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**Sport in the novels of James Joyce: A discourse theoretical approach.**

**Abstract**

*Among the many themes in which the Irish modernist novelist, James Joyce, was intellectually and emotionally engaged, the issue of British imperialism and Irish nationalism was paramount. While Joyce despised the English colonial occupation of his country, he was equally dismissive of a mythical Irish nationalism, particularly in the way it was endorsed by the Gaelic Athletic Association. While Joyce is not renowned as a writer about sport, nevertheless sporting pursuits can be found throughout his novels. Joyce's nuanced understanding of how English culture had permanently altered Irish social subjectivities (and vice versa) can be found in sharp relief in his novels, particularly Ulysses and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. This article takes sport as a theme in Joyce's work through which to explore fractured national identities through a framework inspired by the discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Their post-Marxist work enables an examination of sport and nationality that goes beyond existing orthodox Gramscian theory that has proved so productive in the understanding of sport in Cultural Studies. The article will commence with a brief review of existing studies of Joyce with respect to sport and national debates. After summarising the broad Gramscian approaches to understanding sport and nationalism, some of the key concepts in Laclau and Mouffe's political philosophy are then outlined. The article will apply those concepts to the way Joyce depicts sport, especially cricket and hockey, to deconstruct the binaries in the debate between British colonialism and Irish nationalism.*

**Key words: James Joyce, sport, Laclau and Mouffe, discourse theory, hegemony**

## **Introduction**

The novels of James Joyce have been the subject of a small body of academic studies that analyse how sport intersects with narratives on nationality and cultural affiliations. Building on that research tradition, this article deploys theoretical frameworks derived from the post-Marxist political philosophy of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe to extend the discussion on Joyce, sport, colonialism and nationalism. The article commences with a brief overview of the literature that explores sport and national identities in Joyce's novels followed by an overview of diverse 'left' theories of sport that provide explanatory frameworks for sport's place in wider political contexts, focussing especially on the concept of hegemony. The specific contours of the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe are then outlined followed by a summary of how their theorisations can make an advance on extant hegemony theories of sport. Given that the article focusses on novels as its primary source, I provide a method, based on recent innovative academic approaches to literary studies, that 'operationalises' Laclau and Mouffe's political theory for the study of literary texts. Following an extended discussion of colonial sport in Joyce's novels by analysing text, intertext and context, I conclude by arguing that the article takes the study of sport beyond the political philosophy of Cultural Studies and into new territory of post-Marxist thinking.

## **Joyce, sport, nationalism, and colonialism**

The connections between sport and Joyce's nuanced understandings of Irish nationalism and British imperialism have been explored by authors who have taken seriously Joyce's engagement with sport in his celebrated novels. Several commentators have noted how boxing references in *Ulysses* are organised around fights between British and Irish pugilists (e.g. Brown 2004; Davison 1995; Mitchell 1994; Sayers 2010). It is the inconclusive nature of the bouts that alerts the attentive reader to the supposition that Joyce does not view sports through

a simplistic nationalist lens. Pursuing the theme of sport and nationalism in the ‘Cyclops’ chapter of *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom, one of the main protagonists of the novel, encounters the ‘citizen’, a character Joyce partly modelled on an aging Michael Cusack, founder of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). Ledden (1999) notes how Bloom favours the more genteel skills of lawn tennis in contrast to the physically muscular sports of Gaelic football and hurling promoted by the GAA. Fairhall (1993) highlights the role played by the GAA, with its promotion of ‘traditional’ Irish sports, in the nationalist revival of the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In a discussion of sport in Joyce’s work, Ryan (2012) notes that some of these sports, especially Gaelic football, were latter-day inventions based on the same sets of ideologies, for example with respect to nationality and masculinity, as the English team sports the GAA claimed to despise. Extending Ryan’s analysis, Harvey (2020) observes how Joyce deploys parody throughout his works as a deconstructive technique to call into question simplistic ideological relations between sport and national identity. However, a fuller understanding of the way Joyce deploys sport within the broader framework of the colonial encounter in Ireland in the early twentieth century requires political philosophical approaches that specifically theorise the interconnections between sport, society and culture.

### **Left theories of sport**

Many of the philosophical contours of sport and nationalism explored by Joyce have their parallels in the theorising of Marxist, neo-Marxist, and post-Marxist scholars of sport. Consequently, ‘leftist theories of sport’ (Morgan 1994) have proved to be rich and fertile territories for scholars interested in understanding the array of intersections between sport, nationality, power, and culture. From a Marxist perspective, Rigauer (2001) commented favourably on the attempts by Soviet Russia to use sport to (allegedly) advance progressive causes such as female emancipation and universal healthcare within communist society. In

contrast, sport in Western countries attracted fierce criticism from academics writing from Marxist and neo-Marxist positions (e.g. Adorno 1982, 2001; Aronovitz 1973; Brohm 1978; Hoch 1972; Perelman 2002; Rigauer 1981). Rowe (2004) summarises the critiques advanced by these writers who consider sport as:

an example of the development of the commodification of everyday life by capitalism, appropriating cultural pursuits, distracting the proletariat with sporting 'circuses', obstructing their revolutionary potential, turning athletes into 'robots' and spectators into disciplined, passive consumers, and creating further opportunities for capitalist exploitation and ruling-class domination (p. 100).

These orthodox Marxist understandings of sport in capitalist societies have often been criticised on grounds of cultural snobbery on the part of writers such as Adorno who displayed open contempt for working-class leisure pursuits. More substantive criticisms have focussed on an economic determinism that holds that cultural practices such as sport are governed by economic factors, and a 'left functionalism' that assumes that sport only serves capitalist interests and denies any social agency to sports' participants and spectators (Giulianotti 2016; Morgan 1994).

To overcome the shortcomings in orthodox Marxist theories, scholars such as Hoggart (1958), Williams (1975, 1977, 1981), Thompson (1963) and Hall (1986) developed an interdisciplinary Cultural Studies analysis to provide more nuanced and sophisticated theoretical treatments of post-war society that remained indebted to Marxism but which took popular culture, including sport, seriously as a site of struggle for working classes. Heavily influenced by Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes and, most notably, Antonio Gramsci, they recognised the 'relative autonomy' of social and cultural practices such as sport and the ability of social groups to forge their own identities at particular historical moments, albeit constrained by the economic and other

circumstances in which they find themselves. For example, in a series of texts extending the Cultural Studies analysis of sport, Critcher (1971, 1982, 1986, 1991) recognised the central role played by football in English society, charting how the commodification of the game was turning fans into consumers of football and away from more traditional class-based identities. However, many supporters continue to resist the commodification process as exemplified by Robson's (2000) study of Millwall's fan culture in which he showed how football fandom is both expressive of local working-class culture but also helps to forge and sustain it.

Arguably, the most critical component of Cultural Studies theorising, and one that has had an enormous impact on the study of sport, is the concept of hegemony, first developed by Gramsci (1971). Simply stated, 'hegemony describes the fluid power relationships, methods and techniques by which dominant groups secure their position, by obtaining ideological consent, rather than the physical coercion, of dominated groups' (Giulianotti, 54). A significant advantage of hegemony theory is its ability to conceive of institutions, identities and ideologies as mutually constituted within contested relationships of power rather than determined by economic factors. Nevertheless, hegemonic practices always seek to establish a dominant position for one group or another. For example, in Gramscian thought, the 'national-popular' is an ideological site upon which different class formations seek to promote the idea of politics that is for the benefit of the whole country, but which primarily serve their own class interests. One only needs to think of how successful national sports teams or individuals are presented by hegemonic groups, such as politicians and the media, as demonstrating unique national characteristics or attributes that correspond to the values held by those groups.

In an innovative sporting application of Gramscian theory, Hargreaves' ground-breaking text, *Sport, Power and Culture* (1986), explicitly understood that sport was intricately interwoven

with political, cultural, economic, and social networks such that ‘the sport-power relation is constructed on the terrain of both civil society and the state’ (p. 4). In his foreword to the text, Stuart Hall explains that Hargreaves ensures, ‘the relationship between sport and hegemony – the maintenance of a particular structure of power and social authority through society – is organic to the treatment, not merely parachuted into place’ (p. xi). Hargreaves’s text made a considerable contribution to an emerging interest in sport studies of the value of Gramscian theorising (e.g. Andrews and Giardina 2008; Donnelly 1988; Gruneau 1999). Even if, as Bairner (2009) argues, Gramsci’s name is often largely erased from many of these texts, his concepts, such as hegemony and the national-popular, have provided a way of understanding the role of sport in the social construction of subjectivities within a nexus of power relations.

Hargreaves’ summary of the Gramscian approach to sport encapsulates the most important aspects of the theory. He maintains that sport plays a role in the development of social identities, for example of race, nationality, and gender, but that such development:

has a contingent character: that is, it is the outcome of continual interaction between opposed interests ... adopting strategies in pursuit of their objectives; that strategies are discursively arrived at in given conditions of struggle and that the outcome is determined also by the autonomous character of sport as a specific kind of cultural formation (p. 208).

The strength of a Gramscian-inspired approach is that it properly foregrounds sport as a vital social and cultural practice that exerts an influence over broader ideological as well as material conditions found in society. Gramsci’s retention of Marx’s understanding of the dialectic between force and consent allows the analyst to think of society and sports as routed through structures of power in mutually constitutive relationships. However, Gramsci preserved some essentialist elements of orthodox Marxism, notably that the economy was determining ‘in the

final instance' and the idea that hegemony was restricted to class-based political practices (Jacobs 2018; Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). For instance, Haugaard notes that for Gramsci, 'hegemony is not only the key to bourgeois power; equally it is the master concept for proletariat power' (p.46). The consequence is that, in a Gramscian analysis, sports may be 'more determined [by material conditions] than determining' (Hargreaves, 209).

Morgan (1994) has critiqued hegemony theories of sport on the grounds that their insistence on a class-based and economic analysis of sport is inextricably tied to existing social relations of power which leave no room for a non-circular theory of change. To address these theoretical weaknesses, Morgan proposes a turn to liberal social theory to overcome the impasses of hegemony theory. However, in doing so he arguably moves too far away from the Marxist traditions that have inspired Gramscian approaches to sport. I propose that a turn to the post-Marxism of Laclau and Mouffe maintains the theoretical connections to Gramsci while offering a solution to the conundrum of developing a theory of social change that Morgan identifies as lacking in hegemony theory.

In this article I argue that Joyce portrays sports as practices that are inextricably intertwined with broader structures, particularly those of nationality and colonialism, in ways that are fluid, constitutive and contingent. To do so, a theory of political and cultural philosophy is needed that is unbound from Gramsci's insistence on a class-based 'ultimate primacy of material conditions' (Bairner, 196). The premise of this paper is that the political philosophical works of Laclau and Mouffe offer a set of analytic tools that will avoid a damaging appropriation of Gramsci that does violence to his insistence on historical materialism. By way of emphasis as to the degree to which their post-Marxism differs from Gramscian philosophy, Laclau completely reverses a critical aspect of Gramscian theory: it is contingency, not materialism,

that operates at the last instance. Similarly, Joyce ‘founds his novels on contingency and indeterminacy. Indeterminacy arises precisely because a complete narrative structure, founded on a logic of causality, is only ever partially visible’ (Mambrol 2018). Laclau points out that ‘in the *final instance* no objectivity can be referred back to an absolute ground’. However, he also notes that ‘social agents never act in that final instance’ (Laclau 1990, 27). The distinction is one that is also made by Stuart Hall who argues that, within the empirical social world, ‘determinate relations do exist; they just cannot be guaranteed in advance’ (Andrews and Giardina, 405). Nor can they be thought of as fixed since they are, by definition, relational: a change in one will affect the other.

Routing a discussion of sport through Joyce that is inspired by the political philosophy of Laclau and Mouffe is replete with possibilities because Joyce’s works have proved to be so accommodating to the significant theoretical developments of the twentieth century. These include, ‘feminist, psychoanalytic, Marxist, and post-structuralist theories, particularly deconstruction ... because [they are] already in the geometry of the texts’ (Lawrence, 4-5). Joyce was particularly interested in describing the happenstance encounters between his characters that make up the organic matter of everyday society. From a theoretical perspective, ‘Joyce’s writing is effectively situated at the point where chance – or contingency – and structure coincide. This is his great contribution to literature in the twentieth century’ (Mambrol 2018). Joyce’s primary themes for his task include, *inter alia*, language and literature, religion, myth and politics, music and entertainment, sex, gender, and the body. In this article I argue that an analysis of sport, one of his minor themes, viewed through a theoretical lens pioneered by Laclau and Mouffe will continue this line of Joycean scholarship. Arguably, Joyce anticipates their political philosophy in the way they specifically theorise the relationship between contingency, indeterminacy, and structure. The article will therefore contribute to the

philosophical treatment of sport by developing a post-Marxist political analysis that goes beyond Gramscian Cultural Studies.

### **Discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe**

It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a comprehensive overview of the political theory of Laclau and Mouffe, both as individual scholars (e.g. Laclau 1990, 1996, 2005; Mouffe 2000, 2013, 2018) and as joint authors (Laclau and Mouffe [1984] 2001). There are several book-length treatments of the earlier works (e.g. Howarth 2000; Jørgensen and Phillips 2002; Torfing 2005) and a rich seam of recent commentaries that consider their later texts (e.g. Salter 2016; Stavrakis 2017; Thomassen, 2016, 2019). This article will focus on those aspects of the political philosophy of Laclau and Mouffe, which can be labelled as ‘discourse theory’.

The discourse theory developed by Laclau and Mouffe is located within the broader intellectual movement of poststructuralism, an overarching term to describe a wide array of theoretical perspectives that seek to understand how meaning is constructed. Torfing (2005) explains that ‘poststructuralist discourse theory is a tool for analyzing the more or less sedimented rules and meanings that condition the political construction of social, political and cultural identity’ (p. 153). To do this work, poststructuralists call into question universal categories, binary divides, and absolute concepts. ‘Texts’, which include all signifying practices, need to be understood within their specific historical and cultural contexts, thereby precluding any universal meanings. Similarly, discourse is ‘any complex of elements in which *relations* play the constitutive role’ (Laclau 2005, 68 italics in the original). Discourse should not be thought about simply as language, but ‘understood as any action that imbues reality with meaning’ (Moriconi and De Cima, 57). Helpfully, Laclau (1990) in a piece written with Chantal Mouffe, provides a sporting analogy to explain the idea:

We use it [discourse] to emphasize the fact that every social configuration is *meaningful*. If I kick a spherical object in the street or if I kick a ball in a football match, the *physical* fact is the same but *its meaning* is different. The object is a football only to the extent that it establishes a set of relations with other objects, and these relations are not given by the mere referential materiality of the objects, but are, rather, socially constructed (p. 100. Italics in the original).

For Laclau and Mouffe, discourse incorporates linguistic and non-linguistic material, which should not be seen as divided but as mutually constitutive of the totality of the object, whether that be of sport, nationality, gender and so on. The playing of sport is as meaningful as writing or talking about sport. Discourses constitute subjects, both individually and socially, so that ‘the same system of rules that makes that spherical object into a football, makes me a player’ (p. 101). In its production of identities, discourses of sport will intersect with, overlap, or contest other discourses, such as those about nationality and colonialism. Some discourses become institutionalised thereby becoming sedimented and engrained in society as the ‘truth’, especially when they are supported by informal interpretations and legitimisation. Sporting World Cups and the Olympic Games are prime examples where sport and nationalism have become interlocked within powerful institutional and ideological frameworks.

Discourses are therefore relational and help to form and change each other through articulatory practices. The meaning of ‘sport’ is influenced by discourses of, for example, nationalism and *vice versa*. Poststructuralists aim to ‘deconstruct’ these ‘truths’ to reveal the historically and culturally contingent assumptions that underpin the structures of thought that produce such knowledge. Given that language is the primary terrain on which these debates take place, poststructuralists, following Saussure and the later Wittgenstein, theorise language as a system of difference and negation rather than of positive representation. An absolute ‘truth’ to any

statement is denied because, once the veneer of objectivity has been stripped away, the relations of power that produces it are revealed. Deconstruction is the technique used to ‘analyse the operations of difference in texts, the ways in which meaning are made to work’ (Scott, 37). Critically, as Barbara Johnson points out, the result of deconstructive work is to show how ‘the differences *between* entities ... are shown to be based on a repression of differences *within* entities’ (Johnson 1980, 7, cited in Scott, 38. Italics in the original). For example, the difference ‘Irish/British’ is founded upon a fiction of unified national identities that can be contrasted with each other. This move results in a suppression of the disparate set of differences within Irish and/or British national identities. More fundamentally, the two terms are interdependent because identities are not derived from pure or inherent differences but are culturally constructed. In the thought of Laclau and Mouffe, it is these dislocations, or constructed differences, that are constitutive of subjectivities, which can therefore be said to have a constitutive outside that creates identities at the same time as forestalling any full or closed identity.

### **Hegemony theory and sport**

One of the purposes of the articulation of discourses is to achieve hegemonic positions of power for groups with shared interests. Uniting Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory with their reworked version of Gramsci’s concept of hegemony is therefore critical to the discussion of sport in Joyce’s works. For Laclau and Mouffe (2001), hegemony is ‘a political *type of relation, a form*, if one wishes, of politics; but not a determinable location within a topography of the social’ (p.125. Italics in the original). Sports can therefore be ‘understood by the way that they are articulated into a particular set of complex social, economic, political, and technological relationships that compose the social context’ (Andrews and Giardina, 406). For Laclau and Mouffe, articulation:

is the idea that people give meaning to the world around them by combining certain words, objects, ideas, and concepts in specific ways when they speak or act. When such combinations are repeated over and over again, the patterns they constitute start forming a stable structure' (Jacobs, 298).

However, the structure can never be fully completed, or, in the terminology of Laclau and Mouffe, society remains 'unsutured'. This should not be taken to mean that Laclau and Mouffe regard society as being in a state of permanent flux or chaos: articulatory practices are political attempts at achieving hegemonic stability for a particular set of interests, whether it be of class, nationality, gender and so on. Where these attempts are broadly successful, Laclau and Mouffe maintain that 'objective' conditions prevail that give the impression of a closed society that obscures its contingent nature (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). The task of the discourse theorist is to prise apart (or deconstruct) those seemingly objective conditions thereby exposing their contingency to be able to construct, through counter-hegemonic articulatory practices, an alternative political reality (Thomassen 2005).

One of the key elements of the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe is that identities, including social identities, are 'discursively constituted through *chains of equivalence* where signs are sorted and linked together in chains in opposition to other chains which thus define how the subject is, and how it is not' (Jørgensen and Phillips, 43. Italics in the original). Political articulation is the process by which these chains are established to create meaning – that is someone belongs to one group rather than another. However, these identities are not permanently fixed since the subject is *overdetermined*, by which they mean that the subject identifies with more than one subject position in specific circumstances. To reiterate the point: all identities are relational and contingent.

Given that Laclau and Mouffe argue that all social practices are discursive, sport can be viewed as a critical site on the battlefield for the construction of social subjectivities. Sport is fully integrated as a discursive site of struggle in networks of power in relation to nationality and cultural imperialism. Numerous sports' historians have unearthed sport's role in the export of its ideology by the British empire (e.g. Hutchinson 1996; Mangan 1986, 1992; Perkin 2007). Harvey (2020) argues that by parodying an array of sporting practices, Joyce exposes the contradictions and double standards within discourses of national identity. In this respect, Joyce anticipates the work of C. L. R. James who showed how West Indian subjugated populations came to see the gaps between the stated values of sport and the actual behaviours of the British as a critical weakness in the imperialist discourse. Knowledge of imperialist hypocrisies assisted indigenous populations in their fight for freedom: they could take sport, in James' case cricket, and use it as tool of counter-hegemonic struggle by beating the imperialist at its own game, including its own ideologies.

### **A discourse theoretical approach to the study of literature**

The post-Marxist discourse theory developed by Laclau and Mouffe has been mostly used to discuss political and social issues. However, there is an emerging body of studies that 'apply their notions to the fabricated society of a literary text' (MehrMotlagh and Beyard, 124). Literary studies using discourse theory (e.g. Soltani 2015; Soltani and MehrMotlagh 2017; MehrMotlagh and Beyard 2018; Beyard and Mehrmotlagh 2018) are based upon the idea, discussed earlier, that there is no firm distinction between language and social action – both 'attain their meanings based on the similarities and differences to other signs and social action' (Soltani and MehrMotlagh, 4). This lack of differentiation enables the practice of sport and the reading of texts to be brought within a single analytic frame. Consequently, Soltani (2015) has developed a three-stage 'method' by which to operationalise Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical

notions for the study of fiction, by analysing text, intertext and context. It should be noted that these distinctions are for analytic purposes only because, according to Laclau and Mouffe, each are intertwined, relational and mutually constitutive. Phiddian (1997) captures the idea that text, intertext, and context make up social reality when he observes that, in respect of *Ulysses*, ‘Dublin is textualized in *Ulysses*, but its sounds and smells and the people continue to exist even as they become mythopoetic wraiths’ (p. 692). Early twentieth-century Dublin is arguably as much a product of Joyce’s texts as it is of the materiality of its buildings, streets, and inhabitants. This study will adapt Soltani’s three-step model in its analysis of sport in Joyce’s novels by seeking to explore how text, intertext and context interact with each other in complex, fractured, and mutually contingent ways. The article uses key concepts from Laclau and Mouffe, notably nodal points, master signifiers, elements, moments, chains of equivalence and difference, antagonisms, and dislocations. These will enable a study of how sport and literature, myth and history, fictional character and authorial biography become imbricated with broader relations of power in relation to nationalism and colonialism that are played out both in the texts and in political and social life outside of the novels. Such an approach is in line with Joyce’s own aspirations for his novels as he was aiming to force the Irish people to see themselves in his ‘nicely polished looking-glass’ (Gilbert, 64) with the hope that it would inspire them to political action.

### **Colonial sport in Joyce: text, intertext and context**

According to his brother, Stanislaus, the young James was an able cricketer at Clongowes Wood school, who ‘promised to be an able bat. He still took an interest in the game when he was at Belvedere, and eagerly studied the feats of Ranji and Fry, Trumper and Spofforth’ (S. Joyce, 41). Discussing the role of cricket in British imperial adventures, Bateman (2009) identifies the hegemonic operation of the game within elite schools where it:

was to become an agent of an athletic and moral pedagogy through which socially privileged young men were trained to become leaders of both nation and empire; at the same time, whilst cricket was in this sense being articulated as an elite practice, its representation as a cultural form with educational and ethical attributes made it a crucial component in a collective national culture (p.34).

Joyce continued to take a keen interest in the game throughout his life although, as Atherton (1965) explains, ‘Joyce seems to have resented the almost religious respect which many English people have for the game and associated this aspect of it with those platitudes about ‘keeping a straight bat’ and ‘playing the game’ which are sometimes regarded as the most unpleasantly hypocritical parts of the English character’ (p. 55). Pierce perceptively argues that Joyce chose to embrace the incongruities and contradictions of being an Irish writer opposed to British occupation of Ireland while still enjoying the quintessential sport of the imperialist. As noted earlier, Joyce anticipates the work of C.L.R. James in *Beyond a Boundary* (1963), through his understanding that ‘cricket was like the language he used, the language of the oppressor, but also the vehicle of self-expression, the weapon for writing back’ (Pierce, 168). Joyce identified the dissonance between the values, such as fair play, that the English proclaimed for cricket and themselves, and the lived reality of English imperialism, which was often brutal and murderous, not least in Ireland. However, whereas ‘*Beyond a Boundary* is a profoundly Gramscian text’ (Bateman, 186) where colonialist and indigenous identities are presented as relatively stable and fixed, Joyce, *avant la lettre*, goes beyond a Jamesian historical materialist analysis of cricket as a site of counter-hegemonic nationalist politics. Instead, he depicts the contingent and dislocated relationship between discourses of sport and colonial and nationalist discourses. It is within these *relationships* where fluid and malleable individual and social subjectivities are constituted, and political opportunities may be formed.

Cricket features in each of Joyce's main texts. Brief mention is made in *Dubliners* in the schoolboy truancy tale, 'An Encounter'. Mahoney wears a cricket badge showing that, although cricket was associated with the Protestant British elite, the game was also found in Catholic schools in Ireland, thereby producing an immediate fissure between the game and its assumed colonial status. Cricket is a significant feature of the opening chapter of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: first as the sign of summer, with football giving way to cricket, and again at the end of the chapter where Stephen Dedalus can 'hear the bump of the balls: and from here and from there through the quiet air the sound of the cricket bats: pick, pack, pock: like drops of water in a fountain falling softly in the brimming bowl' (p. 61). Pierce (2005) argues that in his deployment of cricket in *Portrait* Joyce refuses to succumb to the simple idea of sport as national jingoism. He notes that Joyce's use of cricket 'constitutes an act of refusal and defiance; a refusal to toe the nationalistic line and an act of defiance against the English imperialist who sought to wrap a flag around the game' (p. 167). McGarrity (2015) extends Pierce's argument that, in its export to its former colonies and adoption in those countries by indigenous populations, cricket embodies a 'complexity of cultural identity' (p. 577) that cannot be reduced to national chauvinism.

McGarrity argues that in these representations of the game, Joyce 'uses the game as a marker of both isolation and belonging' (p. 576). It is precisely in the dislocation between isolation and belonging where political subjectivities are formed that is of interest to Laclau and Mouffe and which Joyce intuitively explores. It is significant that Stephen *hears* the game of cricket and its familiar sounds, which 'insist on their being heard or noticed' (Pierce, 163). Yet, Stephen is not hailed into a fixed subject position (i.e. to be "English") nor does he completely reject the call (i.e. to be "Irish"): he remains both attached to, and separated from, cricket's ideological, national, and cultural baggage. He neither succumbs nor escapes, but instead

oscillates indeterminately between the two discursive poles. His burgeoning identity is formed in the relationship between them as an Irish citizen, educated at a leading Catholic public school that nevertheless adopts many of the sports and other cultural pursuits of the coloniser.

Stephen's dislocated relationship with colonial British sport is brought into sharper relief in *Ulysses*. Games first make an appearance into the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> June 1904 (the day the novel is set) early in Chapter Two. Stephen is teaching history at Mr Deasy's school and his young students remind him that Thursday is a half day with 'hockey at ten, sir' (p. 25). Stephen retains his bad memories, narrated in *Portrait*, of playing robust sport to which he was physically unsuited. Yet, the text suggests that he is not immune to the persistent insistence of sport. Stephen dismisses his students to go play hockey and their game continues within earshot of Stephen and the headteacher, Mr Deasy, and intrudes itself into his consciousness:

Shouts rang shrill from the boy's playfield and a whirring whistle.

Again: a goal. I am among them, among their battling bodies in a medley, the joust of life. You mean that knockkneed mother's darling who seems to be slightly crawsick? (p. 29)

In this passage, Stephen regrets the corporal frailties that make him unsuited to vigorous sporting pursuits yet in his fantasy he is fully involved in the endeavour that he acknowledges as productive of social life. Later in the same chapter, Stephen appears to recognise the emerging cultural importance of sport, to the extent that when he is debating the 'ways of the Creator' with Mr Deasy he says, jerking a thumb towards the window:

-That is God.

Hooray! Ay! Whrrwhee!

-What? Mr Deasy asked.

-A shout in the street, Stephen answered, shrugging his shoulders (p. 32).

It is no accident that Mr Deasy is a West Briton – an Irish Protestant who supports British imperialist rule in Ireland - and that his school should be a site on which hockey, a sport that was brought to Ireland by the British, should be played. Cheng (1995) argues that the passages cited above reveal ‘how hegemonic “consent” is obtained through cultural institutions and discursive practices’ (p. 165). However, to help to draw out a more nuanced understanding of the political importance of these passages, Joyce’s use of sport can be thought of as a nodal point which help to organise other discourses around nationalism and colonialism. For Laclau and Mouffe, nodal points are ‘partial fixations ... that arrest the flow of difference, to construct a centre’ (p. 98–99). Nodal points are not themselves especially meaningful, but ‘instead, they imbue the signifiers connected to them with meaning’ (Jacobs, 303). Imperial sports that the British exported to its colonies, helped to signify concepts, such as ‘fair play’, ‘playing by the rules’, ‘manliness’, ‘comradeship’, ‘the amateur ideal’, and even ‘civilisation’ in a chain of equivalence that connected them to British colonial ideologies. These concepts require articulatory practices to become established and associated with discourses of sport and colonialism. In the terminology of Laclau and Mouffe, these signifiers can be thought of as either ‘moments’ or ‘elements’ where ‘moments’ are signs that become (more or less) fixed whereas ‘elements’ are signs that remain unfixed or excluded. However, the ‘transition from the “elements” to the “moments” is never entirely fulfilled’ (Laclau & Mouffe, 97), and the polysemy of an element can be recuperated, and the meaning of ‘sport’ therefore always remains contested. Stephen’s refusal to be inducted into the prevailing discursive dogmas of

colonial sport might be read as an act of resistance to the construction of ‘moments’ that would fix the signification of sport.

If ‘sport’ in Joyce’s works is a nodal point that organises discourses, the individual sports of cricket and hockey can be thought of as master signifiers within the discourse of sport that organise identities of, *inter alia*, nationality, class, religion, and gender. In Laclau and Mouffe’s theorisation, master signifiers (like nodal points) are (more or less) empty in that they have little intrinsic meaning themselves. They become critical aspects in the construction of subjectivities through the chains of equivalence created through articulatory practices that invests them with meaning. In *On Populist Reason* (2005), Laclau argues that, in certain circumstances, a signifier retains its particularity while, at the same time it, ‘assumes the representation of an incommensurable totality’ (p. 70). In the passage from *Ulysses* cited above, hockey is closely associated with Britishness, Protestantism, colonial dominance, and upper and middle-class masculinity. Arguably, cricket can be thought of as the most powerful of sporting master signifiers as it became inextricably associated with the identity and purported ideologies of the British colonialists. As noted above, in Laclau and Mouffe’s theory, such efforts at fixing identity cannot fully succeed. Although the construction of ‘moments’ works antagonistically through the exclusion of other identities, this process is never complete; there is always an excess that remain as ‘elements’. This excess is represented in the text through Stephen’s misrecognition of the shouts he hears. He listens to the shouts, but in misrecognising them, either consciously or unconsciously, a dislocation arises where subjectivity is formed. Recalling that, for Laclau and Mouffe, dislocations provide political opportunities, Stephen has subverted the presence of the British in Ireland, shifting the terrain of politics, at least in his debate with Deasy, from the playing field to the street – from the upper-middle class Protestant West Briton elite to the ordinary man and woman on the streets of Dublin. It is the antagonism

between British and Irish culture that helps to forge Stephen's, and, by extension, Ireland's developing sense of identity as formed in the space created in the dislocated relationship between them.

Sport in *Portrait*, notably rugby and cricket, can be linked to a longer tradition of schoolboy novels traced back to *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. As Harvey (2020) argues, the parodic parallels between the texts can be seen in sharp relief in the respective treatment of sport. Both boys are introduced to a form of rugby in their early days at school. While physically robust Tom helps his side to win with a piece of individual bravery, fragile Stephen spends his time trying to avoid both the ball and other players. Whereas, in the alternative semi-autobiographical text, *Stephen Hero*, Stephen is seen playing handball, Joyce removed this scene from *Portrait*, thus ensuring, in the words of Ryan, that 'the hero's aversion to sport for either union or nation, first signalled in his representation of the young Stephen's indifference to rugby at Clongowes, is underscored' (p. 119). Tom concludes his schooldays as captain of the first eleven, unblinkingly taking his place at the heart of English culture, whereas Stephen is semi-detached from it even as it calls to him.

By associating *Portrait* with the *Bildungsroman*, or coming of age novel, exemplified by *Tom Brown*, the chains of equivalence extend to the ethical universe of that tradition as exemplified through sport. They might include 'character building', 'heroism', 'moral rectitude', 'physical bravery', and 'responsibility towards others'. Joyce's parodies help to deconstruct these signifiers by humorously showing Stephen to be unathletic, timid and unheroic. In doing so, he helps to expose the mythic qualities of sporting ideologies that are exemplified in *Tom Brown*. Several scholars (e.g. Boddice 2009; Gathorne-Hardy 1979; Harvey 2013) have shown how Hughes' novel helped to usher in the 'athletic turn' in British upper-middle class society,

notably in its public schools where team sports flourished from the middle of the nineteenth-century, and which ultimately helped to launch the codified sports of football, rugby, cricket, and hockey by its end. It was not only the sports that were established, but also a whole set of (mythic) ideologies that undergirded them, and which helped to create a robust sense of British, and especially English, national identity. In the theorisation of Laclau and Mouffe, myths take specific forms and functions: myths are only ever relational, constructing themselves through the exclusions they make, and they operate as hegemonic articulatory practices that attempt to create an objective society that erases its contingency. However, Laclau theorises that such a social space can never be ‘sutured’: society is ‘impossible’, by which he means it can never be rendered full or complete through any amount of myth-building (Laclau 1991). The purpose of myth-making hegemonic articulatory practices is to try to achieve a society that is as near to full closure as possible. The public reception to Hughes’ novel helped to bring about such a closure and to establish fixed meanings (i.e. creating ‘moments’) about sport and what it means to be ‘English’. Joyce’s texts resist such closure, and, through deconstructive parodies, expose the hypocrisies and inconsistencies within the colonialist discourse around sport, thereby unfixing (keeping as ‘elements’) the signification of sport and national identities.

In the wider political context, the ethical qualities purportedly proffered by colonialist sport were not lost on the subjugated indigenous populations. For many, ‘to excel at cricket became an objective of the lower orders who sought an accommodation with the ruling elite’ (Stoddart, 623). It was these accommodations that gave great concern to Michael Cusack and the GAA which introduced Rule 27 into its constitution in 1905 that banned members of the GAA from playing or watching British sports such as cricket, rugby, and hockey (Hassan 2012). Joyce, however, understood that British colonial sport, any more than the English language, could not simply be wished away voluntarily as part of an Irish national revivalist political project. British

colonialist occupation of Ireland, including its sports, had already changed forever the country and its people. 'For Joyce the impulse to assert the claims of difference in the colonial encounter, the demarcation dispute, between Britain and Ireland, needed tempering' (Pierce, 168). Joyce understood that both imperialist and indigenous people, like the fictional character of Stephen, would emerge changed from their encounter on the sports field and elsewhere through its very terms and experiences.

C. L. R. James is, perhaps, the most notable analyst of this phenomenon. He recognised how members of indigenous populations took up cricket to ingratiate themselves into colonial society, but also how they came to see the supposed moral values of cricket were not fulfilled by the colonial masters. Yet, they also saw that the supposed values of cricket may be politically beneficial if they were to be followed. A liberationist subjectivity was born precisely in the gap between the imaginary ideals of sport and the very different symbolic reality of day-to-day experience. Beating the master at his own game, including at his own alleged ideologies, was a critical step in fulfilling that revolutionary potential, which also served as a marker of national identity and pride. James was not the first to see the hypocrisies and ironies of the stated values of the British as expressed through cricket. In *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce reels off the names of leading English cricketers of the day while at the same time associating them with robust sexual appetites, thereby exposing the space between the lofty rhetoric of English cultural imperialism with its more disreputable reality (Atherton 2009; Malings 1970; Pierce 2005). Such parodic interventions are only possible where a totally closed social space is impossible, thereby allowing it, through deconstructive moves, to be prised open, examined more thoroughly and the contradictions exposed. Joyce was both an able cricketer as a boy and a follower of cricket and other 'colonial' sports as an adult without ever fully embracing or completely rejecting them. Instead, he used these sports to 'write back' in a way that could acknowledge his

country's unwanted but inescapable colonial history and subvert it to create a different Ireland that was beholden neither to Britain nor to a mythical past of the Irish national revivalists.

In *Ulysses*, hegemonic and counter-hegemonic struggles are played out on the hockey field as much as in the political terrain. Since hegemonic articulation is 'any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice' (Laclau & Mouffe, 91), there can be no guarantees as to the effect these cultural battles will produce as subjectivities are subject to perpetual change through the process of those struggles. Since subjectivities are always overdetermined there will always be an excess that escapes integration, and, for Joyce, 'excess, a refusal to stop when the point is made, is the name of the game' (Pierce, 162). Satire is one of the major Joycean techniques by which he excessively makes his points. For example, in the long 'Circe' chapter of *Ulysses*, made up of dramatic fantasies and illusions set in Dublin's Night Town, Stephen comically imagines Mr Deasy, dressed in racing colours, 'gripping the reins of his mount and brandishing his hockey stick as his nag lopes by at a schooling gallop' (p. 495). Joyce's antipathy towards English cultural imperialism in Ireland is here given expression through his parodic depiction of Deasy as a figure of fun, his political identity as a 'West Briton' is exposed as absurd. For Joyce, Ireland's national identity, as much as Stephen's own character, are created in the dislocations and antagonisms that are found in the colonial relationship, not least in sport. For Laclau and Mouffe, 'both the subject and society lack any a priori status; they are constructed discursively' (Bertram, 88). Likewise, Joyce rejects a teleological conception of political subjectivity and instead presents both character and country as perpetually forged in the relational discursive fires of, *inter alia*, the colonial sporting encounter.

## **Conclusion**

This article has outlined a theoretical approach to the understanding of colonial sport in the novels of Joyce by deploying concepts derived from the political philosophy of Laclau and Mouffe. The notions of articulation, hegemony, master signifiers, nodal points, myths, chains of equivalence, moments and elements have been used to analyse the way Joyce uses sport as means to deconstruct debates on British imperialism and Irish national revival that were circulating in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By employing ideas from Laclau and Mouffe it has been possible to extend an important strand of theorising that emerged from Cultural Studies that recruited Gramsci's theory of hegemony as an explanatory framework for understanding sport. In order to deliver on the promise of the insistence on the contingency of all social subjectivities while not doing violence to the historical materialism that underpins Gramsci's work, Laclau and Mouffe's strictly anti-essentialist framework provide the necessary conceptual tools. The analysis has been routed through the work of Joyce as his texts contain the necessary discursive materials. Joyce's novels are not political tracts or treatises. Rather, politics is immanent to the text, interwoven into the relations between the characters and the events of the novels. The article affirms Joyce's complex non-binary understanding of the conflict between colonial oppression and Irish nationalism. Through his utilisation of sport, Joyce deconstructs the colonial/nationalist binary, showing its contingent and mutually constitutive nature to which his novels added an extra layer of discursive material. A question for future research is whether such an approach might be a productive way to comprehend sport in contemporary late capitalist society. Given that Laclau and Mouffe were writing for the era of burgeoning consumerism and hyper-commodification it is likely that their work may well provide some answers for those studying relations of power in today's sporting formations.

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