# SPORT AND CULTURE: ASSESSING THE 'SPORTIVISATION' OF BODY PRACTICES IN INDIGENOUS GAMES

#### Arthur José Medeiros de Almeida

Universidade de Brasília, Brasília, Distrito Federal, Brasil

## Dulce Maria Filgueira de Almeida Suassuna

Universidade de Brasília, Brasília, Distrito Federal, Brasil

#### **Abstract**

This study is based on the Master's thesis presented to the Graduate Programme for Physical Education of the University of Brasilia. The study consists of a dialogue between Physical Education and Social Science, considering as outline the case study. The investigated aim was composed by using approach of body techniques regarding sports, based on the analysis of the IX Edition of Jogos dos Povos Indígenas [Games for Indigenous People]. The aim was to interpret the measure contributed by such competition to offer a new mean regarding the body practices for the several Indigenous ethnic groups. The results revealed an exchange between values and traditional, modern practices; therefore, exposing a new mean for the body practices concerning the Indigenous participants.

**Keywords:** Body practices - Culture - Games - Indigenous People

### Introduction

When assessing the body practices presented in the Games for Indigenous People, one can realise that we aimed at including different disciplines, in particular Social Science (SS) and Physical Education (PE). Importantly, such discipline 'shares determined objects of study, even though not necessarily with the same interests and focuses (MAGNANI, 2001, p. 17).

In this wise, we aimed at discussing on body practices, considering as part of it the games and Indigenous jokes. The tried to understand the sense of such practices by interpreting the context in which it is inserted, i.e. the IX Games for Indigenous People performed in 2007. The body practices observed during such event—which one of the means is the sports competition—compose a set of manifestation regarding movement body culture of each Indigenous ethnic group.

Such practices are also authorised by the Indigenous leadership to be presented to the non-Indigenous public. Such body practices are part of the cultural, immaterial heritage of such peoples, being built and rebuilt culturally based on different representation systems; therefore, it conducts its own operation logically, and its basis is the collective values, which the different ethnic groups appreciate.

In such wise, the sport is seen as means of interaction for different Indigenous communities and national society. Social integration—in which agents and social institutions take part—fosters relations, and for it one creates, interprets, shares and changes symbols for certain purposes (BOURDIEU, 2008). Nevertheless, is understood that the senses showed by the objects represented have essential importance to understand the Indigenous behaviour and thus the Indigenous societies. Such Indigenous behaviour and societies, by contrast, are composed by structures which somewhat affect the subject's awareness and how—to—feel.

Based on this, we used a theoretical reference according to Viveiros de Castro (1987), Geerts (1989), Cardoso de Oliviera (1998) and Lévi-Strauss (2007), who contributed to broaden the knowledge on Indigenous societies. Bourdieu (1983, 1990, 2008), Giddens (1989), Mauss (2004) and Kunz (2006) aided to understanding the body practices as manifestation which express sense and meaning for determined social groups. The dialogue proposed by such authors is weighty because does not limit the discussion to one field of knowledge only and make it interprets the socio-anthropological and PE perspectives.

The qualitative investigation was performed by using strategies of research in different stages. At the beginning, was performed a bibliographic investigation and was identified researchers and research related to the subject. In such stage, we estimated detailedly the books, papers, publications that could help to create hypothesis and provide theoretical subsidy for the object.

Meanwhile, Vinha and Rocha Ferreira (2005) performed studies in the IV and VII editions of the Games for Indigenous People, presenting the importance of the Indigenous leadership for the event. Grando (2005b), paradoxically, assesses the influence of the event on Indigenous education in school for the Bororo Peoples (from the State of Mato Grosso, Brazil). Rubio, Furtada, and Silva (2006, p. 112) also contributed to create assumptions when asserting that 'what one can see in the last editions is the growth for rivalry among nations for a

better position'. Publications of (a) Rocha Ferreira (2002) on Indigenous land sports, (b) Vinha and Rocha Ferreira (2003) on Kadiwéu Indigenous people, (c) Fassheber (2005) on Indigenous people's football, and (d) Grando (2004, 2005a) on education for the Indigenous body also has contributed to this study.

Afterwards, was performed an analysis on Regulamento Geral [General Rules] (BRASÍLIA, 1999) for the Games for Indigenous People acquired along with the Secretaria Nacional de Desenvolvimento do Esporte e Lazer (SNDEL) [National Secretariat for Sports and Leasure Development] of the Ministry of Sport. The intention was to understand how to procedure and the principles necessary to perform such action for the Indigenous peoples, in particular body practices.

The fieldwork was performed during the IX edition of the Games for Indigenous People, in the State of Pernambuco, in Recife city and Olinda city, from 23 November to 1 December 2007. During such experience, we could observe, based on direct contact with the studied object, the moment when the researcher mark the social discourse. 'When making part of such discourse, the researcher turns it considering the past events which exist only in its own moment of occurrence into an account, which exists in its registration and can be checked again (GEERTZ, 1989, p. 29).

At that time, the techniques used to reach such description were: participant observation; interview by using pre-structured scripts; collecting photographic, audio, and video records, as well as notes on field diary regarding body practices, everyday event and social networks established. The sense is that the subjects participating in such intercultural meeting (Games for Indigenous People) are social subjects who use official rules, considering that exist sundry other rules.

In this study is put forward a comprehensive analysis to interact a phenomenon which includes people's inter-relationship within a modern society, and the basis are elements from the traditional societies.

# Indigenous body practices: different senses

The sociocultural aspect of body makes people understand that the physical alikeness and differences came from several cultural behaviours marked by different societies along the time. It occurs since such 'aspect is the method for subject's primary contact with the en-

vironment' (DAÓLIO, 1995, p. 39). As the different societies express themselves by using the bodies of their citizens, such bodies are understood as cultural components, considering that where human relationship is present, culture is also present. Culture controls environment by using rule; for the body, the control is basic to develop specific rules for behaviour. The subjects since their birth learn values, rules and customs on society by using their bodies, i.e. a cultural content is embodied to their set of expressions.

The body techniques are object from a great quantity of study within Social Science. The body techniques are 'ways that human being from society to society knows how to use their bodies traditionally' (MAUSS, 2003, p. 401). They have tradition, which were learnt from specific education processes of each culture and efficacy, considering that it also aided men to solve problems regarding their ordinary life; thus, attributing sense to men's body movements. Mauss (2003) lists sundry body techniques present since men's existence and it exist until now; for example, movement techniques, which are used for games and Indigenous jokes and for sports. All body techniques or attitudes, hence, are specific for something. Leaning it can reveal the way how societies have lived, considering that it is their structure that somehow imposes conditions for reflex control of the body. Adversely, the skills to control the body compose the centre of the social integration, contributing for a social behaviour along the time and space. 'Such skills are mainly based on strict rules' (GIDDENS, 1989, p. 63). In this wise, the body language is understood as a discourse agreed and ruled.

The society provides subjects with safety and skill for movements; this way, allowing them to an answer based on the requirements that social, cultural and natural environment impose to the body. 'For the Indigenous societies, the modus operandi to transmit the body techniques [...] turns the biological body into social body, allowing people to identify with their group and vice versa. (GRANDO, 2005a, p. 167). Within such societies, transmitting body techniques is necessary to acquire a social position. 'The social positions are formed based on specific intersections for meaning, control and law, which are related to agent types (GIDDENS, 1989, p. 67).

A social position presumes an 'identity' build from social relationship in which several legal sanctions is applied to the agent; therefore, it is realised the child' ability to learn from games and jokes (GRANDO, 2006, p. 231). At this moment, the child is assuming the culture, building the identification of the parents and taking a position within the society. The body practices, e.g. ritual in villages, perform the learning—teaching function to do, think and feel that it is specific by gender and age for each ethnic group.

One can verify examples of this in A fabricação do corpo na sociedade xinguana [The production of body within Xingu society], in which Viveiros de Castro (1987) stresses that in some societies—e.g. the ones living in villages of the region Alto do Xingu (State of Matro Grosso, Brazil)—the human body is 'produced' from deliberate and periodic processes. Such changes produced in the body provide others, e.g. social positions and, thus, social identity. The 'body production' is an intervention aware of the human body, composing the person, changing the essence and showing ways to gesture, changing forms of such body, etc. 'It is obvious, therefore, that the set of postures and body movements represent culture values and principles. Hence, acting in the body implies acting in the society, in which such body is in' (DAÓLIO, 1995, p. 42). In this wise, is easy to understand the basis of certain values for such social practices, defining a peoples' identity.

Games, dances and jokes are ludic ways to capture the reality which create an identity based on senses, specific for each culture. Such practices reveal the flavour of social groups; they allow to include a principle for a classification to control the subjects' choices. 'The body is the more acceptable pretence of flavour [...], i.e. the way it treats the body, takes care of it, feeds it, supports it, revealing a deeper nature of habitus<sup>1</sup>" (BOURDIEU, 2008, p. 179).

The choices for certain body practices, e.g. games and jokes, show the model to be different in a group, establishing its moral and intellectual characteristics. They also propose that behaviours should be followed, avoiding negative reactions and helping to continue the social order. The influences from the principles and game classes, however, appear out of such space limited to a period of time and enter society's ordinary life. Such fact help to define different culture styles (CAILLOIS, 1994).

<sup>1-&#</sup>x27;Principle which creates practices objectively classifiable and at the same time also creates rating system (principium divisionis) of such practices' (BOURDIEU, 2008, p. 162). It means ability to create, differ and appreciate practices and compositions which are classifiable.

# **Sports field influence on traditional body practices**

Aiming at assessing the sport influence on body practices in Games for Indigenous People, we reflected on developing human being provided by the sport. Lévi-Strauss (2007, p. 48) aided to explain that the game (sport) is 'disjunctive', i.e. came from a division of players, individually or in teams, that at the beginning it would be egalitarian. At the end of the match, however, winners and losers will be distinguished. The traditional game (ritual) is presented symmetrically and opposite of the game, considering it is 'conjunctive'. It also establishes the relationship or organic relationship for the participants who were separated at the beginning; and at the end it is confused with the community. The game harmony (sport) is from establishing equal rules for both teams, and the asymmetry is from the events which depend on intention, luck and talent. In the game (ritual) occurs the inverse, the asymmetry is preconceived, e.g. for the started and non-started games and is based on joining all in the same side.

According to Kunz (2006, p. 22), the sport that in its aspect of high yield, has the basic principles of 'act of surpassing' and 'objective comparisons', influence the subject's social life. As consequences, these principles bring the 'processes for selection, specialisation and instrumentation', providing that the body techniques and organisation of physical space and the materials used should be more and more ruled.

Another predominant feature for the game turned into sport is the competitive essence. Although the sport can be experienced in the education and participation, i.e. in a ludic way, most people understand the competition today as a situation very competitive in the modern Western society. The sense of sport repeated in different aspects of contemporary society is the high performance sport, understood as holding 'the characteristics for enterprises of the productive sector or capitalist service' (BRACHT, 2003, p. 18). Its scope is very wide, spreading in the world their sense of maximising revenue and streamlining of resources in many body practices.

Another important aspect is the development of a process to transform it in a spectacle of such practice in the current society. The sports spectacle, propagated by means of mass communication, is supported by a science that seeks solutions to improve physically and technically, in particular to produce 'champions'. In this wise, the

sport is a contradictory phenomenon holding its own nature, which is different from other social and body practices. Therefore, the historical changes into society from societies by spread of such aspect of the sport and its influence on events that at first would not have this effect are important.

Bourdieu (1983, 1990) presents a reading of the sport in which institutions or social structures are directly related to the structures of the human personality. In its view, the sports field has rules which establish its operation. It means, however, 'structured spaces for positions of which properties depend on the position in these areas and can be assessed independently of the characteristics of its occupants' (BOURDIEU, 1983, p. 89).

In this field, arise a fight from groups with different interests. Nevertheless, the objects of dispute are only perceived by those who are prepared to take part in it. It means that one must gain knowledge to identify the rules, interests, operation and structure of such particular field. Structure does not depend on the will of subjects and is able to guide their practices and representations by using power relation among agents or institutions engaged in the ownership of specific capital, whether economic, social, cultural, or whether symbolic that, accumulated in the course of previous fights, guides the strategies to be followed (BOURDIEU, 1990). Therefore, in such analysis perspective is involved a process of social actors' interaction, institutions and its structures.

# **Body practice senses in Games for Indigenous People: competition and spectacle**

The Games for Indigenous People were devised by two Indigenous brothers, representatives of the Comitê Intertribal de Memória e Ciência Indígena [Intertribal Committee Memory and Indigenous Science] and they are seen as a government and intersectional action. They were also performed by the Ministry of Sport and involved the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Education, in particular the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) and the National Health Foundation (FUNASA) Such institutions represent a consolidation strategy of a specific government policy for the Indigenous people. According to the official document guiding the event, one aim at promoting Indigenous citizenship, integration and exchange of tra-

ditional values, in order to encourage and enhance the cultural manifestations typical of such people (BRASILIA, 1999)

The body practices, in such scenario, seem to be the core of the interaction among different ethnic groups and those with non-Indians in the relations established by the structure of the event. Nevertheless, the term structure is 'sets of rules which help to establish and control activities, being it of a certain species and subject to a certain range of sanctions' (GIDDENS, 1989, p. 70). The structuring provides certain 'sense' to the activities in which Indigenous people are involved. Thus, recognising objective structures and identifying representations built by agents in the event were considered within the universe regarding body practices. Then, it was necessary to understand that such practices carried out by different groups within a social context have a relationship of interaction and conflict.

The observations performed during field research show that the organisational structure of the event was composed of hierarchies of social positions, in which the occupants were responsible to perform certain tasks. Subjects who held top positions in the organisational hierarchy enjoyed power and prestige to play their roles. These were the creators of the event which had the task to establish general rules and, therefore, delimit the purview of other people involved. In the hierarchical ladder, below those, were the performers, mostly composed of officials from government agencies that were responsible to supply all the needs for the event. Since they are tied to public agencies, they respected the hierarchy of institutions. At some moments, it was perceived how the performers were dissatisfied regarding the orientations of the creators, showing the conflict of interests among such actors in the field. One fact observed was the restriction of freedom for the action imposed by the designers to the last ones.

Then, were the chiefs of the committee, represented by officials less important in institutions organisers and by collaborators. Each committee should perform specific activities, among others: food, transport, information and sports. The latter drew up the rule which will control the body practices, as well as monitored its compliance and recorded the results. Were also part of this structure the volunteers who provided services of all orders, the Indigenous participants, found in their speech as 'competitors', the media of different segments, and the audience composed mostly of non-Indian who were invited to attend presentations.

The technical congress appears therefore as a central and interesting aspect to be assessed, since it is a procedure implemented in order to establish common rules for body practices. At this meeting—attended by only five leaders of the 27 ethnic groups who attended the event, besides three organizers—there was a significant influence of the senses to the sport instilled in sport, in its size of high yield, on the rule for the traditional body practices.

During such technical congress, despite the commentaries for the event structure, was realised that was not significant changes in the document which guides the body practices. Such activity was only for a presentation of the regulated structure which stresses performing the body practices competitively, according to the previous editions. In such wise, the body practices which constituents such event seem to be objects of controversy, because when normalized by a process to build technique, do not help to explain the cultural diversity in the ethnic groups.

Adversely, the specific practices, e.g. rites, dances and some games and Indigenous jokes were exposed to the public. In this case, a presentation as a spectacle of certain body practices of Indigenous peoples was provided to such social actors, in particular interpreted as unusual and exotic for the intercultural aspects. It is important to say, however, that turning certain cultural practices into spectacle can hold two meanings. On one hand, it can create ways to near and absorb the Indigenous culture considering the present people. On the other hand, it can contribute to further the change of sense for a fixed practice of a movement body culture regarding such peoples. Such aspect also should be studied deeply.

Such observation brings a question: How does competition and 'spectacularisation' contribute to a new mean of the traditional body practices present into context of Games for Indigenous People, considering what is important for the Indigenous people?

# Indigenous body practices in the sense of sportivisation

In the IX edition of the Games for Indigenous People, the Indigenous body practices able to be ruled were performed competitively. Even the competition being present in a context with different intensities for the games traditionally performed in the villages, in the event the competitive sense was based on surpassing the result reached by

the opponent. It was observed that the body practices performed according to the event rules included traditional elements (paintings and body adornment) and other regarding modern aspects (rules, inspection and standardisation).

Bow, arrow and spear are tools typically used to hunt and defend the community in the village. Using such tools requires specific body techniques which have own senses for each Indigenous culture. The bow and arrow, in this wise, were produced by the own ethnic group; nevertheless, its aspect as 'sporting event', holding rules which controlled the subjects' actions, originated a single—sense likeness among the techniques presented. The dispute which included the spear presented varied techniques when it was launched. The same aspect could be observed in the 'canoeing' and 'swimming', in particular in the running which, without its original elements, take senses different from those regarding escape, natural environment recognition, and spiritual world relation.

The analysis was also performed considering the practices (a) without conditions for rules, since it is restricted to certain groups, and (b) being developed by using examples. Considering the Indigenous body practices exemplified, the physical fights are accentuated. Each person has a peculiarity; however, the function of the physical fights is to prepare the Indigenous person for fights which require more skill and physical force. Such body practices consist basically of a dispute between two fighters aiming at overbalancing and flooring the opponent, usually fighters—typically known as warriors—have more prestige within the community.

In context of the Indigenous societies, the interaction, in which the body practices are important, is within time and space. When such interaction becomes a routine, it presents institutionalised characteristics from social system of each ethnic group. Nevertheless, one should not assume that the routine is made up of unthinking ways regarding the repetitive behaviours. Rather, they are constantly worked by actors in their behaviour from day to day. In this wise, the physical fights, running, games and traditional jokes are supported in the rating system of each nation and assume a mythological explanation for its performance. Such practices are established in means of interaction between spirits' world and real world, and it is also responsible for pursuing an Indigeneous person's awareness and behaviour. Nevertheless, each ethnic group, according to the cultural dynamics, took body practices

from other peoples within interethnic interaction, e.g. centennial practice as football and volleyball.

Regarding the Games for Indigenous People, was created a different routine, especially by the structure which leaded the social actors to determined social relationship. One realised, thus, that the body practices performed in that space with interethnic interaction had logic, a universe of meanings which was absorbed by the subjects. The behaviour patterns known as appropriate stood out against rare deviant behaviours. It means that the structure of the social situation, which holds modern values, was understood by the Indigenous people.

The social meeting protagonists several times, however, were not able to recognise during their reports that the social coercion influences on their behaviour. The analysis makes one understand that the structure affected significantly regarding the agent's practical awareness, since there was the 'reflexive behaviour supervision' (GID-DENS, 1989, p. 35). Such fact can be explained by 'the [subjects] who use the mental structures to understand the social world, it is essentially an item to internalise the social world structures' (BOUR-DIEU, 1990, p. 158).

Antagonistically, the discursive awareness—i.e. that in which subjects demonstrate being apt to tell consistently their activities and providing the reasons which encourage such activities—was not changed. This can be explained by the arrangement promoted by event structure for the body practices, since all practices were performed in such context, including their traditional particularities overlapped with modern elements. Within such scenario with interethnic process, the traditional elements remain into the Indigenous people's conscience, and they report reasons related to values of their ethnic group, e.g. prestige rise (with conflict) and a social position occupation.

Such intermediary process also creates 'hybridisations'. According to Canclini (2003, p. xxx), the sense for hybridisation serves to 'appoint the intercultural mixtures that are properly modern'. The hybridisation processes, this way, occurs during the modernism contradiction, worldwide commodisation of the symbolic items and power struggle. The structure brought from hybridisation clarify that the modernisation and tradition are overlapped, resulting in other meaning.

Thus, one can understand that the event allowed to build a hybrid process in the way subjects (Indigenous peoples) use their bodies, i.e. when using the traditional body practices which is composed by adopting traditionally modern elements and values. In the process of a cultural dynamics, tradition elements are not totally abandoned, and that it is added in other elements which are typically from the modern society. By means of the interethnic interaction, it is presumed that there is a statement—major element for the relationship between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people. Also, another habitus can be composed by using a disposition system acquired from a learning provided by interethnic contact in a different rating system. Considering such statement, one can understand that such new mean appear from recreation of the cultural heritage based on social actors involved in the event.

#### Final considerations

In this study, we aimed at building an interpretation of the reality observed during the IX edition regarding the Games for Indigenous People. Further, we used an assessment to explain and understand the object of study by using the conditions of actors' personality and coercion, established according to the social structure. When building such interdisciplinary interpretation, the focus was given on the sports influence (encouraged by interethnic contact) to design a process to a new mean concerning the body practices presented in the event.

In this wise, we observed that the body practices was composed to provide the competition among the Indigenous people. Thus, another arrangement was composed to such practices, including hybrid elements which see it as traditional practices involved with elements typically from modern societies. The principle and sports peculiarity, with such notion and in its aspect of high yield, were absorbed by the Indigenous participants.

The offers regarding the body practices in the Games for Indigenous People, for its structuration, pursued the sports logics of high yield. Such event, therefore, contributed to create—competition and spectacularisation—the Indigenous peoples' body practices. The Indigenous peoples recognised themselves as 'competitors', and the sense of competition was recreated by them when they adopted a behaviour pattern according to organisation hopes, without abandoning the dif-

ferent societies customs.

Indeed, we can suggest that the new mean for the body practices occurs according to how the sports principles of high yield by the Indigenous participants are understood. Based on such interpretation, the body practices with a new mean can affect on the subjects' awareness. It also can contribute to establish another habitus and change, thus, the Indigenous people relationship regarding how they use their bodies.

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#### Endereço para correspondência

dulce@unb.br Dulce Maria Filgueira de Almeida Suassuna Universidade de Brasília, Faculdade de Educação Física Campus Universitário Darcy Ribeiro ASA NORTE 70919-970 - Brasilia, DF - Brasil - Caixa-Postal: 04502