

A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON SPORT-FOR-DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSES: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The work being done in the area of Sport-for-Development (SfD) or Sport-for-Development and Peace (SDP) has increased in critical mass in the past decade with several of the research paradigms emanating from neo-colonial and neo-liberal traditions in the Global North. Under scrutiny is the collective hegemony of powerful northern stakeholders in multiple partnerships directing 'development' for achieving the Millennium Development Goals through sport. There is a need for original and innovative counter paradigms underpinned by alternative Southern worldviews to challenge these hegemonic (intellectual) practices. Radical post-colonial paradigms inform the interrogation of four prominent discourses relating to: North-South polarisation; positionality in terms of locality and thematic fields; lack of evidence; and a deficit (reduction) model approach. The politics rooted in the academic/donor/NGO complex exposes privileged voices in the neo-colonial space of SfD work that will remain entrenched in Western intelligibility unless exposed to radical transformation and collective agency at all levels of engagement.

Key words: Sport-for-development; Neo-colonial; Neo-liberalism; Global North; Global South.

INTRODUCTION

Various discourses in the field of sport-for-development (SfD) emerged since the United Nations (UN) 'declared' sport as an effective tool for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (Beutler, 2008). Seldom has a field developed into a social movement within one decade and enjoyed significant political agency and multi-stakeholder engagement (Kidd, 2008; Hayhurst *et al.*, 2011; Suzuki & Kurosu, 2012). Samir Amin, Director of the Third World Forum, questions the 'hypocrisy' of political powers (United States, European and Japanese elites), and their hegemony in the UN, as they stand united in their 'fight against poverty' (Amin, 2006:4). This critique of 'hypocrisy' is also addressed by Kidd (2011), who argued against the uncritical way of making sport part of the international 'aid chain' without recognising the ideology behind sport practices and decision-making processes. SDP policy frameworks often package interventions as 'apolitical and relevant' (Darnell, 2007). The notion of 'development', embedded in 'sport development', affords international sport agencies legitimacy to exercise their collective imperialism, and has attracted global sport powers such as FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) and the IOC (International Olympic Committee) as key stakeholders (Sugden & Tomlinson, 2003).

Kay (2012) describes how SfD carries a high level of political significance in that it is recognised as an extension of the Olympic legacy concept. The rollout of international inspirations to 20 countries as part of the 2012 London Olympic Games bears witness to this, particularly through their 'legacy programmes'. The concept of 'legacy and development' of Third World nations through elite and SfD (life skill based) programmes, is premised on the bourgeois concept of 'catching up the historical delay' (Herrera, 2005). Global integration that allows for the flow of foreign capital and expertise, frames an image of political agency for development work in different spheres, including in different sport practices (Pithouse, 2013). The politics rooted in the academic/donor/NGO complex further underpins the construction of paradigms around SfD practices that takes place in a neo-colonial space.

Academic agency and research mostly derive from assessments of diverse SfD interventions that cover a plethora of scientific and methodological approaches. The dominant approaches here were reductionist and positivist logical modelling, with the implication that sport is an antidote to many social ills and is inherently 'good' (Coalter, 2007a; Coakley, 2011). Coalter (2013) spoke out against the deficit model approach and argued that impoverished populations are not inherently 'deviant' or suffering from 'deficits', but should be understood in the context of their living conditions. People are not merely mechanisms in linear processes of growth and development. Neither is the 'poor' an 'objective collective' with universal experiences of 'living in slums' or 'being unemployed' (Pithouse, 2013). We live in complex and different 'life worlds' where the local and universal articulate (Dube, 2002). Meaningful insights cannot be generated from a reductionist and Eurocentric view of the African Other without scrutinising the evidence and liberal ideology that frame (Western) ways of knowing (Jaworski, 2012; Coalter, 2013). Deterministic research agendas, often prescribed by funding agencies, impose social control mechanisms rather than illuminate and interpret local knowledge, power struggles and inequalities (Mosse, 2001; Nicholls *et al.*, 2011).

The discourse of contextual understandings and capturing privileged 'voices', informed recent debate and praxis amongst academia in the field of SfD (Levermore, 2011; Lindsey & Grattan, 2012). Although there are researchers questioning the neo-liberal ideas and practices, alternative frameworks as analytical tools are lacking (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2012). Many researchers schooled in Western research traditions with limited research experience beyond donor-driven impact assessments, pursue uncritical research practices and neo-liberal understandings underpinning them (Kay, 2012).

Western thought concepts come packaged with validation credentials and universal constructs of persuasive morality, such as 'human justice', 'equality' and 'empowerment'. Such socio-political constructs have the image of political agency in the global South, but 'development work' seldom delivers in terms of 'have-nots'. Darnell (2007) advocates that SDP work should be integrated into or mainstreamed in all forms of development and should take on a self-critical edge. The question remains, though: what ideological stances would best serve such a critical edge? New World black thinkers like C.L.R. James and W.E.B. DuBois argue that Western Marxists remained unconsciously bound by Eurocentric perspectives (Pithouse, 2013). Without ideological scrutiny, neo-liberal thinking continues to structure debates and Western-centric practices across a range of sectors. This paper aims to interrogate some

prominent discourses in the field of SfD and expose the underlying Western socio-political and cultural intelligibility thereof.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The first discourse under scrutiny is the *neo-liberal approach* directing the global agenda for SfD (Darnell, 2010a). The ‘developmental’ paradigm underpins global interest in the almost mythical power of sport as a catalyst for societal change. SDP international policy frameworks and UN declarations, advocacy and interventions uncritically propose sport as a low-cost and highly beneficial tool for youth empowerment as a keystone of individual development and agency. Neo-liberal power relations and propaganda chartered the SfD discourse, with some hegemonic resilience and persuasive advocacy by the who’s who of world leaders and capitalist powerhouses (Levermore, 2009; Darnell, 2010a). Addressing global stakeholders, the Secretary General for the UN, Ban Ki-moon (2011), professed that the power of sport is the ‘good of mankind’, saying:

“Can the sporting fraternity support liberation and transformation through transfer of values? Children suffer most from conflict and can regain confidence by taking part in sport. Sport has come a long way in the work of the UN in the past 10 years. Sport has become a world language – a global industry and a powerful tool for progress and development. We have to work together to reach the *Millennium Development Goals*”.

The social and political utility value of sport became almost conceptually intertwined with neo-liberal ideology, so much so that it is unquestionably assumed that individuals have the agency and will to bring about an utopian social (democratic) order and improved quality of life. Coalter (2010:296) is outspoken against the mythopoeic and “crudely functionalist assertions about sport’s socialising and transformative properties”. Darnell (2010a) holds the view that SDP programmes are a perpetuation of the colonisation process. Radical thinking and agency, as encapsulated by Badiou’s Kantian ideas and Césaire’s advocacy for an ‘international Left’, challenge the status quo of powerful neo-colonial networks (Césaire, 2000; Badiou, 2010; Pithouse, 2013). The critique is also directed towards the absorption of (sport) development policies and programmes by Southern partners or subsidiaries. This sentiment is shared by scholars advocating a critical revolutionary praxis for overcoming the inherent neo-colonial ‘content’. Many argue for SDP frameworks that may act as a catalyst for bringing about radical transformation in SDP discourse and practice (Ndiritu & Lynn, 2003; Symphorien, 2009).

The blindness to unequal power relations seems an aspect of neo-liberalism, at least as an explicit aspect of neo-liberal discourses premised in notions of individual sovereignty, responsibility and rationality. Northern donors often provide well-resourced SfD programmes laden with colonial ideology to recipient communities in the Global South. The latter are often confronted with the reality of accepting these resources on the terms dictated to them, or remaining without them. Persuasive agendas lead to relationships of ‘giving-and-receiving’, with the recipients being responsible for producing the predetermined outcomes. Individuals are held accountable for their own destiny and ‘progress’, regardless of structural barriers, which in sport practices may relate to the absence of essential material resources to access sport programmes. Feeding SfD primarily through the local NGO-sector poses challenges of donor-dependency and an uncritical acceptance of resources (including programmes). This relates to a lack of interrogation of *unequal power relations* in terms of ownership of

interventions and the drive towards sustainability in resource-poor environments (Saul, 1997; Andreasson, 2010). Without challenging the sources of power masked in notions of (equal but different), partnerships to spread neo-colonial philosophies and cultural practices, colonial domination in multiple spheres is perpetuated by local populations earmarked for 'development' (Bray, 2003). SDP interventions, implemented by powerful Northern NGOs and development agencies, seldom demonstrate lasting effects in addressing local needs and priorities.

Poverty is treated as an infliction and the poor as victims of their 'own making'. When 'volunteers' are recruited among unemployed youth and exploited by low wages (stipends), with training focused on the 'delivery of development', debates about ethical practices hardly reach the boardrooms (Burnett, 2011a). The relatively short funding periods of many projects compromise the sustainability, or taking up local and many social entrepreneurs (NGOs) play by the rules of the donor, and move from partnership to partnership where funding can be obtained (Burnett, 2011a; Kay, 2012). In this sense, they become the 'hands for hire' and channels for delivering neo-liberal ideas well vested in programme content and methodology.

In the neo-colonial packaging of 'development', local agencies and participants experience relatively little freedom to pursue their own interests or make rational choices bringing about growth and progress on their terms (Symphorien, 2009). Envisaged outcomes and justifications for the SDP work in developing economies often muffle critical voices speaking out against neo-liberal interventions (Spaaij, 2010; Kidd, 2011). Selective evidence provides a justification for the politics of the elites, conceptually rooted in the academic/donor/NGO complex (Spivak, 1999). This rings very true for such as most decision-makers are from the North where privileged voices are mediated in building a case for SDP work.

Implementing partners are equally blinded by notions of delivering 'development' to the 'common good' of their constituencies, but choose to ignore broader discriminatory, structural and exploitative cultural practices (gender discrimination) (Skille, 2007). Pre-conceived success indicators for development programmes are re-informed by monitoring and evaluation data reporting on selected outcomes. If the goal of 'youth leadership' or 'empowerment' is a programme directive, evidence is packaged to 'attest' to its achievement regardless of the transferability of such programme outcomes or effects (Burnett, 2006; Kay & Spaaij, 2011). Self-professed positive effects on participating families, social institutions and communities reinforce the prevailing assumptions and if 'no effects' are noted, there is a high level of blame directed towards an implementing partner (Crabbe, 2007).

Dominant ways of knowing and meaning are *socially constructed* and reflective of very diverse SDP programmes. The neo-liberal individualistic determination (and, by implication, global consensus), contrasts with non-Western-ness and different non-Western epistemologies. For instance, a disparity is reflected in the *Ubuntu* ideology of Southern Africa (found throughout the continent with different terminologies), where a collective consciousness directs life courses, as opposed to the individual consciousness driven by agencies from the Global North (Kotzé, 1993). The embodiment of this ideology in SDP practices in Zambia mainly relates to the role of peer-educators in acting as 'real' role models for sport participants in their programmes (Lindsey & Grattan, 2012). Such an Africanist worldview and practices provide the impetus of high levels of bonding and collective activity

rather than fostering individualism or competitiveness (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2011). It is a philosophy and way of life where the collective supersedes the individual and interdependency translates into the forming of cohesive teams and social closeness between the coach and participants (Khoza, 2006; Nkondo, 2007).

However, there is not a singular post-colonial South, an 'absolute'. Such a construction demonstrates fluidity, struggle and contestation as evidenced in the radicalism of Badiou to create an "egalitarian society which, acting under its impetus, brings down walls and barriers" (Pithouse, 2013:92). There are identifiable collectivist elements of different ontological and epistemological frames in the South that underpins radical opposition to colonial thought.

Many political communities emerge within the neo-colonial space created by SfD. A binding force centres around partnerships based on shared sentiments, trust, cooperation and altruism to improve the lives of vulnerable people and 'communities in need' (Bond, 2000; Zegeye & Krige, 2001). Such 'communitarianism' is anchored in the reality of time and place as framed by Agamben's insights of how it might transcend beyond the local (Jaworski, 2012). It is also at the heart of the 'active citizenship' demonstrated by local peer-educators, which is at the root of the volunteerism on which many development projects depend for implementation and acceptance at community level (Burnett, 2012b). Programmes' reach and 'uptake' require the mobilisation and readiness of and buy-in from vulnerable populations to engage in and benefit from SfD initiatives. Along with notions of belongingness and development of social capital (bonding, linking and bridging), community integration and 'transformation' are projected and 'assessed' (Burnett, 2006; Coalter, 2013).

Placing *culture and local realities* at the centre of interventions and analyses, a cultural studies framework (developed from a Marxist perspective), provides the mechanisms for understanding prevailing power relations in relation to praxis (as intellectual work with a thrust for practice) (Pope, 2010). At the local levels of programme implementation, unequal power relations and resource availability reflect local layering of socio-political and economic hierarchies (Maru & Woodford, 2005). If a particular NGO is well-resourced and politically connected, the chance of delivering top-down programmes are enhanced. This holds true for the status of those local coaches or peer-educators delivering SfD programmes. Sugden (2011) reports on such effects through working with the youth in conflict zones in Israel. From his critical work in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, it is clear that collectives in local settings are influenced differently by forces of religion, history and the buy-in from local populations. Complex and overlapping power relations and collective resistance are often at play. For instance, dominant views such as patriarchal values and practices in the South show differential manifestations and contested in a myriad ways from within. The individual counts at all levels of engagement and research should unearth such localised realities (Brady, 2005; Harvey *et al.*, 2007). This indicates a need for a more complex paradigm and understanding of intersecting 'life world' as the individual and collectives experience and react to SDP work (Dube, 2002). An increased body of knowledge is emerging where, by utilising a plethora of disciplinary approaches and methodology, 'local voices are captured' (Kay, 2012). However, the complexity of how a sports programme fits into the 'life worlds' of individuals and collectives seldom features in broader or longitudinal analyses (Cronin, 2011).

Whereas events create ‘moments of togetherness’, they lack depth, with the consequence that at times the ‘lingering effect’ is one of ‘no change’, or in cases of highly competitive circumstances, they might even intensify mistrust and conflict. The boundaries and temporality of ‘effects’ were indicated by Schulenkorf (2010) in his work on the impact of sport events on ethnic reconciliation between the Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim sportspersons from Sri Lanka. In another study, by Sherry (2010), the relatively narrow focus provides only a lens of self-assessed changes in the behaviours of homeless sportspersons (‘Street Socceros’), who participated in the Australian Homeless World Cup team. Given the complexity of real-life settings and filtered inclusion criteria determined by unequal power relations, the lens should be ‘wider’ and ‘deeper’. SfD programme effects should be interpreted against the sense-making thereof by the participants and beneficiaries within their lived-realities, and within a particular geographical and historical setting.

Leading scholars are increasingly arguing for a more holistic understanding and participative approach capable of rendering multifaceted and nuanced understandings. Retrospective inquiry, typology development (Giulianotti, 2011), the dynamics of social impacts (Sugden, 2011), development dynamic analysis (Burnett, 2011b) and the scrutiny of evidence (Kay, 2012), are all directives for future research and theory construction. The following four discourses informed by neo-liberal ideas speak to persistent ways, reminiscent of earlier paleo-colonialism and what Chakrabarty (2012:142) described as “European domination”, justified by “their civilizing mission”. These chosen discourses demonstrate a high prominence and prevailing neo-colonial political ideology flowing from a Northern core to Southern peripheries through socio-political and economic mechanisms (Dieng, 2007).

North-South polarisation

Modern sport, grounded in socially constructed (Western) phenomena, carries, in itself, the global colonial ideology, which is imprinted on the historical, material and contextual landscape of influence and intervention (Saavedra, 2009). These ideologies and ‘structural adjustments’ are ever-present in the SDP as a global force. SDP operates in the context of implementing national co-ownership and completing the loop for masterminding a reductionist and uncritical global agenda for preconceived change (Burnett, 2012a). Coalter (2013) poses the questions of ‘what change?’ and ‘on whose terms?’ as integral in such a debate. In real-world applications, provincializing critical theory shows how powerful elites influenced post-colonial and Indian history after subaltern studies (Chakrabarty, 2012). Such critical work queries dominant SDP narratives (Tiessen, 2011). It calls for radical views and relates to the need for interrogating the ideological underpinnings of scholarly work. If developmental debates are uncritically followed, they may stifle innovation and agency among an emerging research community. It may also perpetuate an agenda dominated by Northern scholars (and neo-liberal paradigms), without questioning the very roots of knowledge production (Burnett, 2012a). It is about insightful and critical research rather than geographical locality. For instance, the work of sport anthropologists on Kenyan running (as a phenomenon), generates new insights of local phenomena that break down stereotypical barriers and bridge the North-South divide (Bale & Sang, 1996). Established scholars should charter new ways of conducting research and address the SDP in a complex way, rather than pursuing a particular disciplinary perspective or personal research interests.

In addition, delivering on the theory construction, layering processes and local understandings of 'whiteness' (as opposed to the African Other), demonstrate ethnocentrism and stratified thinking from the standpoint of privilege and respectability (Darnell, 2010b, 2011). Darnell (2011) critiques the viewpoints of 'racial' and 'class' superiority evident in how international (predominantly white) volunteers reflect on their sport coaching experiences as placements with NGOs in the Global South. Such volunteers, who come from first world countries, are privileged and often relatively well-remunerated compared to their local counterparts. Donors may recruit, train and even pay local implementers under the smokescreen of 'empowerment', yet seldom reach beyond labour exploitative practices (Kay & Bradbury, 2009). Many of these employment and 'empowerment' opportunities are temporary in nature, and they also do not lead to positive transformation in the lives of individuals and households within impoverished communities, where resources are scarce and unemployment rates consistently high (Burnett, 2011a). It is an issue of perpetuated inequality and partial inclusion masked as notions of empowerment, because training for programme implementation rarely facilitates independence and agency. Making a living out of coaching sport is not a reality, while transferring experience from the sport context to the world of work is equally challenging.

Positionality and disciplinary perspectives

Positionality directly links to the North-South divide with most research agendas being driven by global agencies in the North following (Kidd, 2008 & 2011; Cronin, 2011). The advocacy of the World Health Organisation influenced development agencies and promoted sport as an agent for development (Levermore & Beacom, 2012). Cronin's *Comic Relief Review* (2011) mentions reports produced between 2005 and 2011 outside the Global North, namely from South Africa, Kenya and Zambia. With researchers in this field mainly positioned in the Global North, it is to be expected that a small minority (9%) of research will be produced in Africa with even less research produced by sport sociologists. Coakley (2011) showed that 35 of the 265 sources listed (13.2%), were associated with researchers in the field of the sociology of sport with the implication of a limited knowledge pool from this disciplinary perspective.

The England Sport Monitor (2012) is an on-line monitoring service of the most up-to-date reference sources, including critical reviews of published research evidence on the contribution of sport to a range of social issues. Of the more than 144 research publications, most were in the field of 'physical fitness and health' (n=36), followed by 'participation', as well as 'economic impact and the regeneration of local communities' (n=26). 'Education and Life Long Learning' (n=18) and 'psychological health and well-being' (n=17) were also prioritised in terms of publication frequency, compared to community-related effects, which were captured as 'crime reduction and community safety' (n=13) and 'social capacity and cohesion'. Only a few papers addressed methodological matters and monitoring and evaluation (n=3).

Demarcation of SfD research is problematic, as scholars map the field from their own conceptual frameworks where some multi-disciplinary studies cut across a range of academic and professional fields. A more daunting task for researchers is to provide comparable research across a wide spectrum of delivery models and sport or forms of physical culture (Coalter, 2013). In addition to the sport+ and +sport models (Coalter, 2007a), Burnett (2009)

identified 'sport-in-development' or integrated and 'comprehensive' approaches. Giulianotti (2011) described three ideal-type models, namely 'technical', 'dialogical' and 'critical' to add to the existing clustering. While the technical SfD or SDP model is underpinned by a realist, positivistic instrumental philosophy, the dialogical SfD/SDP model is rooted in interpretative, communicative philosophy and the critical SfD/SDP model featuring highly reflexive, critical and andragogical approaches (Giulianotti, 2011). All these models appear in different and intersecting ways in the SfD practices and literature.

It is thus a fallacy to view SfD as a clearly demarcated field of scientific inquiry, as sense-making should go well beyond the mere classification or assumed homogeneity (Giulianotti, 2011). The loose arrangements of delivery models and wide spectrum of content, add to the richness of literature, yet diminishes coherence and knowledge flows to advance discourse development. Academic clustering is slowly appearing as scholars interact and find themselves in similar niche areas. One of the main challenges remains to bridge the academic-funder-practitioner divide in a meaningful and coherent way. Academics need to acknowledge their ideological standpoints and interrogate practices and findings so as to ensure that they contribute to a critical body of knowledge and discourse development.

Lack of evidence discourse: Evangelism versus complexity

The lack of evidence discourse followed soon after the myopic dimensions captured in the well-received work of the United Nation's Inter-agency Task Force on Sport-for-Development and Peace (Beutler, 2008). Since the UN's agency in promoting SfD, status-quo-maintaining stakeholders mostly consume and dictate related mandates at all levels of engagement. Growing discontent from the academic community accused the NGOs and implementing sectors (mainly practitioners) of evangelism, where leaps of faith and marketing rhetoric were seldom substantiated by solid evidence. Coalter (2007a, 2010) commented on the broad unrealistic outcomes by asking about what really counted for development, criticising 'ill-defined interventions with hard to follow outcomes'. First-hand experience with localised development programmes brings in the contextual reality of process analysis. Kay (2012) criticised the lack of resources and local research capacity, and the fact that monitoring and evaluation reports serve as the dominant research base. Both these criticisms have merit, yet her argument does not draw on an in-depth understanding of the whole spectrum of possibilities, nor does it identify clear demarcations of effect, interrelated stakeholder dynamics and causal relationships in determining cause and effect (Burnett, 2012a).

The tension of valid and reliable empirical research produced in a positivistic paradigm satisfied donors who wanted the numbers to be tick-boxed for reaching a wider constituency. Researchers, on the other hand, argued from in-depth research and the inclusion of local voiced response through qualitative methodology and in the interpretation. The NGO-partner, often depended on the funding of the donor, had to play the 'numbers game' and would produce narratives in such a bias and confessional way, as to be branded as 'evangelism' (Coalter, 2013). Coalter (2013) is critical of such findings, and questions the evidence base of some programmes in Africa (Northern Uganda, Malawi and Kenya). The validity and trustworthiness of the research findings are dependent on the integrity and agency of the researcher to manage this triad.

Academics across a wide spectrum of research interests took up the challenge of framing their research by arguing for innovative methodology and the inclusion of local and contextual knowledge and perspectives (Nicholls *et al.*, 2011). Impact assessments increasingly focus on theories of change and tracing the most significant changes at the micro-level of programme engagement and effect (Kay, 2009). Programme delivery and community-level uptake is still absent from studies focusing on producing hard or robust evidence, rather than capturing meaningful data, which might not 'prove' effect, but rather indicate the potential contribution and reach of SfD programmes (Coalter, 2010). As phrased by Coalter, with reference to the work of Pisani regarding cultural factors affecting the spread of HIV/AIDS, "the deep rooted complexity of the issues [are] often ignored in policy rhetoric, which too often reduces complex social issues to individual behaviours" (Coalter, 2010:310).

The discourse relates to the limitations of impact assessments that most often lack scientific rigour. It is not necessarily that there is no evidence of change and programme effect, but rather that the broad-based societal change claims are not achievable or there is just no evidence to back them up (Burnett, 2012a). Programme evaluation research mostly follows a limited time span aligned to a particular funding period and Eurocentric normative measures and methodology. Narrowly focused investigations undermine knowledge production and the extrapolation of findings. Meaningful research needs cultural and local relevance and has to follow a developmental approach by serving all constituencies through the application possibilities and rigour of academic scrutiny.

However, well-designed and inter-connected small-scale studies with optimal cultural relevancy can provide rigorous outcomes and findings. In the current economic climate and given the dominance of neo-liberal outlooks, careful and integration research across a range of fields (in the Bourdieu's sense) remains untapped (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). As funders want to substantiate their claims, it produces fundamental tensions between the kind of critical outlook argued in this article and the programme objectives and evaluation required. Critical researchers need to build meaningful networks, develop methodologies (including methods), and support systems that can provide the means to mediate the challenge of academic freedom and scrutiny. A developmental framework and understanding of what development work entails, may provide insights that would enable different agendas to integrate. In this way, research can serve the 'cause' with resultant agency and strategic direction for all.

Deficit model

Coakley (2011) exposes the neo-liberal ideas and beliefs of the 'social problem industry' and the fact that interventions adopted 'a deficit reduction model'. This approach sees the recipients (especially youth) as 'needy victims', but without interrogating structural challenges, they rather focus on behavioural changes (self-efficacy, positive gender attitudes, leadership and HIV/AIDS knowledge relating to responsible sexual practices). This discourse in the SDP space argues for the rejection of the deficit model, which underpins most assumptions of vulnerable populations earmarked for 'development' and who are, in some sense, 'deviant' (Coalter, 2011). This is reflective of the broader development framework packaged as the 'social problems industry', which pays special attention to 'at-risk' youth and vulnerable populations (Hartmann & Depro, 2006). This discourse articulates with the neo-colonial and Global North-dominated agenda of 'giving' to 'recipients' who have been

identified as 'deficient' and are, therefore, the target populations for 'treatment' and 'rehabilitation' as they meet global standards of deficiency. The fact that Northern researchers establish the contrary, and come up with findings of 'normality' using non-contextually validated methodologies, is contentious. The very same academics who declared millions of people 'deviant', later claimed that the same people were just living in different (extra-ordinary) circumstances (Coalter, 2011). Mosse (2001) and Remenyi (2004) argue that people's knowledge and 'embeddedness' in a particular context (coping with the manifestations of poverty), should be understood differently and their circumstances should be taken into consideration when inter-cultural comparisons are drawn.

This particular discourse illustrates the relative immaturity of the SfD literature and the need for paradigm crossing. Extensive literature on socialisation, identity formation and children's well-being (including indexes) are ignored by following reductionist paradigms and intentions of shaping sport-related experiences and addressing the perceived needs of recipient constituencies (Haudenhuyse, 2012). For instance, in socio-psychological studies about youth resilience, social learning and social identity formation would provide valuable concepts in addition to studying the reduction of risk factors and the increase of protective factors. Benson and Scales (2009) conducted extensive studies in this field and reflected on the relevance of the positive effect of community-based interventions as explained by the thriving theory and potential of communal plasticity (potential for systemic change). The change may be expressed as intangible or 'soft benefits'. Such programme-level outcomes find expression in vividly articulated narratives mediated by the academic/donor/NGO complex to bring hope for the hopeless, joy for the joyless and development for the under-developed. They deliver needs-based, rather than asset-based, interventions, and perpetuate notions of dependency inherent in subjective understandings of colonial, neo-liberal thinking (Darnell, 2011).

CONCLUSION

The neo-colonial and neo-liberal philosophies are inherent in most SfD research and programmes initiated in the Global North with relatively unequal power-relationships. Cultural and contextual understandings should inform SDP research designs and endeavours in all its complexity and power (stakeholder) dynamics, but research alone will not bring about the desired changes. Activism in the vein of feminist praxis may contribute to the development of a collective of scholars and stakeholders, loosely constituting a socio-political movement to facilitate radical change. Advocacy stems from a deeper understanding of the social phenomena under scrutiny in service of a human justice framework. Academics and researchers communicating a 'view-from-the-South' may find a radical epistemological framework valuable in their advocacy for social change. A strategic research focus may also be beneficial to practitioners and funders, who may come to understand the complexity of development work.

It is up to researchers to produce strategic work within niche fields where they can exercise influence on the scientific community, as well as on all stakeholders, from global to local levels. Discourse always follows practice, so academics face challenges as negotiators of equal partnerships and show agency within their roles and mandates to meaningfully address

and bring about positive and enduring change in SfD spheres within a developmental framework,

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