the degeneration into naked black nationalism (not even the nuanced “black consciousness” of Biko) by some of the Fallists requires an appropriate theoretical response (New Unity Movement, 2018:4).

The non-racial organs were unique since all organisations of the oppressed people had, until the 1930s, been created and sustained with a liberal-reformist perspective, if not literally under liberal bourgeoisie tutelage (No Sizwe, 1979:55).

A sport history curriculum, according to Clevenger (2017), informed by decolonial thinking, offers the potential consideration of alternative avenues of historical representation. A challenge not taken up by sport historians in South Africa to date is the question: How does decolonisation thinking impact on a sport history curriculum at an institution of higher learning in South Africa? By drawing on conference presentations, key works on decolonisation, sport history and daily conversations, an attempt was made to respond to this question. The use of daily conversations as source material is a legitimate practice and was used in a similar fashion as in the academic work of Adhikari (2002:12). Where deployed as evidence, this personal experience was either clearly indicated or referenced, and was used only to add colour and texture to the argument (Adhikari, 2002:12).

Before proceeding with an attempt at answering this question, the following sub-question was posed: What enables a researcher to comment and make suggestions for a decolonised curriculum? According to Alexander (2002:5), “the [sport] historian does have an angle of vision”. This angle of vision is shaped by life experiences that has commonality with other black experiences (see September, 2018: 119-129). In imitation of Alexander (2002:5) and Adhikari (2002:12), I used the first person singular at times. That I proffer opinions and speculations might disturb the reader. However, the fact that I do propose ideas is a privilege I assume because of my involvement in sport historical research, which on occasion gives me reasonable certainty, but not proof in the strict juridical sense. Furthermore, I can legitimately claim to have had extensive experience of life as a black sport historian working with marginalised communities.

As the author of this research, I have first-hand experience of the colonised sport curriculum . I have had an academic interest in the history of physical education, physical culture and sport since the late 1980s and have used my day-to-day interaction with colleagues to probe issues broadly relevant to the subject. I am therefore a participant-observer in the unfolding of this particular history. Two former colleagues in particular, George van der Ross and Brian Isaacs, need to be singled out for giving me a very basic introduction to Black Consciousness, the NUM and Pan Africanism at a time when only the Congress movement, driven by the African National Congress (ANC), was in the public consciousness of students and teachers. Regular discussions of an informal nature with Barry Firth, Dr Hendrik Snyders and Paul Hendricks, three individuals with divergent approaches to the decolonial project, also

shaped my thinking around curriculum. I have experienced deliberate racist exclusion from physical education departments at institutions of higher learning, something that was not uncommon to black students prior and during the 1980s (September, 2018:122). I write this research from a left-wing, non-racial position that takes into account that the decolonial and decolonisation discourses are currently dominated by Black Consciousness, Pan-Africanism and African socialism discourses. However, having been mentored since the 1990s in the traditions of left-wing socialist movements that hold steadfastly to the ideals of creating a non-racial society, I create this narrative from that angle.

What is decolonisation and decoloniality?

Decolonisation, according to Mignolo (2018), is a state led-project while decoloniality is in people's hands. Decolonisation and decoloniality themes are not 21st century inventions and according to Mignolo (2018) again, it is a re-emergence of previous consciousness. Clevenger (2017) states that the 20th century postcolonial works of Said (1978), Bhabha (1994), Fanon (1965) and Spivak (1988), with their efforts to give voice and agency to the colonised and "othered" peoples, continue to exert an influence on historians. Thus, decoloniality becomes conceptual moments, not always a historical moment, and is summarised in a poem as part of Mazwai's (2018, n.p.) keynote address at a conference with decolonisation as its theme:

It is an abomination to adore those who oppress you ... who teach children to be better robots. Everything is still the same for the black nation ... only the complexion[s] of leaders have changed who take orders from London. These people want to be affirmed by whiteness.

Although arguments on decolonisation and decoloniality have been most successful in challenging the European academic traditions of disciplines and domains, sport science, the overarching area of study for sport history, remains aloof and silent resilient about the topic. In an unpublished oral presentation, Milaras and McKay (2018) state that [sport] scientists are closeted about issues of decolonisation. When the student protests of 2015 called for the Africanisation of the science curriculum, the sport science fraternity did not respond. As a result, sport science practitioners have not brought about a critical analytical change in the "literature on the so-called philosophy of dance, sport and physical education ... that amounts to nothing more than a string of pretentious slogans" (Best, 1978:18). During the 1976 student uprisings, a future sport activist at Stellenbosch University (SU), Odendaal

(1976:n.p), wrote emotively in the student magazine: “We dare not ignore the interactions around us ... a frustrated black youth is staring white authority and the pigmentocracy in the face ... the resultant anger, fear and suspicion create a situation of relentless struggle. The call must be for ... contact between people that are living past one another”. The SU authorities did not respond. Current sport scientists and historians would do well to reflect on Odendaal’s call and ask themselves the same question as Morgan Ndlovu did, when he wrote on decolonisation within another context: “To what extent has past patterns of inventing and packaging history for disunity and domination been reversed and re-directed towards the attainment of an inclusive common belonging by the postcolonial and post-apartheid governments?” (Ndlovu, 2013:9). In my view, curriculum change around decolonisation and decoloniality is an essential corrective to this inertia among the sport science fraternity. Official statistics on sport transformation (Department of Sport and Recreation, 2017) are silent on decolonisation; the statistics are usually presented as bland databases, rendering the information of little value if left uncontextualised.

I argue that decolonisation and decoloniality theories, as they manifest in curriculum studies, cannot be studied in isolation from the National Question (NQ). What is the NQ? Mawbey and Webster (2017:1-2) define the NQ as a century-long discourse on South Africa’s nationhood framed by four popular narratives:

- Colonialism of a special type – the notion that South Africa consists of two nations, the colonised and the colonising, in the same territory;
- The approach that recognises the indigenous African, numerically the largest group as the most oppressed and exploited members of society, and places special emphasis on African leadership, as well as prioritising the conditions of African people;
- The “rainbow nation” which emphasises the multiple identities that constitute South Africa’s diverse population.
- The fourth narrative, non-racialism, often ignored in current discourses, was advocated by the NUM and its predecessor, the NEUM.

The NQ was a concern of the NEUM since its early origins in December 1943 to January 1944. For the NEUM, according to Brown, Giyose, Petersen, Thomas and Zinn (2017: 79), the NQ has “always meant nothing less than the establishment of equal citizenship for the entire population as well as the abolition of rightlessness [*sic*], poverty and inequality of the nationally

oppressed and economically exploited mass”. The NEUM narrative on the NQ differs starkly from others. Alexander (1994:1) claims, “[E]thnic groups which are taken as self-evidently real today were virtually invented ... as a consciously crafted ideologically creation”. However, non-racialism does not imply colour blindness and an NEUM intellectual, Hosea Jaffe, went to great lengths to level charges of Euro-centrism at white South African historians and intellectuals of liberal and radical Marxist persuasion (Lategan, 2016).

Decolonisation therefore is an attempt at a complete break with past hegemonies of colonial attitudes that pervade the current curriculum at institutions of higher learning. Decoloniality has a global history without a common logic of a Western way of reasoning. A frequently-raised concern amongst critics of the decolonising and decolonial discourse centres around the need for precise definition. However, Behari-Leak, Masehela, Marhaya, Tjabane and Merckel (2017) argue that decolonisation is a nuanced and layered concept whose meaning cannot be unlocked using a scientific formula or recipe, since its meaning lies more in its detail than its definition. Decolonisation is the moment where colonised people take over power from colonising agents and either change or continue with past practices.

In the South African context of the 1994 change of government, this (decolonising) moment has been described by the NUM (2018:6) “as a facade ... to plaster over the real inequalities [still] prevalent 22 years after liberation”. After all, the South African 1994 moment was an attempt at reconstructing society around capital acquisition. This ties in with a black journalist’s comments on the apparent unity brought about by rugby and stated:

The so-called unity that was introduced with the advent of democracy, has proved to be one of the biggest confidence tricks in the history of the [of rugby] game in this country. With sleight of hand, white administrators engineered a process that was far removed from true unity. They succeeded in getting those promoting non-racialism to join their structures. It was a process that destroyed club rugby in the townships. Their promises to develop the game in the townships, by taking it into the schools and by building facilities were forgotten as quickly as they were made. If it was true that South Africa’s victory in the 1995 World Cup had united communities across the country, it was only for a month, and maybe even less (Oakes, 2018, n.p.).

This does not imply that decolonisation moments – in sport in particular – are without merit.

Why decolonisation and decoloniality

I advance ten reasons of merit why sport history curriculum designers need to engage with decolonisation and decoloniality theory. According to Mignolo (2018), the world is experiencing a process of “De-westernising” where the West, particularly America, can no longer control the world through military hegemony, and is threatened, on equal terms, by Iran, Russia and China. Secondly, the increasing commodification and commercialising of sport science has led to a new morality of knowledge purchasing for those who can afford it. This commodification of knowledge leads to sport science (the subject) and the sport science industry (the business) not being the same. Therefore corporate business, with its huge footprints in sport science industry, cannot bring decoloniality to people (Mignolo, 2018). Decoloniality must come from elsewhere. Thirdly, Denise Zinn, a guest lecturer at the Nelson Mandela University introducing Michalinos Zembylas (2017), gave a compelling reason why universities should adopt a decolonised curricula: “It forms the basis for asking, What is the most important imperative at this time when we think of transforming our curricula?” Fourthly, decolonisation forces us to re-look at our sporting past without romantic lenses of the present. Such a re-look forces the critical-minded academic to question why sport is being “transformed through employing apartheid era racial quota labels, while the transformation of society receives scant attention” (New Unity Movement, 2018). Fifthly, none of us will ever really know what the past was, and in reflection we run the risk of misrepresenting events. However, we would be remiss if we remained silent and we did not begin to try to imagine what the many complex and interlinking factors of the colonial project was. Sixthly, the decolonisation debates, that formed the intellectual foundation for the 2016 protests, force university leadership, as expressed by Cairncross (2018), into spaces of deep thinking, open feeling and collective healing. This holds especially true for black university leadership in the 21st century who have become comfortable in newly-found neo-liberal and materially opulent spaces. According to Cairncross (2018, n.p.), black leaders have the responsibility of:

... initiating, driving and embodying change and of being a beacon and role model, therefore never stumbling, never failing, never showing weakness. [Black leaders have] [t]he responsibility for supporting individually and collectively, socially and academically the young black students and staff who desperately need a light before them to guide them onwards.

A seventh point of justification centres around Cairncross's issue of black performativity at predominantly white institutions of higher learning. Although Cairncross's (2018, n.p.) argument is directed at leadership, her observation also holds true for lecturers, who are more vulnerable to bureaucratic onslaughts than their white counterparts:

Layer on to this the insidious, covert racism that permeates so many of our university structures, both in the bureaucracy and the academic leadership. This racism that continuously either consciously or unconsciously undermines black [lecturers] so that the pervasive atmosphere is one of constantly proving that you are worthy.

An eighth justification point for decoloniality is provided by Cairncross (2018, n.p.) who summarises the overall decolonial project within universities, particularly within the health sciences:

Let us not absolve our pathological work culture; let us not absolve overt and covert racism at universities and in society; let us not absolve the capitalist system that makes of our thinking and our students' [thinking] commodities to be bought, sold and measured. And, finally, let us not absolve ourselves for not changing this system, for not taking care of ourselves and for not taking care of each other.

This point is relevant due to the complicity of the health sciences, in particular the medical fraternity, for providing racism with a "scientific" base. Here, I specifically refer to the work of MacCrone (1936:1108), professor of psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. In the *South African Journal of Science*, MacCrone set out a study for the purpose of "conducting a preliminary survey of the scope and content of group differences as they exist in the country ... [to determine] group stereotypes". A summary of MacCrone's survey are set out in the following Table 1:

Table 1: Scientific Group Stereotyping

Group Stereotypes		
English-speaking South Africans	Afrikaans-speaking South Africans	Jews
Very fond of sport	Very religious	Shrewd at business
Intelligent	Hospitable	Intelligent
Straightforward	Strong family feeling	Industrious
Law-abiding	Politically-minded	Thrifty
Sense of humour	Stubborn	Fond of gambling
Good-natured	Good-natured	Energetic
Fair-minded	Very fond of sport	Enterprising

Charitable	Law-abiding	
Industrious		
Energetic		
Feeling of superiority		
Politically-minded		
Strong family feeling		
Natives	Indians	Cape Coloured
Superstitious	Shrewd at business	Noisy
Noisy	Industrious	Quarrelsome
Imitative	Very religious	Fond of gambling
Good-natured	Intelligent	Dishonest
Dirty	Thrifty	Treacherous
Fond of gambling	Dirty	Dirty
Hospitable		Superstitious
Unreliable		

The ninth defence point for a decolonial perspective on curriculum is the denunciation of the colonial project by the major South African parliamentary political parties: the ANC, DA and EFF. Finally, universities are intended to provide leadership and mentoring spaces for students through curriculum innovation and practice. If the international call is for a decolonised curriculum, then such innovation and practice should be provided. Presently, many sport history courses are located in health and medical faculties where, according to Lydia Cairncross (2018), “decolonising work is definitely applicable to all aspects of medicine from curriculum to pedagogy”.

A decolonial sport history curriculum should therefore be cognisant of the idea that the decolonisation of sport is part of a broader intellectual project that aims to transcend firmly-held colonial epistemologies (Cleophas, 2018:9). At the core of this project is the effort to understand how colonial narratives became fixed in the sport literature and minds of South Africans and to attempt to redress this situation (Ondendaal, 2018:1).

A decolonial sport History Curriculum

the year 1990 is significant for South African curriculum theorists because of the changes in the political landscape, both inside South Africa, the southern African region and the world (Jansen, 1999:4). In South Africa, following

political and economic pressures from the liberation movements and the international community, the Apartheid state released political prisoners and unbanned political organisations. In the region, the end of the Cold War had recast ideological and political alignments in, amongst others, Angola and Namibia, facilitating the emergence of a post-Apartheid state in South Africa. This post-Apartheid state emerged from a negotiated settlement between two key role players, the National Party on the one hand and the African National Congress on the other hand. This negotiated settlement facilitated South Africa's entry into international sport. Brown (2006:140) states that the role of the then existing non-racial sport movement under the direction of the South African Council on Sport (SACOS - an organisation that was a home to all liberation movements) was downplayed as the sports wing of the liberation movement because it resisted the terms for lifting the sports moratorium and it kept to its non-aligned stance towards any political tendency. This, coupled with the Euro-centricity of the sport history curriculum, calls for a complete overhaul of the curriculum.

Traditionally universities employed, maybe unconsciously, the Von Ranke method of constructing sport history courses and curriculum. Von Ranke asserted that history should be reported "as it really happened, should never be viewed from one side and that the truth lies possibly in the middle" (Campbell, 1986). This superficial method remained intact for a large period of time in the 20th century. Daryl Siedentop (1990:327) presented the study of sport history in America in the same fashion, stating that the subject is an "interpretation of the past, relating the past to the present and provides guidelines as to what might be expected or what courses might be taken in the future". Postma (1945:4) claims that sport history was introduced into the South African university curricula in the 1940s and consisted of "a summary of facts with little connection to ... economic and political developments". The thrust of sport history content in the university curriculum centred around Western European civilisations, mainly the Hellenistic, Latin and 19th century British, German and Swedish worlds. These accounts are still present in what Bhabha (2-004:16) calls "unexplained narrow-minded nationalisms". This calls for a challenge to the assertion that the [South African] sport history curriculum "serves as an information depository ... and a barometer for progress" (Van der Merwe, 1999:xi). A limitation of this view, from a decolonial perspective, is that it ignores that sport history records and reports on events in a world, described by Saul (2008:1) as a "horribly unequal and exploitative place". Therefore, Fanon (2008:62) asserts that "the problem

of colonialism includes not only the interrelations of objective historical conditions but also human attitudes toward these conditions”. Marxist humanists identify these conditions as emancipation from human oppression in the cultural realm (Kneifel, Leatt & Nürnberger, 1986:253). Cultural traditions are shaped by political and economic developments. This is evident in the work of Alexander (1994:1) where he states:

... as Apartheid as a political and economic strategy began to disintegrate, many of the race and class based privileges bestowed on white South Africans by the ill-gotten wealth of colonial conquest and Capitalist exploitation could be salvaged via the reification of cultures and the de facto hierarchisation of the human carriers of these.

History has shown that the sport curriculum of the past is filled with conflict, the present too, and there is no utopian future. Decolonising agents, such as Ndlanzi (2018), argue that colonialism honed in on differences between people and the colonised accommodated colonialism for the sake of peace. Therefore, the sport history curriculum on its own cannot be a tool of liberation because as Raymon Boudon argues in Haralambos and Heald (1984:207): “[T]he key to equality of opportunity lies outside rather than inside the school”. This is so because the curriculum operates in a higher education system that, according to Cairncross (2018, n.p.) is:

... built within a broader society which is inherently unjust. [It is a society] [w]here the very entry into university is policed by the politics of class and racial inequality. [It is home to] a fee-paying system which keeps the majority out, a schooling system which disadvantages the majority and a university environment which alienates and marginalises those few who jump through all the hoops to get in.

Curriculum construction has territory claims and ruling classes attach their identity to it. What the FMF movement in fact did, was to rip the curriculum transformation debate from the bourgeoisie. Those in the Africanist and black nationalist tradition, within the FMF movement, called for a total dismantling of colonised spaces in order for African people to reconstruct their cultural lives in ways that augment core elements of traditional culture, and where reconceptualised cultural forms can be adapted to the modern African world. On the other hand, the non-racial ethos is highly critical of this stance. It focuses rather on the “primacy of class, otherwise the politics of the skin will prevail” (New Unity Movement: 2018:4-5). In short, a decolonial curriculum will vacillate between these tendencies and offer, according to Clevenger (2017), sport historians and academics an opportunity for a rethinking of Western modernity, including its epistemologies employed in sport historical

narratives and different classroom practices.

Past sport historical epistemologies at South African universities were dominated by male sport accounts that were infused by notions of Muscular Christianity. According to Siedentop (1990:69), an important source for the philosophy of Muscular Christianity was the educational ideals of the mid-19th century aristocratic British education system which promoted competitive sport as an attribute of a virtuous and moral life. A decolonised perspective on Muscular Christianity is thus necessary for sport historians. As Buntu (2018) professes in an unpublished public presentation: “[P]ractices of masculinities reflect the degree to which society is teaching manhood, ...power and brutality”. These elements of most male team games reflect Western notions of masculinity. On a further point of criticism against Muscular Christianity, a decolonial sport history curriculum takes cognisance of African traditional transcendentalism where the deceased plays an active role in the affairs of the living. A study of rock art, for example of the Southern African Bushmen, reveals much how death is commemorated through dancing (Dowson & Lewis-Williams, 1989:50).

Until the 1990s South African education was characterised by a uniform and predictable curriculum policy environment. Fanon (2008:64) is forthright in his description of environments under which such curriculum policies emerged: “structured racism”. Jansen (1999:4) too states that the apartheid regime managed a centralised school curriculum policy system, which was variously described as racist, Eurocentric, sexist, authoritarian, prescriptive, unchanging, context-blind and discriminatory. It can be stated with certainty that university curricula during the Apartheid era were no different. This led to at least one South African sport historian’s comment: “[P]resenting sport history in such narrow nationalisms has run its course” (Cleophas, 2016: 62). Such presentations have run their course because, as Fanon (2008: 66, 69) further states, “... [Presentations by narrow nationalisms were responsible for colonial racism ... [leaving] the colonized with values of inferiority and dependency”. Adhikari (2005:87) alludes to an inescapable acceptance of an inferiority complex by the colonised, something that was imposed by the coloniser. Decoloniality means epistemic reconstitution when power relations change. However, Mignolo (2018) argues that when the colonised takes over the state, they want to be like settlers and thus reproduce these past complexes without questioning. This results in devising sport curricula where the nation becomes of secondary importance and growth (of economic capital) becomes

more important, leaving the Eurocentric curriculum intact.

Conclusion

This paper did not attempt to map out content matter for a decolonised sport history curriculum – that is left for future research. Instead it identified stakeholders in the contestation for such a curriculum. What the author concludes from this contestation for space coincides with a suggestion from Alexander (1994:7): “It is axiomatic that in a more democratic, post-apartheid South Africa, the Euro- and white-centric curriculum must disappear”. Therefore, a post-apartheid sport history curriculum should have at its core the emancipation from oppressive cultures and to subvert all epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies of curriculum intentions that present themselves as being very nostalgic about a privileged colonial era. The crucial contest over control of the decolonised sport history curriculum at institutions of higher learning will always be manifested in the inclination to foreground a particular ideologically-based process emanating from the inherited traditions of the liberation movement. This paper calls for a recontextualised sport history curriculum that foregrounds the non-racial tradition. In this recontextualisation process however, university curriculum planners in sport history need to underpin their courses with decolonial content and engage different lobbies and social movements, referred to in this paper, on specific issues of the curricula canon. All the role players should take ownership of the conceptualisation process of a decolonised curriculum. This does not imply that the outcome, or the enacted curriculum, should be accepted by all. It could however result in a 21st century decolonised sport history curriculum that is conceptualised through broad-based comment and input, especially by academics, sensitive to the NQ, who must ultimately implement it.

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