

New Bodies, New Order: Sport and Spectacle in the Institutionalisation of the Army and the Police in Post-Revolutionary Mexico, 1924–1931

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RESÚMEE

Der Artikel untersucht die Wirkungsmöglichkeiten, die im post-revolutionären Mexiko dem Sport – verstanden als körperliche Betätigung wie als öffentliches Schauspiel – seitens der politischen und militärischen Eliten zugeschrieben wurden. Der Artikel skizziert dabei die Zusammenhänge mit den im zeitgenössischen Kontext verbreiteten evolutionstheoretischen Annahmen lamarckistischer Prägung; er unterstreicht die Rolle des Sports als einer Betätigung, die sich durch spezifische Räume, ein eigenes Ethos und besondere Rangordnungen von allem Bekannten und Geläufigen abhob; und er verweist auf die Rolle des Sports als Bindeglied zwischen einer militarisierten Schule und einer Armee, die ihrerseits als zentrale Erziehungsinstanz und Medium der Modernisierung angesehen wurde. Die in Streitkräften und Polizei praktizierten unterschiedlichen Turnübungen und Sportarten – von der Bildung menschlicher Pyramiden mit ihrer rigiden Eingliederung des Einzelnen in gestufte Ordnungen bis zum Mannschaftssport und seinen Erfordernissen, das Handeln individueller Akteure zur Erreichung gemeinsamer Ziele aufeinander abzustimmen – wurden nicht nur im Hinblick auf explizit angestrebte Ziele der Disziplinierung gefördert. Sie erfuhren Förderung auch wegen der indirekten Wirkungen, die ihnen zugeschrieben wurden: nämlich als Alternativen zu religiösem Fanatismus oder zum Abgleiten in Prostitution und Alkoholmissbrauch zu fungieren. Schließlich kommt im Artikel zum Ausdruck, welche Rolle der Sport bei der „Institutionalisierung“ der revolutionären Heere in einer „Nationalarmee“ und einer nationalen Polizei spielte, sei es in Form der politischen Inszenierung des Bildes einer disziplinierten und der zivilen Regierung untergeordneten Armee, sei es als Instrument zur Ermittlung und Aussonderung derjenigen Elemente, welche dem postrevolutionären Regime und seinem Programm mit Ablehnung oder Feindseligkeit begegneten.

Wandering through a flea market in Mexico City, James Oles¹ found in 1997 a photo album that caught his attention. The album was remarkable both because of its dedication – to General Joaquín Amaro, Mexico’s Minister of War and Navy and an outstanding character in Mexico’s military history – and because of its content – 89 photographs of sportive-military events. The history of this album, dated from 1931 and entitled *Festival Militar y Deportivo* (“Military and Sportive Festival”), epitomize those of the study of sport in post-revolutionary Mexico. Although studies of the popular and political culture of the period point to the importance of sport both as practice and as spectacle, they do not examine the phenomenon with a depth correspondent to its given importance.² The scarcity of studies in this field and the significance of the topic have compelled us to analyse the album as part of a major work in progress about the relationship between sport and the armed and police forces. By extension, this is also a discussion of the relationships between sport, culture and politics in the post-revolutionary period. The centrality of the album in our article derives not only from its novelty, but also from the fact that it documents in great detail the staging of two sport festivals, thus complementing the limited descriptions of such events available in the printed press and giving us access to the festivals’ “grammar”. Moreover, the dedication to General Amaro set this piece against the backdrop of personal power relationships of crucial political importance of the time.

In our analysis we first contextualize the festivals documented in the album and the figure of Amaro, especially in regards to his role in the so-called “institutionalisation”³ of the army. Then we consider the ideas and objectives associated to sport circulating at the time in Mexico and follow with a discussion about how these ideas and objectives were articulated in sport and festive practices of the forces of defence and of public order. We pay particular attention to the ways in which these ideas related to the iconographic conventions through which the festivals were documented. Before reaching the conclusion, we briefly explore the role of the album and the festivals documented by it in the political affairs of the time. Throughout the article, we argue that the practice and spectacle of sport were seen by the military authorities as instruments to reinforce hierarchy and self-control, to “incorporate” Indians and women into mainstream society, to maintain the cooperation of the troops, and to channel both collective and sexual violence. Moreover, behind this discourse about their positive effects, sport and spectacle were encouraged by the military authorities for their indirect negative effects as well, which made them powerful disciplinary instruments. This could be called the “hidden curriculum” of the promotion of sports.

1 J. Oles, *Policía, deporte, espectáculo*, in: Luna córnea, 18 (September-December 1998), pp. 58-69.

2 For instance, M. K. Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*, Tucson 1997; A. Knight, *Popular Culture and the Revolutionary State in Mexico, 1910–1940*, in: *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 74, 3 (August 1994), pp. 393-444; pp. 409-10.

3 P. E. Calles, *Informe Presidencial de 1 de Septiembre de 1928*, in: *Los presidentes de México ante la Nación*, vol. 3, México 1966, pp. 805-812.

1. The Álbum Festival Militar y Deportivo de 1931: Sport and Spectacle

The *Álbum Festival Militar y Deportivo* was given as a present to General Amaro by General Mijares Palencia, Chief of the Central Department (of the Governor of Mexico City). The *Album* is a collection of photographs of two different events that took place on two different dates. It begins with the photographs taken by journalist Enrique Díaz of the “gymnastic games” on 16 September 1931, Independence Day. A number of pictures were taken on the avenue *Paseo de la Reforma* (“Reform Promenade”) next to the *Niké* column (better known as “Independence Angel”), a central landmark in the iconographic representation of Mexican history displayed along the avenue: some photographs were taken from the top of the column; others have the column as their vanishing point. These photos show, for example, a synchronized staging of martial arts or groups of gymnasts in organized formations making the insignia of the police and the words “Mexico” and “Policía” (Figure 1). Other photographs have the *Zócalo* (the central square) as their background and show the parade of the fire brigades and the police.



Figure 1: Gymnastic Games

Source: Gymnastic Games of 16 September 1931 (Álbum Festival Militar y Deportivo, Museo Nacional de Arte, México, D.F.)

The album also documents the *Magno Festival Militar y Deportivo de la Policía Capitalina* (“Great Military and Sportive Festival of the Capital’s Police”), which was celebrated on 7 June 1931 at the Polo Club of the Army in honour of President Pascual Ortiz Rubio and General Amaro. There a number of female and male officers and employees of the police departments and fire brigades of Mexico City participated in the festival. A newspaper article reported that “both guardians of the public order, properly uniformed and carrying their new weapons, and other guardians wearing their athletic or sportive outfit with equal poise”, could be seen parading.⁴ Throughout the festival, “demonstrations of pole vaulting, personal defence, jiu-jitsu, rifle and pistol shooting, fencing, soccer, volleyball”, American football, baseball, gymnastics, polo, and cycling were held.⁵ Police-women and the female administrative staff gave demonstrations of “shooting, personal defence, and basketball”. The event was closed with an acrobatics show of the mounted police, a concert by the music band of the fire brigades, and a banquet with a speech by the President.⁶ The combined “sportive” and “military” character of the two festivals documented here was an always present component of all military and police festivals of the post-revolutionary period, which indicates the importance given to sport both as disciplinary practice and edifying spectacle.⁷

In contrast to the parade of 16 September 1931, which was held in a public place, the second festival documented in the album was witnessed by “government officials, army officers, national and international journalists, and diplomats”.⁸ Although the organizers could have chosen a public site for the festival, such as the National Stadium, the private character of the premises points to a restriction in the audience. This suggests that not all rituals of post-revolutionary societies served as pedagogical instruments for the indoctrination of the masses; some of them had as their preferred targets the elites who the new state wanted to integrate or to instruct in the government’s ideological programme. Just as the assumption that post-revolutionary mural painting was a mere means of popular indoctrination has recently been questioned by art historians – who draw attention to the confinement of those paintings to non-public buildings, the abundance of cryptic iconography in them, and the interest of the Ministry of Education to separate and keep the painters busy to avoid conspiracies⁹ – sportive and military festivals also need to be examined in such a way that reveals the hidden curriculum behind the apparently public celebration of sport as a means of improvement for firemen, the police, the army and the whole population.

4 Un festival militar y deportivo organiza hoy la policía local, in: *El Nacional*, 7 June 1931, p. 6.

5 *Ibid.*

6 El festival de la policía metropolitana, in: *Revista del Ejército y la Marina* [in what follows: REM] 11, 6 (June 1931), pp. 490-91.

7 D. Lorey, The Revolutionary Festival in Mexico: November 20th Celebrations in the 1920s and 1930s, in: *The Americas* 54, 1 (1997), pp. 39-82.

8 Un festival militar y deportivo (footnote 4), p. 6.

9 R. González Mello, El régimen visual y el fin de la Revolución, in: E. Acevedo (ed.), *Hacia otra historia del arte en México. T. III. La fabricación del arte nacional a debate (1920–1950)*, México 2002, pp. 275-309.

2. General Amaro and the institutionalisation of the revolutionary army

An article published in the *New York Times* on 7 December 1930 entitled “The Indian Who Sways Mexico’s Destiny” portrays the life of General Amaro as a metonymy of the Mexican revolution: the ascent of a poor “pure Indian” boy¹⁰ to chief of the army; from a combatant of the Revolution wearing amulets (an earring) to reorganizer of the national army. Amaro was appointed Minister of War and Navy by President Plutarco E. Calles (1924–1928), a post which he held until 1931 given his success in disciplining the army. But Amaro, according to his biographers, was the opposite of a typical revolutionary leader. Compared to the excess-driven Emiliano Zapata or Francisco Villa, Amaro – who was involved in planning Villa’s assassination – lived a “rigorous, abstemious life” and had “an omnivorous desire to extend his education”. He had a great organisational ability, and was hard-working and withdrawn from the mass media. Though “in ordinary intercourse he was mild, quiet, gentle”, he was often quick-tempered and violent with other military men. This was perhaps the type of character necessary to “institutionalize” the revolutionary armies, that is, to “unite the various feudal armies of the revolution under personal leadership and move towards a national institution based on loyalty to the State”. To do this Amaro had to impose a chain of command on a military composed of “violent and unruly spirits accustomed to graft, plunder, and the satiation of every human desire and lust”. He had to discipline the revolutionaries who were always ready to “betray their friends and their country” and “whose only law had been their own caprice”.¹¹ As the title of the article stated, Mexico’s destiny was in Amaro’s hands, for Calles considered that the most pressing task of his government, even more important than a fiscal reform, was the reform of the army. Towards the end of 1931 Calles, who still held the power behind the presidency, obliged Amaro to leave the Ministry, making him director of the *Colegio Militar* (Military Academy), where he would have the job of “improving and perfecting the soldier”.¹²

The process of “institutionalisation” of the army and police involved also certain image politics by which both organisations had to be shown as disciplined and obedient to the established order. Thus, in spite of his shyness towards the media, Amaro started a programme of symbolic acts aimed at showing the public the discipline of the armed and public order forces, their loyalty to the constitutional governments and, consequently, the power of those governments. The above-mentioned *New York Times* article was published on the occasion of an inspection of “35,000 troops equipped and drilled as no troops have ever been trained in Mexico”.¹³ In contrast to other generals, Amaro was, since the early 1920s, already organising celebrations with military programmes that dis-

10 J. A. Lozoya, *El ejército mexicano: 1911–1965*, México 1970, pp. 44–45.

11 C. Beals, *The Indian Who Sways Mexico’s Destiny*, in: *The New York Times* 7 December 1930, p. 9–10; M. B. Loyo Camacho, *Joaquín Amaro y el proceso de institucionalización del ejército mexicano, 1917–1931*, México 2003, p. 122; Lozoya (footnote 10).

12 Loyo (footnote 11); Lozoya (footnote 10).

13 Beals (footnote 10), p. 9.

played the merits of training and obedience to superiors.¹⁴ Festivals and parades became later central elements of this image politics, for they, according to the press, showed the “improvement and progress of the army” in the service of guaranteeing order, protecting institutions, and defending the nation.¹⁵ Yet such image politics were not only aimed at public opinion: if festivals showed the “discipline and good organisation that has been instilled in this modern force of social service”, it was believed that by displaying such “degree of improvement and discipline”, the police themselves were becoming “zealous and conscious of their duty”.¹⁶ In the eyes of some contemporary analysts, those early parades and festivals had a performative character, by virtue of which the soldiers internalized, in inspections and celebrations, the values they were displaying.

Sport was a central element in these festivals and parades. Himself sporty – being fond of horse-riding and pelota – Amaro had a key role in the promotion of sport in the civil realm as well, for example during his brief presidency of the Mexican Olympic Committee. The most general and obvious aim of Amaro’s interests in sports was the physical enhancement of each soldier, policeman or fireman, which was to improve the efficiency of all the forces of defence and of public order.

3. Sport in post-revolutionary Mexico

The generalized realisation of Mexico’s backwardness *vis à vis* the United States, which had seized half of Mexico’s territory and interfered continuously in its affairs, gave way at the end of the nineteenth century to a number of vague movements and languages of “renewal” or “regeneration”, similar to others that took place in Latin America. These “developmentalist” ideas,¹⁷ which constituted the ideological nucleus of some factions of the Mexican revolution,¹⁸ had their roots in republicanism – the reason why many of their proponents have been considered as “liberals”¹⁹ – but they could approach socialism, some forms of corporatism and even anarchism. The republicanism of these languages was evident in the attention they paid to virtue, manners and customs in educational reform. These developmental languages adopted the social psychology diagnoses of the causes of the decadence of the Latin-Catholic societies with respect to *WASP* societies: they considered that one of the reasons for that decadence lay in distinctive features of

14 Loyo (footnote 11), p. 98; F. Suárez Gómez, La importancia de la carrera profesional militar, in: REM 4, 2 (November 1925), pp. 941-942.

15 L. Segovia/R. Segovia, Los inicios de la institucionalización y los años del maximato (1932–1934), México 1977, p. 148.

16 Un festival militar y deportivo (footnote 4), p. 6.

17 Knight (footnote 2), p. 396.

18 For the views on regeneration and Swedish gymnastics in Bolivia, see F. Martínez, Que nuestros indios se conviertan en pequeños suecos, in: Boletín del Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos 28, 3 (1999), pp. 361-386. In Mexico it was Luis N. Morones who took on the idea through his magazine *Regeneración*.

19 M. E. Romos, Los militares revolucionarios: un mosaico de reivindicaciones y de oportunismo, in: Estudios de Historia Moderna y Contemporánea de México 16 (1993), pp. 29-52, <http://www.iih.unam.mx/moderna/ehmc/ehmc16/206.html>.

the national character of the former: superstition, fatalism, indolence, and individualism, among others.²⁰

However, the threat poised by the USA and internal reactionary forces was not the only reason for the launching of a comprehensive programme of “psychological revolution”, as President Plutarco Elías Calles called it. Popular evolutionism, which did not distinguish between the theories of Darwin, Spencer, Lamarck or even the quasi-mystical theories of Bergson, also informed the ideas of the new political and intellectual elites. This popularized evolutionism considered that, whereas competition for survival had begun as a physical and material struggle, in modern human societies the struggle was an individual and moral one; the ‘fittest’ in this context were the most virtuous and intelligent people. However, for these elites the problem arose considering environment: if the environment was not morally adequate – as was the case in underdeveloped societies – adaptation would not lead to the selection of modern and exemplary individuals. Therefore the social environment as a whole had to be targeted, transformed and used as an educational instrument by the educational offensive.

The catalogue of prescribed remedies to these diseases ranged from physical and mental eugenics,²¹ anticlericalism and educational activism to vitalist attempts to foster the *élan vital*²² and socialist and corporatist models of social organisation.²³ The post-revolutionary governments defined their all-encompassing educational strategies along those lines, with the purpose of “redeeming”, disciplining, and mobilising the new Mexicans, and ultimately transforming the country. They started a programme of “social engineering”, a crusade for hygiene, health, and morality to eradicate disease, bad habits, and crime. This programme was to lead to the development of a healthy, stronger and homogenous population; a requirement for the forming of a single social body.²⁴ Everything hindering modernisation was to be exorcized.

These programmes conceived of both the army and the school as modernising agents that should educate and collaborate in the defence of the country. President Ortiz Rubio decreed on 23 June 1931 that primary schools should be established in military units²⁵, and ordered on 6 October that “military instruction should be provided in all public and private schools of the country”.²⁶ The promoters of these measures did not hide their objectives:

20 G. Le Bon, *Leyes psicológicas de la evolución de los pueblos*, Madrid 1912; C. O. Bunge, *Nuestra América*, Barcelona 1903.

21 J. Bayer, *El laboratorio fisiológico del ejército francés*, in: REM 2, 2 (November 1923), pp. 269-274, p. 269.

22 E. J. Marteau, *El papel del instructor de cultura física*, in: REM 4, 2 (November 1925), pp. 982-85. D. M. Véllez, *Discurso del 4 de julio de 1929 dedicado al Gral. Amaro*, in: REM 9, 1 (January 1930), pp. 137-139.

23 E. Krauze, *Los caudillos culturales en la revolución Mexicana*, México 1981; V. Díaz Arciniega, *Querrela por la cultura revolucionaria: 1925*, México 1989; C. A. Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism in late Nineteenth-Century Mexico*, Princeton 1989; D. Cosío Villegas, *Historia moderna de México*, México 1974.

24 B. Urías, *Eugenesia e ideas sobre las razas en México, 1930-1950*, in: *Historia y grafía* 17 (2001), pp. 194-283; B. Urías, *Utopía no utopía. La arquitectura, la enseñanza y la planificación del deseo*, México 2005.

25 *La organización de la enseñanza primaria. Decreto para que se haga en el ejército*, in: *El Universal* 26 June 1931, pp. 7, 9.

26 Presidential agreement num. 697, 29 July 1931.

*Military instruction at school creates habits of discipline and inculcates the feeling of hierarchy, which is indispensable for social functioning. Disregard for that hierarchy in political, civil, and intellectual realms is the reason why in twenty years we have not been able to at least go back to the point where we were when the Revolution caught us by surprise.*²⁷

Such legislation followed, among others, the ideas of the popular social psychologist Gustave Le Bon. The *Revista del Ejército y la Marina* (“Journal of Army and Navy”, short: *REM*), the official bulletin of the Ministry for Army and Navy, published in 1922 an article by Le Bon in which he suggested that the army was the “prime educational centre, the efficient agent for the improvement and regeneration of the French (Latin) race, which had been degenerated by the university”. Compulsory military service should instil in all recruits the victorious Anglo-Saxon character, which was characterized by “discipline, solidarity, resistance, energy, initiative, and feeling of duty”.²⁸ However, in Mexico, compulsory military service had additional aims. Referring to the Indians who learned the “national language” in the army, Amaro himself said that enrolment was “the true campaign against illiteracy”.²⁹

The army was turned into the experimental field for the global reform of Mexican society, with similar ideological emphasis and instruments as those advocated for civil education: teaching of basic literacy, moralisation, mobilisation, revolutionary indoctrination, and anticlericalism. Sport was promoted both for military and civil education and constituted a link between both systems.³⁰ Thus in the “Organic Law of the Army”, written by Amaro’s spokesman (General Álvarez), sport was put at the centre of military instruction in schools, and this was deemed as preparation for compulsory military service.³¹

By contrast with the social evolutionism that characterized the dictatorship preceding the Revolution, the post-revolutionary discourse on sport turned back to the common ideas derived from Lamarckism about the relationship between the transformation of individuals (ontogenesis) and the evolution of the species (phylogenesis).³² This parallel between the individual and the social body enabled the post-revolutionary elites to maintain that the large-scale practice of sport would lead not only to a physical regeneration but also to the moral regeneration of the whole race and nation.³³ An article entitled “The practice of sport is the best means to build the Fatherland”, published in 1931 in the officialist newspaper *El Nacional*, presented the view of the leaders of the National Revolutionary Party (the ruling party, PNR) about sport and patriotism:

27 Educación militar, in: La Prensa, 6 October 1930.

28 G. Le Bon, La Educación por el Ejército, in: REM 1, 7 (July 1922), pp. 797-801.

29 Loyo (footnote 11), p. 104.

30 M. Velázquez Andrade, Tópicos sobre educación. Educación Militar y Previsión, in: El Nacional, 28 June 1930, p. 11; Proyecto de adiestramiento patriótico-militar a todos los jóvenes en nuestro país, in: Excelsior, 24 September 1931, p. 10.

31 Loyo (footnote 11), p. 133.

32 Aristóteles, De generatione animalium. S. J. Gould, Ontogeny and Phylogeny, London 1977, p. 13ff.

33 C. Juarros, El valor práctico del deporte, in: REM 3, 9 (September 1924), p. 627f.

*Through the promotion of sports all children and young people will attain sound physical development and will receive all the benefits of these kind of activities, improving in the three orders of the triangle of racial improvement, that is, the intellectual, the physical and the moral orders... For the widespread dissemination of sport we need to create a special body that controls all sport-related activities.*³⁴

The need for sport and its benefits for the individual and the race was a recurring topic in the articles of the section “Physical Education” of the *REM* during the 1920s. Most of the articles regretted the lack of a sport tradition in modern Mexico,³⁵ and eulogized sport as an instrument for social reform because of its ability to promote “discipline, drive out indolence and encourage activity, develop team spirit, and improve the intellectual faculties”.³⁶ Sport also served to encourage an ethos of subordination to superiors, to the government, and to the nation as well as to channel individual violence and educate the character.³⁷

Moreover, as the head of the Sport Committee of the PNR put it, sport was not only to form the new Mexican according to the “archetype of the man of the future, of strong muscles and healthy spirit”; sport was “*a religion* that would save humans from the tentacles of bad habits and evil, creating character and strengthening the fortitude of the people”.³⁸ Therefore sport was the means for the “redemption” of the country.³⁹ As such, it should become “an important weapon in the struggle against the Church and social vices” such as gambling and alcohol.⁴⁰ The anticlerical post-revolutionary elite considered that the Church and its doctrines were responsible for the superstition, submission, indolence, and injustice of the Mexican society, and thereby hindered the modernisation of the country. In their view, the Church had monopolized popular recreation by imposing a large number of religious festivities which fostered alcoholism.⁴¹ In order to reduce the presence of the Church in public life, religious festivities and public religious representations were banished and substituted with secular and “hygienic” activities not linked to popular religious celebrations. Amaro, who became famous for ordering his

34 El cultivo del deporte es el mejor medio para hacer patria, in: *El Nacional* 7 June 1931, p. 6 (our emphasis). See also: I. Muñoz, El aseo y la gimnasia como medios de la regeneración del ejército, in: *REM* 5 (May 1922), pp. 581-583.

35 D. Betancourt, La gimnasia y los deportes base de la salud, in: *REM* 4, 10 (October 1925), pp. 915-917; p. 916.

36 Marteau (footnote 22). La guerra y el deporte, in: *REM* 2, 1 (January 1923), p. 91 ff.; Juarros (footnote 33), p. 627. El deporte en la educación por la acción, in: *REM* 4, 1 (January 1925), pp. 627-630; Ideas modernas de educación física en Latinoamérica, in: *REM* 2, 10 (October 1923), pp. 1167-1171; p. 1969.

37 Loyo (footnote 11), pp. 55, 65.

38 El actual presidente del PNR estimula los deportes en bien de la futura generación mexicana, in: *El Nacional* 14 June 1931, p. 6.

39 This diagnosis was shared by General Tirso Hernández, head of Physical Education of Mexico City and member of the Mexican Olympic Committee. Hernández was a decided promoter of physical education and in 1929 he set up the so-called “National Committee for the Struggle against Alcoholism”.

40 F. Rojas González, Estudio Histórico-Etnográfico del Alcoholismo entre los Indios de México, in: *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 4, 2 (1942), pp. 111-125.

41 According to rural teacher B. Avilés, the “extended religious festivities were nothing but pretexts for scandalous drunkenness and other immoral excesses”. Cit. in: Knight (footnote 2), p. 405.

troops to desecrate churches during the *Cristero* war, shared the deep anticlericalism of the governments of the so-called *Maximato* – that is, the period in which Calles ruled *de jure* or *de facto*, 1928–1934.⁴²

In the eyes of the post-revolutionary elites, sport, then, did not only have a positive and direct impact, but also very important indirect effects. Sport could counteract the influence of the Church as it introduced a new ethos, new spaces for socialisation, new leaders, and alternative role models.⁴³ In this last respect, for instance, an article published in the *REM* described the physical instructor as a counsellor and moral example.⁴⁴ That the *Festival Militar y Deportivo* of the police took place on a Sunday (7 June 1931), suggests, as in the case of other festivals, that organizers wanted to drive people's attention away from mass and draw it towards secular activities, namely sports. The practice of sports on holidays distinguished and separated the revolutionary believers in the redemption of the individual and social body from the reactionary faithful of the Church.

The role of sport as an instrument of negative selection continued in the over-sized constitutional army, which was full of soldiers enlisted for lack of job alternatives or recruited forcefully during the war. An article calling for reform in the army and the need for discipline to best face external enemies and prevent internal struggle, announced that the army would get rid of soldiers who were “apathetic and indolent”. Participation in sport served as an instrument to single out and purge the troops of those who were lazy and reluctant.⁴⁵

That sport not only was promoted for its positive direct effects was clearly articulated in the June festival documented in the album, a festival that was conceived of as part of a “moralising” campaign for the police launched in May 1931 by General Mijares. Sport and instruction were not only intended to physically prepare the police for their job, but also to occupy time that could be used for unhealthy, immoral, criminal, or conspiratory activities. Amaro had already since 1922 imposed on his division an exhausting 15 hour daily program of horse-riding, gymnastics, basic literacy, and military lectures which left soldiers only a few hours free on Sundays. As Loyo points out, “Amaro insisted on the promotion of sport [...] to reduce the rate of endemic diseases among the soldiers”.⁴⁶ Their main disease after years of war was syphilis, which also affected a large number of the population.⁴⁷ According to the *REM*, seven out of ten soldiers suffered from it.⁴⁸ Sport was not only to channel their sex drive but intended also to reduce the time in which they could engage in activities liable to contract the disease or pass it on.

42 J. Meyer, *La Cristiada*, México 1993.

43 M. K. Vaughan, *The Construction of Patriotic Festival in Tecamachalco, Puebla, 1900–1946*, in: W. Beezley et al. (eds), *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance*, Wilmington 1994, pp. 213–246.

44 Marteau (footnote 22), p. 985.

45 Suárez Gómez (footnote 14), p. 941 ff.

46 Ibid.

47 T. Arteaga, *Nueva Italia*, 20 November 1939, estimates that three quarters of the agricultural labourers of the Hacienda “Nueva Italia” had syphilis.

48 M. F. Gaona, *Medicina Militar. La sífilis*, in: *REM* 4, 2 (February 1925), p. 151.

Troop inspections, manoeuvres, and demonstrations served also as examination for the lower levels of the army and a means to prove their loyalty to their commanders. Through them officers ensured that time was not used for conspiracies but for training. Parades and shows were, then, to the outside, displays and reaffirmations of the power of the high commanders and confirmations of their being in control.

4. Sport in the army and police through the album of General Amaro

The *Álbum Festival Militar y Deportivo* documents the different kinds of sports and military exercises practised by the Mexican army and police. In this section we analyse these visual representations, paying attention to the variety of iconographical conventions used in them to further develop the discussion of the aims and objectives of the different kinds of sports and military practices.

The album shows images of a military adaptation of French gymnastics and the German *Turnen* (vault jump, somersaults, and the like). In the 1920s several articles of the *REM* were devoted to different types of gymnastics, focusing in particular on the French and German ones – that is, the two kinds that had the most nationalistic and militaristic contents. However, if these schools had developed exercises that symbolically and practically gave precedence to the infantry – representing *la Nation* or *das Volk* – over the cavalry, the adaptation of their exercises for the Mexican army inverted that common feature by glorification of the cavalry and the establishment of rigid hierarchies. In this sense, many figures consist of human pyramids with bases of soldiers kneeling down “on all fours”; this is almost a metaphor of animal-like submission (Figure 2). Such a submission to hierarchy and to the group was the topic of an *REM* article entitled “The importance of the professional military career”, which stated that military life involved “giving up the free and individual will in the face of command”.⁴⁹ In the language of natural law, omnipresent in Spanish America well into the twentieth century, free will denoted deliberate action, the quality which distinguished human beings from animals.

Animal-like (or machine-like) submission of the soldiers in the gymnastic pyramids was reinforced by similar exercises in which the basis of the pyramid consisted of horses, motorcycles or bicycles. The photographic language used to describe these exercises is based upon an objectifying distance of very general shots which convey the idea of the social pyramid as a natural and therefore necessary concept.

The album also shows examples of so-called “mass ornaments”, in which large groups of bodies moved together forming figures or choreographies (as shown by Figure 1). These movements largely drew from Swedish gymnastics, which paradoxically had emerged as a reaction against the militarism and nationalism of the French and German schools of gymnastics. Swedish gymnastics had as their guideline a notion of equality, aiming at the body’s self-control without external instruments rather than at action.

49 Suárez Gómez (footnote 14).



Figure 2: Human pyramid

Source: Gran festival militar y deportivo de la policía metropolitana, 7 June 1931. Polo Club, Mexico (Álbum Festival Militar y Deportivo, Museo Nacional de Arte, México, D.F.)

But the meaning of this form of gymnastics was transformed when it was applied to large groups of athletes and combined with military exercise routines. It is important to mention that Swedish gymnastics and callisthenics were introduced in the army only for synchronized team floor callisthenics and “mass ornaments”, whereas in regular schooling they had already been in use before the revolution. In this kind of exercises, the participants form large collective geometric shapes or letters, thus losing their own individuality. Individual wills and bodies join in a general design which, given its complexity, might remain unnoticed to the performers. These choreographies eloquently showed worship of the controlled movement of the social organism. Through their emphasis on individual submission to a superior design, they invoked the dream of an ordered and uniform “mass” which rejected individualism and could be (de)mobilized in a short period of time. This is why they were so appealing to authoritarian and totalitarian systems. Their introduction in Mexico might have had to do with an admiration for the political and educational policies of the Soviet Union at the time.⁵⁰

The above-mentioned features were reinforced by the iconographic conventions used in their representation. For their design, deciphering, and photography, “mass ornaments” had to be seen from an almost zenith bird’s eye view that portrayed the “mass” – therefore these exercises were made especially for the public on the stands and for the mass

50 B. Urías, *Retórica, ficción y espejismo: tres imágenes de un México bolchevique (1920–1940)*, in: *Relaciones* (Winter 2005), pp. 261-300.

media. Such a photographic formula, which had become a convention with Aleksandr Rodchenko, is the most avant-garde of the album.⁵¹ The private character of the album, almost a professional document intended as a record of efficiency, made difficult the use of more avant-garde forms of representation (which were being used at the time in Mexico). Neither are there prime shots of the athletes in the album, such as those common in Nazi Germany which glorified the perfection of the athletic body.

The “mass ornament” had some affinity with the Taylorist principles of mechanized production: within the ornament, the individual performs prescribed routine movements as a piece of the machinery, the whole of which he does not know. Just as in the “Soviet physical culture” where the strength of the population was supposed to guarantee industrial development and military success,⁵² in Mexico the promotion of this kind of gymnastics and collective exercises was justified with the notion that they improved attention and increased enthusiasm for repetitive work tasks.⁵³ Sport practice as a guarantee of productivity thus became a sort of civic commitment required of every individual; within the army, it was a sign that this institution wanted to “give back to society productive citizens”.⁵⁴

A significant number of the album’s photographs are devoted to basketball, which together with other Anglo-Saxon team sports were promoted during the 1920s and 1930s in all educational institutions in Mexico.⁵⁵ Team sports were favoured by the movements of educational and social reform in the USA. Moisés Sáenz, the Mexican Minister of Education in 1928, was a pupil of John Dewey⁵⁶ and might have been a main promoter of sports in the state sphere, even within the troops given the proximity between school and army.⁵⁷ The dominant activist pedagogical literature of this time stated that team sports promoted strong links of solidarity and cooperative personalities. This view was particularly appealing to the Mexican authorities in light of the sociological and social psychological theory that modern societies led to anomy and a loss of community integration. Moreover, if the individualism of Latin-Catholic societies was believed to have been one cause for Mexico’s decline, then it was natural that the intellectual elite looked for instruments that counteracted that negative trait. In any case, the promotion of team sports paralleled the revolutionary state’s attempt to foster (and control) associations and

51 S. Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, Cambridge, Mass. 1995, pp. 75-86.

52 M. O’Magony, *Sports in the USSR. Physical Culture-Visual Culture*, London 2006, p. 16.

53 Juarros (footnote 33), p. 627.

54 Vélez (footnote 22), p. 143.

55 A. Knight, *Estado, revolución y cultura popular en los años treinta*, in: Marcos Tonatiuh Águila/A. Enríquez Perea (eds), *Perspectivas sobre el cardenismo*, México 1996, p. 308; Joseph Arbená (ed.), *Sport and Society in Latin America*, New York 1988.

56 E.g. J. Dewey, *Educational Lectures before Brigham Young Academy*, in: *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925–1953*, vol. 17, Carbondale 1981, pp. 260-261; J. Dewey, *The School and Society, School and social progress*, in: *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899–1924*, vol. 1, Carbondale 1971, p. 10.

57 The collaboration between both Ministries extended to the (re)foundation of military schools and academies including the Military School of Medicine and of the Military School of Engineering.

corporatist integration.⁵⁸ The official project also intended to appropriate those sports which were so far the monopoly of private sponsored or owned clubs – of immigrants, the YMCA or newspapers – and to make them part of the government programme of social reform and nationalisation of popular culture.⁵⁹ Not only did the *REM* insist on the creation of non-military sports teams,⁶⁰ but it also argued that “all sports” should be practised in the army, for they “prepare us for the *struggle for our own life* and for the fulfilment of our duties”.

With respect to basketball, it stated that this sport was “favoured by the *citizen* President of the Republic and by the *citizen* Minister of War and Navy”.⁶¹ This support stems from its recommendation by Protestant activism,⁶² and plausibly from the view that it was a sport which demanded a great deal of skilfulness and fast reflexes – and was thus a good mobilisation instrument. However another reason for this preference might have been precisely the reason why it was unpopular in the army. The article contradicts the common belief, that “it is not a masculine sport but one for girls” by affirming that “all sports may be practised by both men and women”.⁶³ Therefore basketball was fostered plausibly because it was thought less masculine (that is, less violent) than, for example, football. The rejection of “feminine sports” by the troops was part of a larger resistance to physical exercise, which was often justified with less subtle arguments such as injuries or illness. To deal with that resistance, the authorities had to try different strategies: promoting various kinds of sports to attract different preferences, participating themselves, rewarding exemplary participation, and separating the lazy and reluctant soldiers into special units.⁶⁴ As mentioned before, sport was used as a mechanism of negative selection. In contrast to the rigid hierarchies and formations displayed in military gymnastics, team sports strengthened individual decision-making and action within the general rules of the game and in interaction with the group. Team sports were therefore a more modern means of instruction for the army that presupposed responsible and educated individuals and groups, with a high degree of autonomy and discipline. The *REM* mentioned that there were around eleven basketball teams in the Ministry of Army and Navy, which made together an internal league.⁶⁵ This suggests that much of the sport policies were addressed at the military elites. It remains a subject of further investigation whether the promotion of team sports in the army was more adamant for the higher ranks, who had

58 F. Katz, Un intento único de modernización en México: el régimen de Lázaro Cárdenas, in: Günther Maihold, Modernidades en México [Mexican Modernities], México: Porrúa, 2004, pp. 11-22.

59 R. V. McGehee, The Impact of Imported Sports on the Popular Culture of Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Mexico and Central America, in: I. Efev / K. Racine, Strange Pilgrimages: Exile, Travel, and National Identity in Latin America, 1800–1900s, Wilmington 2000, pp. 95-112, p. 97 ff. M. Quiroz Cortés, La educación física en el ejército, in: *REM* 10, 4 (September 1930), pp. 692-695.

60 Team de basse-ball (sic) de los Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, in: *REM* 2, 10 (October 1923), p. 1173.

61 J. I. Fortunat, El basket ball, in: *REM* 4, 10 (October 1925), pp. 919-920 (our emphasis).

62 R. V. McGehee, Sports and recreational activities in Guatemala and Mexico, late 1800 to 1926, in: *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 13 (1994), pp. 7-32, p. 16.

63 Ibid.

64 M. Quiroz Cortez, Anales de la educación física en el 25 batallón, in: *REM* 11, 1 (January 1931), pp. 19-30.

65 Fortunat (footnote 61).

to work responsibly and in a group, than for the privates, who were expected to obey without exercising free will.

The album's photographs emphasize the informal character of team sports as well as the bonds of solidarity and camaraderie created by them. It is not surprising that one of the most relaxed pictures is one that shows the female basketball team during a break: the players crowd together and smile at the photographer, thereby following an iconographic convention established in Anglo-Saxon countries. It is an image that reinforces the idea of a supportive and united team even beyond the match itself. The very performative process of posing like a team for the picture was intended to strengthen that ethos.⁶⁶ The frame of the group in which the athletes' facial expressions can be appreciated reinforces this impression. But, like Mosse points out for German athletic festivities, "spontaneity was never a fact; all festivals were planned, yet an illusion of a carefully constructed spontaneity makes them more meaningful".⁶⁷

Alongside these forms of gymnastics and sports the album contains images of physical activities traditionally associated with the army and police, such as horse-riding, fencing, Greek-Roman wrestling, and jiu-jitsu. The latter exhibits the Mexican interest in the Japanese army, of which the encounters between the representatives of both armies and some *REM* articles further indicate.⁶⁸

All these different forms of sports conveyed different ethos, therefore, the practice and spectacle of sport in the police and the army was above all characterized by eclecticism. The parades of army and police forces practising sport and dressed in sports outfit contrasted strongly with the traditional conceptions of military virtues as opposed to civil ones. Continuous participation of army and police forces in sport competitions in which good civilian players were also put on the teams was considered means for the former to socialize with the "popular masses" (a practice that was then abandoned when it was discovered that it put off many in the military⁶⁹). The sportive events documented in the album precluded the conformation of November 20th, the anniversary of the Revolution, as a plainly sportive celebration lead by military units in sport outfit.⁷⁰ The message of this form of official celebration of the 20th November was clear: more than the fulfilment of agrarian and economic demands and more than democracy and elite change, for the winning faction of the revolution the true objective was the modernisation of the social body through the mobilisation and hygienisation of individuals and through their integration into a country which was productive, detached from the Catholic Church, and able to defend its sovereignty against its Northern neighbour. Such representations and the growing importance given to sport highlighted the growing demobilisation and

66 C. Wulf et al., *Das Soziale als Ritual. Zur performativen Bildung von Gemeinschaften*, Opladen 2001.

67 G. L. Mosse, *La nacionalización de las masas*, Madrid 2005, p. 126.

68 J. C. Ballet, *Japón: El entrenamiento en las escuelas públicas*, in: *REM* 4, 2 (November 1925), p. 944; p. 965.

69 Quiroz Cortez (footnote 64), p. 25.

70 INEHRM, *Celebración del 20 de noviembre: 1910–1985, México 1985*; Lorey (footnote 7); K. Brewster, *Redeeming the 'Indian': Sport and Ethnicity in Post-Revolutionary Mexico*, in: *Patterns of Prejudice* 38, 3 (September 2004), pp. 213-231.

demilitarisation of the armed and public order forces, the channelling of their violence, and openness to a more civil ethos that was to support its transformation into a guardian of a civil and civilized order. The armed forces dressed in sport outfit promised a more peaceful and healthier future.

However, this openness to a more civil conception of the army ran parallel to a process of *disciplining* or militarising the whole of the citizens. Some participants in the parades wearing military uniform performed the Roman salute to the state leaders in the podium, a visual and corporal exchange that expressed allegiance and commitment to national unity.⁷¹ Practised by the Olympic movement, during the first half of the twentieth century the Roman salute became a symbol of loyalty and compliance in strong authoritarian and nationalist movements, like the Nazi-fascist rituals or the “Pledge of Allegiance”. In Mexico, its coexistence with the traditional military and police salutation indicates the growing influence of sport in the army and the militarization of civil realm.

Uniformity provided by military and sport conveyed the ideas of classless uniformity and equal citizenship. This became an important meaning for marginalized groups as Indians and women. Festivities and their representation in the album also reflect the post-revolutionary project of the so-called “incorporation of the masses”, which referred especially to women and Indians. The album also reveals the deeply contradictory character of that project, for “incorporation” – later called “integration” – implied the acculturation of the Indians and their mixture with the white society. Military and sport activities and outfits uniformed all Mexicans, allowing the Indians to excel in those activities for which it was believed they were by nature more gifted than other groups, but they imposed Western clothing and activities. As many articles in the REM show, the top army ranks were aware of the relationships between gymnastics, compulsory military service, and colonisation in the French empire. All these topics join together in some articles in the REM devoted to the civilising mission and the internal colonisation carried out by the Mexican army.⁷²

One of the main themes of the album – in terms of the number of photographs devoted to it and of their position in the middle part of the work – is the participation of women in the festivities. Indeed two gender discourses may be identified in the album: one about virtuous virility, focused not so much on the perfect masculine body as repository of virtues but rather on the values of cooperation, order, and compliance; the other, about feminine emancipation. This discourse reproduces the contradictions of discourses on the integration of women: to achieve a similar status to men they are supposed to adopt masculine values and abilities such as physical strength, the use of violence, the ability to defend themselves, and the wearing of uniforms. Particularly revealing are the shots of women doing jiu-jitsu locks to their male colleagues. Some of these photos show a row of women pulling down men to the floor which gives a diagonal to the shot's framing

71 Mosse (footnote 67), p. 168.

72 Le Bon (footnote 28); Proyecto para colonias militares en el norte de la república, in: REM 1, 7 (July 1922), pp. 800-804; p. 801.

with a vanishing point located outside of it, thus helping to reinforce that discourse by creating the illusion of a repeated, endless sequence. The photographs become a general statement about women's skills.

The creation of new public spaces and forms of socialisation alternative to the existing ones (especially to those provided by the Church) was highly significant for women, for whom sport meant a space of freedom and interaction that preceded or accompanied paid labour outside the home. The contradictions and eclecticism of the modernization programme were shown even in the outfit of the athletes. Differences were particularly evident with regard to the female outfit, which ranged from the long skirt worn in fencing and the culottes for Greek-Roman wrestling to the short pants of the basketball players. However, the photograph of the female basketball players parading in short pants ahead of other male athletes has clear connotations (Figure 3). It is a message that women may partake in public activities and even take precedence over men; it tells of a modern morality of hygienic decency of built-up bodies and of comradeship between the sexes, in which sport serves to channel and restrain the instincts. After a revolution in which so many Mexican women were raped, and considering the traditional values associated with rape in Mexican culture,⁷³ the photograph of female athletes in shorts guiding policemen proclaims the end of sexual violence – the epitome of all violence – by showing a decidedly sexually-content and peaceful police.



Figure 3:
Female basketball players. Source: Gran festival militar y deportivo de la policía metropolitana, 7 June 1931. Polo Club, Mexico City (Álbum Festival Militar y Deportivo, Museo Nacional de Arte, México, D.F.)

5. Sport spectacle and image campaign

The post-revolutionary government encouraged the practice and spectacle of sports through their diffusion in the media (printed press and radio). This promotion follows to a large extent the strategy of education through models and vicarious learning so dear to the Catholic Church and the Hispanic American tradition. In contrast to official historiography which portrayed the independence, the wars against foreign invaders, and the revolution through a vast catalogue of heroes and martyrs who served as role models,⁷⁴ sport provided images which offered a more civil and demilitarized ethics. The athlete was elevated to the category of *exemplum* to be imitated; his very presence was supposed to encourage sports practice.⁷⁵ More than a mere activity or spectacle, sport became a symbol, a metonymy of all revolutionary values and politics, a model to identify with or to reject.

Towards the end of the 1920s Mexico was in turmoil. Apart from a number of political and military revolts (the *Cristero* war, the rebellion of the Yaqui Indians, various military uprisings), an economic crisis broke out in 1926 anticipating the 1929 crash. In a period when criticism of the government and the revolution at whole was at its highest, “the new virility of the police was living proof that the nation had vigorously re-emerged after the violent civil war”.⁷⁶ Military and police parades were a form of publicity for the efficacy of both forces, and if the “success in sports guaranteed [...] the strengthening of an identity, [...] and even the legitimacy of a political regime”,⁷⁷ the brilliance of the sport spectacle was intended to boost the public image of the government. However, parades and sportive-military shows were also just that, spectacle and public amusement in times of crisis.⁷⁸

Moreover, the public presentation of the guardian of public order as a sportsman (or sportswoman) was the nicest face of an intensely nationalist campaign which intended to make “a noisy propagandist projection of the *national values*”.⁷⁹ And if sport demonstrations tried to show the “chance for self-improvement in the struggle against vices and atavistic behaviour which undermined the greatness of the Mexican race”, they also served to mask, under the banner of the hygienic regeneration of the race, the purge of drug addicts and prostitutes, the repression of the Mexican Communist Party, and the attacks on the Chinese and Jewish minorities.⁸⁰

74 I. O'Malley, *The Myth of the Revolution*, New York 1985; S. Brunk, Remembering Emiliano Zapata, in: *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 78, 3 (August 1998), pp. 457-490; L. Mayer, El proceso de recuperación simbólica de cuatro héroes de la revolución mexicana de 1910, in: *Historia Mexicana*, XLVIII, 2 (1998), pp. 353-381.

75 O'Magony (footnote 52), p. 69.

76 Oles (footnote 1).

77 P. Arnaud, El deporte, vehículo de las representaciones nacionales de los estados europeos, in: T. González Aja (ed.), *Sport y autoritarismos*, Madrid 2000, pp. 21-42. p. 24.

78 R. Gallo, *Mexican Modernity: the Avant-Garde and the Technological Revolution*, Cambridge, Mass. 2005, p. 210.

79 R. Pérez Montfort, *Estampas del nacionalismo popular mexicano (Images of Mexican popular nationalism)*, México 2003, p. 144.

80 J. M. López Victoria, *La campaña nacionalista*, México 1965, p. 193.

6. The album in the networks of political intrigue

What were Mijares' intentions in dedicating to Amaro both the demonstration here described and its commemorating album? A key to the answer is provided by the date chosen for Amaro's homage. All those involved in the event knew that precisely on that day the supporters of former President Calles – who intended to remain in power from the shadows – had plotted in the city of Querétaro to discredit Amaro and to force him to leave the cabinet – thereby weakening President Ortiz Rubio. Whereas the real power games were being held in Querétaro, the power of image was being displayed at the Polo Club in the capital. Most of the photographs of Amaro and the President taken on that day highlight their relaxed, almost informal attitude. Ortiz Rubio, who in his speech praised the purge and discipline of the police and its moralising task, stated:⁸¹ “*The higher police command staff is worthy of the trust of the authorities and of the Presidency of the Republic, for the bad elements in the police have been punished and purged.*”⁸² Ortiz Rubio's speech reflects two purposes of the festivals: the cleansing of the public image of the police and the display of the police as a healthy body able to guarantee social order and civil welfare. However, as is the case with any disciplining programme, its ultimate goal was the establishment of a hierarchical, efficient order. The festival was therefore, above all, a public demonstration of Mijares's loyalty to both Ortiz Rubio and Amaro and consequently a display of the strength of Rubio and Amaro *vis à vis* Calles. The show and the album celebrate Amaro's achievements in the “institutionalisation” of the police and the police's allegiance to him. Therefore, the political situation discouraged the presence of the public, who might make an attempt on the lives of the top leaders or ruin the event. Calles had always acknowledged Amaro's strong character and especially his ability to “dismantle personal loyalties and form bonds of full obedience to the Ministry of War and Navy”.⁸³ Yet it was precisely Amaro's “institutionalisation” programme which involved loyalty to the official power, together with the accumulated power in the Ministry of War, which made him a potential enemy for the real power holder in the shadows. Even if they are of sportive nature, police or military demonstrations are always displays of power.

7. Final remarks

General Amaro's album is an idealized representation of post-revolutionary cultural policies and the process of “institutionalisation” of the forces of public order and defence; yet it veils the contradictory character of that transformation (and in general of the policies of forced modernisation to which it belonged). The album shows disciplined, efficient, and

81 El festival de la policía metropolitana, in: REM 11, 7 (June 1931), p. 490-491. We are grateful to Enrique Plasencia for generously sharing this information with us.

82 Un festival militar y deportivo (footnote 4), p. 6.

83 Loyo (footnote 11), p. 176.

submissive armed and police forces, which are yet tamed by sport so as not to represent a danger to the established power. However, the “sportivisation” of the army required as its counterpart the mobilisation and militarisation of the whole of society by means of militarized sport. To achieve that, the *Maximato* governments attempted to turn the army and the school into agencies of both education and defence, with interchangeable roles, thus constructing the moralising global environment needed for the “psychological revolution” of the Mexicans. Sport and sport spectacle were essential instruments of this policy. The album presents the state’s attempts at mobilising and instilling collective values in the armed and police forces (and, by extension, in the whole of society) through sport, but only to promote their obedience and corporate control. It documents the integration of women and Indians in those organisations but at the price of acculturation and acceptance of the values of virile virtue. The album is a kind of mirror of the Mexican cultural policies for which those forces served as an experimental field.

Yet this is an idealized reflection. The friendly promotion of sport as both civic activity and spectacle hides not only the project of a militarized society, but also a repressive nationalist policy. In the context of the intolerant hygienic-nationalistic campaign, the models to follow were not so much the athletes but the disciplined police and army in charge of guarding public order and maintaining respect for the institutions. Even discipline and modernisation were nothing but a dream, judging from the political situation of the time.

In Amaro’s disciplinary project, the main feature of sport practice was its eclecticism, the use of several forms of sport entailing different, even contradictory, ethos. This eclecticism might be linked to the second characteristic of sport and the military in Mexico, namely that sport and sport demonstrations, as many other forms of ceremonial pedagogy, were fostered not so much for their direct positive effects as instruments of improvement, but for their indirect negative results. The practice of sports and their public demonstrations were intended to occupy the time and energy of soldiers and their commanders and divert them away from drinking, prostitution, gambling, religion, crime, and subversion. As an activity and a symbol of a whole programme of moral reform, sport aided in the identification and removal of the lazy and reluctant elements of the armed and police forces. In any case, that eclecticism, typical of all the cultural policies of the period, makes further research necessary, so as to determine, for example, if different kinds of sports were promoted for the different ranks of the army.

The same literature that has considered Amaro as a central agent in the “institutionalisation” of the army has shown the weakness of his work. The lack of means, the fear of uprisings, and the persistence of the informal power networks made a total reform of the army impossible. Amaro’s fate is the best proof of his limitations. He permitted corruption and only weakened the informal networks of the factions who opposed the government. Rather than the positive measures taken in favour of physical and moral health,

it was the foundation of the National Revolutionary Party,⁸⁴ the purges after the uprisings and the creation of an effective military justice that institutionalized the army and transformed it into a more disciplined organisation.⁸⁵ Sport had in this cleansing process only a secondary though nevertheless important role, for it enabled the commanders to identify the undesirable elements and facilitated the expulsion of these elements.

The very concept of “institutionalisation”, might owe part of its plausibility to Amaro’s image politics: the sport spectacle was a central piece in the construction of the image of “civil” and “civilized” armed and police forces, which as one strong and healthy body (physically and metaphorically) was a model for the whole of the social body. The concept should be valued taking into account the bias introduced by this rhetorical exercise, brilliantly presented in the album, which was able to prevent neither future uprisings nor the fall of the one who had most struggled to make it a reality.

The discourse and practice of sport as instruments for legitimating the army and the police were quickly worn out. Already by the time of Lázaro Cárdenas’ presidency (1934–1940) when the revolutionary cultural policies reached their highest point, some questioned the formula of the sportive-military parade in the non official media:

*[The athletes] give the parades a splendour that is not sportive, but rather makes them look like a zarzuela. The sport parade becomes a display of bright and colourful costumes, sometimes a little grotesque. It becomes, thus, a parade of ridicule.*⁸⁶

Gradually, the military was substituted by other groups – such as representatives of the trade unions or of primary schools – in the sport parades. In the symbolic and emotional economy of the cultural policies, the use of programmes of ceremonial education is something exceptional, and eventually their insistence and large scale lead to their own exhaustion.

84 Lozoya (footnote 10), p. 48 ff.

85 E. Portes Gil, Distribucion de premios a los cadetes de la escuela militar, in: REM 9, 2 (February 1930), pp. 168-172, p. 171.

86 R. Salazar Mallén, La parada del ridículo, in: Hoy (“Today”) 10 December 1938, pp. 17, 94.