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Sportization: ideologies and Western neo-colonialism

EXPORTIZAÇÃO: IDEOLOGIAS E NEOCOLONIALISMO OCIDENTAL

De Martino Mario[1], Pelloso Piurcosky Fabricio[2], Barnashov Oleg[3], Alonzi Roberta[4], Isidori Emanuele[5]

Corresponding author: Mario De Martino

E-mail: mario.demartino@grupointegrado.br

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(Abstract) This article examines the profound influence of sport as a cultural and ideological instrument in contemporary society, in which it embodies the processes of McDonaldization and the pervasive ideologies of economic neoliberalism. Sport not only mirrors but also actively shapes Western cultural identities and societal norms, often reinforcing capitalist ideologies through its practices and structures. This study aims to dissect the mechanisms through which sport acts as a sociocultural device that both constructs and manipulates the athlete's body, particularly emphasizing its role in promoting masculine dominance and other male-centered values. Employing a hermeneutic approach complemented by an extensive literature review, this research spans from ancient Greek philosophies to contemporary discussions up to 2023, integrating diverse disciplinary perspectives including sport sciences, history, sociology, pedagogy, philosophy, and politics. This interdisciplinary methodology enriches our understanding of the complex interplay between sport and societal ideologies.The results highlight the sportive body as a prime site for the reinforcement of traditional gender roles, the propagation of ethnic and gender prejudices, and the manifestation of neoliberal values such as competition, performance, and commodification. Sports culture is critiqued for its role in perpetuating these ideologies, which support the commercialization of the body and reinforce Western cultural hegemony. The article advocates for a critical reassessment of sports as a medium of cultural neo-colonization, urging a more conscientious engagement with how sports influence and regulate both the physical and ideological realms of society. By challenging the existing paradigms, this study contributes significantly to the discourse on the sociocultural dimensions of sport, encouraging a reevaluation of the values it perpetuates in contemporary global culture.

Keywords: Sportization; McDonaldization; Neoliberalism; Hermeneutics; Gender identity; Cultural neo-colonization; Bodily pedagogy.

(Resumo) Este artigo examina a profunda influência do esporte como instrumento cultural e ideológico na sociedade contemporânea, onde incorpora os processos de McDonaldização e as ideologias onipresentes do neoliberalismo econômico. O esporte não apenas reflete, mas também molda ativamente as identidades culturais ocidentais e as normas sociais, frequentemente reforçando ideologias capitalistas por meio de suas práticas e estruturas. Este estudo busca dissecar os mecanismos pelos quais o esporte atua como um dispositivo sociocultural que constrói e manipula o corpo do atleta, com ênfase especial em seu papel na promoção da dominação masculina e de valores centrados no masculino. Utilizando uma abordagem hermenêutica complementada por uma ampla revisão de literatura, esta pesquisa abrange desde as filosofias gregas antigas até os debates contemporâneos mais recentes, integrando perspectivas disciplinares diversas, incluindo ciências do esporte, história, sociologia, pedagogia, filosofia e política. Essa metodologia interdisciplinar enriquece a compreensão sobre a complexa relação

[1] Centro Universitário Integrado, Paraná, Brasil. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3903-6532
[2] Centro Universitário Integrado, Paraná, Brasil. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5458-512
[3] Peoples' Friendship University of Russia named after Patrice Lumumba, Moscow, Russian Federation. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5576-732X
[4] Peoples' Friendship University of Russia named after Patrice Lumumba, Moscow, Russian Federation. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3604-3283
[5] University of Rome "Foro Italico", Rome, Italy. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5214-6015

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entre o esporte e as ideologias sociais.Os resultados evidenciam o corpo esportivo como um espaço privilegiado para o reforço de papéis tradicionais de gênero, a propagação de preconceitos étnicos e de gênero, e a manifestação de valores neoliberais como competição, desempenho e mercantilização. A cultura esportiva é criticada por seu papel na perpetuação dessas ideologias, que apoiam a comercialização do corpo e reforçam a hegemonia cultural ocidental.O artigo defende uma reavaliação crítica do esporte como meio de neocolonização cultural, promovendo um engajamento mais consciente com a forma como o esporte influencia e regula tanto o corpo físico quanto os domínios ideológicos da sociedade. Ao desafiar os paradigmas existentes, este estudo contribui significativamente para o debate sobre as dimensões socioculturais do esporte, encorajando uma reavaliação dos valores que ele perpetua na cultura contemporânea global

Palavras-chave: Esportização; McDonaldização; Neoliberalismo; Hermenêutica; Identidade de gênero; Neocolonização cultural; Pedagogia corporal.

INTRODUCTION

Sports have long been a medium through which Western values and cultural identities are expressed and perpetuated. This role of sports in conveying cultural specificity can be traced back to ancient civilizations, as exemplified by Lucian of Samosata in his essay *Anacharsis seu de gymnasiis*. In this work, Lucian imagines a dialogue between Solon and the Scythian philosopher Anacharsis, illustrating how gymnasiums were a unique and distinctive creation of the Greeks, emblematic of their civilization.[6] Today, sports continue to serve not only as a reflection of cultural values but also as a vehicle for transmitting the ideologies of capitalism. In contemporary society, these ideologies have taken the form of economic neoliberalism, a perspective supported by several authors (Kornbeck, 2021; Reyes, 2020; Chen, 2022). Sport represents a social institution and a set of cultural practices that have shaped, marked, and given meaning to the bodies of ancient, modern, and contemporary humans through specific rituals in which men and women of different ages and belonging to different social groups have interacted and still interact more than ever in the era in which sport has become a "total" and planetary social fact, which we can define as the "Sportocene"[7].

Sport today is an integral part of a seemingly unstoppable process of McDonaldization of contemporary culture and society. It has significant repercussions on people's consciences, ways of thinking and relating, lifestyles, forms and methods of communication, and education. The term McDonaldization was created by the American sociologist George Ritzer, who used it in his book *The McDonaldization of Society (Ritzer, 1996).* Following George Ritzer's pioneering work, contemporary scholars continue to delve into the pervasive influence of McDonaldization across various societal domains. For instance, Michael H. Romanowski and Hadeel Alkhateeb (2000) explore how the processes of McDonaldization influence the accreditation of teacher education programs

[6] Lucian of Samosata, *Anacharsis seu de gymnasiis*, where he discusses the exclusive nature of Greek institutions in comparison to those of the Scythians, highlighting the gymnasium as a central aspect of Greek identity (Samosata c. 120 – Athens, between 180 and 192).

[7] By the term "Sportocene," which we coined by taking the word "Anthropocene" as a model, we mean the current era, in which the terrestrial and mental space that humans "inhabit" comes to be strongly conditioned, both on a local and global scale, by the effects of sport. In this case, sport is seen as a product of human action on the environment, with particular reference to the problems of sustainability and transformation of spaces (both natural and urban).

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abroad. Their study demonstrates the cultural and pedagogical challenges faced by non-US institutions adopting American accreditation standards. In a different realm, Johnson and Dietrich (2021) analyse the impact of McDonaldization on long-term care facilities in the United States, highlighting how the push for efficiency and predictability often undermines the quality of care and well-being of residents. Additionally, Shchekoturov (2020) assesses the role of social media as a new McDonaldized institution, illustrating how platforms like Facebook and VK conform to McDonaldization principles, affecting the way social interactions and cultural exchanges are conducted online.

Therefore, it is crucial not only for pedagogy as a science but also for all human and social sciences to address and understand the mechanisms by which sport has become a social and cultural institution and organization. This requires deconstructing the processes through which sport shapes both male and female bodies. In contemporary society, sport-related cultural and social practices shape and construct the gender identities of men and women (Bausinger, 2008).

METHOD

This research employs a hermeneutic approach and an extensive literature review, spanning a broad chronological spectrum from ancient Greek philosophies to contemporary studies up to 2023. This approach was pivotal for understanding the evolution of sport and its sociocultural implications, thereby allowing for a nuanced analysis of texts and ideas across various epochs and disciplines. The study's interdisciplinary nature required an integration of perspectives from sport sciences, history, sociology, pedagogy, philosophy, culture, economy, and politics, making it a complex but enriching endeavor.

Our primary method, the literature review, involved a detailed examination of seminal and contemporary scholarly works that address the multifaceted relationship between sport and society. Starting witho ancient Greece, where the foundation of physical education and sport as societal pillars was laid, we traced the thematic developments through to modern interpretations and critiques of sportization processes. For instance, the philosophical underpinnings of sport, explored through the works of Ariemma (2013) and Fernandez-Balboa (1997), provide insights into the ideological constructs surrounding physicality and sport.

In the realm of sport sciences, the contributions of Gomis-Gomis, Pérez-Turpin, and Pena-Pérez (2022) were instrumental in understanding contemporary trends and scientific evaluations of sports performance. Politically and sociologically oriented studies by authors such as Liston and Joseph Maguire (2021) and Reyes (2020) enriched our analysis of the global sportization processes, offering a critical view of the economic and social dimensions of sport in global contexts.

The gendered aspects of sport, a crucial area of investigation, were thoroughly examined through the works of Pilyushenko (2022). This research highlights the ongoing challenges and developments in gender inclusivity in sports contexts. Additionally, the sociological dynamics within sport were articulated through the studies of Theberge (1991), Thorpe

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(2014), and Zarotis and Tokarski (2020), whose research underscored the complex social structures and interactions facilitated by sport.

From a pedagogical perspective, the insights from Vigarello (2004; 1988) provided a historical and educational framework for understanding how sporting disciplines have been taught and perceived over the centuries. The historical narrative was further enriched by Scharagrodsky (2011), whose research focused on the historical trajectories and transformations within sport.

The hermeneutic method, with its emphasis on the interpretive analysis of texts, proved essential for dissecting and understanding the ideological layers embedded within the discourse on sport. This methodological approach allowed for a critical examination of texts and their sociocultural and philosophical contexts, thereby facilitating a comprehensive synthesis of the varied dimensions of sport as both a practice and a concept.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we delve into the core of our research findings and discussions, systematically exploring the intricate interactions between sport, the body, and society. Drawing upon the designated themes, this analysis scrutinizes the multifaceted ways in which sport both reflects and shapes societal structures and ideologies. We begin by considering the concept of sportization within society, analyzing how this phenomenon contributes to the framing of social interactions and identities through sport. This is followed by an examination of the relationship between sport and the ideologies of capitalism, where we assess how market dynamics infiltrate and influence sporting activities and perceptions.

Subsequently, we explore the pivotal role of sport in gender socialization, discussing how athletic institutions and practices contribute to the construction and reinforcement of gender identities. This discussion extends into the realm of bodybuilding, where we dissect the gendered ideologies inherent in this sport, highlighting its impact on societal norms and personal identity.

Finally, our analysis addresses the regulatory function of sport within social and political bodies, evaluating how sport serves as a mechanism for both maintaining and challenging existing power structures. Throughout this section, our findings are aligned with the research objectives, addressing the underlying questions posed by the study and contributing to a deeper understanding of the interplay between sport, body, and society. This comprehensive exploration not only adheres to the investigative purpose outlined but also enriches the academic discourse on these pivotal themes.

1. The body, sport, and the sportization of society. Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning (1989) assert that the sportization of society is part of the complex and contradictory process of the consolidation of capitalism. The latter serves as a hegemonic, social, and productive way of organizing the world that, together with industrialization, has created different forms and conditions of life in which people and social groups have established different types of relationships and performed diversified types of work. Also, these authors highlight the dialectical relationship between the terms sports and industry, pointing out that the former is usually used in a general way to designate various competitive sporting events. In

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contrast, the latter is used in a broad and narrow sense to identify and signify the process of commodity production.

Capitalism and industrialization have generated specific forms of production and labour of the body – supported by competition and market expansion – as well as the hierarchy and exploitation of the human labour and production, the optimization of material and natural resources, and the control and regulation of social time and space. All these forms organized most social activities, including recreational activities, which were gradually given sporting characteristics governed by the economic rules of production and competition.

Sport, as a social institution based on the hierarchy, exploitation, and optimization of the human body's abilities, skills, and competencies, has given rise to a complex organization, the distinctive features of which have made sport one of the significant social and gendered practices prevalent in all cultures around the world. Recent research by A. V. Pilyushenko (2022) delves into the gender dynamics within sports. The study examines how the institution of sports perpetuates traditional gender roles and contributes to the social construction of masculinity and femininity through its practices and policies. This investigation underscores how sports act as a powerful agent in reinforcing gendered identities and social hierarchies, often marginalizing non-conforming gender expressions within its competitive structure (Pilyushenko, 2022).

In nineteenth-century England, some games, because of their competitive nature and the fact that they were played by an increasing number of people, began to take shape as mass sports that gradually transcended local and national contexts. They began to acquire global dimensions and were then to be exported, leading to the creation of supranational sporting institutions that later took shape as complex organizational structures.

These institutions, through the development and consolidation of sports as a social agency, cultural practice, and general organizer of the civilizing process, have given rise to the emergence of a powerful elite with a significant presence and influence in the world of sports, responsible for the development and consolidation of sports as a social institution, cultural practice, and civilizing process with economic, political, educational, and social implications globally (Guttmann, 1994).

Joseph A. Maguire's analysis provides a nuanced view of sport as a complex socio-cultural practice that not only reflects but also influences the broader cultural and societal contexts. By utilizing a synthesis of sociological theories, Maguire demonstrates how sports can challenge and perpetuate societal norms, including those related to gender, class, and ethnicity. His approach reveals how sport, as a cultural practice, contributes to the social construction of bodies, shaping individual and collective identities through the interplay of physicality, emotion, and social norms (Maguire, 2011).

2. Body, sport, and ideologies of capitalism. The process of the sportization of society, linked to that of industrialization, is part of what Jean-Marie Brohm calls the "process of sports production," meaning that the sports system is part of the very development of the capitalist organization of production, which produces very particular commodities: champions, spectacles, records, and competitions (Brohm, 2006). This process is framed in the analysis of sport as an original social institution of modern life, in which attention is paid to the analysis of the layers, levels, and instances that determine it, as well as to all the political, economic, cultural, ideological, pedagogical, symbolic, and mythological

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realities of the sport. For Brohm, sport is an *institutionalization of regulated physical/body competition* in which the strongest wins. It is an institution for men only, as was intended by Pierre de Coubertin, who was always an enemy of women's sports until the last day of his life because he was convinced that sports are like war. Men constantly waged war, while women, the "angels" of the domestic hearth, had to stay home, take care of the children, and not risk dying.

The twentieth century, through sports, has become the century of the sportization of Western society. That is to say, it has undergone an unstoppable process of organizing not only the boundaries of male and female bodies but also the mechanism of control of their emotions, feelings, desires, fantasies, and imaginaries. This process aims to control all the manifestations and symbolizations of male and female subjectivities. To achieve this control, these structures and organizations continuously use discipline and the supervision of bodily health. This practice aims to stage the attributes of hegemonic masculinity in sports performance (Hughson, Inglis & Free, 2005).

We can undoubtedly say that all these modern social, economic, political, and cultural structures and organizations of sports we have mentioned are involved in making "gender sportsmanship." That is to say, it is a process through which men and women belonging to different societies and cultures, social classes, age groups, ethnicities, religions, sexualities, and territories internalize and transform into a way of life the sports practices acquired even in their leisure time. Sport is based on competition and the enhancement of the masculine. That creates a "competitive identity" that supports the binary opposition of the superiority of the masculine over the feminine, of masculinity versus effeminacy (Burstyn, 1999). Sheree Bekker et al. (2023) further this discussion by introducing the concept of gender-inclusive sport, arguing for policies and practices that affirm and protect all participants, countering the traditional competitive framework that often upholds gender binaries.

3. The athlete's body and gender socialization. The athlete's body, in its inseparable biocultural dimension, thus represents the "tool" and "mode" of application par excellence of sport and the "space" of reception of its ideologies. The ideologies that sport transmits on and through the athlete's body can be identified, for example, in the forms of male-centered domination of the masculine over the feminine, attested to by the widespread presence of ethnic and gender prejudices and stereotypes in the conception of sports practice and in the attribution of its value and meaning. They can also be identified in the presence of more or less disguised forms of eugenism linked to the principle of bodily normality; in the exaltation of competition, selection and performance; in the rejection of the construction or non-acceptance of hybrid bodily identities and differences; in the exaltation of aggression and force to the limits of violence; and in the presence of narcissistic forms in the perception of the body. Finally, they can be identified in the subjection of the body to the logic of commercialization and, sometimes, to that of commodification; in the paradoxical search for the demarcation of a clear boundary between the natural body and the artificial body, with the prohibition of the latter; and in the exaltation of Western identity, its view of the body and its use as an instrument of cultural colonization (Pedraz, 2008).

Through sports, men and women show off their bodies and exhibit them through "play styles" of their own and acquired from others; through them, they shape and compose the dimensions and forms of their bodies and prepare them for competition.

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In sports, male and female bodies are represented as forms constructed by the social group they belong to, as manifestations of status, and as forms that synthesize the social integration of groups and individuals. The development, expansion, and consolidation of sports according to the modern capitalist model have created universal sports institutions linked to the capital. The transformation of the body into an instrument of the complex system of productive forces, the consolidation of professionalism over amateurism, the structuring of the model of the high-level athlete, and performance are seen as generators of surplus value and have become accepted and regular practices in contemporary society. These practices have created the entertainment industry that produces sports goods, services, and objects (Scharagrodsky, 2011).

Sport, considered a competitive activity, contributes to thinking of contemporary men's and women's bodies as bodies aimed at performance, success, triumph, endurance, and discipline, in which every part of the body and its senses are hierarchized and specialized. Recent research by María José Gomis-Gomis and colleagues (2022) addresses new trends in physical exercise and sports performance, highlighting how contemporary priorities are reshaping both the perception and practice of sports to increasingly emphasize performance-driven attributes in today's evolving global context.

In this way, the male body is converted into the space of social meanings, the stage of ritual and symbolic representations, and the center of allocation of functions and social attributes of bodies' "physical geography". Also, the male body is turned into the regulatory entity of politically permitted and prohibited behaviors, acts, and movements, the historical synthesis of sexual and gender expressions of each society (patterned on the Western one) and its culture.

Sport is the result of the creation of the male body, and the modern male body is a creation of the sport, which is a creation of Western culture. Therefore, the relationship between the male body and sport is based on reciprocity and circularity. Sport has created the male body, as opposed to the female body; that is to say, the male body represents the subjective content of a being synthesizing a set of attributes that make it the paradigm of the human and a universal symbolic representation of women and men, which legitimizes it to create, think, signify, and (unfortunately, in some instances, as in that of war) destroy the world.

The industrialization and sportization of society implied, among other things, the differentiated and unequal control of male and female bodies. For women's bodies, society has assigned exercises, movements, routines, uniforms, times, and spaces that have been defined and influenced by sports considered feminine. These, in turn, shaped the figure of the female body, developing the socially permissible and sexually desired parts to achieve the ideal form (Fernandez-Balboa, 1997). For male bodies, on the other hand, exercises, movements, routines, uniforms, times, and spaces were designed to achieve the maximum depiction of freedom and fitness and the comprehensive exhibition of all their parts, and this can be seen and found in almost all sports.

In line with Holly Thorpe's insights on the integration of biological and social analyses, it becomes evident that understanding gender dynamics in sports necessitates a comprehensive approach that considers both the physiological and sociocultural dimensions of athletes' experiences. Thorpe highlights the critical role of hormones and

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other biological factors in shaping physical capacities and experiences, which, when analyzed alongside social influences, can provide a fuller picture of the challenges and realities faced by female athletes in sports (Thorpe, 2014).

Nancy Theberge's examination of the body in the sociology of sport illuminates how deeply gendered dynamics and power structures are embedded within sports culture, influencing both the representation and experience of athletes. By synthesizing feminist poststructuralism with sociological approaches, Theberge demonstrates that sports can act as a critical site for the reproduction and contestation of societal norms related to the body and gender. This perspective is crucial for understanding not just the physical but also the cultural and political dimensions of sports practices, particularly how they reinforce or challenge gender norms and identities (Theberge, 1991).

4. Bodybuilding and the gender ideology. So-called bodybuilding is one of the practices that have contributed the most to the construction of the body within the primary Western ideologies led by the capitalistic one. Bodybuilding is the cultural and muscular construction of the athletic body in which men and women of different socioeconomic statuses revere their bodies through exercise and training carried out in their homes, gyms, streets, and parks, observing flexible or strict diets. This allows the construction, real and symbolic, of a resistant body *"ad infinitum."*

The drawing, modeling, and sculpting of male and female bodies practiced through bodybuilding are integral parts of the sports production process. In this process, women's and men's actions and activities function within the economic logic of production, in which "work" is seen as one of the main reasons for the existence of most people, societies, and cultures. The capitalist organization of production bases its conception of work on performance, effort, endurance, and success, just as in bodybuilding and competitive sports (Ariemma, 2013).

Based on these principles, women and men prepare their bodies to endure intense work schedules and withstand the hardships of the pressures and conditions associated with them, as well as the weight of social uncertainty. Through this practice, it seems that they are developing resistance to prolonged economic austerity that results in economic, social, and cultural poverty and the harassment and destruction wrought by daily gender violence. Bodybuilding helps to ensure that contemporary women and men are educated, trained, coached, prepared, and disciplined to live through performance, effort, endurance, and success within the model of Western culture and its ideologies.

The bodybuilding model as a sport demonstrates gender inequalities, as men and women experience the muscular configuration and symbolization of their bodies. Bodybuilding is consciously and unconsciously experienced, accepted, and rejected by men and women. It is part of their social imagination and involves maintaining the body in the best possible condition.

Bodybuilding confirms (and places maximum value on) the generic construction of hegemonic masculinity, in which the attributes of power, strength, virility, sexuality, courage, intelligence, ability, vigor, power, and an unbreakable body characterize the real man and are exalted (Planella, 2006).

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Moreover, bodybuilding is a social practice that ensures the control of the overflow of emotions, the display and concealment of body parts, and the specialization and hierarchy of its parts. The muscular codification oversees and punishes the body, which, as Michel Foucault points out, is intimately immersed in a political field. The power relations that operate on it make it their primary prey; they surround it, mark it, domesticate it, subject it to torture, force it to specific jobs, oblige it to certain ceremonies, and impose a mark on it. This political "encirclement" of the body is linked to complex and reciprocal relations, to the economic use of the body itself, which, to a large extent, is always imbued with relations of power and domination that serve to control it and channel it toward its transformation into a force of production.

5. Sport as a regulator of the order of social and political bodies. The process of the sportization of society through people's bodies has progressed from transforming recreational activities into sports. Today, after this process has been accomplished, sports have been transformed into an institution that regulates the gender order, emotions, sexuality, hygiene, and bodily health of members of society. In the context of globalization, this process places the male body as an object and instrument of modernization and actualization of gender identities, values, norms, beliefs, and institutions related to the structure of sports, organization, and functioning. Katie Liston and Joseph Maguire (2021) elaborate on how global sportization processes influence power relations between the sexes, revealing how these dynamics are represented and challenged in contemporary sports settings, thus affecting the organization and experience of sport at a global level.

The sportization of society sees men's bodies as the only producers and "subjects" that generate surplus value. The man's body is seen as the leading actor in the process of sports production; it is women's bodies, on the other hand, that transcend and transit, in real, virtual, and symbolic ways, through the world's financial markets, as "objects" of consumption. This phenomenon further emphasizes the gender disparities present within the sports sector. As explored by George F. Zarotis and Walter Tokarski (2020), the changing societal values have significant implications on "Sports for All," reflecting how gender roles within sports continue to evolve and impact the broader social fabric, contributing to a more diversified understanding of athleticism that includes a wider array of societal participants.

Moreover, the State sees sports as one of the (Western) political institutions useful for exercising the power of domination over the organs of civil society. This view shows how the State has given sport and its institutions political content. This content has been given to it by programs, projects, events, tournaments, and a series of activities that are now part of the aspirations and imagination of peoples and nations (as in the case of the World Cup), and the mentality of people, groups, societies, and cultures (Vigarello, 2004; Vigarello, 1988).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The progressive appropriation of sports as an institution by states is part of those practices of shaping gender relations and configuring of male-female identities, in which sports have sought to give institutionalized playful content to the organization of society from the perspective of roles and differences. However, the sportsmanship of the male body in

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society still represents an overrepresentation of men, considered the only subject capable of creating the sports scene (and the sports themselves).

Contemporary body pedagogies should engage in a critically exploration of the ideological construction of the sports body and become aware of the Western antidemocratic ideologies it is and has been built on and through. This analysis should be conducted through deconstruction and critical philosophical methods to understand the mechanisms through which this device acts and constructs sports ideologies.

The sportive body is a social body produced by a specific pedagogy based on stressing masculine characteristics of the body. This masculine body should be "weakened," as the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo, an exponent of weak thought, has stressed. By this weakening, the sportive body should be rethought by considering an authentic critical pedagogical philosophical perspective. That is to say, a genuinely democratic perspective that is open to differences and not closed to "strong" identities (so damaging to the cultures and societies of our time). This weakening is a critical operation that pedagogy and the social sciences should perform. That should be done not only to better understand sport as a form of human culture but also to help people more critically understand the ideologies of Western culture and break free from them by becoming aware of them (Carmagnola, 2015).

This process of understanding will help us move toward a greater awareness of the contemporary Anthropos (male or female) and the steps through which institutions dominate and control the sportive masculine body by constructing identities and ideologies on it and for it.

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