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Physical Education in the Colonial Gold Coast: From a Civilizing Mission to “Useful Citizens”

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Abstract: This paper addresses the transfer of Physical Education to the Gold Coast, focusing on its shifting role in producing ideal subjects and its relationship to the imperial politics of the mid-20th century. It explores the contradictory ways in which, in the Gold Coast (now Ghana), the training of young teachers in higher education institutions allowed for the transfer of British citizenship training codes into a colonial setting during the first half of the 20th century. It is focused on the conversation engaged between the Education Department of the Gold Coast and specialists in higher education institutions. The paper is based on archive material collected in the United Kingdom and Ghana.

Keywords: Gold Coast; Ghana; citizenship; Physical Education; sports; higher education; colonial; masculinities

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1. Introduction

In 1954, on the verge of Ghana’s independence, a British educationalist held a conference at Achimota School and stated as follows:

“In a rapidly developing country like the Gold Coast, it is not only teacher, administrators and clerks who will be in demand in the future. There will be a need for the physically skilful too—for boxers, dancers, footballers, youth-leaders, etc. The child in school must also learn co-operation if he is to become a useful citizen.”¹

However, this association between citizenship and physical skills was by no means a unanimously held view, and came after intense debates over the role of British Physical Education in the Gold Coast (now Ghana). Throughout the first half of the 20th Century, there was a long way to go before African and European educationalists reached a consensus that would definitively link citizenship with Physical Education. This was the result of a half-century long conversation involving the Gold Coast government—via its Education Department—and African and European specialists in local higher education institutions, as well as intense exchanges between Britain and the Gold Coast.

In line with a literature that has examined cultural transfers (Espagne and Werner 1987) in sports (Eisenberg 2011) or education (Yamada 2018), this paper aims at understanding how British Physical Education was transferred to the colonial Gold Coast, thereby challenging contemporary logics of difference that distinguished subjects from citizens (Hunt 1999; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997) on racialized grounds, and how in turn these logics were reinforced and challenged locally.

Broadly speaking, being a colonial subject may be defined as being a “national’ deprived of rights or whose rights are extremely limited”² (Barthélémy and Cuchet 2016, p. 16). In the Gold Coast, from 1914 to 1948, Africans were British subjects, under the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act. But, within the Empire, people’s rights and duties were far from

¹ PRAAD. RG 3.5.914. Rulka, “The Importance of Physical Education in the School Curriculum”, November 1954.

² “un « national » privé de droits ou dont les droits sont extrêmement limités.”

universal. They were adapted locally by colonial governments along unequal lines, based on gender, class and skin colour (Paul 1997, p. 12). De facto, the Gold Coast colonial government adapted a racialized legislation, as highlighted by historians interested in the racial status and citizenship rights of metis people (Ray 2015; Hugon 2020, pp. 120–23). It was not until 1948 that the British Nationality Act established a new citizenship code, founding a new legal status: Citizen of the United Kingdom and the Colonies (CUKS). However, this did not bequeath equality. First, according to Carina Ray, “in the colony, sharing the same nationality status with their European counterparts did not free Africans [. . .] from the restrictions and inequalities that were part and parcel of colonial racism, as epitomized by and embedded in the category ‘native’ and the application of indirect rule” (Ray 2015, p. 51). Second, while the inhabitants of the Gold Coast colony and Ashanti could claim CUKS status, this was not the case in the Northern Territories. Third, the multi-layered nature of African British Gold Coast subjects’ rights and non-rights included a class divide, through a fragmented access to the census and/or conditional suffrage for a handful of wealthy and literate African inhabitants of coastal towns (Quarcoopome 1988).

An analysis of the texts, discourses and social practices surrounding Physical Education in higher education reveals the paradox of these multi-layered statuses, as these pedagogical practices flirted with the codes of citizenship training that had been imagined for British citizens: first an individualistic, British upper-class sportsman and commander, then a British middle-class patriot who was at once free and duty-bound to cultivate moral and physical fitness in order to reproduce the nation and empire. Indeed, since the end of the 19th century, moral education in elite British boarding schools relied heavily on learning and practicing amateur sports competitions (Holt 1990). The training of the ideal gentleman was then based on the fusion of honour and respectability and embodied in the figure of the sportsman (Holt 2018), a form of ideal citizen, an individual steeped in liberal values and capable of guiding the Empire towards modernity. During the interwar period, however, the pedagogical principles that underpinned the learning of sports pedagogy were largely modified in Britain. The shock of the 1929 economic crisis, the rise of fascism in mainland Europe and the widespread fears about the weakening of the British people—tinged with eugenics and natalism—prompted educationalists and doctors to focus on the physical and moral reform of the British citizenry as a whole, beyond well-to-do young men (Zweiniger-Bargielowska 2010; MacDonald 2011; Bolz 2014). Thus, throughout the 20th century, Physical Education was part and parcel of the education of young British citizens, with a view to the acquisition of a moral ethos whose changing contours were reliably based on fitness and body training.

As underlined by James Mangan (1986) pioneer work, such principles were transferred to the colonial higher educational system throughout the British Empire in general, and in Gold Coast in particular. The few young men (and women) who attended Gold Coast higher education—be it missionary or public (Foster 1965; Prosperetti 2019), or even specialised training overseas (Adi 1998)—were mostly born into the most well-off families of the colony. By entering higher education, they entered into a highly negotiated area of colonial contact.³ As most of them were trained to become teachers (Yamada 2018), these students were the ones to disseminate their new skills and knowledge further down the line. This paper, mainly focused on male students, aims at accounting for the gendered orientation of colonial Physical Education. During recent decades, historians have shown how Gold Coast young men took up physical activities that were identified as modern, such as sports. These transfers allowed for a re-enactment of a tough and able-bodied masculinity in urban areas such as Accra (Dunzendorfer 2014, p. 1023), or a focus on ways to prove one’s physical skills and prowess in schools, as young men in missionary Presbyterian schools were confronted with novel definitions of “manliness, its high value of fair play, perseverance and respect of rules” (Miescher 2005, p. 74). The transfer of

³ Following Anne Hugon who recently added maternity hospitals to Romain Bertrand’s list of colonial “*lieux de contacts*” (ship decks, harbors, markets and courtrooms) (Hugon 2020, p. 279; Bertrand 2011, p. 15).

Physical Education in colonial schools—alongside sporting leisure—was indeed mainly dedicated to training and shaping colonial male subjects. However, this focus on men and masculinities would be shallow if it allowed British women’s involvement in structuring the field (Hargreaves 1994; Vertinsky 1994)—even in a colonial setting—to go unnoticed. Besides, the training of female teachers alongside male classmates is of specific interest, notably as this allows us to further clarify our gendered argument.

The transfer of moral principles associated with British Physical Education carried by successive British educationalists travelling to the Gold Coast was paradoxical. Indeed, British Physical Education in higher education institutions purposely trained students within a moral citizenship framework. However, Gold Coast students were excluded de jure and de facto from such political and social rights and were maintained in the position of colonial subjects. To borrow the Comaroffs’ analysis on religious conversion in South Africa, “despite promises to the contrary, even those blacks who identified closely with the church and with Western life-ways [such as Physical Education] remained noncitizens in white society” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997, p. 7). To this end, colonial Physical Education specialists were to be part of “the old modernist tension” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997) between a universalistic civilizing ideal and the racialized colonial setting, “modernity” being here understood as an emic claim, “a marker of Europe’s right to rule, something to which the colonized should aspire but could never quite deserve” (Cooper 2005, p. 115). As such, this study shows how this cultural transfer both challenged and reinforced contemporary logics of difference that separated subjects from citizens, until Independence in 1957. Students in higher education were at the heart of this paradox of the civilizing mission. They held extremely restricted political, civil and social rights, as framed by the geographical, social and racial codifications of the colony, and some fought to extend these (Prais 2008). However, their training was framed within a “grammar of citizenship” (Goastellec and Bancel 2020) that played most closely along the codes of British citizenship training. By taking up the character training codes set up in British Public Schools and then through the spread of Physical Education defined as modern, colonial higher education systems placed the training of young Africans at the crossroads of two worlds.

This article is based on the cross-analysis of the biographical paths of some of the Physical Education officers and teachers (Africans and Europeans), the pedagogical ideals successively put forward by the Education Department and higher education specialists, and the reception of these ideas by students and teachers. Our analysis is based on the archives of the Education Department (especially correspondence with higher education institutions, which reveal different positions on Physical Education) collected in the Ghana National Archives in Accra (PRAAD), on the archives of the Colonial Office in London kept at the British National Archives (TNA) which provide information on the British government’s position regarding colonial higher education, and on the archives of Physical Education colleges in Britain, which allow the analysis of imperial connections.

This paper is structured chronologically. It first focuses on the creation of an imperial teaching field at the beginning of the century and outlines how higher education institutions laid claim to the use of ‘character training’ through sports during their implementation at the beginning of the 20th century. Secondly, the article explores attempts to export a modern Physical Education to the Gold Coast in the 1930s and 1940s. Finally, the third section, devoted to the 1950s, reports on the breakthrough caused in 1951 by the Gold Coast general election and its role in the expansion of higher Physical Education facilities.

2. Imperial Teaching Field (1910s–1930s)

At the turn of the 20th century, Physical Education was introduced into British colonial Africa according to two logics. Physical Education first appeared in primary schools. In this context, it was implemented through physical training and drills, and was about learning subordination, quite similarly to activities aimed at European working-class men (Arnaud 1991). Meanwhile, in emerging higher education institutions, sports, following the British Public Schools’ model, were making their appearance. As such, they were used

as pedagogical tools for the training of colonial gentlemen, close to the ethos of the British sportsman embodying an imperial ideal subject.

In the early 1910s, for the first time, the colonial government officially sanctioned the inclusion of “suitable physical exercises” and “military drill for boys” in the curricula of British government schools in the Gold Coast (Jenkins 1992, p. 63). The colonial military drill was inspired by physical exercises designed for Victorian and post-Victorian working-class schools (Yamada 2018, p. 131). At the same time, missionary teachers from the Basel mission were inspired by Swiss military gymnastics (Bussard 2000),⁴ until their eviction from the colony in 1917 (Coe 2002, p. 25). Throughout the decade, different types of physical activity were set up in the colony’s schools, all following a military inspiration: parades, ensemble movements, obstacle courses. Inspired by pedagogical principles that were to establish a sense of order among children and to help the military preparation of the troop soldier, they were aimed at training a colonial subject, submissive to the authority of the Empire.

However, in parallel in urban centres, higher education institutions were being set up (such as Mfantsipim and Adisadel in Cape Coast), under pressure from some literate Africans and occasionally supported by Wesleyan and Anglican missions (Foster 1965, p. 102). As part of his quantitative analysis of colonial schooling, Phillip Foster pointed out that by the end of the 1920s, only six higher education institutions were established in the colony (missionary, but also governmental ones such as the new Achimota College, founded in 1924), catering to some 600 pupils. The few students reaching higher education were mostly boys and young men from relatively well-off homes in the urban centres of the coastal South (Foster 1965, pp. 115–20), as “the government limited access to education and focused on the education of the elite” (Coe 2002, p. 25). Hence, most students came from wealthy and already literate families, as their parents were in clerical professions, teachers, traders, chiefs or cocoa producers (Coe 2002, p. 38). They mainly learned to become teachers or, through the most specific and elitist curricula, to work in law and medicine.

In higher education, the British focused on character training, aimed at the acquisition of an elite ethos inspired by the British public schools. In this respect, Achimota college occupied a special position. Here, teaching was aimed at avoiding the formation of a new generation of “highly educated professional Africans” such as those who had emerged by the beginning of the 20th century, “including lawyers and medical doctors, who were critical of colonial rule and who pressed for the political advancement of Africans” (Yamada 2009, p. 34). As Shoko Yamada pointed out, Achimota students were trained to become leaders: “Western in intellectual attitude”, “African in sympathy” and loyal to the British Empire. Founded as a result of the joint influence of Africans (such as James Aggrey), Americans (through the Phelps Stokes Commission) and the colonial government, this became a model of adapted education. To achieve this, teaching was based on an “adaptation” and Africanisation of the curriculum, but also on British-inspired school life, and more specifically team sports. These games were intended to enable students to acquire a “games ethic” in order to conform to post-Victorian ideals, as implemented by schoolmasters and teachers in favour of the ‘Muscular Christian’ movement (Mangan 2006). It was a matter of using the moral education of the British elite through team sports, physical training or scouting⁵, while at the same time discouraging the political demands for citizenship made by the first wave of nationalist militants in the colony. Indeed, this moral training was first and foremost one of loyalty to the Empire.

Practically, in the 1920s–1930s, higher education, whether in Achimota or in more rural areas, offered weekly or daily physical training (mostly gymnastics) and sports as well as championship sessions. In Achimota, for example, the school comprised ten

⁴ Marching, parades, obstacle courses, etc. While no manuals were retrieved for this research, the digital archives of the Basel mission’s website includes photographs of the exercises organised in the Gold Coast missionary schools during the years 1910–1920. See. Accessed date: 19 February 2021.

⁵ Scouting is explicitly mentioned as such in Gold Coast’s governor’s writings (Guggisberg 1924, p. 38) and Timothy Parsons clearly demonstrates its place in the British Empire in general (Parsons 2004).

sports fields for hockey, football and cricket.⁶ Schools held inter-school and inter-home cups organised by Games Masters and Mistresses.⁷ Young men were the most common participants in such games. Indeed, not only were there still very few young women in higher education,⁸ but such practices directly targeted male students. Sporting activity and Physical Education, which took the place of unsupervised leisure activities, were aimed at helping prevent “sex indulgence and wild forms of emotions’, considered ‘too general in the life of primitive people’” (T. Jesse Jones, quoted from [Miescher 2005](#), p. 72), as well as supporting the promotion of British manliness. In boys’ boarding schools—attended by pupils from the wealthiest families—sports became more serious, and teachers and students excelling at sports commanded respect, to such a point that according to Stephen Miescher, playing sports and becoming a true sportsman became a “test of masculinity” in the 1930s ([Miescher 2005](#), p. 75). Moreover, elite schools such as Achimota relied on British staff trained in Public Schools in their youth ([Yamada 2018](#), p. 140) to promote sportsmanship. Thus, by the end of the 1930s, “good at games”⁹ British teachers organised sports and physical training at Achimota and were part and parcel of “a sort of exclusive preserve for white Britons” (Nnamdi Azikiwe, quoted from [Jenkins 1994](#), p. 183), as in the Education Department and the Gold Coast civil service at large.

At the same time in Great Britain, a number of factors were to influence Gold Coast Physical Education in the decades to come. In interwar Britain, as shown by Daphné Bolz, “there were growing anxieties over the health of the British nation, especially the living conditions of the urban masses [. . .] fitness, Physical Education, health and recreation were widely discussed on a national scale” ([Bolz 2014](#), pp. 570–71). Among other factors, this led to the strengthening of Physical Education and sport practices in the British school system, beyond public schools, the increased involvement of doctors and physiologists in the field, and the establishment of Physical Education colleges in order to train specialists with state-recognised tertiary qualifications. This conversation also reached the Gold Coast. On the one hand, the Education Department of the Gold Coast imported the new 1933 British syllabus.¹⁰ On the other hand, one may trace back the training of African and European experts in new Physical Education colleges as they trained in sports pedagogy and Physical Education.

English people were trained in newly funded colleges during the 1930s, before joining the Gold Coast in the following decades. This is the case of Mrs Gladys K. Huntley. She graduated from Bedford Physical Training College, then taught in Achimota in the 1940s, before moving to Headtown in South Africa.¹¹ Huntley’s presence is noteworthy. It points to the fact that the training of specialist Physical Education female teachers in Great Britain was at an earlier stage than in neighbouring European countries ([Hargreaves 1994](#), pp. 81–84), and this early stage was reflected in the colony, as British women joined the colonies to work, to follow a husband or to become missionaries ([Chaudhuri and Strobel 1992](#)). As such, the Gold Coast hosted both female teachers and female Physical Education specialists to teach, lecture and work in colleges and the Education Department. Meanwhile, African students were travelling in the opposite direction, leaving the Gold Coast for the British Isles. This was the case of Peter D. Quartey. In 1936, he joined the Scottish School of Physical Education and Hygiene at Jordanhill College,¹² founded in Glasgow in 1931. The expertise he acquired during his British stay was to be greatly valued on his return. He taught at Achimota ([Asare 1982](#), p. 220) then, during the 1950s, became a member of the boards of various

⁶ TNA. CO 1045.173. Map of Achimota school, 1926.

⁷ See ([Tibo 1967](#)).

⁸ Less than a fifth of higher education’s population, despite the foundation of a few girls boarding schools ([Yamada 2009](#), p. 50).

⁹ TNA. CO 1045.173. Letter from Reverend Stopford (Principal of Achimota) to Christopher Cox (educational adviser to the Colonial Office), 28 Mai 1940.

¹⁰ See ([Board of Education 1933](#)).

¹¹ PRAAD. RG 3.5.914. Letter from L. J. Lewis (University College of the Gold Coast) to the Director of Education, 26 May 1952; “Current news about Nelson Books”, 1954.

¹² Strathclyde. JCE.10.4.2. Scottish School of Physical Education Registrar, 1936.

leading sports associations such as the Olympic Committee, the Gold Coast Amateur Hockey Association and the Gold Coast Amateur Sports Council (Nicolas 2019a).

Thus, by the late 1930s, Physical Education was at a turning point. Higher education for the African elite included sportsmanship training, in order to perfect their education as gentlemen, as opposed to the training of schoolchildren in the missions, who continued to engage in military drills. In this respect, the training of young Africans in higher education was based on mechanisms that were antagonistic, to say the least. Wealthy young urban dwellers were encouraged to practise sports in order to shape their character according to the codes of Victorian and post-Victorian elite masculinity, as they were encouraged to abide by British imperial values. However, the colonial government insisted on the importance of maintaining the racial distinction between colonial subjects and British citizens within the colony, as highlighted by de facto racialized recruitment in the most prestigious higher schools and the Education Department. This gap between educational projects and citizenship rights was to grow over the next decade, as new educational principles focused even more on citizenship.

3. Towards a Modern Physical Education

The end of the 1930s marked a major turning point in the teaching of sports and Physical Education in British colleges. Indeed, in the face of the rise of fascism in mainland Europe, it became a specialist field widely supported by the government, which defined the practice of Physical Education and sports no longer as beneficial for a sole individual from the aristocracy, but as a civic duty for working and middle-class men (although not a compulsory one). As Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska pointed out, “stimulated by anxieties about perceived physical deterioration, physical culturalists represented the cultivation of a fit male body as an obligation of citizenship patriotic response to the needs of the British Empire” (Zweiniger-Bargielowska 2006, p. 596). This national fitness movement was characterised by its empire-wide scale, as demonstrated by Charlotte MacDonald in her work on New Zealand, Australia and Canada. As she put it, “so central had the pursuit of the ‘better body’ become by the 1930s, that it seemed almost to define the modern condition” (MacDonald 2011, p. 12) in the Empire. Indeed, this quest for modernity at large also reached the African colonies, as has been underlined by historians of girlhood (Thomas 2006; George 2014).

In the 1940s, a handful of young Africans followed in the footsteps of Peter D. Quartey and completed their training in British colleges such as Loughborough College in England or the aforementioned Jordanhill College¹³ (Opoku-Fianko 1985, p. 107; Nicolas 2019b). Indeed, full training courses were not yet available locally. However, from 1940 onwards, newly trained Achimota teachers and Education Department officers introduced one-off courses during the holidays for young teachers who were already teaching, as well as two weekly courses for student teachers.¹⁴ First organised at Achimota, they were soon followed up in other higher education institutions, particularly at Adisadel in Cape Coast. Newly-trained African and British specialists—recruited from the Education Department and Achimota—organised these courses. And they were keen to put forward new pedagogical principles stemming out of the British preoccupations of the interwar period. In British specialised colleges, the emphasis was then placed on Physical Education (inspired in particular by Nordic gymnastics), in order to move away from the promotion of amateur sport alone and, on the other hand, on a more systematic use of expertise from the fields of physiology and medicine. Thus, the new training courses emphasised the “necessity for a scientific training as well as games and groundwork”, offered notions of biology and physiology and insisted on “modern methods of commanding by teaching”.¹⁵ Achimota’s two Physical Education Officers (one African, Peter D. Quartey—back from Scotland—and

¹³ Strathclyde. JCE.10.4.2. Scottish School of Physical Education Registrar, 1936.

¹⁴ PRAAD. RG 3.5.2235. Letter from the head of the Education Department to Reverend Stopford (Principal of Achimota), 25 September 1941 and Bulletin published by the Education Department, 15 October 1941.

¹⁵ PRAAD. RG 3.5.2235. “Report on the refresher course”, 1942.

one British, Miss Blackwood) sought to transform the values conveyed by Physical Education. It was no longer a question of the liberal individualism of the sportsmen of public schools but “of a physical fit, muscular male body [which] corresponds with what Sonya Rose has termed the ‘tempered British masculinity’ of the ‘good citizen’ combined the virtues of strength, endurance, restraint and chivalry” (Rose 2003; Zweiniger-Bargielowska 2006, p. 598). This new masculinity transcended class boundaries and was addressed at both elite and working- and middle-class men.

In the context of Achimota’s refresher courses held by Quartey and Blackwood and composed of volunteers (in this case all men), the Education Department’s rapporteur did not hide his joy at the interest sparked by novelty: “The men were enthusiastic and enjoyed the course, they were unanimous in their approval of the newer method, in the beneficial effect and in their enjoyment of the gymnastic classes”.¹⁶ These new lessons offered at Achimota were framed by an enthusiastic lexical field, marked by expertise, modernity, novelty and science, moving away from missionary drills as well as the “good at games” amateurs who had previously dominated Physical Education.

However, this apparent success did not lead to a generalised infatuation with the new Physical Education methods. On the one hand, a certain number of students in higher education remained attached to amateur sport and its values of elitist liberalism and individualism, as underlined by Kumasi Wesley College’s principal, as he wrote that “old students who showed their abilities in Sports while in College, maintain[ed] that interest in the field” throughout the 1940s and the 1950s.¹⁷ On the other hand, these principles, meant to train upstanding British citizens, collided with being a colonial subject, while subjection remained enforced by racist practices and discourses. The differentiation between British citizens and African subjects had indeed long been enforced via naturalised arguments—as well evidenced by historians of colonial medicine (Hunt 1999; Hugon 2020)—including by the very persons who promoted a modernised Physical Education, such as Blackwood:

“Scientific exercise is required to educate the body, alongside the brain to strengthen the weak organs (especially the lungs) and to train the body to adopt the posture recognized from the days of the Greek athletes by the more progressive races, as the healthiest for mankind giving the correct balance to the body so that none of the organs are congested. A better reason is that an African man or woman with a good carriage will command much greater respect from the white races. The African has an unhygienic love of crowding. African dancing has little or no formation, the dancers crowd together as close as possible. [. . .] Scientific P.T. [i.e., Physical Training] will train them to make the most of whatever space is available, also the value of formation, they will appreciate a straight line and the value of tidiness. Mastery over their bodies will also help to eradicate fear.”¹⁸

In her notes written for the first refresher course organised at Achimota then dispatched to the Education Department by its Director,¹⁹ a well-known hierarchy was invoked. In a metonymic stance, the British people were associated to “more progressive races”, with a classic allusion to Greek athletes. With explicit reference to “races”, she thus antagonized African (lack of hygiene, crowd, absence of formation, closeness, fear) and British/European (progress, health, correct, strength, formation, tidiness) bodily practices and nature in order to promote the need for a British Physical Education for the sake of Africans. Colonial subjects were to be uplifted through these exercises, as part of the British civilizing mission, quite in line with Achimota’s “white liberal” orientation (Jenkins 1994, p. 184). Henceforth, Physical Education was twisted into the colonial setting. From the training of British citizens, it became a civilizing tool dedicated to African colonial subjects.

¹⁶ PRAAD. RG 3.5.2235. “Report on the refresher course”, 1942.

¹⁷ PRAAD. RG.9.1.79. Letter from Arthur Banks (Principal of Wesley College) to M. A. H. R. Joseph, 22 August 1950.

¹⁸ PRAAD. RG 3.5.2235. Miss Blackwood, “Specialist P. T. Course”, January 1940.

¹⁹ PRAAD. RG 3.5.2235. Internal dispatch from the Director of Education, “Notes on Physical Training by Miss Blackwood”, 21 March 1941.

However, these changes were difficult to implement. In a report published following one of the Achimota courses, an Education officer stated that “some mastered the changes but others found it difficult to drop the “sergeant major” tone.”²⁰ Certainly, the military drills of the “sergeant major” were no longer the right tone, according to specialists from Achimota and the Education Department. However, the young (future) Gold Coast teachers nevertheless cross-referenced these new principles with their experience in primary missionary schools, where it was common practice.²¹ What is more, despite the efforts of specialists, as they left higher schools, young teachers kept on relying on the “old physical drill’ with its dull repetition of well-known exercises and its dangerous neglect of correct posture”²². Indeed, in her notes, Blackwood expressed the following regrets:

Few European Missionary teachers have any knowledge of PT and one Inspector I spoke to regretted the lack of time to see the lesson and lack of knowledge of modern methods, the subject has so completely changed in the last few years. This means that there is little or no supervision once a student leaves college, and without that supervision and advice the knowledge gained in the two classes a week during their training soon becomes stale, also being the newest and youngest members of the staff, it is difficult for them to take the lead.”²³

Education Department officials agreed with these disappointed views. An inspector explained five years later that the new methods still did not seem to be used in schools. It appeared that the newly-trained young teachers had “given it up and have fallen back on some type of pseudo military drill—or even musical drill. This type of exercise is easy to conduct but does not really have any value physically or mentally.”²⁴ These officials pointed out a major practical difficulty in this transition, as even the most enthusiastic teachers were at odds with the pedagogical practices already in place in schools.²⁵

The officer’s refusal of “musical drills”, alongside Blackwood’s disapproval of African dances, is particularly revealing. Physical Education was deemed modern, a modernity implicitly defined as European. Henceforth, throughout the 1940s, while the Education Department and Achimota college members sought to encourage adaptation and Africanisation of some fields in the higher education curricula (Steiner-Khamsi and Quist 2000; Coe 2002; Yamada 2009), this process was not to reach the field of Physical Education. Indeed, the pertinence of traditional music and dances was debated then rejected. To support their claims against such activities, the Department’s officers based their arguments on health (as Blackwood does in the document quoted above) and gender. Some years after, an officer concurred with his colleagues quite explicitly, writing that African dance and its “odd [and] sexy movements [were] unsuitable for introduction in schools”.²⁶ During the whole decade, colonial officers thus framed their argument against dance and music using a sexual interpretation of said traditional dances, inspired by long-lasting tales told by colonial officers or missionaries in Africa (Lauro 2016). Presented as both scandalous and unhygienic, bodily promiscuity was clearly targeted as a typical African practice to be amended. Henceforth, while other areas of knowledge were reconsidered and adapted, Physical Education was going in the opposite direction, with the support of specialists from the United Kingdom.²⁷ In the end, the principles and methods laid down in the training of

²⁰ PRAAD. RG 3.5.2235. “Report on the refresher course”, 1942.

²¹ PRAAD. RG 3.5.710. Captain Sykes Thomson (Provincial Education Officer, Central Province), “The place of Physical Education in the curriculum”, 11 September 1944.

²² PRAAD. RG 3.5.710. Captain Sykes Thomson (Provincial Education Officer, Central Province), “The place of Physical Education in the curriculum”, 11 September 1944.

²³ PRAAD. RG 3.5.2235. Miss Blackwood, “Specialist P. T. Course”, January 1940.

²⁴ PRAAD. RG 3.5.710. Captain Sykes Thomson (Provincial Education Officer, Central Province), “The place of Physical Education in the curriculum”, 11 September 1944.

²⁵ PRAAD. RG 3.5.2235. Application for a Refresher course by Marc G. Gbikpi (teacher at Accra Catholic Mission Schools), 11 December 1941.

²⁶ PRAAD. RG 3.5.710. Notes by Charles E. Whitworth-Smith (Education Department) on Barbara Burdess’ Conference, December 1949.

²⁷ Charles E. Whitworth-Smith notably reported discussing these issues with physical education specialists from Carnegie Physical Training College at Leeds and the University of Liverpool in the mid-1940s, during his yearly holidays in Britain. See: PRAAD. RG 3.5.710. Notes by Charles E. Whitworth-Smith (Education Department) on Barbara Burdess’ conference, December 1949.

young teachers, whether they aroused their enthusiasm or not, seemed singularly out of kilter. The modernisation promises of the new Physical Education methods were steeped in the racialised stances of the civilising mission.

In the meantime, anticolonial dissent was growing throughout the colony and the youth of the Gold Coast was built up as a political and social problem in the eyes of the colonial government throughout British Africa (Fourchard 2018). Indeed, over the course of the decade, an increasing number of Gold Coast students were vocal in their criticism of the colonial system, much to the chagrin of the Colonial Office.²⁸ In the eyes of the colonial government, young Africans were to remain loyal to the empire and, as such, Physical Education had a role to play in this voluntary allegiance.

In this context, Blackwood provided the Education Department with a new memorandum in 1944, which may be framed as part of this wider reactionary defence of the colonial order. Following her previous writings, she called once more for a civilizing mission that promoted “character building”. Young people were to “learn to co-ordinate and to concentrate, to show courage, determination and initiative, to overcome difficulties, comradeship in helping others and leadership when in charge of a section.” It was a question of disciplining young people so that they learned to “obey instantly, yet not mechanically, to subdue the self for the sake of the whole, to comfort to order [. . .] i.e., that of orderliness that the hygienic effect comes in.”²⁹ According to an almost martial stance, loyalty to the British empire and its values was therefore high on the agenda. In her conclusive remarks, Blackwood finally stressed a crucial point: “I have worded the above in terms of people rather than school children as it is a nation we are educating, not the sons and daughters of an already cultured class”.³⁰ Here, while she did not explicitly refer to the Empire, we may understand her discourse through the prism of the contradictory British justifications for imperial expansion as analysed by Karuna Mantena. On the one hand, for the proponents of liberal imperialism, which was defined as universalist, colonial subjects were to become citizens and colonial possessions, nations. On the other hand, in a culturalist view, colonial subjects were considered incapable of governing themselves and therefore needed British trusteeship (Mantena 2010). Physical Education, as framed at Achimota and at the Education Department, fitted well into this dialectic. They wished to educate future adults, within a national framework. However, this education was steeped in British principles and could never lead to dissent. Of course, it was no longer the Victorian Games Ethic, but it was still a question of promoting a British model imagined as superior, in this case modern and scientific, following the ascendancy of modernisation theory in the Empire during the 1940s (Cooper 2005).

Following Blackwood’s lobbying,³¹ the Education Department expanded the Achimota courses and went through an internal discussion that eventually led to new bulletins on Physical Education.³² Indeed, faced with the poor results of the training courses carried out in higher education institutions, the Education Department took upon itself to extend the dissemination of the new Physical Education principles by reaching teachers directly in the institutions themselves, instead of bringing young teachers to higher education institutions for training. Between April and May 1946, more than a thousand copies of each bulletin were sent to schools in the colony. The bulletins dealt with arrangements regarding pupils, staffing, clothing, and the lessons themselves, and reasserted that hygiene and “stiff drill movements [were] quite out of date, useless, and should never be used”³³ and meanwhile exercises such as “free marching” allowed “for encouraging independence, poise, balance and good manners.”³⁴ These bulletins encouraged more physical freedom

²⁸ TNA. CO 96.775.12. “Things to change in Gold Coast” by the Gold Coast Youth Conference, summarized by M. Lynch (Colonial office), 14 August 1942.

²⁹ PRAAD. RG 3.5.710. Miss Blackwood, “Physical Education”, 25 February 1944.

³⁰ PRAAD. RG 3.5.710. Miss Blackwood, “Physical Education”, 25 February 1944.

³¹ PRAAD. RG 3.5.710. Letter from Reverend Stopford (Principal of Achimota) to the Director of Education, 30 August 1940.

³² PRAAD. RG 3.5.710. Follow-up notes by Miss E. Appleyard and Captain C. S. Thomson, December 1945–February 1946.

³³ PRAAD. RG 3.5.710. Education Department, “Notes on Physical Education. Issued by the Education Department of the Gold Coast”, n°1, April 1946.

³⁴ PRAAD. RG 3.5.710. Education Department, “Notes on Physical Education. Issued by the Education Department of the Gold Coast”, n°2, May 1946.

and were in line with earlier concerns with hygiene, crowding and sexualised behaviours on the one hand, as well as overwhelming military drills on the other hand. However, they did not use Blackwood's terminology of "nation" or "people". The principle disseminated through the bulletin or the refresher courses appeared to have found a favourable echo among some African teachers, as one of them wrote in 1947 an essay appropriating the principles laid down by modern Physical Education supporters.³⁵

During the following years, this new model became progressively accepted among teachers, specialists and government officers, to the point that some even discussed its adaptation and improvement. Hence, in 1949, an education officer challenged previous concerns by encouraging African games and dances.³⁶ However, her talk met with strong opposition in the Education Department,³⁷ which may be understood as a reaction to the growing turmoil in the colony. After debating this suggestion, the Department disagreed and followed the position of a military officer who was strongly opposed to African practices and wrote that "the needs of the country both physically and mentally, are for a strong, virile type of Physical Education".³⁸ As the years 1948–1949 were particularly troubled by anticolonial and nationalist protests and repression, the Education Department's answer was by no means insignificant and may be read as an attempt to avoid emasculating pedagogical practices. Replacing manliness at the core of a "virile" Physical Education promoting "character building"³⁹ would allow for the restoration of the colonial political and moral order. However, in spite of these late upsurges, in the following years, the former "'new' terminology of ideas which have been held in senior Physical Education"⁴⁰ was challenged once again. And this time, change did not come from the British Islands but from the colony itself.

4. Self-Government and Independent Citizens

After 1945, the ambiguities of the Empire became increasingly contradictory and problematic. With the return of World War II veterans demanding compensation, the demands of Africans intensified in the late 1940s. More broadly, post-war inflation, the lack of consumer goods and wage employment, and antagonism towards European banks and companies heightened hostility towards the colonial government (Killingray 2010, pp. 257–58). The latter violently opposed the growing popularity of anti-colonial and nationalist demands. In 1948, repression culminated in the shooting of veterans demonstrating in Christianborg and the imprisonment of the colony's main political leaders.⁴¹ Following this, students demonstrated in the streets in support of the "Big Six". The government was particularly concerned about the popularity⁴² of the young Convention's People's Party among literate or "semi-literate"⁴³ urban youth, the "Verandah Boys", many of whom joined Kwame Nkrumah's party, which had been founded in 1949 (Allman 1993, pp. 28–29).

Following these growing calls for self-governance, general elections were held in 1951. According to Justin Willis, Gabrielle Lynch and Nic Cheeseman, these "were held in an attempt to breathe new life into the late-colonial state, on the way to a future self-government whose timetable still remained unsettled" (Willis et al. 2018, p. 1120). The British government retained a major influence. The people elected only 38 out of 84 members of the assembly. The other members were appointed by a council of chiefs, members of the business community and the governor (Willis et al. 2018, p. 1120). Despite these

³⁵ PRAAD. RG 3.5.710. I. B. Boye-Doye (teacher at the Accra Government Senior Boys school), "A Synoptic Essay on Physical Education", 18 August 1947.

³⁶ PRAAD. RG 3.5.710. Barbara Burdess (Education Department), "Physical Education. Notes for Conference of Women Education Officers", 19–20 December 1949.

³⁷ PRAAD. RG 3.5.710. Follow-up notes on Barbara Burdess' talk, December 1949–March 1950.

³⁸ PRAAD. RG 3.5.710. Notes by Charles E. Whitworth-Smith (Education Department) on Barbara Burdess' notes, December 1949.

³⁹ PRAAD. RG 3.5.710. Notes by Charles E. Whitworth-Smith (Education Department) on Barbara Burdess' notes, December 1949.

⁴⁰ PRAAD. RG 3.5.710. Notes by Charles E. Whitworth-Smith (Education Department) on Barbara Burdess' notes, December 1949.

⁴¹ Ebenezer Ako-Adjei, Edward Akufo-Addo, Joseph Boakye Danquah, Kwame Nkrumah, Emmanuel Obetsebi Lamprey and William Ofori Atta.

⁴² TNA. FCO 141.5087. Secret police report, savingram n°2277, 1948.

⁴³ TNA. FCO 141.5087. Letter from the Ashanti High Commissioner to Robert Scott (Colonial Secretary), 16 January 1949.

precautions, the new government declined its subordinate position. The overwhelming victory of the Convention's People's Party led to the rehabilitation and release of Kwame Nkrumah from prison and set in motion a series of constitutional reforms, which led to the independence of the Gold Coast six years later, in 1957.

The new government funded institutions intended to train the country's future citizens. They set up an Accelerated Development Plan for Education in order to broaden access to schooling (and especially primary schooling), a major change for the colony's inhabitants (Prosperetti 2019). Mass literacy was the Plan's major challenge, in order to speed up access to de facto citizenship. At the same time, in the early 1950s, there were 13 government-supported selective higher education institutions in the colony, and around 50 private secondary schools. These schools became twice as numerous by the end of the decade, while enrolment tripled (Foster 1965, pp. 190–91).

The government set up specialised higher education institutes to train future executives for the nation. They thus set up a higher education department specializing in pedagogy and physical education. This was to replace the Achimota courses, the discontinued short-term refresher courses for teachers,⁴⁴ and, last but not least, training in Great Britain. The department was first founded within Achimota College. It offered a full one-year course for future primary school teachers. It was then transferred in 1952 from Achimota to the Kumasi College of Technology (Opoku-Fianko 1985, p. 70). The College became a University of Science and Technology in 1961. The centre was then transferred to Winebba, at the heart of a new Specialist Teacher Training College, under the leadership of its first African Principal, Edward Teye-Botchway (McWilliam 1959, p. 80), who trained at Loughborough College in England in the 1940s. In 1954, he succeeded two British women who had successively headed the institution. Teye-Botchway modified the course so that it lasted for two years instead of one. At the same time, he initiated a partnership with foreign universities, notably the sports faculty of Springfield College in the United States (Nicolas 2019a, pp. 376–77). Within the Department, pupil-teachers could follow a one then two-year specialised training course, during which they were housed and catered for, while keeping their wage. Entry was based on a competitive examination with hygiene and English tests. In 1951, the course was attended by 24 people, including five women (among whom one Nigerian).⁴⁵ This was the most well attended specialised course that year (compared to music, arts-and-crafts or housecraft).⁴⁶ The number of Physical Education specialists trained was determined by the number of positions available. African newly-trained specialists were still few in number in relation to the school population: about 30 per year for more than 280,000 pupils in 1950 (Foster 1965, p. 113). Henceforth, these specialists were exclusively meant to teach in higher education.⁴⁷ However, this was a decisive step: in neighbouring Afrique Occidentale Française, the new training centre funded in 1953 at Sébikotane (Senegal) welcomed about ten students per year (Nicolas 2019a, p. 188).

While Physical Education was expanding on an unprecedented scale, it was taking a new turn as many African protagonists sought a voice concerning physical training and to distance themselves from the Education Department's previous concerns.

Firstly, there were a number of statements in favour of the sustainability of games and sports. This was the case of the founding fathers of the institutionalisation of civilian sport on the Gold Coast. These members of the coastal city intelligentsia had founded the first sports associations in the 1920s and strongly advocated sports practice. Thus, they called for the training of specialists to be centred around sports, so that schools could become "nurseries of sports".⁴⁸ At the same time, they organised conferences with alumni

⁴⁴ PRAAD. RG3.5.644. "One-year course in Physical Education at Achimota Training College—1952", 30 December 1950.

⁴⁵ PRAAD. RG 3.5.644. Results enclosed to the letter from F. G. Hugsin (Achimota's rector) to the Director of Education, 30 August 1951.

⁴⁶ PRAAD. RG 3.5.644. Letter from F. G. Hugsin (Achimota's rector) to the Director of Education, 30 August 1951.

⁴⁷ PRAAD. RG 3.5.711. Answer required by the Minister of Education to a question asked by M. S. E. Arkah, "whether he will review the salaries and conditions of service of teachers who have completed courses in physical education at the Kumasi College of Technology", 11 November 1955.

⁴⁸ PRAAD. RG 3.5.1366. Meeting of the 1st meeting of the Working Sub-Committee of the Interim Sports Committee held at the Secretariat, 12 July 1949.

from the most prestigious secondary schools to promote the values of amateurism and British games, as at Wesley College in Kumasi in 1950.⁴⁹ Indeed, the emergence of Physical Education specialists did not signal the end of amateur sports in higher education, quite the contrary. The University College of the Gold Coast, founded in 1948 as a branch of the University of London, hosted inter-university games in 1951 in track and field, lawn tennis and cricket between students and faculty members from Legon and the Nigerian university of Lagos (Opoku-Fianko 1985, p. 218).

Secondly, specialists in higher education went beyond the dialectic between elite amateur sports and military drill. According to them, Physical Education was a tool for citizenship training for the entire population. In 1954, this new challenge was summed up as follows:

“In a rapidly developing country like the Gold Coast, it is not only teacher, administrators and clerks who will be in demand in the future. There will be a need for the physically skilful too—for boxers, dancers, footballers, youth-leaders, etc. The child in school must also learn co-operation if he is to become a useful citizen. He must learn to work not only for himself but as one of a team; so that when he becomes an adult, he may understand the principle of Public service, and be able to place the welfare of his country before his own personal convenience. Only in that way can a country become great.”⁵⁰

Rulka questioned future teachers’ skills in training citizens that would be beneficial to the nation, loving and serving their country and state, and even, for some, becoming useful professionals throughout the country. Once again, it was the British model of education that was on the agenda and enabled the process of modernisation being envisioned here, this access to greatness.

Thirdly, African specialists newly trained in Scientific Physical Training were questioning the very nature of this citizenship training, especially the exclusive focus on practices originating in Europe. To this end, they put their finger on the question of Africanisation. Following their reading of the new Physical Education manuals successively published by the Education Department in 1954 and 1955 and written by Mrs Huntley (from Achimota) and M. Whitworth-Smith (from the Education Department and strongly opposed to African dances),⁵¹ some were particularly interested in this issue. These included specialist teachers trained abroad or locally, the very same students who had previously taken the 1940s Achimota course or had gone to Loughborough (such as Edward Teye-Botchway) or Jordanhill college (such as Georges Ayi-Bonte). Now working in higher education in Accra, Kumasi or Cape Coast and involved in leading sports associations, these men obtained privileged positions. Edward Teye-Botchway (member of the Gold Coast Amateur Athletic Association), Georges Ayi-Bonte (teacher at Kumasi College of Technology), J. C. Aikins (teacher at Wesley College, Kumasi), and S. H. Amisah (Principal of Wesley College and President of the Ashanti Amateur Sport Association) held a meeting in Cape Coast in 1955 to engage with the new recommendations and ask to be part of this reform.⁵² They notably concurred with the main focus on health and approved the gendered logos of Physical Education:

“Considering the psychiological [sic] make up of boys and girls and their respective roles in adult life, boys I think, should be trained and given opportunity to develop into men with strength and hardiness. Girls on the other hand, should

⁴⁹ PRAAD. RG.9.1.79. Letter from Arthur Banks (Principal of Wesley College) to M. A. H. R. Joseph, 22 August 1950.

⁵⁰ Archives do not include the author’s first name. However, Anglo-Canadian pedagogist Constance Rulka being employed at Adisadel College during the time, we may safely assume she authored the text (which was unlikely to have been penned by her husband, army officer Kazimierz Rulka). See: PRAAD. RG 3.5.914. Rulka, “The Importance of Physical Education in the School Curriculum”, November 1954.

⁵¹ See (Huntley and Whitworth-Smith 1954, 1955).

⁵² PRAAD. RG 3.5.914. Samuel G. Ayi-Bonte and J. C. Aikins, “Suggestions for a Physical Education and Hygiene Syllabus for Middle Schools”, 1955.

be given more ining [sic] in finer and more graceful movements to equip them for motherhood."⁵³

Indeed, they considered that women and men's bodies and social roles were different by nature. With the rise of girls' schooling throughout the 1950s, they advocated for an adapted female Physical Education curriculum. They called for a "separate program", considering that mixed Physical Education would end up with a "lowering of standards."⁵⁴ In this perspective, they were in line with previous concerns expressed by the colonial Education Department. However, the Education Department dropped the issue, fearing it would be too costly and complicated to consider the Physical Education of girls. Alongside these agreements, the group opposed a second issue. They regretted the absence of "traditional African games"⁵⁵ in the new textbooks. Here, they stepped aside from the previous link between African body practices and lack of hygiene/over-sexualisation. Teye-Botchway and his colleagues revived the debate, put down on paper in 1955 by Ayi-Bonte and Aikins, writing that "most of our games in their original form are not often suitable to be included as such in the Physical Education lesson. They need to be adapted or progressed upon."⁵⁶

This proposal may be analysed at several levels: as a pedagogical trick to encourage young people to take up sports or as a willingness to apply the sports codification and modernisation model to African practices. Furthermore, the emphasis on local games may be read as an instrument for promoting national culture and preserving practices that were part of the idea of tradition, against colonial cultural imposition, especially as, for the first time, African Physical Education teachers from higher education successfully lobbied in order to formally play a part in drafting the new official curriculum.⁵⁷ These specialists and teachers were at the crossroads of the promotion of European Physical Education methods that were deemed to be modern, and the preservation of African culture, and this allows one to bring to light a lasting line of inquiry for the teaching of Physical Education in independent Ghana. In the light of the nationalist reflections carried out in the country (Ahlmán 2017), as Kwame Nkrumah's and the Convention People's Party's "'national dreams' were very much entangled with 'modernist visions'" (Allman 2014, p. 238), the First Republic government sought to weave local physical and sports practices deemed fit to the national character into a training programme for modern citizenship, through the Ghana Young Pioneers movement.

5. Conclusions

Physical Education was transferred into the colonial pedagogical field through an intense conversation between teachers and officers of the Education Department and higher education institutions, in which Africans increasingly participated over the decades. In this context, British, then African, pedagogists framed these practices within a modernist and moralising agenda that eventually led to linking Physical Education with citizenship.

In Britain, Physical Education was built up as a series of pedagogical practices meant to enable the acquisition of moral values specific to British citizenship and manliness. However, the genealogy of these practices' cultural transfer to the Gold Coast revealed the discrepancy between pedagogical principles designed for full citizenship and their transfer into a colonial setting. Educationalists convinced of the benefits of Physical Education for the sake of raising up Africans were steeped in a colonialist view that naturalised and othered the difference between British citizens and African subjects, through discourses targeting hygiene and sexual behaviour.

⁵³ PRAAD. RG 3.5.914. Samuel G. Ayi-Bonte and J. C. Aikins, "Suggestions for a Physical Education and Hygiene Syllabus for Middle Schools", 1955.

⁵⁴ PRAAD. RG 3.5.914. Samuel G. Ayi-Bonte and J. C. Aikins, "Suggestions for a Physical Education and Hygiene Syllabus for Middle Schools", 1955.

⁵⁵ PRAAD. RG 3.5.914. Samuel G. Ayi-Bonte and J. C. Aikins, "Suggestions for a Physical Education and Hygiene Syllabus for Middle Schools", 1955.

⁵⁶ PRAAD. RG 3.5.914. Samuel G. Ayi-Bonte and J. C. Aikins, "Suggestions for a Physical Education and Hygiene Syllabus for Middle Schools", 1955.

⁵⁷ PRAAD. RG 3.5.914. Education Department internal notes, 6 July–18 September 1955.

It was only after the acquisition of self-government in 1951, and the rising involvement of African specialists trained both overseas and locally, that Physical Education actually became a tool for citizen training, intended to educate the Ghanaian people for the future. The demands for an Africanisation of the curriculum finally found an echo in specialised institutions in the 1950s and even more intensely afterwards. After independence in 1957, reflections on a possible syncretism between local and European physical activities were deepened through the Ghana Young Pioneers youth movement founded by Kwame Nkrumah in 1960 (Nicolas 2017), entangling a modernisation agenda with African traditional physical activities.

However, while this syncretism was praised, the naturalisation of gendered difference remained throughout the 1950s–1960s. Indeed, even with the rise of female enrolment, Physical Education specialists carried on naturalising differences between genders on the one hand and on the other viewed the field first and foremost from an androcentric perspective. Colonial Physical Education drew a direct link between manliness and Physical Education. Henceforth, as the connection between Physical Education and Citizenship was strengthened, understanding the genealogy of Physical Education in the Gold Coast allows us to refine our analysis of the link between masculinities and citizenship. During the colonial era, moral and physical strength were woven together in higher education institutions, as part of the training of an ideal male imperial subject. When Physical Education eventually turned into a privileged tool for citizenship training from the early 1950s onwards, this androcentric perspective lingered.

This case study calls for further inquiry in the field of Physical Education in the colonial setting. Taking stock of women's involvement in Physical Education, in higher education institutions (as highlighted in this paper) or at primary school level (notably by African female teachers) would help to refine our understanding of the gendered and racialised nature of colonial (Physical) Education. Besides, further research into the reception of these pedagogical projects in secondary schools, including by those teachers who were not keen on Physical Education and sports, would enable us to understand more specifically the way local masculinities were (or were not) framed by Physical Education and sports.

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