

Reading Baron Pierre de Coubertin: Issues of Gender and Race

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Baron Pierre de Coubertin, like many other Frenchmen, wanted revenge for the defeat and the lost provinces of Alsace and Lorraine in the Franco-Prussian war. As a descendant of an aristocratic family, Coubertin might have felt a special responsibility 'to seek *revanche* for the debacle at Sedan' (Guttman, 1992, 8). As with many young aristocrats, Coubertin initially considered a military career. After spending some time at the French military academy at St. Cyr, he was persuaded that becoming a soldier would not suit him. He subsequently decided to attend classes at the *École Libre des Sciences Politiques*, where the social theories of Frédéric Le Play attracted his attention (Guttman, 1992, 8). In 1883, he joined the *Unions de la Paix*, founded by Le Play, and he wrote many essays that were published in Le Play's journal *La Reforme Sociale*. Although Coubertin studied history, literature, education, sociology and many other subjects, he focused his attention on education, and in particular on sports education (*pédagogie sportive*) (Hill, 1992). Coubertin thought that the defeat in the Franco-Prussian war was not a result of the lack of military skills of Napoleon III, but of the physical inferiority of the average French youth.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, at a time that Napoleon I occupied much of Germany, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn had developed an extremely nationalistic form of gymnastics, the 'Turnen'. Jahn added a patriotic motive to what German educators had developed at the end of the eighteenth century: to unify the divided German Volk and to eject the hated Napoleonic invaders from German soil (Hobsbawm, 1992). Turnen

became the basis of physical education in German public schools, as well as the dominant sport in private clubs and sports associations (Guttman, 1992). Coubertin suspected that German soldiers were much fitter than the French, and that if the latter wished to confront the Germans successfully, they had to improve their physical capacities. Therefore, he concluded that the solution was a sport-based educational reform (Müller, 2000), unlike his contemporaries who suggested a theory-based educational reform (Hoberman, 1995).

Accordingly, he travelled to Germany, England, the United States and Canada to inspect the leading approaches personally (Kidd, 1996). While studying the German approach, he concluded that there were probably better paths to physical development than the rigid routines of German physical education (Guttman, 1992). In the United States (1889) and Canada, he visited the early programmes of intercollegiate athletics, and he was impressed by the excellent facilities that the colleges and universities had made available to their students. In *Universités Transatlantiques* (1890), he wrote enthusiastically of what he had seen (Guttman, 1992), but still he had not found something that impressed him sufficiently to advocate its implementation in the French context (Kidd, 1996). Therefore, Coubertin travelled to England, knowing that the English were passionate about sports, as at Eton, Harrow, Winchester and the rest of the Public Schools, boys were practising for many hours daily the activities of rowing, running, jumping and ball games (Hoberman, 1995).

Coubertin's enthusiasm for English sports education escalated, when, in 1875, he read a French translation of *Tom Brown's School Days* (1856), a novel in which Thomas Hughes romanticised his memories of Rugby School. In his study *L'Éducation en Angleterre* (1888), Coubertin, at the age of twenty-five, wrote of Arnold, that he "could not have been English if he had not loved sport" (Guttman, 1992, 9). Nonetheless, Guttman (1992) and Hoberman (1995) argue that Coubertin was misled by Hughes and thought that Thomas Arnold had been a fervent advocate of sports. In fact, Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby school from 1828 to 1842 (Hill 1992), was far more interested in boys' moral education than in their physical development (Guttman 1992). No matter what the real focus of Arnold was, Coubertin admired the combination of physical health and character that was reflected in the sport of the English youth. After visiting Rugby school in 1883, Coubertin was totally convinced that the British approach to sport in education would help invigorate France (Kidd, 1996). In one of his memoirs, *Une Champagne de Vingt-et-un Ans* (1909), Coubertin described his visit to the chapel of the Rugby school as 'pilgrimage' and Arnold became for him an inspirational figure (Guttman, 1992).

His openness to English and American influences brought Coubertin into conflict with his Anglophobic countrymen (Guttman, 1992).

Pascal Grousset, organiser of an extremely nationalistic *Ligue Nationale de l'Éducation Physique*, insisted on having French sports with French names. For instance, when league members showed a big interest in playing *football*, he desperately and persistently wanted to rename the sport *la barrette*. In this climate of disapproval and chauvinism, Coubertin was steadily and frequently publishing papers urging the French to emulate the English, as a preparation for revenging the defeat by Prussia (Guttman, 1992). Working closely with educators from progressive schools, such as *L'École Monge and L'École Alsacienne*, he propagandised athleticism, a dominant element in the British secondary education. Additionally, Coubertin organised or re-organised a number of sports associations, of which the most important was the *Union des Sociétés Françaises de Sports Athlétiques* (USFSA), which was founded in 1890 by Coubertin and his friend Georges St.-Clair. In a letter from Coubertin to Brookes in July 1892, he indicates that he was using the union as the base for reviving the Games. The union had reached sixty-two member societies with about 7,000 participants and this made him believe that the revival of the Ancient Olympic Games was close. His studies of classical history, as well as his experiences from travelling in different domains comparing educational programmes, had convinced him that 'sport' and 'character' were the ingredients for the successful development of youth. In ancient Greece this combination was achieved, through a triple unity in Athens gymnasia: between old and young, between different disciplines, and between people of different types (Hill 1992).

It was not until 1889 that Coubertin decided to try to revive the Games, and thus he devoted the next five years to the preparation of the International Congress of Sportsmen in 1894 (Hill, 1992). Many scholars (Kidd, 1996; MacAloon, 1996; Hoberman, 1986) argue that Coubertin's revival of the Olympic Games aimed at revitalising French society and reducing the imperialist rivalries of the European powers and the growing likelihood of war, with the possibility of further French defeat. To a certain extent, Coubertin changed the focus of his interests over the years (Hoberman, 1986). In his early years, his writings were centred on preserving the equilibrium of 'modern' individuals and societies; whereas, by 1931, with the publication of his *Olympic Memoirs*, his focus was more on preserving the influence and autonomy of the IOC (Hoberman 1986). Coubertin, in later life, was keener on the survival of the Olympic Movement than the 'ideological cleavage of the world' (Hoberman, 1986, 33).

Coubertin's revival can be interpreted as representing both his nationalist and internationalist tendencies; being traumatised by the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian war, Coubertin offered a formula for making French youth more robust, healthy and physically fit. However, Coubertin, as an internationalist, perceived sport as a 'pacifier', a means for enhancing peace in the world and fighting controversy (Hoberman, 1986, p.34). Toohey and

Veal (2000) argue that it would not be an exaggeration to acknowledge Coubertin as the driving force and designer of the modern Olympic Games. Most of his ideas are drawn from the Ancient Greece and how Ancient Greeks defined democracy and their values and principles (Hill, 1992). His ideal of Olympism, a synthesis of supposed ancient Greek practices and nineteenth century British sporting ideas, internationalism and peace, inspired him to revive the Olympic Games (Toohey, 2000; Parry, 1994).

His biggest contribution to the Olympic Movement is the revival of the Olympic Games based upon the philosophy of Olympism. Despite its grand ideals, Olympism has been subjected to major criticisms (Hoberman 1986; Simson and Jennings, 1991; Hill, 1992). The rise of nationalisms, the involvement of politics with the appearance of successive boycotts, accelerating commercialisation, the professionalisation of athletes, but also discrimination against race, gender and ethnicity in the Olympic arena, represent some of the major criticisms against the modern Olympic Movement. This article will focus on the exclusivist character of the ideology of Olympism in terms of gender and race, as reflected in the writings of the founder of the Modern Olympic Movement, Pierre de Coubertin. For the purposes of this research, 201 writings have been analysed, 19 of which included specific references to gender and race. This paper will examine in depth the controversial character of the ideology of Olympism and will provide insights into its paradoxes and contradictions which have synthesised its complex and unique meaning.

The 'Feminist Drive' and the 'Women's Olympics'

Women were never originally seen as equal partners, nor indeed as any kind of partners, in Coubertin's view of modern sport, and consequently in his project to revive the Olympic Games. In his 'Ode to Sport', the centrality of the male athlete was obvious.

O Sport, you are Fecundity!

You tend by straight and noble paths towards a more perfect race, blasting the seeds of sickness and righting the flaws, which threaten its needful soundness. *And you quicken within the athlete the wish to see growing about him brisk and sturdy sons to follow him in the arena and in their turn bear off joyous laurels.*
(Coubertin, 1912a: lines 34-38, emphasis added)

Classism, sexism and racism were bound up with the organisations and the social structures of the nineteenth century Europe. Based on the theory of 'separate spheres', the role of women was limited to issues concerning home, whereas men dealt with the public affairs. Coubertin shared fully the sexist prejudices of his era which privileged the male physique and male sociability

in their conception of sport culture (Guttman, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994; Welsh and Costa, 1994; Roche, 2000). He never hesitated to state clearly his opposition to the prospect of allowing women to participate in the Olympic Games.

The question of allowing women to participate in the Olympic Games has not been settled. The answer cannot be negative merely on the grounds that that was the answer in antiquity; nor can it be affirmative solely because female competitors were admitted in swimming and tennis in 1908 and 1912. So it is clear that the debate remains open. It is good that too swift a decision has not been reached, and that this matter has dragged on. It will resolve itself quite naturally at the Congress of Paris, which will give the Olympiads their final form. Which way will it go? I am not a soothsayer, but for my own part I am not afraid of siding with the no vote. *I feel that the Olympic Games must be reserved for men.* (Coubertin, 1912b: lines: 1-8, emphasis added)

Coubertin, in his plans for the Games revival, had envisaged that they should be reserved for male athletes. In his efforts to explain this position, he referred to several reasons that can be summarised as follows: a) the organisational problems that would follow the inclusion of women due to the increased need for the establishment of separate sport associations and the staging of separate events during the Olympic Games, b) the inappropriateness of viewing women competing with each other in public sports competitions, and c) the limited physical abilities of women which made them 'incapable' of producing records in a highly competitive form of sport such as the Olympics. With regard to the first two points, evidence is provided in the following quotation:

First, in application of the well-known proverb depicted by Musset, "a door must be either open or closed". Can we allow women access to all Olympic events? No? Then why should some sports be open to them while the rest are not? Above all, what basis can one use to place the barrier between the events that are permitted, and those that are not? There are not just women tennis players and swimmers. There are women fencers, women riders and, in America, women rowers. In the future, perhaps, will there be women runners or even women football players? *Would such sports, played by women, constitute a sight to be recommended before the crowds that gather for an Olympiad? I do not think that any such claim can be made.* But there is another reason, a practical one. Would separate

events be held for women, or would meets be held all together, without distinction as to sex, regardless of whether the competition is among individuals or teams? The second of these approaches would be logical, since the dogma of the equality of the sexes tends to expand. Yet this assumes the existence of co-ed clubs. There are hardly any such clubs now, with the exception of tennis and swimming. *Even with co-ed clubs, ninety-five times out of a hundred, elimination rounds favour the men.* (Coubertin, 1912b: lines 13-29, emphasis added)

Even though the Games were reserved exclusively for the male athletes, at the 1900 Paris Olympic Games, Charlotte Cooper became the first female modern Olympic victor. There were 1318 men and only 19 women at these Games (a figure which was reduced to eight in the St. Louis Games of 1904). These were females from privileged backgrounds who had the necessary funds and leisure time to enable their participation in socially acceptable sports. The most popular sport among those classes were archery, field sports, and later in the century, golf and tennis (Guttmann, 1992; Toohey and Veal, 2000). However, it should be noted that women in these Games performed in a few unofficial events, while the IOC banned women from participation in the Olympics in 1912 (Hargreaves, 1994). It is obvious that Coubertin did not want to incorporate women's organised sport into the Games, and, for that reason, he often exaggerated the structural and bureaucratic issues that could arise. Another issue that concerned him deeply was the exposure of female physicality through the public contests. He referred to it several times in his life.

Although I would like competitions among boys to be more infrequent, I emphatically insist that the tradition continues. This form of athletic competitiveness is vital in athletic education, with all its risks and consequences. Add a female element, and the event becomes monstrous. The experience of Amsterdam seems to have justified my opposition to allowing women into the Olympic Games. On the whole, reaction so far has been hostile to repeating the spectacle that the women's events provided during the Ninth Olympiad. *If some women want to play football or box, let them, provided that the event takes place without spectators, because the spectators who flock to such competitions are not there to watch a sport.*" (Coubertin, 1928a: lines 172-180, emphasis added)

In similar vein, some years later (1935), he returned to this point.

I personally do not approve of feminine participation in public competitions, which does not mean that women should not go in for a large number of sports, but I mean to say merely that they should not seek the limelight! In the Olympic Games, their particular role should be that of crowning the champions, as in the tournaments of olden times. (Coubertin, 1935: lines 242-258)

He was apparently influenced by the contemporary view of the concept of chivalry in the Middle Ages. As he described in one of his earlier writings, with reference to the English Dr. Brookes who had attempted to revive the institution of ancient athletics,

Yet in some ways antiquity was not enough for Dr. Brookes. It did not know of gallantry. So he drew on some chivalrous customs of the Middle Ages. He had the winner of the tournament bend his knee to receive the symbolic laurel from the hands of a lady. (Coubertin, 1890: lines 108-111)

In principle, sport offered cultural liberation for women in terms of the social constraints of the Victorian dress code and 'body culture' (Roche, 2000). However, even after World War I, when women had more freedom in many spheres of their lives, they were denied equality of access and opportunity in sport (Birrell and Cole, 1994). The culturally appropriate behaviour for women demanded the female athletes to demonstrate the principles of modesty, dignity and morality, which defined behavioural and dress standards (Toohey and Veal, 2000). In this rationale, Coubertin believed that public competition for women was inappropriate. Instead, a more suitable role for them would be to show their appreciation of the male athletes for their remarkable achievements.

There remains the other possibility, that of adding women's competitions alongside men's competitions in the sports declared open to women, a little female Olympiad alongside the great male Olympiad. What is the appeal of that? Organizers are already overworked, deadlines are already too short, the problems posed by housing and ranking are already formidable, costs are already excessive, and all that would have to be doubled! Who would want to take all that on? *In our view, this feminine semi-Olympiad is impractical, uninteresting, ungainly, and, I do not hesitate to add, improper. It is not in keeping with my concept of the Olympic Games, in which I believe that we have tried, and must continue to try, to put the following expression into practice: the solemn and periodic exaltation of male athleticism, based on internationalism, by means of fairness,*

in an artistic setting, with the applause of women as a reward.

This combination of the ancient ideal and the traditions of chivalry is the only healthful and satisfactory one. It will impose itself on public opinion through its own strength.
(Coubertin, 1912b: lines 37-56, emphasis added)

In the above text, a third reason, explaining why Coubertin opposed women's participation in sport, is also evident. He argued that competitions solely organised for women would lack interest. This relates to his view that women's physical capabilities are limited to physical exercises, and thus women cannot perform successfully in competitive sport.

Let us not forget that the Olympic Games are not parades of physical exercises, but aim to raise, or at least maintain, records. Citius, altius, fortius. Faster, higher, stronger. That is the motto of the International Committee, and the fundamental reason for the existence of any form of Olympism. Whatever the athletic ambitions of women may be, women cannot claim to outdo men in running, fencing, equestrian events, etc. To bring the principle of the theoretical equality of the sexes into play here would be to indulge in a pointless demonstration bereft of meaning or impact.
(Coubertin, 1912b: lines 29-36)

In the nineteenth century, the emphasis in women's athletics was on graceful movement rather than strenuous competition, which was related to 'masculine' development and loss of 'femininity'. Moreover, a related fear was that strenuous sport competition would damage a young woman's health and make her unable to become a mother. In short, the criteria for women's physical activity were hygienic and aesthetic rather than athletic (Guttman, 1992). Besides, there was the common view that women were frail individuals who just could not cope with the physical exertion that was required in many of the events. Interestingly, Hargreaves (1994) notes that, when the IOC held a conference in 1925 to examine the 'issue' of sport and women, "its medical report was a reaffirmation of the popular nineteenth century theory of constitutional overstrain ... urging caution about the type and amount of exercise ... with a scientific justification limiting women's participation in track and field athletics during the following years" (p. 213).

Can the young women I have mentioned before, with justified cruelty, acquire a moral sense through sports, too? I do not believe so. Physical education, athletic physical culture, yes. That is excellent for young girls, for women. But the ruggedness of male exertion, the basis of athletic education when prudently but

resolutely applied, is much to be dreaded when it comes to the female. That ruggedness is achieved physically only when nerves are stretched beyond their normal capacity, and morally only when the most precious feminine characteristics are nullified. Female heroism is no phantom. I would even say, more directly, that it is just as common and perhaps even more admirable than male heroism. (Coubertin, 1928a: lines 158-168, emphasis added)

Here Coubertin is again concerned with the issue of preserving the characteristics of women's femininity, which could be distorted through sport. He always emphasised that "the Olympic Games were established to exalt the individual male athlete, whose existence is necessary for the muscular activity of the group, and whose prowess is necessary to maintain the general competitiveness of all" (Coubertin, 1931b: lines 75-78). Although Coubertin had no objections to women's involvement in physical activity per se, he felt strongly that women should not take part in competitive sport. He always made it clear that "the true Olympic hero is the individual male adult" (Coubertin, 1936: line 43). Interestingly, Coubertin emphasised that women could also demonstrate a kind of heroism through remarkable achievements, but not in the domain of competitive sport. Evidence of what constituted his perceived 'female heroism' is the following:

A record. A Swedish woman, Mrs. Wersall, had all six of her sons taking part in the Games in one way or another, the youngest as boy scouts enrolled to help in maintaining order and carrying messages. How true to ancient ideals! The IOC awarded her the Olympic medal. (Coubertin, 1997b: lines 398-404)

Thus, women were only to be valued for bringing into life Olympic male champions rather than for their own sporting accomplishments. Women's response to this exclusionary attitude was similar to that of the working-class and socialist organisations discussed earlier, namely they formed their own international association. Women from different countries who were interested in sport formed the *Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale* (FSFI) in October 31, 1921, under the leadership of Alice Milliat, and the Women's Amateur Athletics Association (WAAA) was formed in Britain in 1922. It is also worth mentioning that women's participation in sport was encouraged in the national and international socialist sport movement and in the SWSI Workers' Olympics discussed above (Roche, 2000). This group organised a separate female sporting contest, the first 'Women's Olympics', held in 1922 in Monte Carlo, with 300 competitors (Toohey and Veal, 2000). However, subsequent to their success and the continued antagonism of the IOC to their proposed term 'Women's Olympics', the event was renamed and the

FSFI staged the Women's World Games in 1926, 1930 and 1934 (Guttman, 1992; Roche, 2000; Toohey and Veal, 2000).

Sigfrid Edström, founder-president of the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) (1912) and influential member of the IOC's executive board, in response to the pressure caused by the organisation of the 'Women's Olympics' very close to the Olympic Games, voted in 1924 to sanction women's track and field events but not to advocate their inclusion in the Olympic Games. Finally, after hard negotiations between Edström and Miliat, it was agreed that the FSFI would drop the word 'Olympic' in reference to their sport contests, but in return the IAAF agreed to leave the FSFI in control of women's sport (Guttman, 1992). Just as with the worker movement, the women's movement faced internal conflicts because some women wanted women's sport to follow a pattern based more on cooperation, which would be different from that of male competitive sport. Nevertheless, with the success of the 'Women's World Games', the IOC accepted the recommendation of the IAAF to permit the admission of women to a restricted number of athletic events at the Games (on April 5, 1926).

All the same, Coubertin never changed his mind about the participation of women in the Olympic Games, "as to the admission of women to the Games, I remain strongly against it. It was against my will that they were admitted to a growing number of competitions" (Coubertin, 1928b: lines 50-52). Even after the successful organisation of the FSFI successful events in 1922, 1926, 1930 and 1934, his views remained the same, as opposed to the shift he initiated toward the democratisation of Olympism after the analogous rise of the socialist and worker's movements that were discussed above. His writings around this period provide evidence of this refusal to change his views.

Likewise, I continue to think that association with women's athleticism is bad, and that such athleticism should be excluded from the Olympic program—that the Olympiads were restored for the rare and solemn glorification of the individual male athlete. I believe that team sports are out of place in Olympiads, unless they compete in associated tournaments held outside the "Altis" (to use the ancient distinction), in other words, outside the sacred enclosure. (Coubertin, 1934: lines 136-142)

Towards the end of his life, Coubertin explained the rationale for his focus on male adults and adolescents rather than girls.

The average Frenchman's infuriating sense of logic made my friends reproach me: you are working for the adolescent, for the boy ... what are you planning to do for the child, for the girl? ... Nothing at all, was my answer. They are not going to advance my

cause. The reform that I am aiming at is not in the interests of grammar or hygiene. It is a social reform or rather it is the foundation of a new era that I can see coming and which will have no value or force unless it is firmly based on the principle of a completely new type of education. (Coubertin, 1976: lines 125-131, emphasis added)

The Olympic Games were originally part of Coubertin's envisaged social reform based on a new form of education, in which male sport education would be given priority. The absence of grammar or hygiene from this reformed education reflects his ideas about replacing some aspects of academic discipline with a competitive form of sport. Thus, this form of education based on modern competitive sport, and the Anglo-Saxon model of athleticism, would apply only to the male students who were thought to be physically capable of the rigour of competitive sport. In retrospect, his negative views about the participation of women in the Olympic Games may be seen as a corollary of the original plans and initial reasons for his social reform. Physical exercise, in the form of the Anglo-Saxon model of modern sport, would produce a stronger generation of men, and thus a stronger French army. This would therefore heighten the possibilities for France to become a strong imperialistic force again. Nonetheless, even if socio-political changes took place, it may be argued that his interest in the advancement of the male individual, albeit initially related to an imperialistic *raison d'être*, remained a core belief until the end of his life.

Issues of Race

Coubertin understood and interpreted internationalism from a Eurocentric standpoint, which manifests the centrality of the West in the Olympic Movement.

The work [of the Olympic Games] must be lasting, to exercise over the sports of the future that necessary and beneficent influence for which I look-an influence which shall make them the means of *bringing to perfection the strong and hopeful youth of our white race*, thus again helping towards the perfection of all human society. (Coubertin, 1908: lines 214-224, emphasis added)

Therefore, it may also be argued that Coubertin's internationalism was never cosmopolitan, but was tied to the origins of racially exclusive European humanism (Carrington, 2004). Evidence of such racial exclusivity is also the distinction Coubertin makes between the Greek race and other 'Eastern' races, "The Greek race, however, is free from the natural indolence of the Oriental, and it was manifested that the athletic habit, if the opportunity be offered, would easily take root again among its men" (Coubertin, 1896c: p

359). Modern Greece was often seen as part of the East, but being associated with the origins of Europe through its classical past, it gave her advantage over other 'Eastern' nations. "No other Eastern people has such prerogatives to the world's confidence" (Coubertin, 1906: lines 11-12).

In the interwar period, the IOC was influenced by the increasing current of internationalism and pursued a worldwide profile, by promoting Olympism in colonial societies (Hoberman, 1986; Roche, 2000). Therefore, Coubertin encouraged the establishment of Regional Games in different continents for the sake of the expansion of Olympism and based on the principle of universalism, but he made sure first that these games would be limited in number and always under the IOC's control. In this way, he ensured the survival of Olympism in the turbulent post-war years, but also opened ways for its further development. As evident in his writings, principally three Regional Games had his support: Far Eastern Games, South American Games, and African Games. Nonetheless, Coubertin's statements about the indigenous populations in these areas and his perception of 'exotic athleticism' have created images of 'Otherness' presenting them as 'primitive' and 'savage', as opposed to 'us', the 'moderns'. In relation to the Asian people, once he stated the following,

The 'yellow men' seem to us to be admirably prepared to benefit from the athletic crusade that is taking shape. They are ready individually and collectively. They are ready individually because endurance, tenacity, patience, racial flexibility, the habit of self-mastery, of keeping silent, and of hiding pain and effort have shaped their bodies most effectively. They are ready collectively, because their young imperialism, which has not yet had its fill of domination, will impel them to taste the fresh joys of athletic victories, as well as the honour this brings to their national flags. For a while still, clearly, athletic Asia will grow and become strong where it is. Yet it is quite probable that contacts with the West will be made and, at Berlin in 1916, the yellow teams will be able to show what they can do. If that comes as a "revelation", all those who have athleticism and its spread throughout the world close to their hearts must rejoice, with neither second thoughts nor hesitation.
(Coubertin, 1913: lines 49-64, emphasis added)

The social structures of imperialism that defined colonial relationships produced powerful images of Others, placing them in a binary opposition allowing the idea of Europe to emerge. As it developed during the Enlightenment, humanism became a core ideology, and the notion of 'humanity', though partial and narrow, was constructed (Davies 1997). However, Carrington (2004) argues, "humanism far from challenging

European imperialistic expansion and colonial control, actually provided one of the main philosophical justifications for racial error and exploitation" (p. 83). In this context, ideologies of 'race' and white supremacy emerged in European thought, which promoted an ethnocentric, western model of humanism. Sartre (1961) emphasised, "there is nothing more consistent than a racist humanism since the European has only been able to become man through creating slaves and monsters" (cited in Carrington, 2004: 84-85). The ideological content of Olympism, tied to the same origins of the racially exclusive European humanism, was always skewed in practice towards the interests and perspectives of the 'modern' and 'advanced' western nations and empires (Roche, 2000). From this standpoint, Coubertin's references to racial characteristics of the Asians (such as endurance, tenacity, patience and racial flexibility), shares common characteristics with the philosophy of Social Darwinism, which embraced the common interpretation that 'only the strong survive' (Mangan and Nam-gil, 2001, 65). Besides, his emphasis on the benefits that the Asians would gain from their contact with the West provides evidence that the movement had retained ethnocentric and racist attitudes, resembling those adopted by the US and European imperial powers.

Similar references were also made by Coubertin with regard to the Africans. Coubertin had expressed his disappointment that, notwithstanding his efforts to promote organised sport in French colonies, sport practices in those areas remained non-competitive, mostly recreational, activities. However, he had warned the European officials about the forthcoming difficulties in their 'civilising mission' in Africa.

And perhaps it may appear premature to introduce the principle of sports competitions into a continent that is behind the times and among peoples still without elementary culture-and particularly presumptuous to expect this expansion to lead to a speeding up of the march of civilisation in these countries. Let us think however, for a moment, of what is troubling the African soul. Untapped forces-individual laziness and a sort of collective need for action-a thousand resentments, and a thousand jealousies of the white man and yet, at the same time, the wish to imitate him and thus share his privileges-the conflict between wishing to submit to discipline and to escape from it-and, in the midst of an innocent gentleness that is not without its charm, the sudden outburst of ancestral violence ... these are just some of the features of these races to which the younger generation, which has in fact derived great benefit from sport, is turning its attention. Sport has hardened them. It has given them a healthy taste for muscular relaxation and a little of that reasonable fatalism possessed by

energetic beings, once their efforts have been accomplished. But while sport builds up, it also calms down. Provided it remains accessory and does not become a goal in itself, it helps create order and clarify thought. Let us not hesitate therefore to help Africa join in. (Coubertin, 1997a: 141-178, emphasis added)

A significant element of imperialism was the western perception that indigenous cultures (the 'Others') are 'peripheral', 'uncivilised' and 'savage'. Paternalism, hierarchy, conservative and racist discourse were evident in describing the colonial societies with the notion of assumed superiority of the West over the colonies (Said, 1993). It is noted from Coubertin's documents that the African societies were repeatedly described in subordinated terms regarding the spread of Olympic sport in Africa and the development of sport in general.

Here we consider the matter only in relation to the main precepts of sportive pedagogy. Are these precepts applicable to the native races? Can they be adapted to their often very primitive mode of living? The answer is yes, even entirely so. The beauty of these precepts lies in the fact that they are sufficiently humane to suit all conditions of men from the semi-savage state to that of the ultra-civilized state. Of course, when dealing with men, one must take into account the difference of temperaments. (Coubertin, 19831a: lines 96-104)

Providing evidence of 'Social Darwinism' again, Coubertin assumes a 'racial' and 'temperamental' superiority of the Westerners, thus admitting to the West the role of 'civilising force' that will bring "the light of civilisation on the vast continent of Africa" (Coubertin, 1894: lines 359-361).

The time has come for sport to advance to the conquest of Africa, that vast continent which it has as yet hardly touched and to bring to its people the enjoyment of ordered and disciplined muscular effort, with all the benefits which flow from it. (Coubertin, 1923: lines: 1-5)

The above quotation is part of the Olympic solidarity campaign that Coubertin initiated in 1923 but was short-lived due to lack of support (Müller, 2000). Interestingly, in the 1960s Olympic solidarity campaign, initiated by the IOC, the African societies were again described in subordinate terms. Al-Tauqi (2003) has cited the following quotation from the minutes of a meeting held by the Commission for International Olympic Aid (CIOA):

Mr Brundage thought that we should keep ourselves out of all financial considerations, which might put the IOC in an embarrassing position. The President said that above all it was necessary to educate these people and inculcate in them the Olympic ideal. *Any sporting undertaking should be built up the foundation upwards and the people must be taught to help themselves* (CAIO meeting minutes, date unknown: Doc 05; cited in Al-Tauqi 2003: 202, emphasis added).

In similar vein, Coubertin believed that the colonies should be 'instructed' by the imperial powers.

They [i.e. colonies] are like children: it is relatively easy to bring them into the world; the difficult thing is to raise them properly. They do not grow by themselves, but need to be taken care of, coddled, and pampered by the mother country; they need constant attention to incubate them, to understand their needs, to foresee their disappointments, to calm their fears. (Coubertin, 1902; quoted by Hoberman, 1986, 39)

Thus, in the light of such overt paternalistic references, it is suggested that the IOC's attitudes to race and ethnicity were closer to those of British and French imperial paternalism than to any real humanism (Roche, 2000; Carrington, 2004). Moreover, it is argued that even the profoundly imperialistic British Empire Games in the 1930s (the *Commonwealth Games* as they were later renamed) was "probably a more inclusionary international event in relation to non-European 'racial' and ethnic groups than was the Olympics" (Roche, 2000, 110). However, it should be noted that during the decolonisation period that follows, while some ex-colonies rejected the imperial culture, most adapted it to their own cultural ethos. Thus, it can be argued that, although during imperialism modern sport practices were imposed on the indigenous populations, often dismissing their own cultural traditions, in the post-imperial era modern sport games, such as cricket, have often been used by the ex-colonies as a tool to enhance and foster nationalist feelings and racial pride (St. Pierre, 1990; cited in Houlihan, 1994b: 17-18).

Another theme evident in Coubertin's analysis is that he, in common with the colonial powers, viewed the indigenous sporting cultures as 'peripheral' merely providing 'entertainment and recreation'. By contrast, the western sporting model was seen as the only efficient system that with its rules and regulations could lead to competitive sport performances.

There are certain forms of sport activities among natives, which localised to a region, sometimes even to a district, should not be discouraged, on the contrary, they ought to be encouraged, but they do not pretend to be anything else but

a form of entertainment and recreation. If we want to extend to natives of colonized countries, what we call boldly the benefits of 'sport civilisation', it is imperative that we allow them to belong to the vast sport system, which entails rules and regulations and competitive sports results performances, which form the basis of this civilisation. (Coubertin, 1931a: lines 113-119)

In the interwar period, a number of notable imperialism-oriented expos were staged, where non-European 'racial' and ethnic groups, such as Africans and Japanese, showed evidence of their 'modernisation' process by cultural displays.

Three years later, we had the Colonial Exhibition in Paris (1931 Ed.), which commemorated the centenary of French Africa, and showed the progress realised by sport in that country. *Do not be mistaken, however, the situation is not yet frank and definite. Sport there meant chiefly spectacular sport manifestations. It did not mean at all that natives were encouraged to go in for sport, nor did it give them facilities and encouragement for their training in manly games but above all, it failed to make them understand the true philosophical value and pedagogic importance of the motto we alluded to the other day, in connection with the African medal created in 1923 by the International Olympic Committee as a medal of encouragement, on it were engraved the following words: 'athletae propium est se ipsum noscere, ducere et vincere'.* (Coubertin, 1931a: lines 64-75, emphasis added)

Major imperial expos were planned in Britain and France in the pre-war period, but these plans were delayed by the war and were restored soon after it. France staged a 'Colonial and International Exhibition' in Paris in 1931 which attracted 33 million visitors and is described as "a stunning imperial fantasyland" (Rydell, 1993; Greenhalgh, 1988; cited in Roche, 2000, 59). The sporting tradition of the imperial powers, predominantly 'modern sport' based on western (mainly Anglo-Saxon) rules and regulations, was imposed on the colonies often with the intention to undermine indigenous sport traditions or with the aim of 'civilising' the colony (Guttman, 1994; Houlihan, 1994b).

Concluding remarks

Olympism has been criticised for being inherently contradictory. My analysis has illustrated that the nature of this philosophy has been a contested one in the discourse of the modern Olympic Movement. Coubertin's rhetoric spoke of universal ideals and equal opportunities

for all people and all nations, but at the same time his Olympism may be seen as exclusionary, elitist and racist. The notion of amateurism, a concept developed by the Victorian middle and upper middle classes to legitimise the exclusion of the working classes from sport, is inconsistent with the call of Olympism for 'sport for all', which was mainly made and supported in the aftermath of the First World War. The exclusion of women and the provision of a "podium for the celebration of competitive, physical masculinities in contradistinction to other masculinities and femaleness" (Wamsley, 2004, 235) have also raised questions about the 'universal' ideals of Olympism during the early years of the movement. Racial categorisations and discriminations, sharing characteristics with Social Darwinism, were part of the operationalised Olympism of the early century, despite ideals of racial equality and fraternity. Coubertin, as evidenced in his writings, has often attached racial characteristics to indigenous people from Asia ('racial flexibility') (Coubertin, 1931c) and Africa ('lazy') (Coubertin, 1997a), while he for example also perceived the 'white race' to be the leading civilising force of the world (Coubertin, 1908).

Moreover, the social structures of imperialism that defined colonial relationships and produced powerful images of 'Others' are also reflected in the expression of Olympism during the early years of its expansion outside Europe (1918-1937). In this period, ideologies of 'race' and white supremacy emerged in European thought, which promoted an ethnocentric, western model of humanism (Davis, 1997). During this period, many imperialism-oriented expos were staged, where non-European 'racial' and ethnic groups, mainly Africans and Asians, showed evidence of their 'modernisation' process in cultural displays. Olympism, ideologically linked with the racially exclusive European humanism of that time, was distorted in practice towards the interests of the 'modern' and 'advanced' western nations and empires. As discussed before, Coubertin's references to racial characteristics of the Asians (such as endurance, tenacity, patience and racial flexibility) (Coubertin, 1931c) and the Africans ('individual laziness', 'a thousand jealousies of the white man', 'the conflict between wishing to submit to discipline and to escape from it') (Coubertin, 1997a) share common characteristics with the philosophy of Social Darwinism. Besides, his frequent paternalistic references, which cast the West in the role of 'civilising force', and assumed 'racial' and 'temperamental' superiority of Westerners, have provided evidence that the movement had retained ethnocentric and racist attitudes, similar to those adopted by the US and European imperial powers.

Looking at Coubertin's view that indigenous sporting cultures were 'peripheral', merely for 'entertainment and recreation', whereas the western, 'modern' sporting model provided the only efficient system that could lead to competitive sport performances, evidence of cultural imperialism is provided again. In addition, unlike many colonials who were against the

organisation and development of regional modern sport (through initiatives such as the African Games) fearing that their victory could lead to rebellion, Coubertin always encouraged them to spread sport among the colonised. His ultimate motive was related again to European interests. Moreover, the Eurocentric character of the Olympic organisation is evident in the promotion of a single sporting model. The history of the Olympic Movement is replete with examples of 'assimilation' to this single 'universal' model, e.g., Women's, Worker's, communist movements, and partial assimilation of the paralympic movement (though this is still successfully resisted by the International Paralympic Association, IPA) (Schantz, 2004). There are some examples of interculturalism, e.g., the incorporation of judo and *tae kwon do* into the Games. There is also one recent example of a recognition of the need for 'separate development' in the case of the *Islamic Countries Women's Sport Games* (Henry, 2005).

Nonetheless, the Olympic Movement, which today, consists of the IOC, the Organising Committees of the Olympic Games (OCOGs), the NOCs, the IFs, the national associations, clubs and, of course, the athletes (IOC 2005), has developed a global network through which the values of Olympism are disseminated not only through the conduct of the Olympic Games, but also by the organisation of Olympic education programmes, including the IOA and the NOAs, as well as by the establishment of the global sports development programme of Olympic Solidarity. Thus, it may be claimed that, notwithstanding its inherent contradictions and paradoxes, its humanist ideals have still much to offer in the global cultural space of the Olympic Movement including the Olympics, one of the biggest mega events of modern times, which may still have the potential to act as a forum for alternative worldviews and epistemologies.

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