

## **MULTICULTURALISM AND UNIVERSAL PROCLAIMED VALUES IN OLYMPIC MOVEMENT: AN APPROACH TO HUMAN RIGHTS AND SPORT DEVELOPMENT?**

**Lamartine DaCosta, Neise Abreu and Ana Miragaya  
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The remark of multiculturalism embedded in Olympic sport may initially be examined harking back to Pierre de Coubertin's basic principles of international understanding and mutual respect as issued in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As yet, considering the present-day worldwide trend towards the promotion of cultural integration and diversification, the Olympic Movement and the Olympic Games are here understood to have an explicit engagement on cultural relativism. This paper aims at providing a theoretical basis for this typical relativism from multicultural assemblages in contrast to proclaimed Olympic universal values, in view of current debates on the needed universality of Human Rights for sport concerns.

In retrospect, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, with his principles of Enlightenment, began this Movement with the modern version of the Olympic Games. He was successful in leading an international congress in Paris 1894 to call upon participant nations in order to accomplish this restoration. After controversy and negotiations, it was decided by a group of 10 nations to re-establish the Games, beginning in 1896. Henceforth, the so-called neo-Olympism appeared, and Coubertin conceived it to meet a "philosophy of life" based on proclaimed universal values.

This intention of universality is one of the primordial characteristics of both the Olympic Movement as well as the Olympic Games, as far as they were grounded in the presupposed philosophical principles of Olympism. As initiator of Olympic Movement, Coubertin developed, after 1894, a renewed doctrine based on the Ancient Olympic Games and oriented towards a social pedagogy, which supposedly could be adapted to any ethnic group or culture. In this sense, one of the main historians of Coubertin's life, Yves Pierre Boulongne (1994, p. 22), divulges in one of his writings that the Olympic Congresses from 1897 to 1914 "defined the doctrine and promoted Olympism as a universal value".

Nevertheless, the cultural relations established within the Olympic Movement led to an international understanding implied meaning without explicitly promoting a discussion of the universal acceptance of the values of Olympism as related to the particular values of each culture. In other words, sports activities are taught and experienced in different ways in each society, according to the interpretations of the specific local culture.

### **Olympic universality**

Anyway, Coubertin's multicultural vision of Olympism had a specific construction based on the intention of the universality of the Games and the Olympic Movement. In one of his texts from 1920 it was recorded that in the Olympic Games of London 1908, there was a

"resolution to include not only all the nations but also all the games. All games, all nations". (Coubertin, 1920)

The Olympic Games of Athens (1896) started the process of baptism of Olympism. The second Olympiad (1900) in Paris revealed the modern character of the Games, and the third Olympiad (Saint Louis, 1904) showed that 'the universal trend of the movement became clear' (p.10). The process of baptism was finally completed in London, four years later (1908). Thus, the expression "All games, all nations" is representative of the Olympic ideology, presupposed in this investigation and displayed in several texts, including one from 1911, in which Coubertin precisely reinforced the doctrine of 'all games, all nations', depicting for the first time a multicultural trait: "The fundamental rule of Modern Olympic Games is linked with two expressions: all games, all nations. The power to change this rule does not come from the International Olympic Committee. I would add to this explanation that a nation is necessarily an independent State and that there is a sport geography that can sometimes differentiate from the political geography".

In other words, a multiple cultural approach for Coubertin was an implicit universal construction, but clearly founded on the distinction between nation and culture, according to the beliefs of that period. Again, a reexamination of the texts shows that the period between 1908 and 1924 can be considered by and large as the period when Coubertin approximated the concept of multiculturalism. This latter term, by the way, is from recent extraction, and the 'all games, all nations' doctrine seems to have dissolved when Coubertin withdrew from the presidency of the International Olympic Committee - IOC, in 1925.

However, the universal claim has been kept up to present day under several rationales of the IOC, including the option that it should be incorporated into the Olympic Charter. For instance, the Principles of the Olympic Charter of 1997 clearly proclaim several values such as the one of the second principle, which refers to the definition of Olympism as a movement which "seeks to create a way of life based on the joy found in effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles" (p.8). The seventh principle also demonstrates an assumption of universal values: "The activity of the Olympic Movement symbolized by five interlaced rings is universal and permanent. It covers the five continents. It reaches its peak with the bringing together of athletes of the world at the great sports festival, the Olympic Games" (p. 9).

Still in retrospective terms, DaCosta (2002) identified in the 1930s phase of the Olympic Movement not only an apparent multicultural focus but also a dominant eurocentrism. In sum, the motto "all sports, all nations" in the decade of the 1930s was under a different interpretation key than Coubertin's Olympism, as it passed from an eclectic concept to an outlined understanding based on limited ideological and political confrontations. Moving out from Coubertin's lifetime to contemporary Olympic Movement's facts, it is symptomatic that in many sessions promoted by the International Olympic Academy - IOA (Greece), there have been declared and explicit preoccupations with multiculturalism related to Olympism.

For instance, in the 33<sup>rd</sup> IOA Main Session - 1993, some representatives from the African continent questioned the fact that modern Olympism only values the practice of sports that are characteristic of the European continent. In the same session, a discussion emerged about the viability to commend universal human values of sport practice upon societies still full of racial, social and political conflicts (Abreu, 2002). In keeping with these debates, some principles proposed by Olympism continue to be distant conditions, since these principles are far from representing a singular sports culture. In this concern, there is a need to review the notion of multiculturalism facing the possible adoption of cultural relativism by the Olympic Movement as one of its main operational definitions. Additionally, the understanding of the formation of a multicultural group is often considered groundwork for the Olympic Education concerns.

### **Multiculturalism**

Multiculturalism as a term has appeared very recently. According to many sources, this word emerged in the United States of America during the 1990s. At the beginning of the 1980s, the same expression appeared as a code to hide the word "race". It became linked with (to) the appearance of the language considered "politically correct", established in that country to fit the social-economic minorities discriminated against by the developed nations' market. Within this context, the expression 'multiculturalism' often gives the impression of a cultural mixture or cultural diversity, but it carries a 'politically correct' statement.

The anthropologist Eller (1997), focusing on the initial concept of multiculturalism, found similarities with the concept of anthropology; both terms contradict each other when they are treated under the concept of culture. Otherwise, paraphrasing another anthropologist (Cardoso, 1995), multiculturalism, under political and practical conceptualization in several domains, has formed, in some Western countries, debates and endless polemics. Multiculturalism was (has been) confronted with different philosophies related to the way to promote equal opportunities. From these debates, concepts from several areas, like biology, sociology and anthropology have emerged. Above all, multiculturalism found its roots and its theoretical stems in anthropology. Culture and cultural relativism concepts are indications of a multicultural approach in spite of different usage and ideological implications. Anthropology as a social science has been brought into relation with the development of multiculturalism and has also been influencing it. Yet, according to Eller, in a certain way multiculturalism is an applied anthropology. But, in spite of this proximity, the dialogue between both areas of knowledge has not been intense and sometimes their influences can not be seen.

The increasingly growth of heterogeneous societies (from the intensification of migrations, ethnic interactions, globalized intercultural relations, and movements in favor of Human Rights) guides approaches that can not stem from traditional cultural concepts and traditional cultural relativism concepts. Facing these realities, the problematic of culture concepts becomes indispensable and it is considered a collective elaboration, in continuous transformation.

Within this scenario, how are Olympic values going to be brought into discussion? How are proclaimed universal values going to be attached to cultural diversity? Epistemologically, to what future is it possible to guide these values? In this context, an attempt is needed to find solutions for economic and social inequality, including concepts such as multiculturalism, post modernity, ethnic and gender issues.

Eller's concern (1997) towards this topic is related to the debate around the dangers of either adopting a multiculturalist's point of view or an anti-multiculturalist's point of view. First of all, multiculturalists' conception about multiculturalism is that several cultures living together can either destroy a country's national identity or enhance the power of a nation with cultural diversities. Universal values are old attempts of Human Beings to create values accepted, absorbed and reproduced among all cultures - a kind of knowledge that is valid to (in) any situation. While trying to relate multiculturalism to universalism, an adjoining line between the preservation of cultural characteristics and the good use of all the traditional and classic values stored by humankind is being drawn.

The impact of the civilization toward the rearrangement of the world order settles a collision between power and culture as well as the tendency to establish universal concepts. The political structure of some civilizations reacts against Western universalized concepts and transfers the presupposed established power to other representative issues such as the necessity of international understanding, preservation, inclusion and valorization of non-Western cultures. It does not mean that we have to get rid of philosophies that proclaim universal values, but we have to consider the world conflicts and examine if certain paradigms do not have eternal validity.

### **Olympism developments**

Historically speaking, Olympism has been taking multiculturalism in consideration and this experience showed that a focus that was adequate in a certain period of time does not mean that it would be likewise in another period. A growing number of institutions, organizations, research centers and teachers are now debating multiculturalism and its influence in everyone's life. Several channels are being used to make these groups meet, including schools, Internet, and occasionally, Olympic Movement's institutions.

Although many people consider Olympism a dogmatic theory and criticize it for its doctrinaire discourses, Olympism has changed its profile thanks to some scholars who advocate an applicable Olympism. Lining up with this model, Parry (1998) suggests that the philosophical anthropology of Olympism promotes the ideal of individual all round harmonious human development; excellence and achievement; effort in competitive sporting activity; mutual respect, fairness, justice and equality; lasting personal human relationship of friendship; international relationships of peace, toleration and understanding; and cultural alliances with the arts.

With this proposal, Olympism embraces a variety of contemporary issues that cover some basic required conditions to be adjusted to our present world. Another proposal was

developed by DaCosta (1998, p. 193) by understanding Olympism as a Progress Philosophy, a proposition generally defined today as a speculative construction of philosophical positions or directions yet without internal coherence, which asserts that reality is constantly in a process of change. Parry and DaCosta link their interpretations of Olympism to the promotion of values.

### **Closing**

In conclusion, it is worth mentioning another DaCosta's (1998, p. 198) argument when one approaches dilemmas, paradoxes and overall constraints of the Olympic Movement worldwide nowadays:

"Then philosophically, the practical meaning of Olympism is more concerned with cultural claims than with scientific or pedagogical prescriptions. (...) In principle, while athleticism requires control in macro-relations, the symbolic identity of man in his pluralistic environment comprises values and contingent experiences in micro-relations, demanding a new approach to equilibrium after all."

Regarding this interpretation, a concluding remark of the present review concerns to the two-level differentiation of Olympism: while DaCosta had recommended a pluralistic and progressive adaptation to Olympic doctrine, MacAloon (1991) proposes in the same context of analysis "global interconnections" and "cultural differentiation", both mutually adapted. Equivalent approach has Müller (1990), to whom Olympism progresses keeping "immutable values" from its historical foundations and developing "updated values". Coincidentally, Liponski (1987) envisages present-day "Olympic Universalism" as opposed to "Olympic Pluralism", prescribing a long-lasting process of introducing "to Olympism the cultural and philosophical experience of societies other than Western".

Summarizing, this two-level approach suggests that each Olympic value must be submitted to an agreement involving a diversity of cultural understanding. In this case, "universal" value should be an agreed value and not necessarily an outcome of Olympic and Coubertin's traditions. This option for mutual understanding is more a philosophical problem than an anthropological contention related to cultural relativism. Finally, in terms of the current discussion emphasized on the initial proposition of this paper, should this suggestion be also applicable to Human Rights approaches in sport based on multiculturalism? Should we all be finally able to find a balance between the need of universal values and the respect to particular cultural identities?

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**Lamartine DaCosta, PhD, Universidade Gama Filho, Rio de Janeiro,**  
<lamartine@terra.com.br>

**Neise Abreu, PhD, Escola Americana, Rio de Janeiro, <neise.abreu@earj.com.br>**

**Ana Miragaya, PhD, Universidade Gama Filho, Rio de Janeiro,**  
**<amiragaya@uol.com.br>**

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