



Three Athletes, Two Countries and a Single Club: The Process of Identity Formation of Immigrant Sailors in Brazil

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Abstract

Brazil received a large number of German immigrants in the late 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century. Their adaptation process involved both economic and social factors since they took part in several institutions, such as schools and sports clubs. This paper aims at describing the route taken by three immigrants (Joaquim Roderbourg, Klaus Hendriksen and Burkhard Cordes) who were born in Germany, took root in São Paulo, Brazil, between the 1930's and the 50's, and represented Brazil in the Olympic Games as sailors. It aims at understanding their migration process, adaptation and decision to become Brazilian. The method was based on biographical narratives. Even though they migrated at different times, points in common were found in the subjects' routes, since they constructed a relation with Brazil which went beyond sports.

Subject Areas

Sports Science

Keywords

Immigrants, Sailing, Olympic Games, Brazilian Olympic Athletes

“Trying to understand a life as a unique and self-sufficient series of successive events and without ties other than the association to a ‘subject’ whose constancy is probably just that of a proper name, is nearly as absurd as trying to make sense out of a subway route without taking into account the network structure, that is, the matrix of objective relations between the different stations.” (Pierre Bourdieu)

1. Introduction—Immigrants and Sports in Brazil

The second half of the 19th century was marked by significant changes in the

Brazilian society. The end of the African slave trade and the abolition of slavery were factors that attracted European immigrants and, later, Asian ones. Data collected by the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE) show that Brazil received more than four million immigrants, mainly Portuguese, Italian, Spanish, German and Japanese ones, from 1884 to 1933 [1]. Japanese immigrants landed in Brazil after 1904. These foreigners developed settlements and associations and kept their countries' cultural traditions. One of the practices that were brought to Brazil by immigrants was sports, which led to the opening of several clubs and institutions.

This study aims at understanding the process of identity construction of three athletes that were born in Germany, took root in São Paulo, Brazil, and participated in an edition of the Olympic Games as Brazilian sailors: Joaquim Roderbourg, Klaus Hendriksen and Burkhard Cordes. They migrated to Brazil between the 1930's and the 50's, when a German settlement had already been established in Brazil. Besides, its objective is to explain which factors influenced the athletes' (or family members') preference for the country, how they constructed a relation with the sport, the role of German settlements in the practice of the sport and why they decided to represent Brazil in an international competition. In order to do so will be discussed the issues related to nationalism and the identity formation of immigrant athletes.

The methodology is based on biographical narratives and interviews with two subjects and the late Joaquim Roderbourg's daughter. Working with oral history enables not only data collection, but also contact with subjective elements which are full of emotion and help to understand both the athlete and the subject's personal nuances. This method enables the memory of athletes who constructed the history of Brazilian sports to be preserved [2] [3].

Search for individual memory also involves the reconstruction of the historical context in which the subjects' life history develops. One of the challenges of working with biographical narratives is to intertwine historical and social factors. This construction was reported by Rubio [2] and Giglio [3], who referred to the existence of a strong connection between individual histories and the historical events in which they occur.

2. Nationalism × Immigration

The migratory processes and the displacement of athletes from a continent to other have taken place since the beginning of the Olympic Movement [4] [5] [6].

If the search for work is what mobilizes the migrations and migratory processes among athletes [7] [8] [9] [10], in the first half of the 20th Century, World wars have led families to migrate, settle in other countries, play sports in their new countries, and thus develop new identities [11].

European immigrants started to come to Brazil at the beginning of the 20th century. Most German immigrants came to America after 1914 and that Brazil stood out as their receptor when they started to spread all over the world after the First World War, a period in which Germany had to go through reconstruc-

tion [12]. More than 250 thousand people left their country and came to Brazil between 1824 and 1969¹. More than 75 thousand German people arrived in Brazil from 1920 to 1929 since it not been directly involved in the conflict. The process was facilitated by several factors, such as the political cordiality that had already been established between both countries and the existence of many German-Brazilian institutions, mainly schools and churches [1].

These associations were created because a part of the immigrants established themselves in settlements which originated several types of associations, such as sports ones. In Rio Grande do Sul state, the Deutscher Turnverein, a gymnastics association which was founded in 1867, still operates under the name Sogipa (Sociedade de Ginástica de Porto Alegre). Another example of a club founded by Germans in that state in 1906 is the Grêmio Náutico União, whose original name was Ruderverein Freundschaft. The idea had come up in another institution connected to the German, *i.e.*, the Deutsche Hilfsvereinshule (a school). Ruderverein Freundschaft was replaced by Grêmio Náutico União in 1917 [13].

The constitution of these clubs may be understood as the strengthening of a relationship network, since the associations helped people who shared practices and habits to keep in contact. The migration of European peoples to America at the end of the 19th century and stated that the immigrants did not leave the bonds with their countries behind [14]:

the United States of America (or Brazil, or Argentina) would not become multinational; on the contrary, they would absorb the immigrants in their own nations. Immigrant communities did not lose their national identity in the melting pots of the new world but kept or became conscious and proud Irish, German, Sweden, Italian, etc. (p. 159).

One of the ways to keep and strengthen the bond with the culture of the country of origin is to constitute associations and settlements: “Transnational communities which manage resources, information and cultural capital are constituted and contribute to develop new common values and trigger social cohesion” [15]. The author also states that the constitution of networks enables important information exchange and helps immigrants in their integration process. The union of subjects who share the same origin in a place of destiny has been defined as the constitution of transnational communities, or extended families, which have been seen not only as a way of keeping bonds with the place of origin but also as a possibility of integrating people in the new place [16].

Even though they were very common in the first decades of the 20th century, institutions connected to other countries were subjected to certain limitations after the 1930’s when Getúlio Vargas took office and adopted a nationalist policy which restricted the entry of foreigners and banned the constitution of settlements in Brazil. 1934 was the key year in which the Brazilian migration policy changed because the new Constitution established quotas for the entry of new immigrants [17]. The Conselho de Imigração de Colonização, an immigration

¹Unification of the German territory just happened in 1870 but these data are considered the official ones by the IBGE, even though it acknowledges that their data sources are precarious.

council, was created four years later, in 1938, to coordinate the entry of immigrants into Brazil. Such policy aimed at mitigating the power of foreign communities that had already settled in several places in the country, a situation that was feared by the government.

Besides banning the opening of new institutions, the nationalist policy also imposed limits to the existing ones. An emblematic moment was the publication of Decree no. 383 on April 18th, 1938. The second article prevented foreigners from organizing, opening and keeping societies, clubs and associations that could have political nature, besides banning the existence of international branches of this type of societies in Brazil².

Several institutions went through complicated situations after the decree was published. In Porto Alegre, the capital of Rio Grande do Sul state, the Deutsche Hilfsverein chule managed to keep its name until 1944, when it was replaced by Farroupilha School. Regarding sports societies, there were many changes. The Palestra Itália, a soccer club in São Paulo, had its name replaced by Palmeiras in 1942. Changes were not only limited to names: “At the time of the Second World War, for instance, the club with Italian roots had to change some of its characteristics, *i.e.*, its name, the board of directors and ethnic habits which were practiced in the social area of the club.”[18] These changes made the institutions with foreign origins drift apart and favored the nationalist policy.

One of the institutions that underwent changes during that period was the Deutscher Segel Club, an institution founded by German immigrants in 1930. Eight years later, its name was replaced by Yacht Club Santo Amaro. The assembly that decided for the nationalization of the club had 48 German voters and 37 Brazilian ones [19]. These numbers show the weight the German had in the institution. However, changes in the statute were approved and included alterations to some behavioral rules, such as prohibition of the use of the German language in the facilities of the club.

Even with so many alterations to the statute and internal rules, connection with Germany was kept. An evidence of this fact is that the three subjects who take part in this study were members of the Yacht Club Santo Amaro. Joaquim Roderbourg, who was the first one to arrive in the 1930's, was expected to conform to the old rules. When Klaus Hendricksen moved to Brazil in the 1950's, he met Joaquim in the very same club; there, they prepared for the Olympic Games. Burkhard Cordes was younger and had the opportunity of starting his sports career at the Yacht Club Santo Amaro in the 1950's. Family ties were fundamental to open the doors of the club to the athlete.

After the end of the war, Brazil underwent changes in its immigration policy and received people from other regions which had also been war zones. At the end of the 1940's and in the 1950's, the rowers Edgard Gijzen (Belgium), Paulino Gonçalves Leite (Portugal) and Francisco Todesco (Italy), the yachtsman Klaus Hendriksen (Germany) and the basketball players Vitor Mirshawka (Ukraine)

²The decree may be found at:

<http://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/declei/1930-1939/decreto-lei-383-18-abril-1938-350781-publicacaooriginal-1-pe.html>. Accessed on Dec 7th, 2016.

and Radvilas Gorauskas (Lithuania) arrived in Brazil.

3. Brazil, the Olympic Movement and the Naturalized Athletes

When the first edition of the modern Olympic Games was held in 1896, Brazil had just proclaimed its Republic. The Empire had been replaced by the Republic seven years before and slavery had been abolished eight years before. Brazil became a member of the International Olympic Committee in 1913, when the International Olympic Congress was held in Lausanne, in Switzerland, after an invitation had been made to the Brazilian Minister Barão do Rio Branco in that country [20]. Interestingly, its representation in the international organization happened even before the constitution of a national committee, on June 8th, 1914 [2].

The National Committee and its bureaucratic structure were fundamental to ensure Brazil's participation in the Olympic Games in 1920, with a delegation of 18 athletes. One of them was the shooter Sebastião Wolf who had been born in Gobweinstein, Germany, in 1896, and taken root in Porto Alegre. Information collected in the *Dicionário Histórico-Biográfico das Ciências da Saúde no Brasil*³, shows that Ihering, Wolf's stepfather, came to Brazil in 1880, right after his wedding with Wolf's mother, Anna Maria Clarz Belzer, and became naturalized in 1885. The family lived in several cities located in the interior of Rio Grande do Sul, such as Taquara do Novo Mundo, Pedras Brancas and São Lourenço do Sul. After having become naturalized, Wolf started a military career, a fact that directed him to practice sports shooting. The result he obtained in Antwerp was meaningful: a bronze medal in team pistol shooting, along with Guilherme Paraense, Afrânio Antônio da Costa, Dario Barbosa and Fernando Soledade. The 1924 Olympic Games were held in Paris and, even though Brazil had got three medals in the previous edition, the Brazilian delegation was smaller and had only 12 athletes. None of them had become naturalized. Brazil sent no athletes to the 1928 Olympic Games, held in Amsterdam.

However, Brazil's delegation comprised 67 athletes in Los Angeles in 1932. One of them, Carlos Woebcken, who had been born in Germany, competed in athletics. There is little information about him. The Virtual Encyclopedia "Flapédia" reports that he had already become a member of the club's team in 1923⁴. However, this data must be cautiously analyzed since the virtual encyclopedia is produced in a cooperative way, *i.e.*, it is an open system to which information may be added regardless of its source.

Brazil's participation in the 1936 Olympic Games was characterized by conflicts, mainly because there were two organizations that claimed to command Brazilian olympic sports: the Confederação Brasileira de Desportos and the Comitê Olímpico Brasileiro, [2] [20]. Despite some bureaucratic problems, the Brazilian delegation was large, with 94 athletes competing in 10 different modalities. It was a large group but no athlete had been naturalized.

³Data from the *Dicionário de Saúde* issued by Fiocruz. Available at <http://www.dichistoriasaude.coc.fiocruz.br/iah/pt/verbetes/iheherm.htm> Accessed on July 3rd, 2016.

⁴Available at <http://flapedia.com.br/1923> Accessed on July 7th, 2016.

The 1940 and 1944 editions of the Olympic Games were called off because of the outbreak of the Second World War. The period between both wars was characterized by the beginning of Brazil's commitment to the Olympic Movement and the participation of only two naturalized athletes. In the following editions, there were more immigrants in the national team. One of the reasons is that, despite changes in the Brazilian immigration policy, the country was still receptive to Europeans who wished to come to America. The period between both wars was characterized by the participation of two naturalized athletes among the Brazilian ones in the Olympic Games, even though many others arrived in the country during that period. Although nationalism was going through strained days, Brazil kept its doors open to some foreigners.

4. Joaquim Roderbourg—His Arrival before the War

Joaquim Roderbourg was born in Düsseldorf, Germany, in 1918, right after the First World War, and migrated to Brazil in 1936, on the eve of the Second World War. He came with his parents, his 16-year-old brother Carlos and his 14-year-old brother Júlio. Their place of destiny was São Paulo. Joaquim got a job at a factory called Folhinhos Sheliga that made calendars and belonged to German people who had also taken root in Brazil. Besides the job, his German origin opened the doors of the Yacht Club Santo Amaro to him and his family.

However, it was not simple for his brother Carlos to be accepted as a member of the club. Due to the ongoing fear of being punished by the nationalist government, the board of directors tried to prevent more German people from joining the club. Not only Carlos Roderbourg but also Wladis Polisaitis – whose origin was Lithuanian – had their membership denied. Both young immigrants were dismayed by the decision and decided to make a protest with the help of other members. The case was only solved after some changes in the board of directors and when the new president accepted them as members [19]. Ten years after he moved to Brazil, Joaquim Roderbourg got married to a young woman whose father was a German immigrant and whose mother was an Austrian one. One year later, they had their first daughter, Hilde, who was interviewed by this study.

Hilde grew up on the margins of the Guarapiranga Dam, where her family used to live, and remembers having seen her father cross the world to compete in the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne, Australia. In São Paulo, Joaquim participated in one of the most important competitions in his career: the 1963 Pan-American Games. In the following year, he took part in the Olympic Games in Tokyo, along with Klaus Hendriksen, another German athlete who had become naturalized in Brazil. Eight years later, Joaquim was one of the coaches of the Brazilian team in the Olympic Games in Munich.

Joaquim Roderbourg moved back to Europe in the 1980's with his second wife, but kept in touch with Brazil. "When he watched soccer games, he rooted for Brazil, of course!", says Hilde. Joaquim passed away in 1991, after a bicycle accident in Salzburg, Austria.

5. Klaus Hendriksen—Guarapiranga’s Neighbor for Five Decades

Klaus Hendriksen was born in Germany in 1934. His father was a sea captain and inspired him to work on boats since his childhood. In his youth, he decided to work on ships, rather than study, and replaced the opportunity of going to college by work on vessels, even though his career started with minor jobs, such as deck cleaning. In one of the trips, he could make one of his dreams come true, *i.e.*, to know South America: “On board, I learned Spanish. I thought that Spanish was spoken in Brazil, just like Argentina and Uruguay. When I arrived here, I had difficulty in communicating”. However, hardships were overcome with the help of many German immigrants who lived in Brazil and opened the borders to Klaus: “There is a German yacht club called Yacht Club Santo Amaro across from here. So, when I immigrated in 1955, I had already thought of becoming Brazilian because there was the danger of the Third World War in Europe. It was very strong; the United States and the Soviet Union were fighting. And I was given a warm welcome here in Brazil”.

The Guarapiranga dam and the meeting with Joaquim Roderbourg, another German man who had become naturalized, were fundamental factors which made Klaus decide to migrate to Brazil. As an athlete, he had the opportunity of representing Brazil in the 1963 Pan-American Games and to get the gold medal. In the following year, he took part in the Olympic Games in Tokyo.

Besides his sailing friends, his network of German people enabled him to get a job as a salesperson at Wurth, a company that sold car parts. His position contributed to increase his feeling of belonging to Brazil since he could know all Brazilian states. Work took him to the interior of Brazil whereas sailing made him know other places around the world. On one of the walls in Klaus’ home, there is a world map full of stars: “There are stars on 157 countries, where we were”, says the sailor. He always used the plural to highlight that he was always accompanied by his wife Mirtes.

Even though he has traveled around the world, Klaus has lived in the same place for sixty years: “I am a fanatic Brazilian man. Brazil is the best place in the world. And I can compare Brazil with 156 countries!”. His enthusiasm leaves no doubt regarding his decision to change countries and nationalities.

6. Burkhard Cordes—The Pioneer among Medalists

Sailing is the second sport that has rendered more medals to Brazil in the Olympic Games. The first medal, out of 17, was conquered by the duo Burkhard Cordes and Reinaldo Conrad in Mexico in 1968. At that moment, the history of a winning modality started to be constructed in Brazil. At the same time, the history of conquests achieved by the Cordes family went on.

Otto Cordes, Burkhard’s father, has got two olympic medals, *i.e.*, a gold one and a silver one in water polo, representing Germany in the 1928 and 1932 Olympic Games. However, not even the honor of being an olympic athlete could give Cordes serenity in the period between wars. On the eve of the conflict, in

1939, he migrated to Brazil and had to leave his wife, who was about to give birth, in Germany. She just had to wait the child turn three months old to be able to travel. The child was Burkhard Cordes, who would become naturalized in Brazil some years later.

In September 1939, the ship with the mother and the child headed for Rio de Janeiro but ended up landing in Bahia. The German Navy had asked the vessel to go back to Germany in order to help in the combat that had started. Otto Cordes went to the Northeast to pick up his wife and son and returned to Rio de Janeiro, where he felt the burden of being a German person in Brazil during the war period. He was an electrical engineer who had been hired by a German company in Brazil but could not take over his position because relations between both countries ended. It was hard for him to get a job and he had to sell handcrafted dolls door to door for some time. However, the fact that he knew several languages enabled him to work as a manual translator and brought new perspectives to the family. After the end of the war, the Cordes had the opportunity of going back to Germany but they decided to stay in Brazil.

They lived in Rio de Janeiro for fifteen years. Otto was then invited to work as a manager in the glass sector of the company in São Miguel Paulista, a suburb in eastern São Paulo, where the family lived for ten years. Burkhard, who was an adolescent at that time, moved with his family. In São Paulo, not only his school routine changed (the new school was Porto Seguro, whose origin was also German) but also his group of friends, since he made new friends who were also German descendents and members of the Yacht Club Santo Amaro, located on the other side of town. However, the distance did not prevent him from developing love towards the sport. Burkhard first contacted the sailors in 1954, during the celebrations of São Paulo's 400th anniversary. His sport partners were other German descendents who had already become members of the club and were Otto's friends.

It is worth mentioning a curious fact related to the German community in São Paulo. Burkhard says that police raids on immigrants were common and that they were often taken to police stations to provide some information: "My father made lots of friends in Brazil because the police used to show up and take everybody to the police station. Afterwards, everybody was released together... so, you end up knowing people".

In sailing, Burkhard started by competing in Olympic, a modality in which a sailor sails alone, and also tried Snipe. When he met Reinaldo Conrad, a friend who helped him change his sport career, both started to compete in Flying Dutchman. Their results in national competitions were significant and enabled them to take part in international ones. However, Burkhard had to become naturalized. It happened in 1964 but he could not participate in the Olympic Games in Tokyo. His olympic dream finally came true in 1968. After an irregular beginning, the Brazilian sailboat depended on a striking result in the last race. The Brazilian duo won that race and got the bronze medal. Burkhard kept sailing in Brazil but it is worth highlighting that amateurism prevailed at that time and

that he had to combine his sport, his Engineering studies and his work at Brosol, a carburetor manufacturer of German origin.

Burkhard has already retired, both from his job and sailing competitions, and lives in São Paulo. At 77, he is a regular member of Esporte Clube Pinheiros, whose origin is also German, and keeps in contact with the country where he was born. He has even got a certificate in sporting excellence in swimming issued in Germany.

7. Analysis: The Role of the Club in Immigrants' Integration

Three sailors, all members of the Yacht Club Santo Amaro. Even though they immigrated in different years, the histories of Joaquim Roderbourg, Klaus Hendriksen and Burkhard Cordes have points in common and having chosen São Paulo as their place of destiny does not seem to be a coincidence.

People usually decide to look for large cities when they migrate. There is a trend to occupy territories unequally, *i.e.*, in most countries, one or two areas concentrate from 15% to 45% of the population in less than 5% of the territory [19]. In Brazil, the evidence is found in two mega cities, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Since they were big and well-structured cities, both easily became the immigrants' targets.

First German immigrants who settled in São Paulo were sent to the Santo Amaro region in 1829, where 129 settlers were established to work on farms [19]. Because rivers skirted the region, it underwent a huge transformation from 1906 on, when the construction of a dam on the head of the Pinheiros River was authorized. It would help provide water for the generation of electric energy in São Paulo in the drought period. The construction took three years and the Guarapiranga dam was opened in April, 1909. In the 1920's, some summer homes were built around the dam. Some of them belonged to German immigrants who lived in Santo Amaro. As a result, the Deutscher-Segel-Club was founded in a lot which was rented by the electric company Light in 1930. This club played an important role in the integration among German immigrants, since its founders shared the same German origin and had found a meeting place there.

Sport also had an important role because it became the connection among the German who had settled in Brazil, but it was not the only one. Joaquim, Klaus and Burkhard, the three characters who were investigated by this study, combined their olympic careers and their jobs at Folhinas Sheliga, Wurth and Brosol (companies of German origin), respectively. Besides the Yacht Club Santo Amaro, the city had other institutions which were connected to the German community, such as the Porto Seguro school, where Burkhard and Joaquim's children studied. Santos provides an explanation for this phenomenon: "In a certain subspace, there is a superposition of nets; it includes main nets and affluent or tributary ones, point constellation and line tracing" [21]. Therefore, the German community net had several spots in the capital of São Paulo, *i.e.*, the club, the companies and even the school. They helped to construct a sense of belonging to São Paulo, while they enabled contact to be kept between these

people and Germany, their place of origin. The location of the dam even helped to define where Joaquim and Klaus would live: beside the Guarapiranga dam. Even though Burkhard was physically far from it, he was not kept out of the net. Santos points out that the net is not only formed by physical factors but also by political and social issues, besides the circulation of messages and people [21].

It should be highlighted that sport was an amateur practice in the period under study. Search for sports may be seen as the fulfillment of the so-called “empty spaces”, of free time or of horizontalities, in Santos’ view [21]. The sport has symbolic value for these characters who kept in touch with their friends of German origin and also felt the wish to represent Brazil, the country that adopted them.

8. Conclusions

This study points to the trajectory of the three athletes who migrate from Germany to Brazil, a process triggered by the world wars. Despite the change of continent in both three, there continues to be a proliferation of new conflicts and the need for other adaptation processes to promote a new social life. In Brazil these people and their respective families sought the company of other immigrants, constituting a new circle of relationships and the expectation of a new life. Through the sport it was possible to adopt a new nationality and reach an Olympic edition.

Although the sport has collaborated in this process it is possible to affirm that this was not an isolated fact [22]. Although some have had the opportunity to return to the country of origin, they preferred to stay in Brazil, not only because of sports practice, but also a feeling built with the territory that involves affectivity and practical reasons such as professional exercise and sports career opportunity. Olympic participation by Brazil corroborates this process, giving the athletes the identity of Brazilian athletes, even though they were not born here.

And if Germany and Brazil are two distinct points on a map, the Yacht Club Santo Amaro and the Guarapiranga Dam, leave the trace that unite the countries present in the lives of these athletes.

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