CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

on physical culture
at the edges of empire

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Editor

Chapter 1

Creating a decolonising South African physical culture archive: A case study of Ron Eland

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Introduction

This chapter traces accounts of a 20th-century black strongman Ron Eland through his hitherto unexamined private archive. According to Michelle Perrot (1990:1), private archives are “places of pleasures, servitudes, conflicts and dreams”. The unpacking of Eland’s life and career through his archive represents an important contribution to the creation of a physical culture archival narrative at the edges of empire. In this sense, Eland’s history helps add to a canon of decolonised texts on South Africa’s physical culture history, at home and abroad.

Decolonising physical culture narratives, as far as this chapter is concerned, entails discarding what has been wrongly written, and interrogating distortions of people’s life experiences, negative labelling, deficit theorising and genetically deficient or culturally deficient models that pathologised oppressed people (Le Grange, 2018:17). It also challenges the limitations and dominance of Western epistemologies employed by researchers who were uncritical of physical culture practices in colonial and apartheid South Africa. A decolonised narrative is one that seeks out new ontologies by deliberately moving subaltern experiences – left outside of official colonial spaces and places – to the centre (Slamat, 2018).

From the second decade of the 21st century, there has been an increasing interest in creating sport historical texts within decolonial contexts, notably cricket narratives. A few key works produced in this regard are *Cricket and conquest: The history of South African cricket retold* (Odendaal, Merrett, Reddy & Winch, 2016) and *Reverse sweep: A story of South African cricket since apartheid* (Desai, 2017). Recently, the publication *Exploring decolonising themes in SA sport history: Issues and challenges* appeared, which included the “articulations of academic researchers, professionals and retired sportspeople who were requested to ... place themselves at the centre of discourses that dispel myths that blacks had no sport significance prior to 1994” (Cleophas, 2018b:9). There has also been some

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attention of an informal nature directed at creating decolonised South African physical culture narratives (Cleophas, 2018c). This is best done through the culling of data from private archives.

Archives and decolonisation

Traditionally, state and official archives provided primary sources for South African sport research. Such archives are however limited in their capacity to constructing decolonised sport narratives. Despite certain limitations that underexploited private archives hold, they constitute a valuable body of evidence (Odendaal, 2018:2). The researcher, however, not the owner or donor, creates the private archive from loose materials. Therefore, what we call private archives today was previously referred to as private manuscripts, historical manuscripts or manuscript collections. The evolving terminology is not without polemics for archivists today, considering the impact and influence of their motive and thought on archives. 'Private archives' is both a more inclusive term than manuscripts in that it more readily encompasses digital records and non-textual media and also expressly applies the word 'archives' to fonds of private provenance, something beyond 'historical manuscripts'. Then there are grey areas that dwell between public and private archives, and personal and corporate archives. Nowhere else, other than the private archive, do black weightlifters, who were and remain marginal figures in South African sport history, get to tell their story in detail and thereby allow historians a glimpse of their lives (Fisher, 2009:7). The aim of this chapter was to create such an archive by discarding and ignoring what has been wrongly written about black sport. Such an attempt is undertaken by an examination of Ron Eland's private archive.

Traditional South African weightlifting (the modern-day version of physical culture) narratives reveals a white bias (see Leach & Wilkins, 1992:141-144). During the colonial and apartheid eras, public archives supported this biasness, which therefore limits their usefulness for decolonial sport history research (Lalu, 2008:158). Public archives also no longer hold the sole authority over creating physical culture narratives because they are "processes of preservation and exclusion" (Booth, 2005:85). Private archives, on the other hand, reveal the conditions under which marginalised communities conducted physical culture programmes.

Although there is some scholarly interest (Cleophas, 2009; Snyders, 2018) in South African physical culture, it remains a neglected field of research among scholars. However, the participation of William Ron Eland, a black South African weightlifter in the 1948 Olympic Games and a member of the British contingent, is drawing some interest in South African mainstream printed and digital media (Cleophas, 2018c:9; 2018d). Eland's sport career is tied up in his private archive that reveals how he reached the highest echelons in international sport – the Olympic Games, the Commonwealth Games and Mr Universe – but remains an unknown entity in his country of birth. His international contribution to poor communities, his passion, endurance and commitment to furthering his education make him a role model for youths at risk. The absence of data in Eland's archive relating to strength sport

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among women also reveals much about a genderised attitude during the 20th century. For most of the 20th century, black South African women were limited to acts of balancing and contortionism in physical culture. Seventy years after the introduction of apartheid and the 1948 Olympic Games, South Africa should be enriched by narratives emanating through this archive.

A South African-born strongman's private archive: Ron Eland

South African strongmen are seldom on the radar of sport historians. When attention is directed to this area, a white bias is usually perpetuated, indicative in claims such as “Oliver Clarence Oehley [a white weightlifter] can rightfully be described as the father of South African weight-lifting” (Raad vir Geesteswetenskaplike Navorsing, 1982:54).

The South African public archives also hold little material on black South African weightlifting history, because apartheid and exclusion became naturalised, even among those who were themselves subjugated (Odendaal, 2018:1). This exclusion made black people invisible in colonial and apartheid society. One such individual who was made invisible in South African sport was the historically significant strongman, Ron Eland, who is omitted from formal work on South African Olympic participation in weightlifting (Van der Merwe, 1978:396–398). Historical significance is defined as data that shed light on enduring or emerging issues in history and contemporary life or that were important at some stage in history within the collective memory of groups. Significant topics might meet either of these criteria, but not necessarily both (Peck & Seixas, 2008:1027).

Although South African black weightlifters were marginal, they left behind documentary evidence showing that they too were “exceptionally normal” (Penn, 1999:1) in their day, standing out clearly to be noticed by historians. They do have a history before, during and after apartheid as is evidenced by the private archive of Eland. This archive includes an uncatalogued collection of dairies, programmes, memorabilia (local, national and Olympic) and personal reflections. Eland's private archive provides a telling record of the history of a black weightlifter's struggle against the apartheid system. The author used a standard set of questions, as proposed by Booth (2005:32), for determining whether the sources (testimonials, curriculum vitae, scrap notes) in this archive reveal truth:

- How close geographically and temporally was the recorder to the event?
- How soon after the event did the recording take place?
- What was the mental and physical health, age, educational level, memory and narrative skills of the recorder?

The historian should limit the narrative to evidence in the private archives under investigation, relate it to traces and accounts outside, subject it to deep analysis and finally have bottomless empirical understanding of the field of enquiry in order to draw conclusive statements. Based on Eland's private archive, such a methodology enabled this author to construct a physical culture narrative of South African

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black weightlifting.

Ron Eland's private archive

Childhood and early family life

David Kirk (1999:68) made the point that meaningful engagement with physical culture involves a degree of learning during childhood through formal or informal experiences. An internet source (Steinmair, 2014) quoted a writer of Afrikaans literature, Riana Scheepers, and a colleague, Leti Kleyn, as follows on the topic of childhood influences on creative writers, which may also be applicable to physical culturalists:

A complete detailed memory is not necessary ... I think it is rather the reaction of the emotional or the obfuscation of an experience that has impact on a young soul that becomes artistic in later life. [Scheepers] believes that all children experience life as intense, sensitive and with amazement but the child that is an embryonic writer [or *physical culturalist*] can feel intuitively that certain personal experiences are artistic and thus cherish and grind it for later use [loosely translated].

William Ronald Eland was born on 28 February 1923 in Port Elizabeth to Andrew and Caroline (née Fleurs) Eland. Andrew Eland was a schoolteacher and elevator worker who was also a halfback on the national football team. Elsewhere in the archive collection, his occupation was given as caretaker. At some point in time he was also secretary of the Eastern Province Rugby Football Union (Coloured). Eland (snr) was born in Somerset East in January 1881 and died on 27 May 1934 of lobar pneumonia when Ron was 11 years old. Andrew Eland's death notice indicates that he had family ties with the Scheepers and Leppan families, but his parents are listed as unknown. The Eland's led a comfortable middle-class life. Andrew left his son (Ron) immovable property at 10 Ruth Street in Port Elizabeth and other fixed property at 14 Tulla Street was bequeathed to his two daughters. Eland Snr obtained this property through a loan from the APO Mutual Building Society (WCARS, MOOC 6/9/4457/42091). This was a society that was constitutionally adopted on 28 July 1919 by the African Political Organisation (The Claremont A.P.O. Mutual Building Society, 1920:4).

From an early age, Ron Eland experienced personal tragedy. He was born with a physical limitation, bowlegs, that was corrected by placing him in sea sand. Such physical limitations are not uncommon among well-known 19th- and early 20th-century physical culturalists, commonly known as strongmen. In later life, Eland devoted a great deal of time in assisting physically disabled children at the Maitland Cottage in Cape Town.

Eland recorded that he could not remember much about his mother's background, except that she died at age 45 of anaemia and an enlarged spleen and liver on 18 January 1933, while giving birth to a still-born baby. Public archival records reveal that she was the daughter of Cowland and Sinah Fleurs and that her age at death was 47 years and 7 months (not 45, as Eland recalled). At the time of her death, she lived with her husband, Andrew, and three children, Sinah (Sinnie)

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Elizabeth (deceased), Metha Susana and Ron, at 14 Tulla Street, Port Elizabeth (WCARS, MOOC 6/9/4370/40102). It was not uncommon for Afrikaans-speaking coloured folk to give their children English names alongside more colloquial names such as Metha and Sinnie. According to archival records, Sinah, Ron Eland's sister (a schoolteacher, born May 1910), died on 1 April 1935 as a spinster (WCARS, MOOC 6/9/4666/47400). Some confusion exists surrounding this death date, as her death notice indicates that she died in 1935 (WCARS, MOOC 6/9/4666/47400), but on another notice (WCARS, MOOC 6/9/4370/40102) it states she was deceased by 1933. Eland and his sisters eventually went to live with a family member, Susan (Auntie San) February (at 18 Clarendon Crescent, Port Elizabeth), a washerwoman at the Central Hotel, who continued to be his guardian until 1950. Most mission schools for coloured children terminated at Grade 6 at the time (Cleophas, 2009:121) – Auntie San's academic qualification. She was also the mother of the later national wrestler Cecil February. Further tragedy struck the Eland family when Metha (born 1912), a schoolteacher at the time and residing at 21 Shell Street in Port Elizabeth, died of myocardial infarction on her wedding day on 3 October 1955 (WCARS, MOOC 6/9/23747/5885/55). The young Ron Eland therefore experienced human tragedy of death of loved ones early in his life, which possibly had a lasting effect of caring and compassion.

Eland elaborated at great lengths in his unpublished memoirs about the large family, consisting of nine children living at 18 Clarendon Crescent, Port Elizabeth, that grew up in a Christian-like home atmosphere. He also recalled that although Auntie San did not complete any higher education, she stressed the importance of a good education. She provided the young Eland with the love and care that he missed from a natural mother, spoiling him at times. Such an occasion was when he graduated from college and she had saved up enough money from her meagre income as a washerwoman to send him and his cousin, Cecil February, on a trip around South Africa.

The Eland family forms an integral part of physical culture history in South Africa and abroad. Eland's cousin Cecil, left South Africa in 1967 and became a physical training instructor in Washington, DC, where he pursued a wrestling career, appearing on television. Because television only arrived in South Africa in the mid-1970s, this was a prestigious achievement for the South African-born wrestler. February passed away in Washington on 14 September 1981 at age 58, his death certificate indicating he was a 'Black South African Recreation Specialist'. Eland's brother-in-law was Christopher Lyner, a national bodybuilding champion. In later life, the Eland family lived in the coloured section of the suburb of Wynberg, Cape Town, in a house filled with physical culture significance. Eland recorded on 2 November 1968 that his six-year-old son, Elro, "played on the parallel bars in the yard and he fell and broke his wrist". Currently, Elro is a magician, probably due to his father's influence.

Education

Schools shape 'race' consciousness – Eland recorded having white teachers

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because there was always a shortage of coloured teachers in the 1930s. Eland's archive reveals that he received his initial schooling at Samuel Brooks Primary and completed the primary standards at Weis Primary School (grades 7 to 9) in Port Elizabeth. Samuel Brooks Primary appeared in an official statistic report in 1926 for the first time as a "coloured school, 4 teachers (1 male and 2 women –certified; one woman – uncertified; 173 learners on the roll; 145 daily average attendance)" (Cape of Good Hope Department of Public Education, 1927a:85). It was a time when coloured children, unlike white children, were not subjected to compulsory education, and the school inspector in Port Elizabeth reported that "there are many children whose intermittent attendance at school is a grave drawback to progress ... that is further adversely affected by a successions of epidemics" (Cape of Good Hope Department of Public Education, 1927b:62). Weis Primary School appeared in an educational report in 1930 as a school with "6 certified teachers (3 male and 3 women); with a school population of 210 and a daily attendance of 183 ... [the school provided for] learners 7 years and above" (Cape of Good Hope Department of Public Education, 1931:123).

Eland states in various writings that it was at school where he was exposed to marching and gymnastics in physical education and instruction in Afrikaans and English. Only coloured children attended these schools, but outside they played with children of all 'races'. School was also the avenue where children were initially exposed to sport; Eland recalled that football, tennis, swimming and cricket became his favourite sports as he progressed through the school system. He also wrote that there were up to 300 children gathered at a time for a physical education lesson. Eland failed his Grade 5 examination because he did poorly in both languages – learners were not allowed to fail both. Schools at that time were discipline-orientated and military-like institutions where children were not encouraged to be critical-minded. Hence, despite a series of racist legislation passed against 'coloureds', Eland declared that he "had fond memories of singing God Save the King and Die Stem". Die Stem was the unofficial national anthem in Afrikaans that was representative of white South Africa. Later, it became a symbol of oppression in the anti-apartheid movement. Discipline was interpreted as punishment, and Eland wrote that he had "not so fond memories of six of the best where children would get whipped with sugar cane sticks for things like forgetting a word". In a similar fashion, Dennis Brutus remembers an incident during his junior high school days at Patterson High where a Mathematics teacher, Miss Ray Matz, slapped one of his friends in the face (Thomas, 2012:6).

From primary school, Eland proceeded to Patterson High School. This was the first secondary school for 'coloureds' in Port Elizabeth and was opened in a temporary building on 26 January 1925. It was interchangeably called "Paterson Intermediate Coloured and Native School" and "Patterson Non-European Secondary School" at first. Conditions were rudimentary and discriminatory, and in his Grade 8 year, Eland wrote that he had to walk 4 miles to high school for woodwork classes. At that time, 'coloured' children had to pay for the wood they used.

Eland's archive reveals that he enrolled for a Lower Primary Teacher's Certificate (Coloured) in 1937 at the Dower Memorial College in Uitenhage – an institution

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with an all-white staff and all-coloured student corps. His stepmother paid for his tuition fees and boarding through her employment as a washerwoman and a loan from the college. Here, Eland learned to fend for himself by sharing one of three dormitories with 30 other boys. He also participated in rugby, cricket, soccer, swimming and gymnastics. Further, he played wing for the college rugby team, but it was gymnastics that interested him most, as gymnastics formed the basis of all sport activities from primary school to college level, according to his own testimony. He therefore started an acrobatic team with his nephews, Peter and Leslie Arnaser, calling themselves 'The Acrobatic Three'. Although Eland heard about weightlifting before, he was exposed to it for the first time at college, where he became a physical culture club leader. This club, and later the Milo Academy, developed a strong base for his weightlifting career. He qualified with a Lower Primary Teacher's Certificate in 1941 and a Higher Primary Teacher's Certificate (Music and Art) (Coloured) (HPTC) the following year. By the time he qualified as a schoolteacher, he recorded that he served his community as a physical culturalist, soccer convenor, athletic convenor and swimming convenor and had introduced weightlifting and bodybuilding at school level. In 1950, he qualified with a Higher Primary Teacher's Certificate (Physical Education) (Coloured) at Wesley College, Cape Town (Cleophas, 2009:294).

Teaching career

Eland started his teaching career at Goezaar Congregational Memorial School and De Vos Malan Primary schools in Port Elizabeth in 1943.

Goezaar Congregational Memorial School and De Vos Malan Primary School

Being a Congregationalist, Eland was offered a teaching post for Grade 7 at the Goezaar Congregational Memorial School (GCMS) in Korsten, Port Elizabeth. It was a zinc structure commonly known as a *blikskooltjie* (Van der Ross, 2010:86), where he taught 42 children in the classroom with two other teachers. Eland recorded that the zinc structure "was a furnace in summer and very cold in winter". Coloured teachers earned four-fifths of white teachers' salary with the same qualifications (Van der Ross, 2010:84). Because Eland had a specialist certificate in art and music, he received a better salary than most coloured teachers at the time. He started his teaching career with a £10 salary, the usual being £7 to £8. He handed his full salary to his stepmother, who often would return it with an extra pound or two. Eland states that he was well cared for and never went without food or money, as many 'coloured' teachers at the time experienced. It was wartime and no official statistics are available for these schools, but in 1945, the GCMS had a staff of six (three men and three women) with a total learner enrolment of 294 and daily attendance of 273 (Cape of Good Hope Department of Public Education, 1947:299). After six months he was transferred to the newly built De Vos Malan Primary in Schauder township, a 'coloured' sub-economic development. In 1945 there were eight male and nine female teachers on the staff, with an average of 720 learners on the attendance roll and a daily school attendance figure of 586 (Cape of Good Hope, Department of Public Education, 1947:299). There he remained until 1948, when he went to Great Britain to compete in the Olympic Games.

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Battswood College

Battswood College grew out of the Battswood School (established in 1891) in Wynberg, a suburb in Cape Town, made possible by a donation by Martha Pieterse (Van der Ross, 2008:131), the widowed Countess of Stamford (née Solomons), a black woman. Battswood College was started in the appropriately named *Martha se Saal* (Martha's Hall) (Cleophas, 2009:100). By 1950, it was a 'coloured' teacher training institute that consisted of a post Grade 10 teacher training college, a secondary and a primary school. The college made use of itinerant physical education teachers, while the secondary and primary schools acquired the permanent service of Ron Eland, from c. 1955 until 1969. Eland conducted his lessons in *Martha se Saal* and Mission Road Park, a small public space close to the Battswood College. The park was used because, as Eland stated in a personal memorandum: "physical education equipment was virtually non-existent and the swings, sand pits and monkey bars [could be used] as apparatus". During his time at Battswood, he expanded his physical education programme into the field of physical culture. In 1951, he trained a group of Battswood girls to give an exhibition of ground pyramids at the Mr Body Beautiful competition, and in 1966 he and Sally Hugo were the physical education teachers at the primary and secondary schools put in charge of organising a physical culture display as part of Battswood's 75th anniversary (Cleophas, 2009:101). The 1960s was a period where dominant physical education opinion and policymakers such as I.R. van der Merwe (1960:43) justified the existence of physical education at the expense of physical culture because of an existential value the former has for the policy of apartheid. Eland was therefore caught between the downplay of physical culture as an unimportant area of activity and being a racially marginalised teacher (due to apartheid legislation) of physical education.

As a schoolteacher, Eland filled various positions (administrator, coach, team manager and track and field official) in school sport unions in Cape Town. He also provided opportunities for his Battswood learners to get exposure in the prestigious *Health & Strength* magazine (*Health & Strength*, 1956: n.p). During his tenure as teacher at Battswood Practising School, he became a member of the Teachers' Educational Professional Association, a more liberal organisation than the Teachers' League of South Africa (*TEPA Educational News*, 1957:46). Eland was also intensely involved with the Boys' Brigade Movement.

The Boys' Brigade Movement

Eland wrote in a scrapbook that the two most important influences in his early life was his stepmother and the Boys' Brigade Movement (BBM). The BBM started on 4 October 1883 with a small company of 55 boys under the leadership of Sir William Alexander Smith (Adonis, 1995:1). Smith came from a military family and was an ardent Sunday school teacher who started the first company of the BBM, based on his military experience, in the Mission Hall of the Free College Church in Glasgow (Cleophas, 2009:28). The stated objective of the BBM, according to Eland, was "[t]he advancement of Christ's kingdom among boys and the promotion of habits of obedience, reverence, discipline and self-respect and all that tends

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towards true Christian manliness". The earliest known account of the BBM in the Cape Colony dates to 6 September 1894, when the St Phillip's Anglican Church in Cape Town established a company (Cleophas, 2009:190). As an indication of the imprint that the BBM had on Eland, he could recite and record its motto (which was read once a week during his 17-year membership) into his old age:

I promise to do my best to attend all parades of the Company unless prevented by illness or some duty which I cannot consciously avoid. To render cheerful obedience to all orders of officers and others in authority. To abstain from evil doing and anything likely to cause pain or suffering to any of my fellows.

At the age of 10, he joined the BBM and remained a member until 1970. Eland joined the BBM in 1933, two years younger than what he was allowed, but because his cousin, Cecil February, and his stepmother's adopted son, September, were already members, he was granted membership. This was during the depression years and it was a struggle to pay the one penny per week subscription fee. The BBM provided Eland with an opportunity to experience the outdoors in disciplined and adventurous ways, across racial lines. He recorded:

... trips to camps where we left on a Thursday evening over Easter weekend with 60-70 boys, marching to the train station, going from town to town entertaining people with concerts, making a small profit to pay for our expenses; sleeping on floors of schools between towns and playing rugby games. At times we stole fruit because there was none in the city (Port Elizabeth) ... In Cape Town we had national camps where black and white companies would come together for gatherings.

He progressed to the rank of lieutenant after returning from College. In 1954 he reached the rank of captain of the 1st Company, Port Elizabeth, South Africa at age 21. At some time in his career, he was made secretary of the BBM. Douglas Sylvester, a gymnastic administrator during the 1960s until 2000, stated that the BBM boys in Cape Town, District Six...

... looked forward to Boxing Day (26 December) for the annual competition in drill movements and Physical Education for various groups (junior, intermediate and senior). These activities (including Physical Education, physical training, drill, sport and outdoor adventure activities) remained alive in the memories of many people affected by the forced removals of the Apartheid system (Cleophas, 2009:193).

Eland also extended the BBM to Battswood, as testified in a testimonial by a certain M. Pritchard, where he (Eland) "was responsible for the physical training of the members of the 3rd Wynberg Boys' Brigade in which he held the rank of First Lieutenant".

Sport career (South Africa)

A tribute from a family friend, Colin Diedericks, in Eland's private archive, reads in part: "Ron's earliest tools of the trade were a pair of empty paint cans filled with sand and attached to the end of a broomstick ... until he was discovered by the Milo Academy of Physical Culture, one of the pillars of the sport in Port Elizabeth".

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Eland joined the Milo Academy of Physical Culture (also known as the Milo Academy of Health and Strength) after graduating from College in 1943, under the direction of a pioneer of weightlifting in South Africa, Coomerasamy Gausa (Milo) Pillay. He was introduced to the club by his cousin, Cecil February, who was training to be a wrestler, although the main sport in the gym was weightlifting. Eland trained three times per week with two-hour sessions, usually from 19:00 to 21:00. It was an unsegregated club at the time, but white people started removing themselves from 1949 onwards. Eland admitted it was a status symbol at the time to be invited into a white person's space. The club had very crude and unscientific methods of training, and stretching before training was unheard of. Warm-ups consisted of dumbbell swings between the legs, bench presses, calf raises and light squats. Eland wrote in a scrapbook:

The exercises had no names ... we had no racks and had to lift the barbell onto our shoulders, one side at time, in order to do back squats; the bars were loose; the weights were different sizes for the same poundages; the plates had large holes that got larger with usage and the bars were usually unbalanced ...

He ascribed this situation to "white people who kept written information about weightlifting to themselves and since the sport was not popular, information was scarce". Without condoning white racism, Eland reflected that this situation had hidden benefits. He recorded:

Without realizing it, these methods of training were making me stronger ... for example, we never dropped the weights, we lowered them with care to avoid breaking the floor. I did lots of body weight exercises in the gym, to impress the guys ... 100 pushups in a minute, a real showman ... I suppose I could do anything if people were watching me.

The Milo Academy also extended colonial gender attitudes into colonised communities where women were expected to conform to ideas of physical beauty and be supportive of male physicality. This was accompanied by the projection of Greek symbolisms.

Milo Pillay's own weightlifting experience was characterised by racist exclusion and rejection. A newspaper report stated that Pillay won the national weightlifting championship (before segregation) in 1933 and 1934 (*Rand Daily Mail*, 1976:1). There are also unconfirmed claims that he was selected for a national South African weightlifting team in 1938 for a competition in Lorenzo Marques (*Rand Daily Mail*, 1975:3). Further untrue claims were made that he represented South Africa at

Figure 1.1 Ron Eland's 'earliest tools of the trade'
Source: Ron Eland private archive.

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the 1932 Olympic Games (Chapman, 1994:156). Despite these uncertainties, Pillay stands out as one of the early pioneers of weightlifting in South Africa.

The Milo Academy, operated within colonial frameworks of the day in the form of mimicry. Le Grange (2018:16) refers to mimicry as a term ...

... that has been produced in the field of postcolonial studies to describe the ambivalent relationship between coloniser and colonised, whereby the colonised subject ‘mimics’ the coloniser by adopting the coloniser’s cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values ... [but] the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits ... what makes the relationship between coloniser and colonised ambivalent is the potential for the colonised to redefine this relationship.

Figure 1.2 Eland (standing) in classical Greek pose
Source: Ron Eland private archive

The Milo Academy mimicked white sport and Hellenistic themes while attempting to redefine existing sport relations. It had Danie Craven, a conservative Afrikaner and president of the (white) South African Rugby Board (Grundlingh, 2013:102), as patron; the president of the Midlands Chamber of Mines officiated at its annual competitions; and the Academy had as its motto the non-political slogan “Sacred thy Body as Thy Soul”.

The Academy announced itself as “The Cradle of the Weight-lifting and Bodybuilding System in Africa (south of Egypt)”. Eland’s archive also contains documentation claiming that Pillay was the organiser of the first official beauty competition in South Africa in 1929 and the annual Miss Industry Beauty Pageant since 1962. Pillay’s influence on weightlifting in Port Elizabeth was monumental, and Eland recalls in one of his writings that prior to his own weightlifting career,

“acquaintances would rave about weightlifting as if it was everything in life”. Pillay’s influence stretched across the racist social constructions set by white administrators.

Pillay was not the only black weightlifter with a club at the time. Eland also had the option of joining the Port Elizabeth Amateur Bodybuilding Club run by G.K. (Chief) Rangasamy, Pillay’s brother-in-law. He only chose Pillay’s club because it was closer to home and his cousin trained there. A controversy later arose in black weightlifting circles as to whether it was Pillay or Rangasamy who started Eland’s Olympic career. Rangasamy was recognised by Dennis Brutus as the leader of the anti-apartheid South African Sports Association that was established in East London in October 1958 (Thomas, 2012:7). After nine months of training at the Milo Academy, Eland entered his first weightlifting competition, the Eastern Province Weightlifting Championships, in 1943. There he bench-pressed 130 pounds, compared to his nearest rival, who could only manage 120. At the end of Eland’s career, he could bench-press 220 pounds.

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Eland gained legendary status among black weightlifters in South Africa for decades as the South African champion and record-holder in the 1940s in the three Olympic lifts: the two-hands press, the two-hands snatch and the two-hands clean and jerk. He was denied the opportunity of representing his country and competing internationally because of the segregation practices of the South African Olympic and British Empire Games Association (SAOBEGA). An unsubstantiated newspaper report was made that Eland won the official 1948 South African weightlifting Olympic trials with a total lift of 715 pounds, while the white runner-up with a total lift of 680 pounds was named to represent the South African team (*Globe & Mail*, 2003:5). The official minutes of the SAOBEGA (1948:2), however, make mention of three nominations for Olympic representation made by the South African Weightlifting Association in 1948. Eland was not one of them.

Reflection on the 1948 Olympics

By 1947, South Africa was a segregated society, and the SAOBEGA did not disturb this segregation and forfeited applying for hosting the event in South Africa because, in the recorded words of Capt. Twomey, the South African National Amateur Boxing Association delegate, “the Colour Bar was a big question” (SAOBEGA, 1947b:2). Two South African weightlifting associations applied to the SAOBEGA for affiliation in 1946 – the South African Amateur Weightlifting Federation (non-racial) and the South African Weightlifting Association (white) (SAOBEGA, 1946b:2-3). The SAOBEGA held a meeting with the two organisations and “anticipated an amalgamation ... [after which] a national championship would be held under the new organisation” (SAOBEGA, 1946a:3). According to the minutes of the SAOBEGA, the two organisations were amalgamated by 1947 and “would be accepted as an affiliate unit” (SAOBEGA, 1947a:1). This did not materialise, and Eland turned his sights to the British Olympic movement for assistance.

According to Appler (1995:4), anti-apartheid activist Dennis Brutus raised funds to send Eland to the Olympic Games. Eland’s archive shows that he won a silver medal in the lightweight class in the Empire Championships held in conjunction with the Olympic Games. He also finished third in one of the three Mr Universe competitions held in 1948.

In preparing for a television programme, *This Is My Life*, Eland provided details of his selection into the 1948 British Olympic weightlifting team:

I was the only participant from South Africa to have worn the red, white and blue flag stitched to my blue baret and blazor. I very proudly marched onto the Olympic Stadium at Wembley, London ... rubbing shoulders with the best Olympic sportsmen and women Great Britain could present. While taking the oath my mind flashed back to enjoy the honored place among the British elite athletes. I was thrilled to realize that I was officially the lightweight weightlifting representative of Great Britain ... South Africa did not allow any non-white person to represent its native country. It was through the efforts of Milo Pillay and Chief Rangasamy who had written to the British Weightlifting Association explaining to them that

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I had officially beaten all lightweight lifters in South Africa but was not allowed because of my skin colour, to represent South Africa. They were told by the International Weightlifting secretary, Oscar State, that if I could beat Britain's lightweight lifters, Britain could nominate me as their official representative. Pillay and Rangasamy organized fund raising shows and collected enough money to pay my boat fare. I enjoyed my first sea voyage to Britain and stayed with South African friends, the Baileys ... I trained under Oscar State but after realizing how inconvenient it was for me to travel from the Oval subway station to Twickenham, he made arrangements with Bill Pullum to coach me at the Camberwell Weight Lifting Club. Within the first few weeks, I broke all my South African records in the press, snatch and clean and jerk. At the British weightlifting trials on 8 May 1948, I beat the British candidate, Yorrie Evans. I reached my goal. The headlines in the Daily Mirror read: Colour barred – but not by Britain. In the meantime I visited the Boys' Brigade.

Eland claimed that his ability was soon recognised by the British Amateur Weightlifting Association and he became the first black to gain appointment as an official Olympic weightlifting coach. *Health & Strength*, the renowned British magazine, featured the young Eland on its cover twice. British TV also took an interest in him and he travelled all over Britain displaying his talent, one of the highlights for him being a performance before Queen Elizabeth, then Princess Elizabeth. All of this contributed to Eland becoming a symbol of Olympic hope for black South Africans and the *Drum* coined the phrase "The man who broke the Colour Bar" (*African Drum Magazine*, 1955a; 1955b).

After his return from the 1948 Olympic Games, Eland formed an adult acrobatic trio, 'The Athenian Three', consisting of Eland, Abraham Opperman and Gordon Smith, two physical education specialists (Cleophas, 2009:297, 298), because, as Eland put it in his personal memoirs, "coloured people could never get good seats at circuses". He was part of the move to establish the South African Weightlifting and Bodybuilding Federation (SAWLBF) in 1950 that held its 18th annual competition in 1968 (*Rand Daily Mail*, 1968).

By 1954, Eland enjoyed celebratory status in Cape Town, as was evidenced by his wedding arrangements. He married Cynthia Daniels on 18 December 1954 in the United Congregational Church in Wynberg. At the church, officers of the BBM formed a guard of honour and the afternoon reception was held in *Martha se Saal*, where the speakers included Richard van der Ross (principal of Battswood College), Reverend D.P. Botha (moderator of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church) and the well-known strongman Tromp van Diggelen. A barometer of Eland's international esteem can be found in the hundreds of letters, cards and telegrams received on his wedding day from throughout South Africa, the Central African Federation, France, Belgium, England and the USA. These included well wishes from John Grimeck, Oscar State, the editorial board of *Man's World* and the Gatson Arts Studio (*The Sun*, 1954b:2).

According to Eland's curriculum vitae in his archive, he achieved the following weightlifting accolades:

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- Eastern Province Lightweight Champion, 1943–1950
- Western Province Lightweight Weight Champion, 1950–1970
- Cape Province Lightweight Weight Champion, 1960
- South African Lightweight Champion and record holder, 1943–1970
- Milo Academy Champion, 1943–1950
- National Weightlifting Coach of South Africa, 1951 and 1958
- British Amateur Weightlifting Instructor's Certificate, 1952
- Mr South Africa Bodybuilding Champion, 1951.

For reasons unknown to date, Eland, along with another Cape strongman, John Geduld, was suspended from the provincial controlling body in 1969, the year before he left for North America. Geduld, Tom Minnords, Reg Anderson (all Western Province) and Victor Douglas (Transvaal) were all previously considered by the SAWLBF as possible weightlifting representatives at the 1966 Mr Universe competition in London (*Rand Daily Mail*, 1966:29).

Administration, coaching and community organisations

Besides being an active weightlifter, Eland served as administrator and judge at physical culture events. In 1954, for example, he and John Geduld were judges for the Trafalgar Amateur Wrestling Club when it staged a Mr Trafalgar Physique contest at the Salt River Railway Institute on 13 April (*The Sun*, 1954a:5). During his period as a teacher at Battswood Practising School, he started the Farnese Bodybuilding and Weightlifting Club (later the Farnese Recreation Club) in 1959. From 1980, Eland was a volunteer worker at the Columbus Centre in Toronto, where the Sports Academy introduced the Farnese Weightlifting and Powerlifting Course. In Cape Town, the Farnese Club was a social success, and Eland recorded in his diary that a successful show was held in the Wynberg Town Hall on 29 November 1963. This club produced champions, but also provided an outlet for many youths at risk. Although not a youth at risk, Shireen Daries completed a Farnese fitness course under Eland and proceeded to become a Miss South Africa (bodybuilding). According to archival data, her father and Farnese president, Abraham Daries, stated in 1995 that this club was the “biggest and strongest fitness club in South Africa ... with body builders aged 10 to 40 years”. That year, the club offered athletics, aerobics, bodybuilding, squash and weight-powerlifting. Between 1960 and 1968, Eland was also involved in preparing primary school athletes for inter-district (Wynberg and District Schools' Sports Union) and inter-provincial (Western Province Schools' Sports Board) competitions.

In 1970, Pearl Jansen competed in the Miss World contest on 20 November, finishing runner-up (*The Cape Herald*, 1970:1). Eland recorded in his diary on 4 September that he was appointed by the South African Bodybuilding and Weightlifting Federation to coach Jansen, who came from the economically depressed and apartheid-created township of Bonteheuwel. Jansen was the winner of the Ms Africa South contest. The Ms Africa South contest was segregated for black persons, while Ms South Africa catered for white contestants. After the Ms World Competition, Eland left for the USA on 21 November, where he was sponsored by Cecil February.

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Eland in the USA (1970–1974)

By 1970, all black political organisations in South Africa with mass support were banned, the country was debarred from the Olympic Games and South Africans had little opportunity for representing their country in international sport, except through clandestine ways. The German sport historian Michael Krüger quotes Friedrich Schiller: “... that even the worst conditions and oppression are not able to destroy the human capacity for play and playing, inspired by will and the striving for freedom” (Krüger, 2015:522). This was true of Eland, and his diary indicates that he left South Africa for political reasons as well as domestic concerns in his private life.

He recorded in his notebook that “although having a steady income and hoping to get the family to come and stay, my landlady in Houston gave me notice ... on 8 February 1971 ... calling me a Despite this setback, however, he recorded further that “things are going well ... bought a F98 Deluxe automatic ... am extremely happy [but] miss RonCyn”. RonCyn was the name of his house in Wynberg, Cape Town – an abbreviation for Ronald and Cynthia.

The archival record reveals that for the next four years, Eland, separated from his family in South Africa, enrolled for university courses in the USA and “[worked] by permit – a 20 hour week as a janitor, gardening jobs at \$25 a day plus fringe benefits and half a dozen small jobs ... to keep head above water”. During this time, he studied fine art at the Catholic University of America as a part-time undergraduate student and passed with a B+. He was accepted at Howard College in Maryland for studies in Physical Therapy, but enrolled at the DC Teachers’ College. At the time, the tuition fees were: Howard – \$800; DC Teachers’ College – \$100. Eland started classes on 13 September 1971, stating that his “most concerning factor is my visa which is laying at Capitol Hill for nearly a week and I have 5 weeks left on my passport”. It was a stressful time for Eland – he recorded on 14 January 1972 that “I am physically sick ... unemployed since 19th November last year, still awaiting my passport ...” With money running low, he wrote on 9 March that he got a \$300 present from friends “that helped me tremendously”. By then, his student visa had expired, he still had no reply regarding his visa and he did “not know what the future holds”. He however noted that he had much success at the Toastmaster’s Dinner with his public speaking, which was one of his subjects at the DC Teachers’ College. Eland’s success in this field could be ascribed to debating societies that were important features at ‘coloured’ colleges in Cape Town (Wieder, 2008:27). Eland was also a representative for the DC Teachers’ College at the Inter-Varsity speech-making contest and according to a diary entry on 10 April 1972, he reached the final round. Sometime during that year, he attended the Congress of the International Federation of Powerlifters and was invited to attend again the following year. He worked at the Howard University Sports Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation in the clinic of Russel Davis at the Freedman’s Hospital in the field of bodybuilding, weightlifting and fitness. On 7 November, he mentioned that “things were going badly ... I feel I cannot make it ... I’m desperate and concerned about my family ... I’m keeping on pushing ... via God’s help, I’ll get a good break”. On 17 February 1973, however he wrote: “I’ve no jobs and no

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money". Things worsened for Eland, when on 9 May, his car was stolen with his "passport and visa, camera and family photographs". On 1 August, Eland wrote that he was "holding on and pushing, having to pay back \$578 tax". That year, Eland secured a part-time teaching post at the Woodward Preparatory School and had some employment at their Summer Children's Fun Programme. At the same time, Peter Miller, Secretary of the National Amateur Athletics Weightlifting Union (NAAWU), invited Eland, officially, with support of the president of the International Powerlifting Federation, Bob Crist, to attend the World Powerlifting Championships in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania from 8 to 10 November 1973. O.C. Oehley, the South African representative, also indicated that he would attend this meeting.

Afterwards, he was employed as an athletic trainer on a full-time basis at the Federal City College in Washington, DC from September until July the following year. Roundabout that time, the Canadian Consulate General accepted the Eland family as immigrants, pending the successful outcome of their medical exams. He also attended the Bob Hoffman 75 World Powerlifting Championship for the first time that year. Financially, however, things did not go better until July 1974. After spending New Year's Eve with Cecil February, he stated: "Having better times". This was shortlived and on 1 March he wrote: "I am on a 20 hour working permit, earning \$114 every two weeks ... things are really going tough now". In May, Eland was still struggling financially and wrote: "Money tight - odd jobs to keep me going". However, in June, Eland wrote: "I have a job at the Central YMCA [in Washington, DC] as Director for the Children's Summer Fun program and things are a little better". He was employed at the YMCA until 23 August 1974. During this time he recorded that he was a trainer for the Panthers College football and netball teams, judge for the Junior Mr America Bodybuilding Contest alongside Bob Hoffman and Arnold Schwarzenegger, weightlifting and bodybuilding coach at a hostel for young delinquents between the ages of 17 and 22, and organised the District of Columbia Teachers' College Annual Physical Education Show. He left the USA on 26 September with his family, who had joined him, for Canada with a string of positive testimonials.

One testimonial came from Samuel Barnes, athletic director at the Central YMCA, stating: "We would accept him back at any time he might wish to return". He also had a testimonial from Peter Miller, calling to mind three "examples among the many services he provided the NAAWU: A speech that was made at the annual Awards Banquet where he gave a tremendous speech on athletics; the excellent weightlifting exhibition at Federal City College and the superior judging at numerous meets. Ralph Reynolds, director of health and physical education at the YMCA of Metropolitan Washington, described Eland's "abilities and knowledge of Physical Education to be superior as well as his ability to teach and lead young people to be outstanding. He is of excellent character and integrity and can be entrusted to perform responsibly in every circumstance". He also had a testimonial from Wally Howard, secretary of the British Commonwealth Weightlifting Federation in November 1973, giving an overview of his international career.

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Eland in Canada (1974–2003)

After arriving in Canada, the Eland family resided with former South Africans Ken and Gwen Coffin until they obtained permanent residence at 1855 Jane Street, 1806, Weston Toronto, Ontario, to “make it possible for the children to be registered in schools”. Ronald (junior) and Alta attended the York Humber High School, while Dany and Andrew attended the Gracefield Public School. Eland took a keen interest in his children’s school progress, particularly in their physical education. He recorded in June 1975 that Alta represented her school at a leadership course in physical education, “doing exceptionally well”, and that Elro and Dany “made firsts in their PT”. However, the Elands faced financial difficulties and he wrote that his wages at the North York Maintenance Depot and Broadview YMCA did not cover monthly living, travelling and food expenses. By August 1975, Eland secured a teaching post, starting on 2 September, at Kent Senior Public School, teaching Mathematics and English for grades 7 to 8. He also completed a summer course in Special Education for children with special needs. Shortly afterwards, Eland enrolled at York University (Atkinson College) as a part-time student.

Eland taught in schools under the Toronto Board of Education during the day and worked as a volunteer sports leader in the evenings and over weekends. On 12 December 1975, he recorded that he was “progressing most successfully” and that he was now a member of the Ontario Weightlifting Federation, being appointed as junior coach. The following year he was appointed bodybuilding and weightlifting coach at the local Youth Male and Women Hebrew Association in Bathurst Street, Toronto. He recorded on 10 May that he took his Ontario Weightlifting team to Washington and won the competition. He writes further that he was also assistant coach to Jack Gilchrist, the Canadian team coach at the 1976 Olympic Games, who had become a family friend by then. After his return from the Olympic Games, he invited Precious McKenzie to stay with him. According to his archive, he was a founder member of the Forum Club in Canada in 1976 and filled the position of public relations officer. This club supported charitable causes in Angola, Tanzania, Rwanda, Mozambique and South Africa, notably the Bishop Tutu Fund and school feeding projects in sub-economic areas.

In 1977 he noted that he was chairman of the Ontario Weightlifting Coaches Association, a position he held until 1979. On 28 May 1977 he made a diary entry:

Weight lifting progress – been to Ottawa and Montreal for Olympic Games [last year]; Was at North Bay as coach at Winter Games. From 11-14 February I went to Washington D.C. with national junior team against USA and lost. I went to Edmonton, as coach of the Ontario team at the Canadian National Weightlifting Championship.

On 1 September 1977, Eland recorded that he was in Los Angeles with the Ontario Junior Weightlifting team, who won their contest. In that year, the Elands bought a town house at 4-4 Brookall Drive, Downsview, Ontario. He also recorded that he visited Washington from 25 to 31 December, where he arranged a weightlifting contest. The Elands became Canadian citizens on 24 April 1978, and Eland recorded the exact time – 19:01 – when they took the Oath of Allegiance. A celebration supper

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was arranged at the Railway Tavern, followed by another celebration at home, “drinking, eating and showing South African films”. That same year he was coach of the Ontario weightlifting team at the Canadian Championship and in August, he attended the 6th Annual Commonwealth Conference on Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Sport. He recorded in a notebook that he assisted Wes Woo with coaching the Canadian weightlifting team at the Commonwealth Games. It was a successful meeting and Eland met fellow South Africans, the Hector family, from Wynberg, Cape Town, as well as Precious McKenzie. By November 1978, Eland was complaining about his health and was seeing a specialist. He also recorded that weightlifting in Canada was on “a poor wicket”.

Eland wrote in a scrapbook that he was appointed technical director for the weight training section of Columbus Centre on 5 September 1980. In April 1981 he recorded that he was suffering from high blood pressure, but still graduated with a BA degree in Sociology from York University on 14 June. At that time, he was employed at Kent Senior Primary School, but was informed that his services will terminate at the end of June that year. Despite his deteriorating health (he recorded on 24 June 1982 that he was sick for 11 days and not feeling well), he was making plans to enrol for a BEd degree at Toronto University. He started a teaching contract at Oster on 7 September 1982, stating: “I had a rough time at the school but towards the end of 1982 things have improved in my Special Education classes”. The Eland’s experienced domestic problems (his son, Ronald, passed away of cancer on 11 October 2001), but he reported on his other son, Andrew: “He was scouted for his football ability at Concordia University in Montreal and is doing well at football and studies and is most mature”. Eland completed his BEd degree in 1982 and the family was visited by Shireen Daries (Ms South Africa)² from 10 June until 3 July 1983, and the Abraham Opperman family in July to August. In June that year, he left the Columbus Centre Gymnasium along with Ian Monroe because they “could not take it any longer”. However, Prof. Bruce Kidd wrote a letter to Eland in 1993 where the address was: Ron Eland, Weight Training Consultant, Columbus Centre, 901 Lawrence Avenue West, Toronto, Ontario M6A 1C3.

Eland’s health deteriorated in 1984 and he recorded that he suffered a heart attack, developed ulcers and had high blood pressure. However, he recorded that he still managed to be scorekeeper at the World Super Heavyweight Weightlifting Championships held in Los Angeles. In 1986, he invited Ken Coffen to co-host a television talk show on Newton Cable Channel 10 for 16 weeks. This talk show revealed much about sub-altern narratives of black physical culture and weightlifting and Eland mentioned the influences of Milo Pillay and Sigmund Klein on South African weightlifting. On 27 March 1993, he was honoured by the Ontario Weightlifting Association with their first “Lifetime Achievement Award”.

1995 southern African tour

After Nelson Mandela’s release from prison, Eland voiced a desire to return to South Africa to contribute to sports development in disadvantaged communities.

2 Shireen Daries competed under the auspices of the SAWLBF.

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Spurned by the white South African Olympic regime in 1948, Eland was requested in 1994 by the National Olympic Committee of South Africa (NOCSA) to assist with the training of South Africa's and Zimbabwe's weightlifters for the 1996 Olympic Games. In February 1995, he was made Canadian Representative on a Goodwill Ambassadorial Visit to South Africa in preparation for the Olympic Games in 1996. This was made possible with the help of the Commonwealth Sport Development Programme of the Commonwealth Games Association of Canada and Sam Ramsamy, president of the National Olympic Committee of South Africa. Ramsamy and NOCSA were later criticised by the president of the Farnese Recreation Club, Abraham (Ampie) Daries for "making it difficult for Ron to do what he really wanted to do in some much needed areas".

A descriptive account of Ron Eland's tour (as found in his private archive) to South Africa and Zimbabwe from 16 February to 3 May 1995 provides historians with a window on the state of physical culture in socio-economically deprived regions of southern Africa during the last decade of the 20th century. In an official capacity as Canadian representative for the Olympic Games, he conducted coaching workshops, partially in Afrikaans, for powerlifters, weightlifters and body builders in the Border region in the Eastern Cape on 30 and 31 March. Daries reported that Eland visited them in Mitchells Plain, Cape Town to witness a "well-organised display of body-building" roundabout 7 April. Mitchells Plain is a predominately 'coloured' suburb about 32 km (20 mi) from the city of Cape Town. It is one of South Africa's largest suburbs. Conceived as a 'model suburb' by the apartheid government, it was built during the 1970s to provide housing for coloured victims of forced removal due to the implementation of the Group Areas Act.

According to a report of a regional sport coordinator of the Zimbabwean Sport and Recreation Commission, Eland gave lectures, visited schools, held meetings with sport officials and visited gyms in Bulawayo's high-density suburbs between 19 and 21 April 1995. An undated letter states that Eland visited Colin's Gym, owned by Colin Canary, in Harare. Here he was hosted by the Mashonaland Amateur Bodybuilding and Weightlifting Association, where he presented a two day workshop on weight training and weightlifting. Eland also attended the Junior and Senior Mr Mashonaland Bodybuilding Contest at Colin's Gym on 29 April. He found the competition of a high standard, but was disturbed by the lack of equipment at the Zimbabwe University where the African Games were scheduled for September of that year. Eland wrote:

Zimbabwe is a third world country in dire need of training equipment and coaching, especially at the university. The only equipment available was a bench, a home-made leg extension machine, home training weights of different makes, four training bars and various other loose equipment.

Eland suggested that equipment be purchased from the Weider Store in Randburg, South Africa. After visiting the African Sports Centre in Gugulethu, Cape Town, Eland wrote to Joe Weider on 10 August, requesting assistance for weight training equipment for the University of Zimbabwe and the centre in Gugulethu. The Gugulethu township (the equivalent of the American ghetto) was established in the 1960s due to the overcrowding of the nearby township of Langa, which was the

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only African residential area for Cape Town at the time. During the apartheid era, South Africans classified as African³ were not permitted to live in the city of Cape Town, and many people were removed from areas such as District Six and Retreat to Gugulethu, Nyanga and Langa (Cleophas, 2018a:654). Eland's observation that the "same conditions prevail in the new South Africa as in Zimbabwe" reveals much about sport development in Zimbabwe, 15 years after independence.

Home in South Africa

In 2002, the city of Port Elizabeth wrote to Eland, who was undergoing chemotherapy, informing him that it was establishing a sports hall of fame and wanted to induct him among the very first members. Prof. Bruce Kidd, a Canadian Olympian, academic and personal friend of Eland, wrote in a newspaper column (*Globe & Mail*, 2003:5):

Although painfully ill with cancer he somehow brought himself to a point of health that would enable him to make the long journey back to South Africa. He knew it would be a one-way trip, but wanted the chance to share his dreams about South African sport one more time. Unfortunately, he died before the induction ceremony.

Previously, Kidd had provided a testimonial to the effect that Eland coached Precious McKenzie, who subsequently followed in his footsteps, competing in the Olympic and Commonwealth Games for Britain, Jamaica and New Zealand and earned himself the award of Member of the Order of the British Empire from the British Queen. Eland passed away on 12 February 2003 in South Africa before receiving his award. Although Eland never met Mandela personally, he passed away in the same hospital (Constantiaberg) where Mandela was treated during his incarceration as a political prisoner.

Conclusion

This chapter adds new epistemologies about the origins of weightlifting in South Africa. It differs from traditional narratives rooted in old South African nationalisms that view the past through narrow racist lenses. Black commentators who commented on the history of South African weightlifting often centred Greece as the cradle of origin and also viewed Egyptian history of the sport as an appendage of Western civilisation (Matthews, 1950:7). This chapter created new African physical culture ontologies by shifting subaltern experiences – left outside of the official colonial narrative – to the centre with the aim to foreground a black presence. In this regard, the private archival record of Ron Eland reveals how black physical culturalists made contributions towards South African weightlifting in international sport. It also shows how Eland was stunted from expressing desires of achievement – a situation shared by most black sportspeople. Although Eland cannot be described as a revolutionary in his resistance to such obstacles, for South Africans, he can become a symbol of the cruel racism of apartheid sport

3 This classification was absurd and left deep psychological scars. Individual cases of racial reclassification that confirm this are found in *African Drum Magazine* (1955c:20-21).

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and the resourcefulness and determination of black athletes who persevered. His impact was evident throughout all levels of South African sport, from community level to the highest level of participation in the Olympic Games. Such narratives as that of Ron Eland provide opportunities for revealing how during the 1940s until the 1970s and beyond, black sportspeople survived and carried on with daily life, experiencing human tragedy that is common to all people, but under extra difficult circumstances in apartheid South Africa. Such tragedies form the core of attempts at creating a decolonised South African physical culture archive at the edge of empire.

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