

The introduction of gymnastics in Rio de Janeiro's clubs in the 19th century

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Abstract: This study aims to discuss the introduction of gymnastics in clubs in 19th-century Rio de Janeiro, specifically in associations formed largely by “nationals”. It is a historical research. Its sources included newspapers published in Brazil's capital between the 1850 and 1889. We expects to better understand an important facet of the presence of that practice in Rio de Janeiro's society as an expression of the changes the city was undergoing and the construction of a new public sensibility towards physical activities.

Key words: Physical Education. Gymnastics. Sport. History.

1 INTRODUCTION

In 1876, a journalist stated the following:

In all expressions of our national life, the weakest element is always the Brazilian one! Our powerlessness reveals itself in everything: our atony has come almost to some sort of hibernation for the spirit: absence of a spirit of national collectivity and the depraved instinct of segregation observed among Brazilians make the Brazilian element precisely the only element not vital in our country.¹

According to the columnist, foreigners ended up prevailing in all organized spheres of society, including gymnastic clubs – evidence of Brazilians' “lack of vitality”, their lack of interest in “their own destinies”, “in their lives in the present and in the future”. In a way, albeit with specific traits, this view is in accordance with

¹*O Globo*, Rio de Janeiro, December 12, 1876, p. 1.

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the interpretation enshrined in the work of Oliveira Vianna (1987) according to which “non-solidarity” was a feature of Brazilian social dynamics.

Vianna’s thesis has been highly challenged in classical studies such as Moraes Filho (1978), and recent ones, such as Fonseca (2008). The latter, when investigating the profile of the large number of associations established in the municipality of the Court (Rio de Janeiro), since the mid-19th century, infers that they were sociability spaces that met the specific needs of certain groups, linked to a possible exercise of citizenship, taking into account the limits of the political game of the time. That is, they would not be only an expression of a larger exercise of (and expectations about) social rights, but also the construction of new political stances that materialized a certain view on mobilization.

Anyway, at least with regard to gymnastics societies, the *O Globo* journalist was somehow right at the time: there were already two Portuguese associations,² a French association,³ one gathering Germans,⁴ and none for Brazilians. An anonymous observer who signed “An enthusiast” gets the number wrong but notes: “It is shameful for the beautiful youth that there are three gymnastics foreign clubs, and not even one national!! Come on, come on, guys! Let us unite and carry forward this noble idea!”⁵ Such scenario would soon begin to change.

This study aims to discuss the introduction of gymnastics in Rio de Janeiro’s clubs in the 19th century. In this article, we will not dwell on societies linked with foreign immigrant groups, but on associations formed largely by “nationals”. This is a historical study. Newspapers published in Brazil’s capital between 1850 and 1889 were used as sources.

²The Clube Ginástico Português was established in 1868 and the Congresso Ginástico Português was founded in 1874.

³The Sociedade Francesa de Ginástica was established in 1863.

⁴The Sociedade Alemã de Ginástica was established in 1859.

⁵*Gazeta de Notícias*, Rio de Janeiro, December 19, 1876, p. 3.

By casting a glance at those associations, our hope is to better understand an important facet of the presence of gymnastics in the Court's society – an expression of changes that the city underwent and the construction of a new public sensibility towards physical activities.

Let us start by discussing a pioneering and short-lived initiative: the 1860 establishment of Clube Ginástico.

2 BIDEGORRY AND THE GESTATION OF A GYMNASTICS FIELD

French citizen Bernardo Urbano de Bidegorry played important roles in 19th-century Rio de Janeiro. Among his most notable actions, in the 1850s he proposed the organization of a regular fire department independent from the Army, with regulation and *modus operandi* inspired in Paris's model (CASTRO, 2006). Among his suggestions, he said that gymnastics would be the best way to prepare firefighters.

We must understand these proposals in the scenario of Rio de Janeiro at the time. In the 1850s, the capital city underwent several changes. As its urban structure grew rapidly, concerns about control and order increased. The intensification of connections with the European world, relative political stability, and diversification of the national economy help us understand the higher circulation of “civilizing” discourses and the higher number of initiatives seeking to modernize the Court's society in many different areas.

In that scenario, an increasing number of foreigners landed in the city seeking to seize the opportunities opened in a country that had just begun to structure. Bidegorry's action was remarkable in defining several sectors sometimes regarded as messengers of progress.

He arrived in Brazil in the mid-1840s. In 1846, he was hired to work in the War Arsenal as a teacher of gymnastics for poor children who were welcomed at that institution and as an instructor

for those involved with the task of extinguishing fires (CASTRO, 2006). He was soon in charge of the “Firefighters’ Company”, earning a fame for his courage and his feats.

This was only one facet of Bidegorry’s presence in the Court’s society. When the gymnastics teacher of Pedro II School Frederick Hoppe was fired, Bidegorry was considered to replace him (CUNHA JUNIOR, 2008). Although he has been praised by the institution’s Principal Joaquim Caetano da Silva and presented excellent references, he was not hired because he had published an article on *Jornal do Comércio* where he stated that the only school that understood the value of gymnastics was Colégio São Pedro de Alcântara – a statement that offended some leaders of that prestigious school.

On that occasion, Bidegorry already used to offer his services in newspapers of the Court, such as *Almanak Laemmert*. In its 1848/1849 issue, he presented himself as teacher at an armory located on Barbonos St. (currently Evaristo da Veiga St.). In the 1850 issue, he makes a longer advertising of himself. He reports having been awarded three French rescue medals and being the director of “Gymnasio Normal Militar do Arsenal de Guerra” where taught both sexes.

He suggested that his classes would be appropriate for infants and youth “of weak constitution, and thus prone to certain vicious, having some deformities of the body, upper or lower extremities, weakness in some of the joints, in short, any disease that could be cured by orthopedic gymnastics” (p. 304). His proposal seems to be marked by rationalization of the use of the body, sustained by emerging medical knowledge and new technologies – a process close to that identified by Vigarello (2004, 2009) in 19th-century France.

Note how one of his famous students, Alfredo d’Escragnolle Taunay,⁶ referred to him in his memoirs:

⁶The Viscount of Taunay was, among other things, a writer, an engineer and a politician.

I was speaking, however, of my leanness and weak build. Beyond sea baths, taken with all constancy, I started taking gymnastics lessons at the War Arsenal given by the teacher of the minors at that military establishment, a certain Bidegorry, who also taught the Tosta boy, who would later be Chief Judge and Baron of Muritiba. At the private gymnastics course there was also a young girl whose name I did not keep, but whose shirt and pants impressed me very much (TAUNAY, 2005, p. 41).

If we believe Taunay's words, it is possible to conclude that Bidegorry taught not only poor children and youth, but also people from the elites – the latter in his private lessons. Besides, his students included women. Gradually, public sensibility towards gymnastics increased, connected to a market that was being built around it.

Bidegorry was even willing to teach classes at people's homes, manufacturing the necessary instruments to treat diseases. In addition to its potential to improve health through body preparation, he also saw a healing function for gymnastics, linked to orthopedic treatments. He went as far as announcing the foundation, in partnership with Dr. A. da Costa, of the Instituto Ortophédico do Rio de Janeiro, which he considered an "exciting need"⁷ in the municipality of Court.⁸ According to the master: "The purpose of gymnastics today is nothing but giving the body all the strength, all the vigor and all the flexibility compatible with health, without harming the development of faculties".⁹

It can be inferred that Bidegorry was in sync with the changes that began to take shape years before in Europe in terms of new uses and meanings of body practices. In the early 19th century, according

⁷*Correio Mercantil*, Rio de Janeiro, September 29, 1854, p. 2.

⁸Indeed, since at least 1841, the journal *Revista Médica Brasileira* published debates within the Imperial Academy of Medicine, on the need to create a Gymnastics Orthopedic Institute (see June, July and August 1841 issues).

⁹*O Americano*, Rio de Janeiro, July 26, 1848, p. 4.

to Vigarello (2003a), a “break” and a “renewal” took place in the view about physical exercise: effectiveness and measurement of performance, as well as development of gestures and techniques, were mobilized to design pedagogical interventions. That process – of which Bidegorry’s master, the director of the *Gymnase Normal de Paris*, Francisco Amorós,¹⁰ was one of the key figures – would result in a scenario that, from the 1820s on, included:

[...] an equally revealing “orthopedic gymnastics”: a set of sufficiently precise movements, mobilization of muscles that were sufficiently individualized to correct the erroneous curvatures of the body. That confirms a discovery: a body space completely traversed by mechanical logics, that of muscle acts totally thought for their localized effect. [...] The movement was so simplified and muscles were so properly distributed that an orthopedics was created to the extent of engendering gymnasiums, machines and institutions. Treatment establishments are founded in Paris, Lyon, Marseille and Bordeaux in the 1820s-1830s, suggesting the possibility of rectifying the appearance of those whose shape was not favored by nature (VIGARELLO, 2003a, p.15).¹¹

Bidegorry also became known for his work in some of the Court’s schools. At Santa Cruz School, considered one of the most advanced and well equipped in the city, he shared gymnastics and fencing lessons with Antônio Francisco da Gama – another renowned teacher of the time, who was also a teacher at Colégio Pedro II.

In a city that was improving its educational system, the master was a volunteer to run and build gyms for interested schools, as

¹⁰Francisco Amorós (Valencia, 1770-Paris, 1848) is considered one of the forerunners of modern Physical Education and one of the disseminators of gymnastics teaching in France. For more information, see Sirvent (2005) and Arnal (2009)

¹¹The passage can also be found in Vigarello and Holt (2008, p. 414).

well as to “provide teachers who had been his disciples”,¹² which indicates that he included some prospect of training in his activities. Furthermore, Bidegorry attended some events in the entertainment business, working in fencing disputes and as a referee in fights.

That dynamic man took over the presidency of one of the pioneering gymnastics associations that emerged in Rio de Janeiro: the Clube Ginástico, founded in 1860 by “some young men of commerce”.¹³ We have found few traces of that association. We know that its opening hours were “Wednesdays and Fridays from 7 am to 10 pm”,¹⁴ a time suitable for commerce workers, and had frequent activities during a short time. In fact, the initiative was not very successful or did not last.

One of the reasons may have been the worsening of Bidegorry's health problems. He died of a stomach cancer in 1863. Lack of interest and restrictions about the practice of gymnastics still persisted among Rio de Janeiro's residents. In any case, the French master's initiatives are an indication that a new ambience began to emerge for gymnastic exercises in the Court's society.

In his biography we may detect the ongoing changes in views about the body in the 19th century. On the one side, (rational, mechanical, hygienic, moral) gymnastics established new control mechanisms; on the other hand, it was also an expression of the emergence of new spaces for sociability and entertainment around which a new market was being created. Above all, it reveals how such transformations occurred – at least at first – in a gradual and limited way, albeit with striking consequences.

Gymnastics associations that emerged at approximate times and in sequence, as we have seen, were linked to foreigners' communities. The first society formed mostly by Brazilians devoted to that practice would be founded only in the late 1870s.

¹²*Correio Mercantil*, Rio de Janeiro, November 19, 1858, p. 4.

¹³*Correio Mercantil*, Rio de Janeiro, April 8, 1860, p. 1.

¹⁴*Correio Mercantil*, Rio de Janeiro, April 9-10, 1860, p. 4.

3 GYMNASTIC, ATHLETIC, SPORTS CLUBS

In 1877, the first club of “nationals” was founded with gymnastics as one of its core activities: Congresso Brasileiro. Its dynamics was very similar to the existing “foreign” associations: it offered classes (dance, fencing, music and theater, as well as gymnastics); it promoted meetings, dances, lectures, distinct social gatherings; it provided a library at a headquarters located on Barreira Lane,¹⁵ which also included parlor games and several entertainment activities.¹⁶

The creation of the club was welcomed by *Revista Illustrada* as follows: “The idea was conceived as quickly as it was accepted and carried out; over five hundred members enrolled in the early days, and the number grows by the moment with enthusiasm”.¹⁷ The article praises the body of members formed by “prestigious, influential and energetic gentlemen.” It expressed hopes that the institution would fulfill its “civilizing aims”. The initiative was clearly part of a city which certain sectors aspired to see modernized.

In the 1880s, gymnastics also began to be offered in associations more clearly linked to physical activities, as was the case of Clube Atlético Fluminense, established in 1885 to “provide its members with several amusements aimed to develop physical forces, such as foot and tricycle races, elementary gymnastic exercises, billiard and bagatelle, skating exercises, athletic games, target shooting, etc.”¹⁸ Note that body training and entertainment were connected in the proposal.

For many years, classes were taught by Professor Alvaro

¹⁵The Congresso was located in an area of the city marked by the existence of many entertainment establishments (clubs, circuses, bullfighting arenas, theaters, restaurants), a tetragon formed by Barrier Lane, Lavradio Street, Rossio Square and Campo de Santana.

¹⁶*A Reforma*, Rio de Janeiro, July 20, 1877, p. 2.

¹⁷*Revista Illustrada*, Rio de Janeiro, January 13, 1877, p. 2.

¹⁸*Gazeta de Notícias*, Rio de Janeiro, February 12, 1885, p. 2.

Gentil,¹⁹ celebrated by the press as having “laudable purpose of providing members with useful and salutary exercise”.²⁰ As time passed, the board invested in improving the space for those classes by purchasing new equipment and building its own pavilion. In some of the club’s advertisements, we can see that youth and adults were enrolled, but also children as young as eight years old. As an incentive, the best students were awarded gold and silver medals.

The journalist of *O Paiz* sees how much the creation of that club is related to a process of social appreciation for physical activities: “The taste for gymnastics exercises develops so much that amateurs are no longer satisfied with [...] existing arenas. They create new ones, and under such progress every neighborhood, every suburb is likely to have its own”.²¹ In fact, there is a curious occurrence in periodicals: the ideas of “gymnastics” and “sportive” often merge – both taken as synonyms for appreciating a new, more active attitude, connected both with exercising and with a more intense public life.

If the information provided by *O Paiz* is to be believed, people rapidly joined the Clube Atlético. In June of the same year of its foundation, it had already 1,200 members. With this, it could afford building a rural property on Conde de Bonfim Street: and oval cinder track for foot and bicycle races a skating track; well-equipped spaces for gymnastics, fencing and target shooting; bleachers for 1,400 people.²²

Its events, usually held on Sundays, draw large audiences since its opening. The large presence of women was stressed by newspapers, as well as the relaxed atmosphere that prevailed. We should note that even with limitations, gas columns provided nighttime lighting, thus extending the operation period. The

¹⁹We could not find more information about that master. Apparently, his working method was teaching acrobatics, using trapeze and fixed bars.

²⁰*Gazeta da Tarde*, Rio de Janeiro, September 26, 1885, p. 1.

²¹*O Paiz*, Rio de Janeiro, March 13, 1885, p. 1.

²²*O Paiz*, Rio de Janeiro, June 8, 1885, p. 1.

club became even more attractive with the diversification of its programming by incorporating music and other entertainment activities.

It is curious how, even though it was an “athletics” club, spectacles closer to circus were sometimes held there. For example, on May 16, 1886, there was the rise of a balloon, an attraction always appreciated in the city.²³ On October 31 of that year, a snake and jaguar exhibition created great expectation.²⁴

We must remember, by the way, that while events were initially exclusive for members and guests, they soon became open to all by simply paying a ticket (1\$000 for “general” seats, 2\$000 for bleachers). This is another indication that different references used to transit in the several spaces being created around an emerging entertainment market.

Gymnastics were also a frequent attraction at the events held at Clube Atlético. On some occasions, other gymnastics societies would come to visit. In early 1886, for instance, the Clube Ginástico Português, “in full, preceded by music, banner unfurled”, attended a festival – an occasion celebrated as evidence of “feelings of brotherhood” between clubs.²⁵ More than showing their skills at gymnastic exercises, the Portuguese still did, to the delight of the audience, a fencing exhibition: “dexterity, feint attack, fast defense [...], besides strong hand and elegant position”.²⁶

Rio de Janeiro’s society was hungry for novelties and strong emotions. Despite the discourses of control surrounding gymnastics, the practice was often closer to the opposite: to excitement created by unusual feats so well dramatized by circus exercises. To a greater or lesser degree, the different spectacles shared something of their dynamics.

²³*Gazeta da Tarde*, Rio de Janeiro, May 13, 1886, p. 2.

²⁴*Gazeta da Tarde*, Rio de Janeiro, October 30, 1886, p. 3.

²⁵*Diário de Notícias*, Rio de Janeiro, January 17, 1886, p. 1.

²⁶*Gazeta da Tarde*, Rio de Janeiro, January 18, 1886, p. 2.

There were also foot races exclusively organized for gymnastics students; they used to participate spontaneously in some competitions anyway. Indeed, there was a movement of participants between the different modalities offered by the club.

Moreover, “gymnastics practitioners”, as used to happen in other societies, actively participated in charitable activities promoted by the association. That was the case of “*bandos precatórios*”, a public parade in which donations were collected for some causes. More than charity itself, clubs exhibited their social commitment with such actions, thus promoting their value.

A club of similar profile, founded a few years earlier (1883) in Niterói, also opened a large space for gymnastics: Clube Olímpico Guanabarensense. Its events were dedicated primarily to foot and cycle races. It was probably one of the country's first clubs to promote such bicycle competitions.

As in the case of Clube Atlético Fluminense, presentation of gymnastic exercises was common at events organized by Olímpico, usually promoted by members of gymnastic societies. Take the announcement of races on April 20, 1884: “Distinguished members of Real Club Gymnastico Portuguez are generously willing to provide fencing exercises and conduct gymnastic works during intermission”.²⁷

As usual, exercises performed were those of fixed and parallel bars, exciting the audience. What the journalist from newspaper *Brazil* calls “good method, taste and elegance”²⁸ should not be confused with the typical activities of gymnastic methods. It was closer to the stunts that charmed everyone at circuses. Not surprisingly, at the July 12, 1885 races, “artists of the Anglo-Brazilian circus” performed at the same space occupied by the societies.²⁹

²⁷*Gazeta de Notícias*, Rio de Janeiro, April 20, 1884, p. 6.

²⁸*Brazil*, Rio de Janeiro, April 22, 1884, p. 2.

²⁹*Gazeta da Tarde*, Rio de Janeiro, July 13, 1885, p. 2.

In October 1884, the board of the club, “in order to fulfill one of its social commitments”, announced the foundation of a gymnastics school for members: “No one is unaware of the benefits of such exercises, which, besides being good hygiene, invigorate and strengthen the organism; in Europe, as among us and especially in the United States, this useful lesson has reaped the most excellent results”.³⁰ The search for connection to the “civilized world” marked the “civilizing” nature of the initiative.

Certainly, the growth in concerns with body education and the increase in the number of clubs and associations are related to the new demands of modernity, to new social arrangements and health and civility parameters (VIGARELLO, 2003a; VIGARELLO, HOLT, 2008). References to the European and American continents suggest that Rio de Janeiro’s society shared those perspectives.

In this scenario, on the one hand, appreciation of gymnastics has to do with the expectation of linkage between physical, moral and intellectual domains in youth formation. According to Gondra (2004), it was the “utopia of comprehensive education”. On the other hand, the importance the matter achieves for its possible contributions to the body per se is associated with the increasingly intense process of construction and legitimation of medical-scientific knowledge; i.e., the “emergence of the ideology of hygiene” (CHALHOUB, 1996).

However, note that the discourse about the high value of gymnastics was scientific (health benefits) and cultural (connection to the “civilized” world), but everyday practice in clubs was closer to a circus dynamics. That was not exactly an inconsistency, but rather indicated peculiarities of that scenario where it was still a novelty and there was great movement of influences between the several spaces where it expressed itself, even though doctors and educators condemned the model – more typical of entertainment.

Incidentally, we need to put the strength of the hygienist

³⁰*Brazil*, Rio de Janeiro, October 10, 1884, p. 2.

discourse in the Court's social life at that time into perspective, just as we should be skeptical of interpretations that reinforce the idea that processes occurring in other countries were linearly reproduced in the Brazilian context. Not only health concepts and experiences around ways to cure and prevent diseases were plural and controversial in the Second Empire, often including "unscientific knowledge" (EDLER, 1998; SAMPAIO, 2001; FERREIRA, 2003); the Empire's specific and concrete conditions also made it difficult for it to be a European facsimile in south American lands (although such attempts may have been made).

The relationship between ideas, structure and social formation meant that gymnastics had a particular meaning in 19th century Brazilian social dynamics, although there were similarities with other countries (MELO, PERES, 2013).³¹ The "slow diffusion" of which Vigarello and Holt (2008) speak seems not only to have gained new outlines, but it also occurred possibly in a very eclectic and complex way.

Incidentally, note that in addition to gymnastic athletic clubs and societies, we should mention another important "sports" association that used to offer gymnastics: Clube de Regatas Guanabarenses – one of the most important Brazilian rowing associations, founded in 1874. Besides "promoting rowing, sailing and steam boat regattas", its purposes included establishing "a swimming and gymnastics school" (BRAZIL, 1878, p. 904).

We were not able to find more information about this gymnastics school, only that it actually operated. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the gymnastic societies created rowing teams to participate in regattas organized by Guanabarenses.

Commenting on the "match of clubs" held on the September 8, 1881 regatta, a journalist suggests: "The Club de Regatas is really committed to making it a traditional competition, among others. As

³¹MELO, V. A., PERES, F. F. O corpo da nação: posicionamentos governamentais sobre a educação física no Brasil monárquico. História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos, Rio de Janeiro, 2013. In press. (In-press works are not included in the final references).

can be seen, emulation established between the several societies can only bring more splendor to these festivals. Those who lose once get the desire of revenge”.³² That competition, marked by the excitement of disputes, increased the visibility of clubs and served to celebrate fraternity among peers.

Finally, the case of the English community is worth mentioning. It did not establish its own gymnastics society, even because such clubs were not part of their tradition. However, gymnastic exercises also became common in their associations. It was the case of The British and American Club, British Amateur Athletic Sports Association (Sociedade Ingleza de Jogos Athleticos) and Club Athletico Anglo-Brazileiro.

4 IN SOCIAL CLUBS AS WELL

While appreciation of gymnastics is more obvious in some clubs, since it has a direct relationship with their profile, its presence in others is more curious. We see it as a valuable indicator of how the practice was spreading and gaining notoriety in the Court’s society.

Gymnastics, for example, was present in some charitable initiatives by lower economic strata. As commerce employees gathered to found Clube Progressista, they decided “that the acquisition or possession of a hall be done as soon as possible, where employees of commercial houses could indulge in reading, gymnastics, music and other hobbies as worthy as these on Sundays and holy days”³³. In turn, Sociedade Litteraria de Beneficencia Vinte e Quatro de Julho, when it built a place to offer free classes, did not fail to reserve a room for gymnastics courses.³⁴

The case of Club Marcolino is also interesting. Founded in

³²2 Gazette News, Rio de Janeiro, August 28, 1881, p. 1.

³³Gazeta de Noticias, Rio de Janeiro, December 16, 1879, p. 1.

³⁴Gazeta de Noticias, Rio de Janeiro, July 23, 1877, p. 2.

1878, it was presented as a “society to protect animals”.³⁵ In the first year of operation it already announced the start of a fencing school (run by Antonio Francisco da Gama, already mentioned), a riding school (run by Marcolino R. da Costa Junior, army officer, future teacher of the Military School) and a gymnastics school (run by Marc Periraz, who had served at the Sociedade Francesa de Ginástica).³⁶

Recreativa A. São José, dedicated to promoting balls and soirees, also included gymnastics presentations in its events, as we can see in this news article about a party held to celebrate the inauguration of the new board: “There followed gymnastics works on a trapezium prepared in the building’s main room where some amateur members, dressed appropriately and tastefully, made amazing moves and received many applauses”.³⁷ On such occasions, students of its own school of gymnastics performed.³⁸ M. Salvador Vieira was one of the first masters, being succeeded by Guilherme Somaini, who served for years and seems to have been highly admired by his pupils.

Clube das Laranjeiras, in turn, was founded in 1885, on Duque de Caxias Square (currently Largo do Machado). It had a similar profile to that of São José and it did not offer gymnastics classes overtly, but it reported having a fencing room. The prestigious Club Beethoven also had such facility. It was created in 1882, being mainly dedicated to musical activities.³⁹ Indeed, while it had features in common with gymnastics, fencing deserves a separate discussion, since it is a kind of link between the practices of the ancient and the new regime.

There were many drama societies in Rio de Janeiro. Interestingly, one of them, which also promoted dancing events,

³⁵*Almanak Laemmert*, Rio de Janeiro, 1878, p. 515.

³⁶*Gazeta de Notícias*, Rio de Janeiro, October 5, 1878, p. 2.

³⁷*Semana*, Rio de Janeiro, August 13, 1887, p. 3.

³⁸*O Paiz*, Rio de Janeiro, May 14, 1887, p. 3.

³⁹For more information about the club, see Silva (2007).

offered fitness and fencing classes: Clube Ginásio Fluminense, based in São Cristóvão.⁴⁰ The Clube Terpsychore, in turn, one of Rio de Janeiro's most important dance associations, whose headquarters was located in Catete, had an exclusive board for gymnastics and fencing, headed by S. Reimão.⁴¹ When inaugurating its banner, moreover, it chose Congresso Ginástico Português as its sponsor.⁴²

Finally, we should mention the interesting case of Clube de Equitação Luso-Brasileiro, founded in 1885, on Riachuelo Street. It was a private enterprise in the form of social club that also offered gymnastics classes taught by Luiza Araújo (it had exclusively female classes) and João Gentil, respectively wife and son of the establishment's owner, Genelicio Gentil, one of the first practitioners of riding in the country.

The establishment also offered classes of that modality,⁴³ taught by Luiz Jacome de Abreu e Souza, one of the main promoters of riding and other practices with horses in Brazil,⁴⁴ including in the Army.

Incidentally, considering that physical activities gained space and relevance within the military, even because of changes in their training schools,⁴⁵ it is not surprising that Clube Naval, whose members were "all officers of the fleet or connected classes", adopted as one of its purposes to promote games of "strength and dexterity"⁴⁶ such as fencing, swimming and gymnastics.

⁴⁰*Gazeta de Notícias*, Rio de Janeiro, August 13, 1877, p. 3.

⁴¹*Gazeta de Notícias*, Rio de Janeiro, June 5, 1884, p. 2.

⁴²*Gazeta de Notícias*, Rio de Janeiro, August 15, 1888, p. 3.

⁴³There was also the possibility of renting horses for rides. *Diário de Notícias*, Rio de Janeiro, August 17, 1886, p. 3.

⁴⁴Luis Jacome worked in several cities, particularly Porto Alegre, Curitiba and Rio de Janeiro.

⁴⁵For more information, see Alves (2008).

⁴⁶*Almanak Laemmert*, Rio de Janeiro, 1886, p. In 1528.

From an unknown practice, gymnastics eventually started to be appreciated by clubs and society as a whole in the course of two decades, increasing its presence in Rio de Janeiro's everyday life, interconnected with the changes the Empire's capital was undergoing.

5 CONCLUSION

In the final decades of the 19th century, many recreational clubs emerged in the city and its surroundings (especially in neighboring Niterói) – several of which were somehow involved with gymnastics. That multiplicity of associations – with varying degrees and traits of sociability and associational life – shows the process of configuration of social networks existing in the Brazilian Empire.

On the one hand, it is possible to interpret the emergence and proliferation of those groups as a process of construction of social interactions, albeit temporary, between actors other than those related to more immediate circles (such as family, trade, class etc.). Gymnastics – through classes, presentations and festivities – was one of the practices that encouraged this socialization in spaces of public access, even with strictly private rules.

To some extent, such institutions would become spaces for “extended sociabilities” (AGIER, 1999), in which it was possible to build wider networks of relationships, when compared to rigidly regulated and stratified circles. It seems that the gradual development of a market around gymnastics – here understood as an articulated strategy for education and entertainment – favored such a process, allowing diverse social strata to have access to new social practices that legitimized the process, although not necessarily in a harmonious and stable way.

On the other hand, sociabilities present in those social spaces can be read as a result and a strengthening of their interclassist character. Relations between “equals” would be fostered in search

of a degree of homogeneity marked by meaningful interconnection with social stratum and origin. The emphasis was on developing interactions that sought to distinguish and define boundaries of those considered “others”.

Undoubtedly, any attempt at categorical separation – between sociability among equals and sociability among non-equals – would imply reducing the understanding of the empirical existence of each of those clubs. After all, these forms of sociability cannot be found in perfect or pure state; they must be conceived as an abstraction that enhances certain defining (and non-normative) features. Therefore, classification is a resource that guides and facilitates presentation and analysis of associations’ components and causalities, and it may become important to understand their several configurations.

Thus, these societies – whether or not they were linked to “nationalities”, whether or not they were restricted to certain social strata, involving several forms of participation and belonging – organized and stressed, sometimes more, sometimes less, the two forms of construction of collective life, and gymnastics was one of their connecting links.

On the other hand, the emergence and increase in the number of those clubs are certainly related to the construction of new “public sensibilities” (CORBIN, 2001; VIGARELLO, 2003b), partly associated to the moral, civilizing and medical discourse that would gradually consolidate the bases of its legitimacy in the 19th century.

In any case, the trajectory and the spreading of such associations in the Court’s society shed light on the way dissemination and popularization of gymnastics in the city occurred in a multifaceted way, through a varied set of actors, institutions and ideas, not necessarily mutually exclusive.

One should take into account the peculiarity of that practice at the time. It was an attraction at circuses, it began to enter schools,

it was understood as a dimension of health, it was considered important for national defense in the armed forces, it was present in clubs. In none of those spheres, it manifested itself in “pure” form. Movements and influences were common and constant. It was not one thing or another; it was many things mixed in a complex way. Perhaps it is really better to speak of gymnastics in plural, many gymnastics.

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