

THE INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF ADULT TRADITIONAL SPORTS AND GAMES, AND SOCIAL HEALTH

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Abstract:

Since the industrial revolution, the development of free time has gradually permitted the creation of a sporting system in conformity with the image of the surrounding merchant society, turned more and more toward the elitism and the sport industry, model now copied by the system of management in the enterprises. This is to the detriment of a form of participative democracy, which saw the local actors taking ownership of their leisure, as the practice of their traditional sports and games. The original environment and its values of 'usage' were denigrated, and then relegated to an inferior status as images of an old fashioned world.

The presentation of modern sports as an irreversible process of civilised progress has permitted the sporting system lobbies to impose themselves at the highest level bodies of decision making. This has been used as a springboard to install an institutional system, which devalues any activities not in conformity with the new norm, such as regional or cultural sports and games. A rhetoric of the myth of sport to the large administrations and the public has been created by the general environment, by the exploitation of emotions associated with major events, the use of ancient mythology and the deep human need for collective identification and admiration of extraordinary feats.

One of the processes used to reduce the social impact of traditional sports and games was their infantilisation similar to a neo-colonial process of acculturation, which has a secondary effect of destroying mechanical solidarity and generating social pathologies that can be profound. The market, which manoeuvres today the sports industry, has tendency to eliminate any obstacles which can prevent it from rationalising and controlling the economy generated by sporting activity. Commercial sport is not simple entertainment; it is the result of a choice of civilisation. It is with more democracy between nations at the highest level and more power to civil societies that societies will be able to express the most fundamental of their rights; their cultural diversity, a major factor of social health.

Key words: acculturation, democracy, mechanical solidarity, infantilisation, social health.

Introduction

The development of free time has been considerable since the advent of modern industrialised societies, especially in the 20th century, and this free 'space-time' has greatly changed their socio-cultural environment. They became strongly urbanised and disconnected from the original environment in which sporting games had developed and found their place. That means in symbolic spaces having values of 'usage' full of sense for every body: the saint's days festivals, or festive gatherings bound to the collective works calendar in the country side, but also more lately the recreation time in the environment of their urban work place. This situation had created a 'mechanical solidarity', as defined by Durkheim¹, as well as different shapes of social contract binding the group. The working world of the craftsmen and peasants, in another words the majority of civil society, organised their games in the very environment of their work place, the play ground being built by them, as well as the material. By this, whereas they were "nothing" in the surrounding world, they were their own masters in the one of their game, and this world stopped at the moment they left work. In Western Europe, it is in

general in the contests organised at the occasion of the local festivals and bank holidays that the players could play against other than their usual group.

Industrial society is characterised by the will to optimise the means of production in order to increase profits, imposing the centralisation of decision making with its pyramid of decision, distribution of standardised objects, and rationalisation of tasks. These concepts have been naturally transferred in the construction to the institutions assigned to manage sports. This is how we find in the Olympic motto Swifter, Higher, Stronger a slogan in conformity with the elitist and productivist industrial society. The focusing of the media around the production of results in centimetres, kilograms, seconds, statistics, or records, goes in the same direction. Today the sporting phenomenon is no longer a simple entertainment; it is a universal civilisation fact, of economic, social and political order, even if through its external picture this gives sometimes the illusion of a simplified social working shape. Major questions and stakes hide behind sport.

If we turn to the recent past, one hundred and fifty years ago, let's recall that in the two powerful colonial empires of Western Europe - France and Great Britain - countries also at the origin of the Olympic

¹ French scientist, pedagogue, one of the founding fathers of Sociology.

Games revival, it was common for the workers to work twelve to fourteen hours per day, longer than in the previous centuries. In the United States, the third country at the origin of the Modern Olympics, the week was also from sixty-five to seventy hours around 1850. In France it was only in 1841 that the law limited to twelve hours per day the work of boys from twelve to sixteen years, and in Britain² it was limited in 1847, in an insurrectionary atmosphere, to ten hours for children under twelve years. In some big cities of Britain, the migration rate (from other regions) rose to 40-50%. In twenty years, from 1851 to 1871, at least 30% of the farmers, farm workers and shepherds had to leave the British countryside to emigrate to the cities or the New World because the Industrial Revolution needed hand workers. The perspective of less difficult jobs, and the power of attraction of the cities exhibiting their wealth, seemed to offer a better life to a countryside population which emigrated en masse. The massive exodus of countryside populations to the cities is still now a contemporary situation in many poor countries.

Modern sport as a mercantile product

The new activities practised during the free time won from working time have very quickly interested promoters and the more and more intense intervention of the media has created the globalised sporting environment of today. It began with newspapers and posters at the beginning of the 19th century in Great Britain, but it is the direct broadcasting techniques, which began about 1910 in the US that, applied to sporting spectacles, developed a phenomenon where they become more and more a commercial product. Then the images, on television, accentuated development and the improvement of technology accentuated this further after the launching of telecommunication satellites in 1962. Intercontinental broadcasts were now possible and a little later, images projected directly from sporting events. In parallel to this media construction, and fed by it, one can note the same evolution in the domain of technical material improvement, of sports stadia and equipment. The development of the sporting model was thus permanently built alongside technological development, a model that most of the federations joined sooner or later, every system committing to bring its support to the others with the condition that all must go in the same direction.

So sport equipment manufacturers, sporting infrastructure builders, specialised media's, professionals of the entertainment industry, sponsors and federations unify, in order that all will get returns from their investments, an increase of facility sales, media influence, economic returns and the number of membership cards sold. All are bound together. The new sporting practice oversees a progressive growth of

its mercantile exchange value. The example of the Roland Garros tennis tournament in Paris is very relevant; in 1967 the winner received a purchase order of \$150 to spend in a local shop. With the professionalisation of the tournament, in 1968 the winner earned one hundred times this sum. The live televising of the tournament during two weeks from 1970 then produced a dizzy effect on the number of players in France, with about one hundred thousand extra members every year for the federation! Today the winner receives a cheque representing eight thousand times the prize of 1967! However this sum is not comparable to the two hundred and thirty billion dollars spent by the advertising industry, solely in USA, in 2001.

Thus, the sporting environment became by stages a very strong international economic vector, with powerful extra sporting ramifications. One could even affirm that the modern sport concept was one of the first non-industrial activities to be globalised. As the modern sporting model got settled under the guise of a civilisation process, one noted that the immense majority of the major industrialised countries lost completely any interest in the way in which this happened. Yet, while only seeing the profitable side offered by the new activities, people became in fact, more and more, solely consumers of recreational activities. Our societies permitted the development of a system that was accompanied by a democratic regression, and civil society can only note that it almost lost all influence. This process saw the sporting spectacle, as it exists today, using commercially, the emotions of games associated festivals, culturally conditioning society and introducing new concepts of human links and consumption. Playful activity - games and sports, a societal element being part of our deepest emotional sensitivity, is almost lost to us. Sport and games have always been part of our cultural heritage but the industrial society would have allowed them to gradually fade away in the economic and commercial domain.

All dominant societies try to reproduce themselves

This observation is paradoxical for a society that since the 18th century has claimed to be inspired by the Olympic values of antiquity, because to consider the 'Games' as merchandise would not have occurred to the men of that epoch. In democratic societies today one can observe a tendency to a sort of abandonment by the people of their rights in compensation for material goods, and this from the moment they have done their civic duty which consists of electing political representatives. But we are aware that the political world often lets the economic world establish its own rules. However, in polls taken among the youth of several industrialised countries it appears that a majority have lost confidence in the future, reported the sociologist Olivier Galland (File published in the newspaper *Le Monde*, March 10, 2009.) The number is alarming, 74% in France, 68% in Spain, 64% in Germany, and even 57% in China! We can understand them, because the inheritance left by their parents is striking: their countries in debt, ecological damage

² British parliamentary reports of 1831-1832 (vol. XV. pp. 44, 95-97, 115, 195, 197, 339, 341-342) describe interviews of 8 years old children beginning their work every day at 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning and finishing at 8 or 9 o'clock in the evening!

inflicted on the planet in the name of economic growth, and a world (including all binders of society: culture, education, health) dominated by individuals whom nobody knows and for whom nobody votes: the 'market' and its speculators, and we all bear some responsibility for this situation.

Our industrial societies are sick due the consumerism (In the sense given in sociology) pathology of hyper consumption, and the commercial sport, which invades our TV screens, shows clearly that the sports industry applies the same methods as that of the commercial market place. But to develop a rationalised hyper consumption, it is necessary to standardise cultures, that is to say tastes, playful practices, the imaginary, the spiritual, the whole in order to distribute to the world the same drinks, the same food or the same leisure. It is a situation of neo-colonialism that requires that one looks back on the process of colonisation. In the middle of the 17th century, in Ireland, the English led the first experiments of colonial policies on a large scale, exactly at the time of the setting up of progressive institutions in London within the House of Commons. The Irish had numerous interdictions against speaking their language in official places, or playing certain music in public, or to practice certain games, and all the usual prohibitions when the final objective is to acculturate a country in order to enslave it and to draw from it the major part of its energy and wealth. As for neo-colonialism, to ensure the submission of a society it is necessary to destroy cultural references, economic organisation, the education system, sports and games and the language of the former decision-makers then to impose that of the new masters. The games, taste gastronomic, musical and architectural, are representations bound to cultural references.

For the autochtones the traditional games of adults have always been lived with many other elements, like a way to mean a Us: "We exist, we create, we think and we decide by ourselves". Thus, the future industrial societies developed while imposing new superstructures, sometimes to rationalise and to develop the economy, but always while destabilising or destroying the traditional societies of colonised countries in the name of a civilising mission, their own regions often underwent similar policies. So an important part of the world's cultural wealth, that enriched our generation is disappearing or has disappeared. However the importance of the diversity of these playful practices is more and more affirmed by the works of scientists, who show that games have an immense capacity to develop the energy to construct individual and collective identities, they liberate and develop creative energy. The practice of adult traditional games is also, in general, in harmony with natural space.

In sport it is necessary to tame nature while creating artificial spaces, but also to impose a psychological domination of the opponents, the goal is not only to play but mainly to win. This philosophy is also used in enterprises that require its managers to

follow objectives of excellence ³, as in a sporting competition where only the first place is important. For industrial society it was indeed natural, at least necessary to its eyes, to develop this creative strength as an economic potential. In the same way, it was natural to it to always quantify and measure, because in terms of management the unknown is unforeseeable and therefore risky. However, if the industrial societies have transformed most of the different playful culture domains in terms of economic production, they wanted to keep a mythical ideal because otherwise the mirage, the dream doesn't work! As the winners of wars have always controlled the teaching of history in their favour, one can say that the economic dominating system reproduced naturally a leisure system in its image. This brings us to observe that sporting victory is often used by countries to present the image of a superior social system for their population, a picture often tinted by nationalism. Sport is not therefore a simple entertainment; it is a fact of universal civilisation of economic, social and political order, behind which crop up major questions and stakes. To give power to the sporting system to debate alone sports problems and philosophy would be the same as permitting leaders of commerce and energy to debate alone about the problems of pollution, and of the future of our planet!

The myth of sport

How can this situation be settled and why does it still exist today, in that civil society does not have the same democratic vigilance shown in many other domains, such as work, education, food, human rights, or pollution? It seems that we have a taboo domain, comparable to that of all the myths, where sport is magnified, as formerly a divine activity. All the most honourable attributes are associated to it, without any critique; an instrument of personality formation, social integration, health, democratic construction, formation and education, emancipation, economic development and even an instrument to the service of peace and understanding between peoples! Thus, today most people refer to sport to describe their physical activities, even when it is merely about walking a few hundreds metres to do some shopping. This is the result of a commercial promotional strategy, relayed by the players and the entire system of the administrative machine, federations, administrations and equipment manufacturers. Even though it is not questioned here that some of these values are carried by sport, it is necessary to denounce the hypocrisy which consists of saying that sport is a miracle medicine for the problems of society!

³ Does the definition of sport by Pierre de Coubertin not contain the germs of excess? : "*Sport is the voluntary and usual cult of intensive muscular exercise, motivated by the desire to progress and capable to go on until the risk (of injury). It must be applied with ardour, I will even say with violence. Sport, is not physical exercise good for everybody, under the condition to be reasonable and moderate; sport is the pleasure of the strong, or of those who want to become so, physically and morally. Nothing would kill it more surely than to want to imprison it in a moderation contrary to its essence.*"

If we juxtapose this complaisant speech to the privileged institutional position given to the huge modern sport federations, it makes one think of rhetoric. Indeed, we are all aware that high-level sport, in numerous disciplines, has often ominous effects for health, and those athletes often frequent hospital⁴ operating rooms. These same high-level athletes often have difficulty in accepting the idea of become again 'ordinary' citizens when their sporting career is over. From this, it is very tempting to use artifices not to fall into the emptiness represented by the anonymity of a career's end. Like some politicians, they are determined to cling to their social standing, with risky conduct such as drugs, alcohol, or doping. "For most champions, to stop is a small death" said a former professional champion of the cyclist Tour de France. The doping problem is therefore absolutely not an independent social fact of sport but a visible emergence of its degeneration and that of our societies, and an unchangeable fact so much so that the financial stakes are so important in commercial sport. If we take amateur sport, we must ponder that in certain cases the ethical vision of its leaders should be disturbed⁵, even alienated, since a good example is not being given by the summit of the sporting pyramid?

The reality is much more contrasted. We know that according to the club, the social condition of the player or the social situation of the country, there is no egalitarianism when the object is to organise a meeting between athletes: These are the athletes of the rich countries who win the medals! One could find many counter examples to the values listed in the last chapter, as the fact that in many team sports only the best children were chosen to play, which seems normal for adults, but that, for the educators, is a desocialising attitude and anti-educational. If one takes the role of understanding between the peoples, we can tell at a minimum that it is very controversial because it is well known that the globalised sports are mainly the reflection of Western society. It is the case among the Olympic sports where only two among them are non-western. Two Tunisian researchers (Borhane Erraïs & Mohammed Ben Larbi, 1985) wrote in 1985 that "the world body culture had spilled out (in Tunisia) since the second half of the 20th century" after the country underwent the influence of the French Protectorate⁶. The outcome was that physical activities became controlled by pyramidal bodies "subjugated by the international federations and the Olympic Committee". After having made a collection of the playful practices of Tunisia, the survey showed that in three-quarters of the Protectorate century the indigenous body practices had almost completely disappeared.

⁴ In 1990's, a study showed that in France 85% of the high-level athletes were victims of an injury obliging them to take at least 5 days break.

⁵ In 1994, a study made in the United States estimated that every year a million amateur sportsmen spent \$120 millions in the purchase of anabolic steroid products on the black market.

⁶ A system where the administration and economy of the country is under the control of the armed forces, similar to a British Dominion. Tunisia became independent in 1956.

Other examples exist to show that today's modern sports reflect a type of ethnocentrism. If we consider the massive emigration from Great Britain in 19th century to colonise the North American continent, Australia, and many other countries, one of the concrete consequences was the international spread of a playful and body culture form. The Commonwealth games are one of the modern representations of this spread, and the fifty-three nations in membership and seventy-five teams participating represent an enormous political weight, as these Games are the most important after the Olympics. Their concept was initiated in 1891 with a Pan British competition which was intended to be held every four years. Whether this project was weakened with the 1896's first Games of Athens, an Empire Festival was again organised in 1911 in London. In 1930 The British Empire Games were founded and in 1966, in Kingston, Jamaica, the name was changed to, The British Empire and Commonwealth Games, then later due to political changes, The Commonwealth Games.

Today the sports media cover offers the sporting system a very favourable compost to develop itself. For the ordinary person it represents the possibility to climb to the top of the social hierarchy while becoming a sort of video game hero, almost a god of ancient mythology with all the advantages associated with this position. For underprivileged social groups the system finds a resonance through the big sporting celebrations that answer to a deep spiritual need, mixing communion and collective identification and veneration of extraordinary exploits while slipping themselves, by mimetism, into the skin of almost superhuman beings. It is also the representation of a space out of time and realities, a necessary need to go back to the 'festival', similar to traditional games. However, the sporting world asks permanently for this right to 'a separated time', to evolve as in a parallel world to society, invoking its own laws in this area as it was for the European Union white book⁷ negotiations, even when one had serious transgressions. The last polemic on the Beijing OLYMPICS reinforces the obvious connection between politics and Olympic Games.

Impact of the sports myth on institutional decisions

The list of concrete cases showing discrimination led by this myth of sport, instituted by the macro sporting system, is long and complex. Opaque curtains scramble the visibility and protect the myth, continuing thus to transmit a sort of doping dream. This system of the 'untouchable's' appears in a study made in 2005 by the Danish Institute for Sport Studies, which concluded that newspapers and sporting publishers from all over the world are the best promoters of the sports industry. It is the main conclusion of one of the more important studies

⁷ Article of Henning Eichberg, prof. at Syddansk university, Denmark, research Institute for Sport, Health and Civil society (CISC). <http://isca-web.org/filer/football%20European%20Sport%20revised300407.pdf>

achieved on this topic and based on the analysis of ten thousand articles collected in thirty-seven general daily newspapers from ten different countries (www.playthegame.org/). The investigation deduces that the sporting pages seem to operate like a supplementary marketing branch to the sport industry and don't respect the ethics we expect from journalists. Knut Helland, professor in the Bergen University in Norway and a sports journalism expert deduced that "the commercial activity around sport generates such a pressure on the journalist that it has become impossible to work according to the classic ideals of journalism", which is a fundamental question, touching directly on democracy.

Other observations, alarming for democracy at the European level, can be made showing clearly the interdependence between decisions and political conditioning. The political non recognition in general rhyme with the refusal to subsidise traditional games organisations by the states, a situation that is then reproduced by all other administrative levels: regions, provinces and sometimes the town councils. This also concerns the school system where the door is in general closed, at the level of the teacher training or of practice in the schools. This is how most adult traditional games federations are treated; an example is the *Boule de Fort* in France that comprises fifty eight thousand players, the third biggest federation in terms of the number of participants in the region of Pays de la Loire it doesn't receive any financial aid. This game of the *Boule de Fort* is mainly practised by rural people of modest means and the French media never mentions it! On the contrary, we note that the TV regularly broadcasts images of games almost without participants in France, such as American football.

Confronted by this absence of institutional recognition the players of traditional games have therefore, either abandoned their practice, or they had to create a dynamic and a creativeness to find solutions to allow their games to survive. The traditional games organisations developed some qualities already present in the very essence of traditional games: resourcefulness, creativeness of a human being, and especially, the will to be actors in their own lives, absolutely opposite values to the spectators' consumer situation developed by the mercantile system. These are all activities created around traditional games that forged their image of a social linking tool of development, which allowed clubs and academies to receive the support for their 'social' and 'cultural' action on behalf of local political representatives, permitting to them to engage in a process of recognition in several countries of Europe. This evolution even touched the administrative system, even if the means are still often not there. It is also the will of some regional parliaments which have now permitted some sporting practices to hoist themselves to a equivalent level to modern sports federations, in a register associating sport and culture, to gain an official recognition as a 'cultural sport' in the concerned regions or country as Ireland.

Today we are aware that to adopt the language, the culture - and we could add the games - of

the dominant system, has always constituted a way of promotion. So the autochthonous elite's have often adopted the games of their masters, certainly in the goal to rise socially even though sometimes a similar local game already existed. The case of cricket shows indeed that the game could be a space where the colonist accepted a certain equality, at least during a match, but today cricket international meetings can take the dimension of a nationalistic (Adam Kuper, 1995) revenge. Plato, the Greek philosopher, declared about two thousand five hundred years ago, "when you want to control the people, control their music", which means to control the free time, the festivals and the games... However, if forms of body expressions have been destroyed against their will, the populations therefore have the right to reconstruct them, in conformity with their cultural and spiritual environment. Paradoxically some states, such as the former Eastern Europe countries, judged these reconstruction's potentially reactionary and nationalistic and decided to destroy them or to confine them in a minor role. It was for example the case with the traditional wrestling *grundbirkózás* in Hungary, one of today's most popular school sports there, or *palant*, a game similar to baseball, in Poland, of which the two first were confined to the school practice for young children. However we are all aware today that the manipulations and the nationalistic recuperations are bound up with major sporting events.

These obsolete arguments continue to influence many countries in their physical education policies in which traditional games are often excluded, except in some cases, such as in Spain where the education system allows traditional games to be taught in the universities of physical education while creating specific jobs for teachers. This situation in fact uncovers the fears of the macro political or economic systems to see the citizens appropriate to themselves the places of debates, of democratic decisions, to be actors of their own lives, refusing the mass culture imposed by the market. Once again the problem of the traditional games recognition is bound to a conception of democracy: on one hand the power of the 'experts' named by the central administrations and on the other the local power permitting the implication of civil society in a participative democracy; in other words the concepts of 'theoretical people' and 'sociological people' developed by Pierre Rosanvallon (Pierre Rosanvallon, 2008).

Democracy and social practices linked with health

When we say that playful practices are the mirrors of their societies, then we must wonder about the pertinence of a solely antagonistic system of meetings put in place by the sporting system. One does not worry sufficiently about the repetitive side and the normative functions of these practices which always claim they are without consequences on political (social) life. After about a century of existence this system contributed to create an image of 'losers' for the young that are not always in front, as if the industrial society has recreated a new caste for the first of the class, the 'winners'. However a society that

creates winners, also forges a multitude of losers noted Albert Jacquard (2004), a French poly-technician. To persuade a whole part of society that they are part of the losers, is to infantilise them. Infantilisation⁸, is a way to deculturate the critical thought of adults. Benjamin Barber, in his book (Benjamin Barber, 2007) on the cultural and democratic regression that is hidden behind consumerism, a consequence of infantilised adults, explains to us that one of its perverse effects is also often a sectarian radicalisation of the concerned persons and a weakened adult culture.

In the today's big companies, this system of 'winners' and 'losers' inspired from modern sport is completely integrated to the elitist system of management, where excellence is permanently required. The idea that the progress of society is achieved through the selection of human beings is applied: the market eliminates the weak and keeps the strong. This organisation takes its source in the 'social Darwinism' ideas of Herbert Spencer⁹, for whom a 'healthy' society, like an animal species described by Darwin, organised the elimination of its weaker elements, in a sort of auto natural regulation. All dominant systems, without pre-established rules, tends thus to exclude or to destroy the elements that cannot follow or do not allow themselves be assimilated. By definition, this new social organisation tries to break the bases of solidarity between employees, the foundations of the old 'mechanical solidarity', whereas today all official speeches ask to recreate the social link! It is as if we have recreated a society with an underclass. Thus, when one juxtaposes the speeches made by the sports industry (chapter 'myth of sport') and the result of the setting up of its real politics, the contradictory character is striking. Commercial sport and the mercantile system is one unit, and this is reproduced in amateur sport so much so that there is no resistance. Thus, as Benjamin Barber affirms about the market and education, "it is not enough to have transformed the education in trade; it transforms the trade in education". So for dozens of years our society has been fed with theories that do not function in terms of social health, that are even counterproductive in terms of human investment.

The infantilisation of local cultures, of neo colonial type or other, is a way to inoculate the shame or fatalism by destroying the credibility of the local social contract. This erasing, constrained, from cultural influences has been studied by ethno psychiatrists. Dr Carrer's team which worked on some very important pathologies in Brittany (Breton Cultural Institute, 1986), such as suicide and alcoholism, showed that each time one noted the father's loss of influence, because he represents the image of authority in the family in this

⁸ Infantilisation is an attitude consisting of acting towards a person as to a child incapable of managing alone. The system that infantilises adopts an attitude of superiority to the infantilised persons, suggests that it knows what is good for them, manifests a will to think for them and, teaches them its morals. Infantilisation drives the infantilised people to adopt the point of view of the dominant system.

⁹ English scientist of the 19th century who associated social studies to biology.

region; however in psychoanalysis the father's role is to curb the mother's influence on the young child. In matriarchal societies as in the Breton speaking western Brittany, this is accentuated because the father's lack of influence is supposed to be compensated by the phenomenon named 'psychic extra father', that means the customs, religious and social rituals, or the weight of the social group. In this case, the father and the psychic extra father are devalued. Dr Carrer concludes that when an outside culture is imposed, destroying the socio-cultural institutions, the effects are sufficiently sensitive to create a "social pathology". One can compare these observations to those about the Canadian Inuit population which has the highest rates of suicides and alcoholism in the world, or again the problems of immigrant families in Europe, where the father cannot express his authority in a language and through cultural references now foreign to him.

Pierre Parlebas said, at the 2002 symposium in Nantes (*Popular culture and education for the 21st century* October 2002 - Nantes), that traditional games "accumulated indignities", "condemned by the Church, suspected by the State, often abandoned to the children", that they "took refuge in the underprivileged classes", and we can add that this process of denigration has been applied to all the traditional body practices. In France, in the 18th century, at the time of the affirmation of the philosophical, scientific and political ideas of the *Age of Enlightenment*, the aristocracy and upward moving bourgeoisie confined the common people to a secondary, negligible role. This was done by means of a symbolic separation "(common) people - children" opposed to the "aristocracy - adults" (Philippe Ariès, 1973). Thus, for them, the practice of festival games, the group dances in which everyone including children participated, revealed elements of 'childhood' in which were the common people, while couples dancing became the dance of the comfortable and superior classes, who also abandoned traditional games. In Britain the aristocracy distanced themselves from ordinary people while practising sports newly created from the transformation of former games into sporting disciplines, 'sports'. These are two examples confirming the theory of eugenics¹⁰ developed by Francis Galton.

Sport is neither virtuous, or the opposite, nor do traditional games have miraculous remedies for our societies. However a society that creates discriminations or alienation and which does not respect human dignity, contributes to create serious social pathologies that tend then to turn into physiological problems. It is proven that the different institutional situations imposed on the sporting or playful practices reveal discriminatory realities, in particular for the games of cultural tradition, and the eradication of these discriminations can only help to

¹⁰ Eugenics is an action which tries to improve the hereditary character of the human species by deliberate intervention. Several very serious political attitudes were inspired by this theory. Its promoter was Francis Galton, a 19th century English scientist and cousin of Darwin.

improve some social pathologies. Today, the best answer to the global problem of health is a global answer, by the setting up of societal structures, which answer to a more highly democratic criterion, permitting first of all to place the human being at the centre of the world system, and not the market. This is a necessity in order that everybody should be in a condition to express the most fundamental of rights: their culture. Claude Lévi-Strauss, the great anthropologist and thinker, said that “civilisation implies the coexistence of cultures offering between

them the maximum of diversity, and consist even in this coexistence (Speech at UNESCO)”. The remedy in order to solve the pains that overwhelm our societies is more democracy between nations at the world level, and more power to a civil society which will be respectful of all. In this sense, states moving towards the recognition of traditional games and sports and giving them the same prestige as modern sporting disciplines contribute to the improvement of the social health of their population.

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