

# HEALTHY YOUTH: REPRESENTATIONS OF THE PHYSICAL EDUCATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN SAO PAULO AND RIO DE JANEIRO CITIES IN THE 1930s

UMA JUVENTUDE SAUDÁVEL: REPRESENTAÇÕES DE UMA EDUCAÇÃO FÍSICA DOS JOVENS EM SÃO PAULO E NO RIO DE JANEIRO NA DÉCADA DE 1930

JUVENTUD SANA: REPRESENTACIONES DE LA EDUCACIÓN FÍSICA DE LOS JÓVENES EN LAS CIUDADES DE SAO PAULO Y RÍO DE JANEIRO EN LA DÉCADA DE 1930

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**Abstract:** This study aims to understand how the physical education of urban youth in the 1930s was represented, in a context of conflicts for the reconstitution of national identity in Brazil. It is limited to the observation of discourses and practices evidenced by the press and medical journals in the cities of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. It concludes that the modern discourses of physicians and the press had the objective of legitimizing practices for the body, which, nevertheless, should be based on scientific knowledge and a moral of moderation. However, the need to legitimize physical education also evidences tensions generated by silences and/or criticisms of other practices more identified with the *capoeira* and disinterested amusements, such as the popularization of some sports.

**Keywords:** history of education, youth, physical education, national identity.

**Resumo:** Este estudo objetiva compreender como era representada a educação física da juventude urbana na década de 1930, em um contexto de embates pela reconstituição da identidade nacional. Limita-se à observação de discursos e práticas evidenciadas por periódicos médicos e pela imprensa nas duas maiores cidades brasileiras, São Paulo e Rio de Janeiro. Conclui-se que os discursos tiveram o objetivo de legitimar práticas voltadas aos corpos, as quais deveriam ser baseadas em um conhecimento científico e em uma moral que pregava a moderação. Entretanto, a necessidade de legitimar a educação física também evidenciou tensões geradas pelos silenciamentos e/ou críticas a outras práticas mais identificadas com a *capoeira* e com diversões desinteressadas, como a popularização de alguns esportes.

**Palavras-chave:** história da educação, juventude, educação física, identidade nacional.

**Resumen:** Este estudio tiene como objetivo comprender cómo se representó la educación física de la juventud urbana en la década de 1930, en un contexto de luchas por la reconstitución de la identidad nacional. Se limita a observar discursos y prácticas evidenciados por revistas médicas y la prensa en las más grandes ciudades de Brasil, São Paulo y Río de Janeiro. Concluye que los discursos tenían el objetivo de legitimar las prácticas dirigidas a los cuerpos, que deberían basarse en el conocimiento científico y en una moraleja que predicara la moderación. Sin embargo, la necesidad de legitimar la educación física también mostró tensiones generadas por silencios y/o críticas a otras prácticas más identificadas con la *capoeira* y diversiones desinteresadas, como la popularización de algunos deportes.

**Palabras clave:** historia de la educación, juventud, educación física, identidad nacional.

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## INTRODUCTION

In Brazil in the 1930s, both in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro cities, discourses and practices followed the prerogatives of public hygiene in the early twentieth century (Chalhoub, 1996, 2012; Rago, 2014; Freire, 1979; Hochman, 1998; Luz, 1982). The largest Brazilian cities tried to reproduce the European urbanity, of course to a limited extent, due to other objective conditions. This modern representation of the city found its defenders in Brazil, with population conglomerates that, from the twentieth century on, aspired to differentiate themselves from the rural scenery and the urban outskirts (Mehrtens, 2010; Morse, 1965). New discourses and practices that led to individual pleasures, comfort, and amusements led cities to modernization projects.

Le Goff (2013) explains that the term “modern” marks a given society’s awareness of a rupture with the past. The author also emphasizes that countries affected by European colonialism had to tackle the issue of backwardness in the twentieth century. Thus the announcement of the modern was parallel to the affirmation of national identity. In a process of identification, with negation of and opposition between ancient and modern, such “modernization” had certain characteristics, which for Le Goff (2013) separate a “balanced modernization,” in which the successful penetration of the modern did not destroy the antique, as for example in Japan, from a “hesitant modernization”, which sought to reconcile the ancient and the modern not in a balanced but in partial way, as in the case of the African continent. However, Le Goff (2013) teaches that the assertion of modernity refers primarily to a restricted circle of intellectuals and technocrats. As an awareness of progress, modernity is a plan in preparation, which is always identified as an achievement of a group, of an elite, of restricted circles, even when its practices reach wider populations, in what is called “hesitant modernization” (Le Goff, 2013). Besides, we need to understand that a modernization process has different impacts on different social groups in the city since the modern has a multifaceted meaning. In contrast, the changes established in certain spaces and periods encompass 'plural ways of apprehending' the ongoing transformations (Cerasoli, 2004).

Therefore, in this scenario of plurality and contradictions, if, on one hand, there were modernizing projects inspired by industrialized countries, on the other hand, from the 1920s and 1930s there would also be yearnings for a more genuine representation of 'Brazilianness' (Weinstein, 2015), anchored in the miscegenation (Romo, 2007), which caused, for example, the exaltation of samba (Hertzman, 2009) and the officialization of capoeira (Fonseca & Vieira, 2014).

In that period, racial conflicts, for example, emerged in the production of modernist intellectuals who propagated optimistic discourses and valued miscegenation (Stepan, 2005; Schwarcz, 1993, 1999). These interpretations from a generation of intellectuals, represented mainly by Freyre's (1959) production, were characterized by criticism towards racist stances. At the same time, they built a

Brazilian identity that aimed to become more homogeneous, crying out for optimism, for a country of the future. Thus, Gilberto Freyre, as the most prominent representative of this generation of Brazilian intellectuals, promoted a national identity based on a peaceful reconciliation between modernity and popular culture, omitting conflicts, tensions and the violence that arise from racial prejudice (Bastide & Fernandes, 1971). However, a set of Brazilian social thinkers specialized on Gilberto Freyre's work (Ricupero, 2011) highlight the criticism towards the author's sociological thesis about *mestizaje*, because it overlooked conflicts and emptied the contradictions between antagonistic groups, who were never in struggle and always reconciled in a deceptive 'racial democracy' (Fernandes, 1972; Mota, 1994).

We follow here the same path of criticism, but in the context of an original research subject delimited by the practices and representations that involved the discourses of doctors and the press about the physical education of young people in an urban Brazil, highlighting tensions and conflicts.

Our hypothesis is that the discourses on youth's physical education tried to homogenize youth behaviors, affirming a Brazilian identity. However, they contradicted the miscegenation, because they either criticized or silenced about more popular corporal practices, with African cultural identification.

What we problematize, thus, are the representations about the physical education of urban youth in relation to 'modern' discourses, regarding both the conciliatory principles of miscegenation and their contradictions evidenced by medical and journalistic discourses that intended to shape the youth behaviors.

This problematization is original because it does not limit itself to observe continuities between discourses based on modernity and physical education practices, but, on the contrary, it aims to interpret its contradictions. As Certeau (2011) teaches us, practices obey specific criteria, are classified according to categories and aim at changing objectives. These questions reveal a formality of practices. Therefore, one of the historian's tasks would be to measure the distances, or relationships, between the formalities of practices and representations (Certeau, 2011).

In the search for answers, we limit our investigation to the observation of discourses and practices evidenced by the press in the two largest Brazilian cities, Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, regarding urban youth in the period. The specificities of this discourse aimed at an urban youth from Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro are highlighted by its contrast with other Brazilian locations and with the youths represented by other social and ethnic groups<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> As an example we highlight the German-Brazilians, who throughout the first three decades of the 20th century created an intense associative network in which gymnastics societies formed an important space for youth education with other singularities (Quitau, 2016).

In relation to time framework, we are particularly interested in the 1930s, which, even if it did not represent the first initiatives of construction of the Brazilian nation, made it possible to analyze of different identities about the country that collide in the fields of culture. Sources were gathered from the collections of Faculdade de Medicina, Universidade de São Paulo [Medicine School of University of Sao Paulo] and Biblioteca Nacional do Rio de Janeiro [National Library of Rio de Janeiro]. The documentary body consisted of medical articles from the periodicals *Imprensa Medica* [Medical Press], *Boletim da Academia Nacional de Medicina* [Bulletin of the National Academy of Medicine] and of news from city newspapers, mainly from *Jornal do Brasil*, *O Paiz* and *Correio Paulistano*.

To observe the representations about Brazilian youths marked by urbanization, the primary sources were newspapers with large circulation and closely connected to the urban issue, emphasizing the context of the most populous cities in the country, such as Rio de Janeiro. These cities were the centre of the country's political and administrative structure in the 1930s, and São Paulo, an economic centre that maintained a very intense immigration policy. In these cities, in a context of modernization, the leading newspapers reached readers from different social strata and professional fields. This press gave visibility to numerous cultural practices (Luca, 2005; Cruz, 2000; Martins, 2011), with a growing emphasis on sports news (Hollanda & Melo, 2012). The chosen medical journals, on the other hand, reveal representations of the Brazilian scientific production about urban youth, thus representing a discourse rationalized by medical science, considered a recognized knowledge to think a pragmatic intervention regarding the youth culture.

In the documental analysis, three pieces of evidence anchored the interpretation of tensions generated by the institution of youth behaviors considered relevant to modern physical education practices: a) the silences regarding capoeira identified as physical education and the insistent associations between capoeira, delinquency and loitering, as well as the debate about the role of medicine and physical education concerning criminality and poor youth; b) the need to control juvenile behavior to avoid idleness and shape sexuality; c) the defense of scientific discourse to legitimate the choice of physical exercises based on a representation of moderation, which generated criticisms of the popularization of sports among young people, especially soccer (Kittleson, 2014; Goldblatt, 2014).

## THE CREATION OF YOUTH IN A "MODERN" COUNTRY AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Youth is a term closely associated with body-centered practices, such as dances, rhythms, sports (Groppo, 2000; Brown, 2019), but it was also the target of pedagogies and hygienes (Soares & Gleyse, 2006) pertinent to various institutions such as schools, parks, factories, and dwellings. In Brazil, in particular, the social reforms implemented by public policies in large cities, and encouraged by intellectuals, promoted a series of changes in relation to body practices. For Rago (2004), it was a matter of instilling new rules and ways of living, in which the patterns of behavior and social interaction considered civilized and progressively adopted in the universe of the elites should be exported to all social groups, and that is the reason why they produced tensions and conflicts. (Rago, 2004)

Thus, eradicating popular habits seen as backward or dangerous was equivalent to fostering 'modern' precepts of hygiene and civility (Rago, 2014; Stephanou, 1999; Rocha, 2003, 2017). Among the urban transformations designed to achieve this goal, "[...] leisure programs with explicit pedagogical objectives have grown significantly, at the same time that the discourse about idleness has become stiff, stigmatizing it as threatening and dangerous" (Rago, 2004, p. 428).

Large cities such as Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, among others, gave way through public policies and private initiatives to these transformations materialized in the representation of the modern city. This urban Brazil was surrounded by these changes in public hygiene, architecture, material culture, but also, paradoxically, it was not far from a traditional culture linked to the countryside (Lima, 2008), the farm, the rural and popular habits. Thus, from many hybridities, reconciliations and conflicts, the Brazilian identity was reconstructed (Oliven, 2001).

In that period, discourses guided by a scientific bias coexisted with the tensions of observing everyday practices with other origins, such as African culture and the tradition of the countryside. These cultures that differed from that urban Brazil identity, and were displaced to a universe of isolation and abandonment in which modern representations were inaccessible. When we think of a country that sought its identity between the regional and the national, between the scientific and the political, it would be difficult to establish, analyze, or describe a homogeneous national identity (Lesser, 2015; Anderson, 2013). In this way, our observation and analysis need to be delimited by the characteristics desired by medical and journalistic discourses about an urban Brazilian youth identified with modernization projects and their respective contradictions.

When studying youth in the same period, Savage (2009) explains that in western Europe and the United States, the idea of youth as a distinctive phase of life was still being consolidated. With that, national states began to produce discourses about this phase of life, markedly concerned with juvenile delinquency. In this sense, Savage's research problematized how the United Kingdom, the United States

of America, France and Germany tried to conceptualize, define and control youth from the last quarter of the 19th century until the mid-1940s. Thus, being young was not just a biological data or a specific age group, but it involved an established youth culture. For Savage (2009), particularly in the 1930s youth was created from different national contexts with certain specificities, but with a common feeling, linked to the need to defend a political position as a reason for polarization and violence. The most frequently asked question among young people in Germany, France and the UK was: which side are you on?

In Brazil, in the same period, the urban youth also reproduced political disputes. For example, there were several conflicts between integralist youth and communist youth. They were not simply reproductions of European conflicts, since the presence of young liberals, Catholics, Protestants, modernists and conservatives did not allow a simple dichotomous outline between poles, but complex political readjustments. The 1930s in Brazil was a period of conflict and reconciliation in politics marked by ambiguities in the Vargas government (Williams, 2001).

Although in a political history, communist, integralist and Christian youth represented relevant portions of the youths' activities in the 1930s, in this study we are interested in how the press and the doctors represented youth in their cultural aspects regarding what was conventionally called 'physical education', an expression that at that time brought together a pedagogy developed for childhood and youth based on sports, games and gymnastics<sup>2</sup>. However, this does not mean that political issues do not articulate with these cultural representations, as in the case of German Hitler youth<sup>3</sup> which had in it's essence the daily practice of physical exercises.

Therefore, even without disregarding the political aspects, our gaze will be directed primarily to the cultural field, evidencing the medical and journalistic discourses from the sources that particularly represented a project of youth education that defended the construction of a modern and hygienic society.

This educational project for the young people was established through an imprecise definition of youth in the period<sup>4</sup>, but it already associated the words

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<sup>2</sup> The 1930s are particularly distant from the 19th century in relation to the uses of the word sport. In the nineteenth century, sports brought together an immense diversity of practices that also involved the arts, circus, dances, entertainment in general (Melo, 2014). On the other hand, in the 1930s the word 'physical education' gained greater legitimacy and institutionalization, based on some sports, games and gymnastics.

<sup>3</sup> In Brazil, Hitler youth established groups in different states and, in these places, different ties with gymnastics and sports societies. In Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, Hitler's youth established very friendly bonds with these clubs, which made their facilities available so that this organization could carry out its activities (Dietrich, 2007; Quitzau, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Sometimes the term was replaced by a broader reference to childhood, like 'children under 18'.

youth, youth and youth with the demands involving education, the strengthening of race, physical education, crime and sexuality.

Also, while defending a pedagogy aimed at bodies and that met criteria of rationality, scientificity and modern education, other practices far from these characteristics were silenced or associated with the poor and stigmatized youth (Arend, 2011). For example, despite the legalization of the practice of capoeira and its valorization as a national reference (Fonseca & Vieira, 2014; Pires, 2010)), the cult of racial *mestizaje* of the Brazilian people, and the need to search for our own identities through the “modern” (Schwarcz, 1993), the physical education of youth highlighted and supported by the press was markedly inspired by European and American lifestyles. For this reason, capoeira glimpsed by the press was associated with the poor youth, vagrancy and violence, lacked the representativeness that the practice has in the present days in relation to the Brazilian identity, and did not have any type of bond with physical education. The news published in the newspaper *A Batalha* with the title “Roubou o homem que o protegera” [He robbed the man who had protected him] is an example of that:

Yesterday, Mr. Pereira do Nascimento was in Central Brazil, when he saw the boy, in the company of vagrants playing capoeira. He called a police officer and had him arrested. [...] When interrogated there, he declared that his name was Jose da Silva, he was 17 years old, and had no profession or residence (Roubou, 1932, p. 3).

At that moment, using a particular event, the press associated vagrancy, capoeira and youth. Stigmata that were not confirmed by the meager statistics of the period weighed on poor youth. To access these representations in their own terms, we briefly present a long debate held at Academia Nacional de Medicina [National Academy of Medicine] based in the city of Rio de Janeiro. In the minutes of the session held on October 29, 1936, a debate on child delinquency in Brazil fostered antagonistic discourses among physicians, evidencing medical currents with heterogeneous political views. It is interesting to note that, in the face of many suggestions of solutions to crime control, medical and biological intervention arguments were countered with the need for an educational intervention involving physical education. The discussion was generated by the oral communication of Dr. Leonildo Ribeiro, whose title was “Aspectos médicos do problema da delinquência infantil” [Medical aspects of the problem of child delinquency], published in full in the bulletin of that medical institution. Ribeiro (1936) stated:

Medicine is being called to play an increasingly important role in the defense of society and more specifically in the work against crime, in which experts everywhere are engaged, as criminality grows continuously and frighteningly

in the most educated centers in the world. It was a medical genius, Lombroso, who first demonstrated, more than fifty years ago, that if the idea of crime was linked to that of perfect health of its actor, in order to make him have a sense of responsibility, there was an urgent need to modify criminal laws, inasmuch as most offenders are evidently abnormal or ill individuals, who cannot therefore be aware of the evil they were doing. Simply punishing them, in addition to being in some cases a scientific heresy, was an inhuman measure, without practical purpose, in the defense of society (Ribeiro, 1936, p. 842-843).

In the mid-1930s, Dr. Leonildo Ribeiro advocated the naturalization of social behavior supported by Italian biotipology, whose exponent was Dr. Cesare Lombroso (Silva, 2014). Using biotipology, it would be possible, according to the researcher's understanding, to prevent crime by identifying biological disorders in childhood and adolescence. It was a matter of building taxonomies on ethnic and physical types. Ribeiro continues its defense:

The institutions of study and observation of childhood and adolescence have begun to emerge everywhere after the war. In the United States, laboratories of juvenile research and psychological clinics for children have appeared. Clapède, in Switzerland, founds the first medical and pedagogical clinic, where he carried out a work of worldwide repercussion. Belgium begins the complete reform of its legislation on children, placing itself at the forefront of the European peoples, through its new laws on this subject. More recently, in Germany and Austria, supporters of Freud's doctrine installed pedanalysis clinics and the Biotipology Institutes are appearing in Italy, under the influence of the new ideas of the constitutionalist school of Viola and Pende. (Ribeiro, 1936, p.846)

In the 1930s, according to Savage (2009), the governments of the United States of America and the leading Western European countries were increasingly concerned with controlling crime rates, which led to the desire for greater control and observation of poor youth. In Brazil, a portion of the physicians took the initiative to dialogue with these studies, not based on reliable statistics, but rather on moral discourses on youth (Morelli, 2018). Despite that, Dr. Ribeiro outlined possible solutions to delinquency in the country based on its peculiarities, such as malnutrition and the said genetically inherited physical inferiority. He asserted:

It has thus been evidenced that the solution to the problem of abandoned and delinquent childhood in Brazil differs in some of its aspects from that given to it in other countries, even among those which are closer to us. What good would it do to admit one of these poor children, even in institutes admirably equipped to carry out their physical and professional education? The result

would be, in my view, completely null and even harmful in some cases (Ribeiro, 1936, p. 856).

By relativizing the benefits of education and physical education on the health of children and young people, Ribeiro argued for the limitations of an educational intervention, because for him delinquent behavior also had a biological explanation and was not based on the specific cultural context of youth. Yet not the entire medical profession agreed on this idea. This is how Manoel de Abreu, the President of Academia Nacional de Medicina [National Academy of Medicine], answered:

I do not believe, despite the authoritative opinions put forward by our colleague, that infections positively determine the high rate of delinquency among these children. It seems to me that it is misery that causes disease and, at the same time, delinquency – great misery! (Academia Nacional de Medicina, 1936, p. 858-9).

Dr. Abreu's discourse corroborated a significant portion of Brazilian medicine that argued that there was no racial inferiority on the part of poor populations in the country, but rather, poor health conditions due to the abandonment and isolation resulting from lack of public policy (Hochman, 1998). Thus, the debate on populations led to greater influence of a strand concerned with social reforms from the 1930s on (Stepan, 1998, 2005). The statement by Dr. Manoel de Abreu also encouraged other interlocutors who supported and criticized Dr. Leonildo Ribeiro's studies. Dr. Pedro Pernambuco stated:

We know today, according to the children's Legal Medicine and to the teachings of all who dedicate themselves to these matters of children's Medicine, that crime, in general, takes place after the age of 18, and that children below this age practicing crimes are rare, in which case crimes are always determined by two key factors: First: an actively bad education; and, second, disturbances of an organic or psychic nature, which condition the offense (Academia Nacional de Medicina, 1936, p. 862).

Dr. Pernambuco defended Ribeiro's thesis presenting an unpublished statistic in the study: 70% of young people under 18 years of age committed crimes or offenses due to a condition of mental weakness or psychological illness (Academia Nacional de Medicina, 1936, p. 862). It was a thesis of medicalization of crimes and offenses practiced by young people, since, if the causes of delinquency were related to mental illness, the problem would be more in the medical field than in the educational field. Therefore, such thesis would allow an even greater penetration of the medical discourses in public policies for youth (Souza, 2008). However, the

thesis was difficult to defend. Dr. Ribeiro did not confirm the statistics of Dr. Pernambuco, but he questioned:

Let us admit that 50% are social causes and that biological causes represent the other 50%. Since we cannot tackle decisively the causes of social nature, let us tackle the biological ones, which in my opinion are the easiest to deal with and to more directly overcome, and we will thus have greatly diminished a huge percentage of child crime, which increases systematically in all the large cultured centers in the world (Academia Nacional de Medicina, 1936, p. 866).

Concern for the youth was evident among Brazilian physicians in the 1930s, yet the incidence of crime was far from being higher among young people under 18. Although there were few statistics on crime in Brazil in the 1930s, data from the state of Sao Paulo, verified in 1936 and published by governmental authorities in *Correio Paulistano* newspaper, revealed that there was a greater occurrence of illegal practices by men aged 26 to 45 years (Prisões, 1937).

But the concern of physicians was not only with the education of the poor youth; it was also necessary to defend the physical education of young people of the middle and upper classes. In this case, without the stigmata of racial and biological inferiority, it was a matter of selecting the best physical education for youth. The theme was important, since, between 1920 and 1940, the Brazilian population increased from 30.6 million to 41.1 million; and those under 20 years old accounted for 54% of the total in that period (Fausto, 2002). In other words, caring for youth was to reform the society of the future in terms considered “modern”, using rationality and science, at least from the medical point of view. Dr. Ovidio Meira also considered:

From this point of view, Mr. President, I declare that, in Rio de Janeiro, not only indigent children, but middle-class and wealthy children are abandoned. This abandonment would perhaps be easily correctable without great burden, because there is no sports club in Rio de Janeiro that does not receive special favors from the governments. Therefore, dividing the school year into two periods, one of intellectual education and another of physical and civic education, these great sports centers will naturally be compelled to either give up the favors they enjoy or to offer their headquarters for the education of these children, establishing mandatory and compulsory attendance, except for those who would have to leave Rio de Janeiro, but still forcing them to attend other centers (Academia Nacional de Medicina, 1936, p.860-1).

It seems to us that Dr. Meira understood that the occupation of youth's times was an important task for the control of youthful behavior in all social classes. It

was imperative to avoid the idleness of young people from the middle and rich classes as well. Thus, modern physical education practices were considered important tools of a moral education capable of limiting youthful behavior in a wide variety of aspects.

These prerogatives are observed, for example, when in medical journals the theme directly related to youth was sexuality. In order to avoid an unwanted pregnancy, or even sexual intercourse in adolescence, the “modern weapons” of medicine referred not to religious morality, but rather to a medical morality based on the scientific control of bodies, also using physical education as a strategy, which made possible the occupation of the times of youth, avoiding idleness. Dr. Neves Manta stated in the periodical *Imprensa Medica* [Medical Press] in the article “Prophylaxia das paixões prematuras” [Prophylaxis of premature passions], in 1932:

Therefore, the prophylaxis of premature intercourse must first be done, thus avoiding joints of tender and evolving bodies! But how can we do it? In the aesthetic forces Hygiene will find the means for perfect prophylaxis. But not only there: in physical exercises and puerile games, it will also find admirable derivatives for the bewilderment of erotic sub-instinctive demonstrations (Manta, 1932, p. 342).

In the same way, in 1937, Dr. Clovis Muzzel Faria recommends controlling juvenile masturbation by sports practices:

For parents and educators, who must be sufficiently prepared in matters of sexuality to make their mission perfect, it is important to prevent the student from masturbating excessively. Not by instilling pernicious ideas in the young man such as the ones that he will go crazy, be tuberculous, or impotent, etc. – which only serve to increase the anguish of the masturbator and which is precisely what should be avoided, because such theories make the individual be neurasthenized and have a sense of guilt that will accompany him throughout his life –, but by making his attention be directed to other purposes such as sport, art, etc. (Faria, 1937, p. 483-484).

The word of order in medicine was moderation, avoiding excesses in everything was a principle that guided the educational field in relation to the body. Instead of the moral condemnation of masturbation, which was typical of religious education, early twentieth-century medicine opted for moderation. In order to reach this goal, it was also necessary to occupy youth's time with stimuli of pedagogies for the body, such as those performed in sports. But moderation was also the rule for the very practice of physical education, both for Brazilian medicine (Amorin, 1931) and for French physicians and educators (Gleyse & Soares, 2012).

While for physicians it was important that the exercises be based on science and had moderation as principle, refusing exaggerations, in the dynamic field of culture, other forms of physical education reached youth. This diversity, however, had certain limits on the part of the written press, especially the newspapers of the cities of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The practices associated with physical education derived from particular cultures, since the press tended to report modern practices identified with English sports, children's and educational games of American origin, and European gymnastics.

Similar notions can be found among members of the German-Brazilian community in different states in the south and southeast of the country. When considering that "The strength of youth guarantees the future of a people" (Thümmel, 1929, p. 14), the German-Brazilians established physical exercises as the way to strengthen the young population. Activities such as swimming, cycling, rowing, and even the practice of some sports were justified as an essential element in the education of youth due to their effects on moral and physical aspects, in texts often signed by individuals linked to the gymnastic movement in Germany.

However, there was a transgression of the medical advice by young people, since physical education was not always moderate or hygienic, as we will demonstrate through sources. Resignifications of physical education practices generated tensions. This scenario was not unique to the Brazilian context; other studies evidence these discontinuities between a physical education linked to the "modern" as opposed to traditional or deviant practices: Kirk and Twigg (1993) researched resistance to Swedish gymnastics because of its predictability and monotony in Australia in the 1930s; and Dittrich (2014) examined the contradictions between traditional educational practices and modern physical education in Korea.

In Brazil, the understanding and forms of practice of some sports also brought about conflicts, as we can observe the publication of constant criticisms of their popularization. Based on the identity choices made by both physicians and the press of the largest Brazilian cities, physical education, despite establishing itself in a broader way, could not be tied to a culture of improvisation, of disinterested amusement, for it would thus be associated with the popular, which not only for the modern but also for the moralistic discourses of physicians and journalists, would mean to distort their educational and scientific principles. Even as representatives of modernity, some sports practices were resignified. So, they started to be questioned in the press. Carlos Fernandes, in the article "Cultura Physica" [Physical Culture], in the newspaper O Paiz, pondered:

I do not know whether we have come to understand that British aplomb, dexterity and airiness, despite whiskey and tobacco, are derived almost exclusively from those healthy habits of muscular exercise. In any case, we

adopted those games, we nationalized the shuttlecock, and we got to the exaggeration of erecting football as a pandemic mania, which manifests itself in hebdomadal fits of menacing and contagious delirium. So, we are producing a male generation of kangaroos, due to the excessive size of their legs, as we already have a huge group of guaribas [monkeys], due to the excessive length of their arms– rowers. [...] However, it is necessary not to confuse physical education with sports. The latter are characterized by their recreational purpose, which can reach athletics or the compromise of health, of physiological harmony. Physical education aims precisely to assist, stimulate and maintain the eurythmy of the human body (Fernandes, 1930, p. 1).

Carlos Fernandes warned about the invasion of sports in the daily life of cities. The text represents a line of thought that viewed sports as a threat in the educational field, from the same perspective of physician Dr. Carlos Sussekind de Mendonça, in “O sport está deseducando a mocidade brasileira” [Sport is de-educating the Brazilian youth], in 1921. Mendonça (1921) inferred that the practice of sports brought more harm than good (Santos, 2010; Dalben & Góis Junior, 2018), inasmuch as it caused, in theory, excessive bodily fatigue that unbalanced the body and was therefore unhygienic. As the article entitled “Um grande passo para o aperfeiçoamento de nossa gente” [A great step for the improvement of our people], by Nelson Lourenço, published in the newspaper O Paiz, in 1930, stated:

There was a time when school principals understood the necessity of gymnastics, even if it was only to present it on the days of celebration, that widely praised part of physical exercises. But those who attended these educational establishments probably remember that that gymnastics was usually practiced once or twice a week in an improper place and at an inappropriate time. [...]

But behold, football has come. It had all the qualities that a people, descending in its majority of Latin and indigenous people, demanded. It was violent. It was exciting. And in the way it was understood, it did not require perseverance to be learned. All one had to do was play. [...] But football is sport, and sport is not physical culture. It was far from representing our urgent need. [...]

Sport can only be regarded as the cause of body's invigoration and consequently of race when practiced moderately and rationally. [...]

What is no longer possible is to continue on this dizzying descent. Football has caused a real social revolution in our midst. In the beginning, social revolutions originate outrage, excess, bedlam; after all this, comes the better condition (Lourenço, 1930, p. 4).

These criticisms also show that practices were not controlled by the discourses of medicine and modernity, since in the dynamic field of culture they enjoyed greater autonomy and were appropriated by the young.

Concurrently, the moralistic attacks on sports also aroused their defenders, who came from diverse social groups. Specialized magazines, influenced by sports promotion institutions, such as the Young Men Christian Association (YMCA) in Rio de Janeiro, took part in the debate defending sports as a strategy of sanitation and education of youth. An example was *Sport Illustrado* magazine, which in 1938 published the following passage:

Very advanced countries have started to invest large sums to encourage sports practice and, as a result of government measures, the legislation of these countries focused on the use of the vast field of sport to make it a pillar of the sanitation, let us put it this way, of their youth. [...] Our Ministry of Education, as well as the City Hall, have prescribed very useful requirements on the subject. Gymnasiums of sports, courts, fields, and pools appeared in a plethora of educational establishments and, with them, a contingent of capable, technical and classified instructors. They avoided empiricism and chose scientific, methodical and conscious action (Os sports, 1938, p. 3).

Controversies also lay in the debate on the best instrument of a physical education for young people. As a consequence, on the one hand, an idealization of the value of sport took place. On the other hand, there was a strong suspicion that it would encourage excesses that would compromise the integrity of young people. Netto (1933), for example, adopts a conciliatory position between gymnastics and sports, and this perspective seems to have been more influential when we observe the practices evidenced by the newspapers, both in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, which suggest that sports and gymnastics became less competing strategies throughout the 1930s, giving room for an eclectic physical education, bringing together European and American traditions. The position of Américo Netto was not trivial; if we analyze his network of sociabilities, we will observe that: he was first involved in the creation of *Escola de Educação Física de São Paulo* [School of Physical Education of Sao Paulo]; he had relations with Sao Paulo branch of YMCA, an entity of great relevance in the promotion of North American and English sports; he worked on the publication of *Educação Physica* [Physical Education] journal (1932-1945), the first periodical specialized in the theme. In other words, he was an important historical agent when it came to the institutionalization of a professional area in the country, the now-called Physical Education with capital letters, as a school discipline, as a college degree. Thus, while throughout the 1930s objective aspects were guaranteed for physical education to be offered in the schools of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, now it was necessary to demonstrate the benefits of its implementation. In an attempt to approach the everyday life of physical education

of youth, we have come across the festivities and celebrations organized by entities of the educational field, which aimed to bring to the community the results of the educational work they developed. It is in this context that the youth in parades gains prominence. In the words of Prof. Hollanda Loyola about “The Day of the Race,” in the city of Rio de Janeiro,

It is the day of the Race, the parade of the youth of Brazil. Since early young people stun the air, and one hears the festive touch of the bugles and the hoarse cadence of the drums; from the farthest corners of the city come groups of young people whose destination is the great concentration; the martial music of patriotic songs, the cheers of joy that cross the air and are mixed, the thousands of rustling draped flags give the environment a feverish, communicative, enthusiastic, galvanizing enthusiasm. The whole city is celebrating, joy reigns everywhere. [...] Young people with their heads up, correct attitude, firm step, march gallantly smiling and beautiful, disciplined and convinced, in a splendid vision of what the glorious Brazil of tomorrow will be. [...]. A people parade! Indeed, as we contemplate, in these splendid parades, our vibrant patrician youth, these flexible and harmonious, healthy and strong young people, sun-burned and fervent with life, one feels that a race is being defined, and the nation acquires a consciousness, anonymous Physical Education teacher, crowning your effort, your greatest collaboration for the greatness of the motherland. I congratulate you, rejoice with me! (Loyola, 1941, p. 9).

Hollanda Loyola was an important professor in the publication of *Educação Physica* journal (1932-1945), and played a politically engaged role in the “Brazilian Integralist Action”, as we have already said, a political current that had fascist inspirations, yet with many characteristics of its own (Simões, 2009).

In Sao Paulo, in 1938, the celebration of the “Day of the Race” also gained space in the city's press, bringing together ten thousand young people (Dez mil, 1938, p. 6).

The same incentive occurred in Rio de Janeiro, at the initiative of the City Hall, motivated by the influence of intellectuals who defended a pedagogical modernity and became educational leaders in the city, such as Fernando de Azevedo and Anísio Teixeira. Rio de Janeiro had consolidated a physical education project that emphasized the coexistence of young people with outdoor practices and games as a model of health development. In this perspective, American professor Lois Williams played a central role. She graduated in Physical Education in the United States and was influential in the organization of Physical Education as a school discipline in the public school system and in refresher courses for teachers from the Normal School.

Ms. Williams arrived in Brazil through the women's section of YMCA and soon joined the circle of Associação Brasileira de Educação [Brazilian Education Association]. Later on she held public positions in the Federal District City Hall in the management of Anísio Teixeira. *Jornal do Brasil* newspaper gave prominence to her, in 1932, in a report entitled “Para fortalecer a raça” [To strengthen the race], which reported a public demonstration of Physical Education at Quinta da Boa Vista organized by the professor. The importance of educational games in her physical education project is evident in the document (Para fortalecer, 1932, p. 8).

Lois Williams' experience with Physical Education in Rio de Janeiro shows that European gymnastics was not the only source of physical education practice, especially from the 1930s on. The American influence seems to be important (Schneider et al., 2016) not only in the context of Presbyterian or Methodist schools, but also in some public schools, such as those in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro. In this specific case, the influence of the educational movement known as “Escola Nova” [New School], inspired by the ideas of John Dewey and by North American pedagogies of games and playgrounds revealed an articulation between a Brazilian hygienist project and several strands of thought that had in common the intervention on youth.

Much of this investment on youth was supported by the centralizing government of Getúlio Vargas. Despite his authoritarian position, Vargas was able to seduce many Brazilian intellectuals (Micelli, 2001) to work in the fields of health and education. With the contribution of this governmental intervention, projects aimed at the youth stimulated some transformations in the quotidian of the cities. Such transformations were perceived by the columnists of the time. An example of this is the article “1830-1930”, by Gomes Ribeiro, published in *O Paiz* newspaper in 1930. In his words,

1830-1930 – What will the prevailing mentality be in a century? This is a question that naturally comes to mind when one compares the man, and especially the woman, of 1930 with the man and woman of 1830. [...] The disease of the spirit was reflected in the body. Gymnastics and hygiene were not known; a renaissance of medieval mysticism declared war on the body: To die young and of tuberculosis was the supreme glory of Romantic poets [...] Everyone wanted to live with more hygiene and comfort. The achievements of science have been applied to industry; wealth has increased, progress has developed. People have traveled a lot; different peoples have known each other and shared what they had best. [...] A woman is now a thinking being... She does not fear health; on the contrary, she is strengthened by physical culture. She does gymnastics, participates in swimming races, and therefore beats men in selections for public and private jobs. She no longer sighs to the moon, like the Ophelias of 1830 (Ribeiro, 1930, p. 3).

For Gomes Ribeiro, hygiene and physical education represented the achievements of a modern world guided by the auspices of science and health, which allowed even the conquest of previously masculinized spaces, such as sport, by women. However, he did not mention the eugenics goals that involved the dissemination of physical education among women (Goellner, Votre & Pinheiro, 2012). It is also true that Gomes Ribeiro's report seems too optimistic about the transformations provided by the "modern" project, or at least by the modern city.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Finally, by discussing the physical education of urban youth in the 1930s, we observe that the modern discourses of physicians and the press in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo had the objective of legitimizing practices for the body, which, nevertheless, should be based on scientific knowledge and a moral of moderation. In this way, a physical education, delimited by the guidelines coming from a European and North American education, was highlighted in Brazil. However, the need to legitimize physical education also evidences tensions generated by silences and/or criticisms of other practices more identified with disinterested amusements, with improvisation, such as the popularization of some sports, such as football, or even with traditional practices, such as capoeira.

These data also show contradictions arising from the Brazilian 'modern' discourse, which oscillated between representations of a country characterized by miscegenation, as a conciliatory culture and a 'Brazilian racial democracy', particularly in the line of Gilberto Freyre, and discourses present in science and the mainstream press, with a representation of a 'modern' Brazil that silenced and/or criticized popular practices or those originated from African culture and rural tradition, as it tried to shape urban youth into a modernizing project mechanically identified with industrialized countries.

However, despite some discourses of doctors and chroniclers, the practices gained their own contextualized dynamics. Thus, in a plural modernization, there were tensions between the 'modern' and the traditional, between different cultural and ethnic groups, which in some cases produced attempts of conciliation or segregation that affected the physical education of youth according to their own defenders. In other words, the physical education of young people was reframed by different groups, such as Christians, integralists and communists, who vied for influence on the youth circles formed by the interest in those practices. We conclude that the search for Brazilianness in the 1930s with a positive view of miscegenation did not uniformly affect the physical education of youth.

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