‘Writing from and for the Margins’: Exploring the Utility of Postcolonial Management Theory for Sport Management Research

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Socio-Cultural - Other (International Sport)  
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)  
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There have been recent scholarly commentaries on the need for critical approaches in the study of sport management (see Newman, 2014; Singer et al., 2017). These important contributions have advocated for a more diverse – particularly qualitative – field promoted by the use of theories, methodologies, and methods with differing epistemological and ontological underpinnings than that of postpositivist research (Shaw & Hoeber, 2016). However, while some approaches – such as poststructuralism (Thorpe & Chawansky, 2017) – have been adopted by researchers, postcolonial theory, with one exception (see Chen & Mason, 2018), has received inadequate consideration. Given how postcolonial theory, an approach that is broadly understood to question the ongoing material and discursive legacies of colonialism, has garnered increased attention within the broader field of management and organizational studies (see Nkomo, 2011), its limited acknowledgement in the field of sport management is surprising.

The purpose of this presentation is to provide an overview of postcolonial management theory (PCMT) (Banerjee & Prasad, 2008) and examine how PCMT may be utilized in sport management research. While sociologists of sport have discussed postcolonial theory (see Darnell, 2012), PCMT has received limited attention (McSweeney, 2018). A PCMT approach is timely as the field continues to become globalized and more international in nature (Danylchuk, 2012; Thibault, 2009) and a growth in research outside Western nations is occurring, especially in relation to the field of sport-for-development (SFD) (e.g., Marshall & Barry, 2015). The objectives of the presentation are to: (1) describe and explain the foundations of PCMT and its theoretical and methodological approach; and (2) discuss how PCMT may be applied to two areas of sport management studies, SFD and social entrepreneurship (SE), to offer directions for future research.

Specifically, three key implications of adopting a PCMT approach will be considered. First, a PCMT approach enables examination of the historical underpinnings of SFD and SE in sport in an attempt to connect past and present, and different parts of the world. Through such explorations, these histories seek to connect everyday practices that are informed by marginalized and indigenous knowledges in non-Western contexts to disrupt and display the hybrid nature by which contemporary and universal understandings of SFD and SE have emerged. Second is that such an approach, while based in examining history, would inform the current body of knowledge on sport management studies not only in regard to research but also practice. Through a decolonizing, performative methodology (whereby activism, critical questions, and participatory, qualitative approaches to research are promoted – see Smith, 1999; Spicer et al., 2009), scholars may be able to work with practitioners and research participants collaboratively in order to respond to community and organizational challenges. Lastly, a PCMT approach may be able to reveal the various forms of organizational knowledge, practices, communication, and leadership of sport management (as shown by Chen & Mason, 2018) that is included in the ever-growing, international arenas of SFD and SE in sport (see Bjarsbolm, 2018). The presentation concludes by emphasizing the theoretical and methodological contributions a PCMT approach offers to the broader field of sport management.