

REVISITING SPORTIVE PRACTICES IN THE “COLINA DO SOL” COMMUNITY¹



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RÉSUMÉ : Dans cet article, je discuterai des pratiques sportives dans la communauté de Colina do Sol, où j'ai effectué un travail d'enquête de terrain en 2002, et sous un angle nouveau après quinze années d'investissement théorique et ethnographique dans l'étude du sport. Colina do Sol est une petite communauté du sud du Brésil, où vivaient une soixantaine de personnes à cette époque, mais c'est aussi une sorte de station balnéaire où beaucoup d'autres passent quelques jours à se détendre, bronzer ou faire du sport. Initialement, mon attention s'est portée sur la relation entre les pratiques sportives et l'idéal d'amitié qui y était présent, où la compétition et le conflit étaient compris comme des dimensions négatives de la culture en opposition à la joie naturelle de participer à des jeux. Cependant, à travers une nouvelle lecture de ces données, cet article souligne que les activités sportives sont une arène fortement saturée par les codes linguistiques et les pratiques du naturisme officiel, fonctionnant comme un espace d'affichage de tout ce que les naturistes désirent montrer d'eux-mêmes, ce qui impose que leurs praticiens soient en permanence de la nécessité de basculer d'un habitus lié à l'habillement à un autre lié à la nudité.

MOTS CLÉS : NATURISME, SPORT, COMMUNAUTÉ, CORPS, HABITUS

ABSTRACT : In this paper, I will discuss the sportive practices in the Colina do Sol community, where I did fieldwork in 2002, from a new perspective after fifteen years of theoretical and ethnographic investment in the study of sports. Colina do Sol is a small community in the south of Brazil, where around sixty people lived at that time, but is also a kind of resort where many others spend some days relaxing, sunbathing, or playing sports. Initially my attention was directed to the relationship between sportive practices and the ideal of friendship present there, where competition and conflict were understood as negative dimensions of culture in opposition to the natural joyfulness of playing games. However, through a new lecture of these data, this paper emphasize that sportive activities is an arena highly jaded with languages and practices from the official naturism, functioning as an outdoor of everything that naturists desire to show about themselves, which imposes that their practitioners are permanently aware of the necessity of swinging from a habitus associated with being dressed to another linked to being naked.

KEYWORDS : NATURISM, SPORT, COMMUNITY, BODY, HABITUS.

¹ This paper is a development from the presentation that I did in the meeting “Corps, Sport & Nudité”, which took place between 17-18 July 2019, in Montpellier, France. I would like to thank Jérôme Soldani and Eric Perera for the invitation to this event, and all the people present there for the questions, which contributed to my reflection about this issue.

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In this paper, I will discuss the sportive practices in the Colina do Sol community, where I did fieldwork in 2002, from a new perspective after fifteen years of theoretical and ethnographic investment in the study of sports. To contextualize this new glance, I must begin with some particularities of that research and a short presentation of my academic trajectory after my PhD (Rojo, 2012).

My interest in this naturist community was built from a previous investigation, in my Master, about friendship among Medical students. From the conclusions of that thesis about the importance of group friendship, and the fact that one of the main slogans through which Colina do Sol did its marketing was *"Here we lived the true friendship!"*, I decided to follow this theme there. So, after to obtain permission from the local coordinators, I moved to live there, in the southernmost Brazilian state, for one year to do my fieldwork.

However, what began with a focus only on friendship, immediately was expanded to incorporate the questions of the community - since instead of beaches or clubs where people spent only some hours or a weekend, in Colina do Sol around sixty people lived there permanently, in 2002, and fifty others spent more time there than in other cities where they worked (generally from Tuesday to Thursday) - and corporality, which was almost an obligatory dimension in understanding the singularity of that community.

It was around these three aspects that the theme of sportive practices emerged. At that time, I wasn't particularly interested in sports as an object of investigation, and even so this area was only beginning in Brazilian Anthropology, as the first time that there was a work group about sports in a Brazilian meeting of Anthropology had been less than two years before I began my fieldwork.

So, as I will discuss in this paper, in 2002 my attention was directed to the relationship between sportive practices and the ideal of friendship present there, where competition and conflict were understood as negative dimensions of culture in opposition to the natural joyfulness of playing games. It was, however, only a small part of my dissertation, which had a preliminary version presented at the Brazilian

Anthropology Meeting (Rojo, 2007¹), where I first participated in the Anthropology of Sports workgroup.

It was exactly from this participation that my career had a turning point. That presentation became a paper in a Brazilian review, and I was invited to participate in a local group of investigation about sports, which propitiated my later post-doctorate in Anthropology of Sports. After it, I constructed my career analyzing gender, corporality, and emotions in sportive practices.

It is from this current position that I have the pleasure to look at those data again, constructed in another context, to think a little more about some connections among body, sport, and nudity. So, in the first three parts I will present some aspects of the construction of Brazilian naturism, briefly exposing some of its particularities; the characteristics of Colina do Sol as a naturist community, and finally the main dimensions of sportive practices in that community. After this, in the last part, I will develop some new perspectives from this new point of view of someone who changed from friendship to sports as my current focus in anthropological research.

1. Contextualizing the Brazilian Naturist Community

The first steps of the Brazilian naturism can be situated just after the Second World War, with new waves of European migration and the increase of tourism from Europe and USA, where this practice was much more consolidated. However, until the eighties, there were only isolated initiatives with no social impact and of short duration. It was only with the re-democratization process, in the last years of the civil-military dictatorship, that this movement had a decisive impulse, with the fight for the legalization of the first official beach for naturism, in the south of Brazil, in 1984.

From the success of that initiative, a local association was created to organize the practice on that beach, and a magazine (Naturis) was launched to enlarge the popularization of naturism in Brazil. One of the most important consequences of these movements was the foundation, in 1988, of the Brazilian Naturist Federation, which only few years later was affiliated

to the International Naturist Federation (INF). Another development of this process was the first attempt at creating a naturist community, in a small area close to that beach in Santa Catarina.

The failure of that initial idea didn't stop the organization of this community, with Colina do Sol being inaugurated a few years later, in 1996, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, in an area of almost 500 km² (a little larger than Andorra) where around sixty people had been living, at the moment of my fieldwork and, in the summer months, they received more than five hundred people for tourism and weekends.

In this process at least two characteristics of this movement were consolidated. The first one was the differentiation between naturist and nudist in the insider discourse, with the first being associated with being naked as part of a way of life, linked to an understanding of nature as purity and harmony, while the latter operated as an "accusatory category" for those who, from their point of view, used their naked bodies for exhibitionism or hedonistic practices. So, in Brazilian naturism it is not rare to hear phrases such as: "Being naked is like being purified of all sins. Adam and Eve were condemned to cover their nudity because of the original sin, but through naturism, we can rediscover our natural purity," highlighting the sanctimonious speech, which characterizes great part of this ideology here. The second characteristic, which can be understood as a follow-on from the first, is that this community was organized as a "moral community" (Singer, 2002), in which the border is determined by which definition of nature is used. So, for example, in Brazilian naturism at that time, two national congresses debated, without arriving at a common definition, if homosexual relationships were part of nature, being permitted in naturist areas such as happened at Colina do Sol, or a cultural degeneration which needed to be forbidden, as was the comprehension of some naturist clubs.

2. The Colina do Sol Community²

This community is around seventy kilometers far from Porto Alegre, the capital of Rio Grande do Sul state, being ten kilometers of this distance in a land road, which in rainy days needs more time and ability to pass through. It is placed close to a little district called Morro da Pedra, at the city of Taquara. So, it makes possible that besides the people who live all the time there, there are around thirty other – generally liberal professionals – who split their weeks spending half time there and another half in Porto Alegre or other medium cities around.

Almost all of the people who lived there permanently or partially came from the middle and upper middle classes, principally from the richest southeast and southern regions, and from Argentina, the United States, and England. As a frequenter told me, during a conversation: "*Naturism is something of who has a certain standard of living. Here, in the Colina do Sol for example, poor people do not come to here, so naturism is for middle class to up*". However, the necessity of some basic services, attracted other people to there, whether to live permanently, principally at the times of the economic crisis of the nineties, as a family which went to Colina do Sol to open a small market and adopted that lifestyle, or only to do regular services as house cleaners. Again, the perception of these women who work daily in those houses about naturism said a lot about the class distinction inside this movement. So, talking with one of them, when I asked if she ever had wanted to practice naturism, she answered: "*we can't. We are here only to work*". Intrigued with this affirmation, I taken up this issue during a casual conversation with two other naturists and both confirmed that "*it is not a good thing to mix these themes*", indicating that they did not want to deep this question.

Although the intention in this paper is not to do a full presentation of this community, what is in my

² When I presented this part of my thesis for the first time, I was questioned by a sociologist about the use of the conceit of community since, according to her perspective, Colina do Sol couldn't be thought of as one by the main sociological references. As I said at that time, and emphasize here, community is used in this paper as a "native category," as it is the term by which they refer to Colina do Sol.



dissertation, there is a last aspect that is important to say some words here.

In many naturist areas in Brazil there is forbidden the admission of single adult men. This rule is so strict that, for the national meeting which I followed during my field work, which was hosted by one of these clubs, it was necessary to suspend it for the delegates from other areas, what was expanded for my presence too. In Colina do Sol, however, the entrance of single men is allowed, but only it reach ten percent of people present, and generally these men just spent one or a few days there. It has a consequence in the strong presence of traditional families (man-woman-children) among who lives or are regular there. It also had an impact in the beginning of my field work.

I visited this community for the first time in January of 2001, to submit my project of investigation to the local assembly, spending only one week there. It was necessary because my first contact with this movement was through a national magazine, in which there was a story about this community, at the exact moment that I began to think about my PhD. So, after some phone conversations, in which I learned that my condition of a single adult man could be a problem, they invited me to a face-to-face conversation. After this week, I went back in December 2001 to live for one year in Colina do Sol.

3. Sports in Colina do Sol

Colina do Sol is, as exposed above, a small community where people live, but is also a kind of resort where many others spend some days relaxing, sunbathing, or playing sports on one beach volleyball pitch, one beach soccer pitch, one boccia court, or one clay tennis court. There were also two table tennis tables, a large lake where, in addition to leisure usage, some people practice swimming, and a lot of paths for walking or biking.

In this part of Brazil, the temperatures range from 0°C in the coldest winters to 38°C in the hottest months. With it, these places followed this variation, being almost empty during winter (with the exception of table tennis, placed inside a room) and bringing together almost one hundred people in the summer. It was on one of these sunny days that I arrived for

the first time at Colina do Sol and had my first contact with sportive practices there. Some days before, still in Rio de Janeiro, I received an indication to look a Sociology teacher who frequented that community and who could be a good way to start my investigation there. So, as soon as I was minimally adapted, I asked after him and was oriented to go to the volleyball court. Arriving there I had my first surprise related to some differentiations about playing sports in naturist areas. Immediately players asked me if I would like to play too and invited me to enter on the pitch. I was accustomed to making people who arrive during a match wait for it to finish before they can participate, but there the logic was that everyone who desire could play, emphasizing participation over competition.

When I finally arrived to live there, almost one year later, I could confirm those first impressions about sports in Colina do Sol. Just a few days after I began my fieldwork, they organized a series of games to enjoy the summer and to stimulate the practice of sports, creating more attractions for the people who frequented the community only at this time of year. There, one of the most interesting events was swimming. All the people interested in participating – there were twenty-one enrolled – had their names written on small pieces of paper to compose three teams. So, initially the organizers raffled the first three names, who went to the water and, each one, just after finishing their participation, drew another one for their teams, until all of them had participated. The objectives with this kind of organization were to permit that all interested could be present, independently of the quality of their swimming, and to reduce stimulus for competitiveness, since the people waiting to begin their participation don't know on which team they would be until being raffled. After the event, during a barbecue, all of them were congratulating the person who had suggested this style of competition, exactly because it emphasized the idea of playing and having fun, *“as everything must be here in Colina do Sol”*.

These data constructed from the observant participation should be interpreted connected to their own native first interpretations (Geertz, 1989). This “native point of view”, in this case, could be accessed through an older edition of the local magazine (Naturis, 1997), where a person who had organized these games some



years before my arrival at Colina do Sol explained their perspective:

“Physical activity is of great importance for the individual balance in all aspects: physical, emotional, and spiritual. Activity is movement, action, energy. Playing is a way to bring people together, showing differences, and highlighting rules. Through the games, a man finds himself and his fellows. Then, it is possible to imagine the value of this state of mind in games and sportive competitions where the greatest aim is to get along with others, to fraternize, and to develop friendships. This is, without a doubt, the main reason of the events realized in naturist areas, such as Colina do Sol”.

When I wrote my thesis, I interpreted these data dialoguing with two of my current interests at that time and trying to relate them with other aspects observed in that community. So, on one side, I analyzed how the discourses about the corporality, present in the valorization of sportive practices, were connected with the understanding of the naturist body as a body simultaneously healthy and pure, where the nakedness and the physical activities were conjugated to produce a harmonic body and not to obtain a socially recognized perfect body.

On another side, the emphasis on values such as goodness, solidarity, and friendship, which can be found in any official discourse about the Colina do Sol were, as my whole thesis showed, confronted with tensions caused by commercial disputes and distinct projects for that community, principally those oriented to tourism, demanded by those who needed it for subsistence or economic gain, or to privilege residents, with stronger control on publicity and visitors. These tensions, given the significance of that official discourse, could not be publicly expressed since to do so could rupture the association between this place and Paradise, where all people must be friends as children.

In this situation, the Elias (1992) theory of sports as a possibility of a “*controlled disarray of emotions*” is not appropriate. Since sportive activities were one of the arenas where villagers, regular visitors, and people interested in knowing a little more about naturism interacted most intensely, people there needed to

show the official discourses in the most crystalline way possible. Although, as I tried to explain in the first part of this paper, in the native perspective it wasn't seen as a “*control of emotions*” but as the expression of the true naturist self, in other – and more intern – aspects of their day-by-day this self wasn't prevalent and conflicts, or even fights, emerged. So, in my interpretation, sports there were part of the “*public face*”, the stage, in terms of Goffman (1985).

This conceit is particularly useful to understand some activities in Colina do Sol. It came to me, for the first time, when I was presenting my project for the local assembly. At that moment, I received around fifteen minutes to expose my aims with that investigation and the necessity to live there for one year to do the observant participation. After that presentation, I retired and then they discussed and deliberated about my requests. I just received the positive answer in the next day, when I also was informed that there was only one vote against my solicitation. In his argumentation to vote no, one of them explained to the assembly that they were accustomed with journalists and media in general, which passed only one or two days to do a reportage and goes on, but an anthropologist will be different. I will pass one year, I will live with them and, the main danger, I should know everything that they do not show for media and visitors.

So, at least some of them were conscious about this division between a stage and a backstage in Colina do Sol and the risks, for the official discourse, involved in the permission for a foreigner to enter in this hidden dimension. So, since foreigners can be not only the anthropologist but each new visitor, at least until them became a true naturist, sports, as well as any other public activity, operate as a place where they need to show the official discourse to sustain their ideas of associating naturism and the Paradise.

4. Sports in Colina do Sol: a new perspective

These were my interpretations at that time, when I wrote my dissertation. The invitation for the meeting “Corps, Sport & Nudité” and the possibility to publish this paper brought the stimulus to review that data and to construct new interpretations after fifteen years studying sportive events from an anthropological pers-



pective, and with more intensive dialogues between sports and corporality. So, I will present here three new ways in which these theoretical references can send us to analyze body and sports in this particular naturist village and, at same time, how these data can problematize these same theories.

The first one departs from the discussion above about sports as part of the stage, in the sense attributed by Goffman, to dialoguing critically with the notion of sports as a “free zone”, as considered by Archetti. This author affirms that “free zones permit the articulation of languages and practices which can defy an official and puritan public domain. In modern societies, sports, games, and dance are privileged places to analyze freedom and cultural creativity” (2003: 42). However, what happens when the “official domain” is not represented by the State but by a still more puritan discourse, as in this case of this naturist community?

This question brings the contextual dimension of free zones, indicating that the capacity of sports, games, and dance to be privileged spaces to act as “threats to official ideologies” is not something related to the pretense of an essential attribute of these activities, but only associated with positions contextually assumed for them, vis-à-vis other spheres of the official discourse. So, my interpretation is that, in the case of Colina do Sol, sportive activities are not free zones but an arena highly jaded with languages and practices from the official naturism, functioning as an outdoor of everything that naturists desire to show about themselves.

Another aspect of this category of free zone which the ethnography done in Colina do Sol contribute to contextualize is on its impact on corporality. Until now, I was most interested on discursive dimension of this category but focusing on naturist bodies some interesting questions emerge. One of them is that Archetti says that sport as one of the free zones, permits the expression of corporal performances not necessarily associated to the official ones. However, in Colina do Sol these body expressions were subjected to constant vigilance, even it being explicit only in eventual cases where the local rules are broken related to the obligatory nakedness or any gesture which could be understood as expression of aggressivity or exaggerated proud in celebration of victories. I will

develop some consequences of it in the final part of this subitem.

The second way in which my recent lectures contributed for a new perspective follows from this aspect of contextuality assumed by the roles which sports assume in different situations, as well as theoretical references about the contextual dimensions of emotions, as studied by anthropologists as Lila Abu-Lughod (1990). In her paper about the political dimension of the love poetry in a Bedouin society, she contrasts two kinds of discourse about emotions. In one situation, a woman expressed indifference related to the absence of her husband while in another context she used the intensely valued way of the particular kind of love poetry of that Bedouin society to speak about her loneliness and how much she missed him.

In the opposite direction of those perspectives which could analyze this contrast assuming that one conduct should be oriented by social constraints while the latter would express her inner feelings – helped by the free zone of poetry – Abu-Lughod discusses that both situations must be thought of as genuine, since related to their particular contexts. So, in each moment, the conduct of this Bedouin woman is adequate and express her inner feelings, which vary contextually as Abu-Lughod’s understanding of emotions affirms.

Departing from this theoretical contribution, I think that it can be adapted to interpret a contextual differentiation between sportive practices of naturists inside that naturist community and their practices when they are outside it, for example in the local competition among micro-regions of the county of Taquara. The Colina do Sol is placed in the area of Morro da Pedra, part of this county, and participates together with residents of this area in the local sportive games. Not all naturists competed in this event, but I was invited to joining the Morro da Pedra team for the table tennis competition, since it was the sport in which I played better. This was one of the first differentiations which called my attention there. While to be good in one sport was not a question in the naturist point of view, when these same naturists competed in other contexts it was made relevant. Here again, it is not a question of determining which is the true self of naturists, but to understand that emotions



(like the pleasure of winning) and conducts are not natural essences of human beings but contextually constructed.

The last way by which my experience in the investigations about body and corporality brought me new possibilities to analyze data from this field-work on the naturist community of Colina do Sol came from my lecture of Pascalian meditations (Bourdieu, 2001). The traditional definition of habitus by Bourdieu (1983) is that:

“Habitus is neither a result of free will, nor determined by structures, but created by a kind of interplay between the two-over time: dispositions that are both shaped by past events and structures, and that shape current practices and structures and also, importantly, that condition our very perceptions of these”.

But, in Pascalian meditations, without abandoning or denying this conceit, Bourdieu focuses more carefully about what happens when the adjustment between the habitus and the objective conditions of individuals is neither immediate nor complete. For him, these situations open way to *“lags, discrepancies, and failures”* which can entail an *“awareness associated with a work for transformation”*.

This awareness, in my consideration, can contribute to thinking about situations, such as occur in naturist communities, where people need to balance between two different habitus. Even those who lived in Colina do Sol, many times needed to go to the surrounding cities and with it they were constantly going from the naturist corporality to the traditional corporality, each one with their rules and etiquettes. It was in sports again that I observed it for the first time and then in other ways too.

Initially it appeared as a single expression from a man who was playing volleyball. Among other aspects discussed above, is absolute honesty demanded during matches. In a game in which I was participating, in one attack the ball barely touched on the line, being impossible for the team which attacked to have seen it, and so they called it outside. But immediately one player from my team indicated the error and said that the ball was in. Although it was an attitude always publicly praised in the naturist context, I could hear

another man whisper: *“the honesty of the people here is what hinders”*.

In another moment, while I was playing a match of soccer, which was, as usually occurred there, a mixed game with men and women, I observed that people rarely used their bodies to hinder the passage of an adversary or to take the ball. One traditional phrase said in soccer games outside the naturist context is that it is a contact sport, reflecting that not all touching of bodies must be punished with a fault. However, there, people seemed to change this understanding, avoiding as far as possible any kind of physical contact among their naked bodies.

Finally, recovering here what I said above about corporal expressions of aggressivity during games or exaggerated pride in the celebration of victories, sports activities in naturist contexts demand body performances very distinct from those related to other places where sports are practiced, principally when performed by men. So, the virility associated with sports (Bourdieu, 2007) and many times thought of as still more present in male teenagers (Rojo, 2007²), is translated in Colina do Sol as cultural ways of playing sports and thus as very different from the cooperative and friendly way to practice sports naturally. Here, it is important to highlight that this way of practicing sports in Colina do Sol is demanded independently of which modality is being played.

From these situations, my interpretation is that the naturist way of life imposes that their practitioners are permanently aware of the necessity of swinging from a habitus associated with being dressed to another linked to being naked. The apparent contradiction that both corporal dispositions are not directly informed by the consciousness of the social actors, as the definition of habitus informs, but are triggered by this awareness of the change of contexts, can be resolved by the notion of *“body-mind complex”*, as used by Wacquant to resolve the similar contradiction between to think and to fight in his investigation about boxing. Dialoguing with this theory, my perspective is to surpass the idea that consciousness here is something only related to the mind, admitting that the body is able *“to think and to calculate without passing through the mediation of the abstract thought, the previous representation, and the strategic calculation”*. Consequently, it will be possible to suppose that the body can have some



degree of consciousness too, even if a different kind. In the case of those naturists, it will permit to understand that this constant balance between two kinds of body performances not necessarily need to be done through a mental process.

Conclusion

I would like to begin this conclusion thanking again for the wonderful opportunity to crossing the Atlantic Ocean and, much more importantly, to speak from the South to the North. Most of the people do not read Portuguese, but recently I learned that it is not only a problem of languages. Around ten years ago, I was invited to write a chapter for a book to be published in English. I sent my contribution about a comparative study between two South America cities about gender relationships in a particular sport and the reception of my paper was particularly good, except for the fact that the organizers of the book asked me, politely, to insert two or three authors from Europe or the USA what could became my paper more attractive. I was scandalized. The problem was not my theory, some gap of argumentations or anything else in the field of theoretical or methodological aspects. The problem was not the language, since I wrote it in English and the paper passed through a professional revision. The problem was that, in many places there remains a differentiation between the South as a place where ethnographies are done and the North where theories are produced.

So, the invitation to visit Montpellier – where the meeting which originated this paper was hosted – and to know that there is a place where “le don”, in the best Maussian meaning, is alive made me incredibly happy. The possibility for publishing this paper in this dossier is still more important, for two other reasons.

The first one is exactly the possibility to finish the circuit of “le don”. It began with my offer of a presentation. After that, I received some questions and considerations about my speech, and during the three days of social and academic interaction we exchange many other insights on this topic of nakedness, body, and sports. So, this paper can also be understood as the final retribution where I present, some months later, my afterthoughts from all those discussions.

The second one is to strengthen the notion that data are not reaped but constructed. They are produced not only by the contact among one person – the

anthropologist – and a group of other persons, but also by a particular theoretical perspective. Something that Cardoso de Oliveira (1998) called a sight and a hearing anthropologically trained. So, this paper calls attention to the fact that a new glance about facts occurred almost twenty years ago produces not only new interpretations about them, but new data. Particularly during pandemic times, when many of us are discussing how to produce data in social isolation, I think that this contribution can not to resolve it, since it is not an answer for all situations, but following the avenue open by anthropologists such as Ortner (1996), to highlight other possibilities for fieldwork.

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