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Fontes, Paulo.

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Futebol Amador e a “cidade dos trabalhadores”: São Paulo, 1945-1964

Paulo Fontes

Between the decades of 1940s and 1970s, the city of São Paulo in Brazil underwent an extraordinary urban and industrial expansion, matched by very few cities in the world. From a population of 1,3 million people in 1940 to around 8,5 million people in 1980, São Paulo became the largest city in Brazil and one of the largest in the whole world. It certainly is one of the best international examples of the urban growth in an era marked by the import substitution industrialization and national-developmentalists policies. This expansion posed various challenges to the workers, both at the workplaces and in their everyday life on the neighbourhoods of the city.

The pattern of urbanization of São Paulo during this period was called by many analysts as the “centre-periphery model” and primarily meant strong class segregation within the city space. Middle and upper-class lived in central and well-equipped districts, while the working-classes lived on the poor and mostly illegal periphery.¹ Alongside to the real estate speculation, the workers had to face frequent problems related to the absence of urban infrastructure in the city. Lack of transportation, street pavement and sanitation, as well as the absence of educational and health equipments were part of the experiences of the vast majority of the workers and their families in the new outskirts of the city.

During the 40s and 50s, the metropolitan region of São Paulo city was the scene of an accelerated and diversified industrialization and urbanization process. The region was the main one responsible for the country's high rate of industrial growth. From 1945 to 1960 Brazil's secondary sector grew at the average rate of 9.5% a year making it one of the most outstanding industrialization processes in the world for that period. In 1959 almost 50% of all factory employment in the country was concentrated in the state of São

¹ The “center-periphery model” and its class segregation features were analyzed by Kowarick, Lucio *et al* in *Social struggles and the city: the case of São Paulo* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1994). See also Teresa Caldeira's book *City of Walls, Crime, Segregation and Citizenship in São Paulo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

Paulo.² Furthermore, São Paulo's industrial growth stimulated a huge expansion of the services sector in the region opening up even more job offers and opportunities.

The transformations and intensification of the industrialization process and the diversification of the service sector changed significantly the labour market. At the same time an intense process of migration from rural areas also took place, profoundly altering the social and cultural composition of the working class. The great workers' migration from rural areas to the cities is one of the most important events of the Brazilian social history in the second half of the 20th century. It is believed that between 1950 and 1980 more than 38 million people left the countryside, shifting deeply Brazil's social and economical features.

The metropolitan region of Sao Paulo and the Northeast region of Brazil had special importance in this process. Sao Paulo became the place of residence and work for millions of northeasters. Between 1950 and 1970, the city grew three times in size, while the north-eastern population in Sao Paulo increased ten times. The 50s were the period in which the migration impact was more intense featuring the northeasters as the majority of the workers in the city's new factories.³

Politically, this period, particularly between 1945 e 1964, was marked by new forms of relationship between the workers and the State, generally named by the concept of "populism", establishing a field of conflicts and reciprocities in a dynamic system of alliances and disputes between theses social actors. In the city of São Paulo, such political system was based not only on the traditional *trabalhismo* of Getulio Vargas, but also around the powerful local leadership of politicians like Adhemar de Barros and Janio Quadros. Besides, the Community Party, although illegal most of the time, kept active and relatively influential among the workers and its institutions in different moments.⁴

² See Colistete, Renato. *Labour relations and industrial performance in Brazil: greater São Paulo, 1945-1960* (New York : Palgrave in association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 2001, especially chapter 1.

³ See among others, Fontes, Paulo. *Comunidade Operária, Migração Nordestina e Lutas Sociais. São Miguel Paulista (1945-1966)* (PhD Thesis, History Department, UNICAMP, Campinas, 2002); Negro, Antonio Luigi. *Linhas de montagem : o industrialismo nacional-desenvolvimentista e a sindicalização dos trabalhadores (1945-1978)* (São Paulo: FAPESP : Boitempo Editorial, 2004) and Neto, Murilo Leal Pereira. *A reinvenção do trabalhismo no "vulcão do inferno". Um estudo sobre metalúrgicos e têxteis de São Paulo: A fábrica, o bairro, o sindicato e a política (1950-1964)* (PhD Thesis, History Department, USP, Sao Paulo, 2005).

⁴ There is a huge and diverse literature on populism. Among others, see Weffort, Francisco. *O populismo na politica brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1980; French, John. *The Brazilian workers' ABC: class*

After the 1964 military coup, and especially during the 1970s, the presence of the Catholic Church social activism in the outskirts of São Paulo had a vigorous impact both in the working-class political discourse and organization, with decisive influence in the general process of redemocratization of the country in the late 70s and beginning of the 80s.⁵

The workers expressed and faced the challenges of this era through a series of different strategies. Their social networks, based mostly in informal relationships among family, friends and member of the community, were essential for the formation of a class identity. These networks, for instance, addressed the migrants to specific cities and neighbourhoods, and, often, also to jobs in particular factories and companies. Frequently, the informal relationships between relatives and friends were still the basis for solidarity and mutual help among the workers, with important consequences for social struggles and for the local political life.⁶

These networks and informal relationship were also one of the main bases for a true “associational fever” experienced by the workers of São Paulo in this period. They formed the political and cultural organization capable of structuring and articulating collective movements. My current research, still in its initial phase, concentrates on investigating these forms of workers’ organizations in the city of São Paulo. I argue in favour of the importance of analyse this association dynamic in its relation to the emergence of new forms of expression in São Paulo politics, associated with the phenomena of populism and, after the coup of 1964, with the repression at the local level

conflict and alliances in modern São Paulo (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Gomes, Angela de Castro. *A invenção do trabalhismo* (Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Universitário de Pesquisas do Rio de Janeiro ; São Paulo, SP, Brasil : Vértice, 1988) and Jorge Ferreira (ed.). *O populismo e sua história: debate e crítica* (Rio de Janeiro : Civilização Brasileira, 2001). For a recent analysis of the political presence of Adhemar de Barros and Janio Quadros in the city of São Paulo, see Duarte, Adriano and Fontes, Paulo. “O populismo visto da periferia: adhemarismo e janismo nos bairros da Mooca e São Miguel Paulista (1947-1953)”, *Cadernos AEL* v. 11, n.20/21, Campinas: IFCH-UNICAMP, 2004.

⁵ See Mainwaring, Scott. *The Catholic Church and politics in Brazil, 1916-1985* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986) and Sader, Eder. *Quando novos personagens entraram em cena: experiências, falas e lutas dos trabalhadores da Grande São Paulo (1970-80)* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1988).

⁶ See, for instance the case of the 1957 generalized strike in São Paulo in Fontes, Paulo. “The ‘strike of 400,000’ and the workers’ organisation in São Paulo, Brazil, 1957”. *Socialist History*, 17, London, 2000. See also many interesting examples in Neto, Murilo Leal Pereira. *Op.cit* and Duarte, Adriano. *Cultura popular e cultura política no apos-guerra. Redemocratizacao, populismo e desenvolvimentismo no bairro da Mooca, 1942-1973*. (PhD Thesis, History Department, UNICAMP, Campinas, 2002).

and the emergence of other political actors.⁷ The connections between popular culture and political culture are one of the particular interest. The diversity and heterogeneity of these organizations clearly expressed the formative process of a multi-faceted class, with different cultural and communitarian values. However, in spite of this organizational multiplicity, frequently is possible to find spaces of articulation and integration, not only in critical moments such as strikes and protests, but also in the everyday life of the working-class neighbourhoods. In addition, I also intend to consider this process comparatively as much as possible with other industrial metropolises in Latin America, particularly Buenos Aires, placing this research in a broader context of a global labour and social history.⁸

In this short and incipient presentation, I will focus on the amateur football clubs in the workers' districts of the city mainly during the 1940s and 1950s. Widespread in São Paulo during this period, these clubs are fascinating examples of the connections between popular leisure and political and social organization. They were often associated with local political forces, companies or other institutions, such as trade unions, and frequently played an important role in the creation and support of neighbourhood and dwellers associations.

These clubs were also spaces of popular entertainment and recreation. Beyond the matches themselves, the clubs organized picnics, parties, balls and other activities, including not only the sportsmen, but also women, children and whole families. Additionally, the study of such associations can as well provide interesting clues to understand the lines of identity and diversity among the working-class in São Paulo in this period. Different neighbourhoods and districts, racial and ethnic divisions, regional origins, diverse professions and workplaces, all these factors were important in the organization and in the routine of these soccer clubs.

Amateur football has a long history as a popular leisure practice in São Paulo. Introduced through the interaction of commercial sectors of the English community with

⁷ The continuities and discontinuities between the discourses and practices of the popular movements before and after 1964 will be emphasised in this research, challenging both the date of 1964 as a definitive “water divisor” in political and social terms and the vision that overstress the novelty of the social movements in the 1970s.

⁸ For an overview of the literature on the history of soccer in Brazil, see Lopes, Jose Sergio Leite. “Classe, Etnicidade e Cor na Formação do Futebol Brasileiro” in Batalha, Claudio et all. *Culturas de classe. Identidade e diversidade na formação do operariado* (Campinas, Edunicamp, 2004).

the local population and cultivated in aristocratic sports clubs of Brazilian/ English elites, football quickly spread around the different neighbourhoods of the city, being mastered by the working class who increased included the sport in their recreational menu. The move to professionalism in the early 30s even boosted the football popularity, not only as a sport to be seen, but also as a leisure practice. Analysts conservatively calculate there were around 3.000 football amateur popular clubs in São Paulo, involving a very significant part of the working-class population during that decade.⁹

Many of these clubs were related to the new factories and workplaces of the city. Particularly, the textile industrialists promoted the creation of companies clubs as part of a broader paternalistic industrial relation policy.¹⁰ Therefore, the management concerns to discipline and to control the working-class leisure time. The historian Barbara Weinstein demonstrated how industrialists' organizations such as SESI (the Industrial Social Service) were interested, during the 50s, in disciplining the amateur football. By offering technical and financial support to the companies clubs, SESI seek to boost "a climate of (...) good relations between the footballers and the management", taking care to avoid the "excessive enthusiasm", which was considered a "negative aspect of the amateur sport".¹¹

However, it was the working-class neighbourhoods the locus per excellence for the practice and creation of popular football clubs. In the first half of the century, thousands of these clubs were created in the industrial districts of the city, such as Brás, Mooca, Belenzinho, Bom Retiro, Lapa, among others. This first industrial belt of São Paulo was located near to the main rivers and rail lines of the city, with plenty low and flat land alongside the watercourses. It was in these spaces that the working-class practice of football proliferated. These peculiar conditions helped to popularize the term *lea football* (futebol de várzea) for the amateur practice of soccer.

Frequently stigmatized by the ruling classes and the police as a space for disorder and violence, the *lea football* consolidate itself as the most popular leisure practice in the

⁹ See Cavalcanti, Claudio. *As lutas e os sonhos. Um estudo sobre os trabalhadores de São Paulo nos anos 30*. PhD. Thesis, Department of Sociology, Universidade de São Paulo, 1996, pp. 265, 266.

¹⁰ See Antunes, Fátima. *Futebol de fábrica em São Paulo*. Master thesis, Department of Sociology, 1992.

¹¹ See Weinstein, Barbara. *(Re) formação da classe trabalhadora no Brasil (1920-1946)*. São Paulo, Cortez, 1999, pp. 258-9.

districts of the city and by the 30s and 40s, gained some recognition and legitimization. Until the 1970s, there had been an extensive coverage on amateur football thorough the city in the popular and sportive press and some matches were seen by very impressive crowds. As Eclea Bosi showed, the *lea football* is one of the most common remembrances as leisure practices for old São Paulo residents.¹²

After the World War II the amateur football accompanied the growth of the city and spread out around the new working-class districts in the outskirts. In every neighbourhood, dozens of different clubs and teams were created and constituted a fundamental aspect of the working-class leisure and associational practice. As a contemporary observer stated: “the football is the recreational and leisure form per excellence and more accessible for (...) the paulista people”.¹³

The quantity of football pitches in São Paulo during the 50s is a clear indicator of the widespread diffusion of the sport. However, while in the original industrial belt of the city, the real state speculation and the canalisation of the main central rivers destroyed hundreds of pitches,¹⁴ the new outskirts areas had plenty of space to the sports practice. As an old resident of the outskirts of the city recalls, “every new neighbourhood had to leave a space, a specific area for a football pitch”.¹⁵ Progressively, a geographical dislocation of the working-class sociability was taking place, altering the social conformation of the older and more central industrial areas.¹⁶

Although football was a predominant male recreation, the women could also explore the clubs as a leisure space. The sport practice was restricting to men, but it was possible to find women among the crowds who watch the matches. Many times, the game

¹² Bosi, Ecléa. *Memória e Sociedade. Lembrança de Velhos*. São Paulo, Cia das Letras, 3ª edição, 1994.

¹³ J.V. Freitas Marcondes. “Aspectos do trabalho e do lazer em São Paulo” in J.V.Marcondes e Osmar Pimentel. *São Paulo: espírito, povo, instituições*. São Paulo, Livraria Pioneira Editora, 1968, p. 358.

¹⁴ In 1954, a reader wrote a letter addressed to the Communist newspaper *Notícias de Hoje* demand more news “on the amateur football clubs which currently are facing the problem of finding pitches to play.” *Notícias de Hoje*, 07/02/1954. On the canalization of the Tietê and Tamanduateí rivers, see Seabra, Odete. *Meandros dos rios nos meandros do poder. Tietê e Pinheiros: valorização dos rios e das várzeas na cidade de São Paulo*. PhD. Thesis, Department of Geography, Universidade de São Paulo, 1987. Nowadays, the lack of football pitches is a common problem throughout the city and the main demand of amateur clubs in the periphery of São Paulo. See Hirata, Daniel. “No meio do campo: o que está em jogo no futebol de várzea?” in Telles, Vera and Cabanes, Robert (eds). *Nas tramas da cidade. Trajetórias urbanas e seus territórios*. São Paulo, Humanitas, 2007.

¹⁵ Interview with Afonso José da Silva conducted by the author.

¹⁶ On this regard see Duarte, Adriano. *Cultura popular e cultura política..* for the case of the Mooca district.

was leisure for the whole family and the gathering around the pitches was accompanied with picnics and parties. Besides, the clubs often expanded their activities beyond the football itself, by promoting balls, parties and queen and princes beauty contests.¹⁷ They could work as real centres of working-class leisure and integration, but also, it important to state; they were space for varied forms of conflicts and antagonism.

The creation and existence of these clubs were strongly associated to the informal groups that get together in their districts and places of residence. Almost every district and new concentration of people had their own club and football team. They were important for the reinforcement of the local identity. The residents frequently considered the teams a sort of representation of their “space”, their “area”, a representation of the place where they lived and shared difficulties but also solidarity with their neighbours and friends. Therefore, the clubs were also important spaces for the constitution and reinforcement of ties and bonds among specific working-class communities.¹⁸ On the other hand, the rivalry between clubs from different districts could be gigantic. It is not surprise, for instance, to note the huge participation and enthusiasm of the fans and supporters (including women and children) during the local tournaments. Maria José Jensen, for example, remembers that the team from his district, the *União Esportiva Paulista* from Vila Curuça, in the predominant North easterner migrant district of São Miguel, played against its main rival, the *Santa Cruz*, from the neighbour district of Guainazes, “it was a real party, a lot of lorries full of fans” went to the pitch.¹⁹

Beyond the localities, the clubs could express ethnic, racial identities or other working-class cleavages. There are many evidences of specific amateur football clubs for Blacks or international migrants groups, such as the Italians, Spaniards, Hungarians or Portuguese. Even among them, the clubs could refer to specific cities or regions from these countries.²⁰ After the World War II, some clubs also could reflect identities of different internal migrant groups. The *Bahia*, from the Vila Nitro Operária, in São Miguel

¹⁷ See Neto, Murilo Leal Pereira. *Op.cit.*, p. 395.

¹⁸ See Siqueira, Uassyr. *Clubes e sociedades de trabalhadores do Bom Retiro: organização, lutas e lazer em um bairro paulistano (1915-1924)*. Master Thesis. Department of History, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 2002, p. 70.

¹⁹ Interview with Maria Jenses, UNICSUL Archives.

²⁰ See Cavalcanti, Cláudio. *As lutas e os sonhos*, p. 268; Duarte, Adriano. *Cultura popular e cultura política...*, pp. 100 and 10; and Siqueira, Uassyr. *Clubes e sociedades de trabalhadores do Bom Retiro*, pp. 97 and 108.

Paulista was a good example. The baiano (originally from Bahia, a North East state) Antonio Xavier dos Santos affirms that the team was named after as a “homage to the Northeasteners from Bahia. There [at Vila Nitro Operária] there were a lot of baianos”.²¹

However, the identity exclusiveness to participate in a club could vary a lot. In the case of *Bahia*, for example, it wasn't necessary to be a baiano to play in the team. The neighbourhood, friendship relations and ties seemed to be more important to be associated to the club than other criteria. In this sense the clubs were important forms of popular organization to integrate residents of the same locality. But not just that.

The so-called football festivals (a sort of championships when clubs from distinct districts could play against each other) integrated residents from different neighbourhoods, allow them to get to know the city space and landscape and also stimulated experience exchanges. As early as in 1921, neighbourhood's tournaments were taking place. The District Championship, for instance, gathered together teams representing the main neighbourhoods of the city.²² These clubs and tournaments integrated the São Paulo working-class in a communication network which connected the different areas and spaces of the popular city.²³

The amateur football clubs are interesting examples of a network of local and voluntary associations that proliferated in the working-class districts of São Paulo in the years following the World War II. The neighborhood organizations called *Sociedades Amigos de Bairro* (Neighborhood Friends Society), for instance, were the most vocal in demanding infra-structure improvements and social equipments, such as schools and hospitals, for the depriving new working-class districts. This neighborhood associativism is a fundamental feature of the working-class culture and political action in São Paulo. In the late 50s and early 60s, neighborhood associations, trade unions and popular political parties joined forces in their demands against inflation, urban claims and for deep social reforms. It was the case, for instance of a political rally in 1960 in a distant district of São Paulo, that gathered trade unionists, local politicians and local leaderships. As the police officer, who reported the event to the social and political investigations department,

²¹ Interview with Antonio Xavier dos Santos conducted by the author.

²² Siqueira, Uassyr. *Clubes e sociedades de trabalhadores do Bom Retiro*, p. 101.

²³ Duarte, Adriano. Duarte, Adriano. *Cultura popular e cultura política...*, p. 101; Seabra, Odete. “Urbanização, bairro e vida de bairro”, *Travessia* set/dez 2000; and Jesus, Gilmar Mascarenhas. *Várzea operários e futebol*, p. 6

stated, one of the most vociferous speeches was made by Vavá, the president of *Olaria*, a local football club, who claimed against the work conditions at the local factory, the bad salaries and the high cost of living.²⁴ During the 1950s there was an increased proximity between trade unions and neighborhoods organizations, including local sports clubs. Trade unions also used football as an instrument to recruit support from its working-class audience. They also promoted championships and trade-union clubs. During a generalized strike in the city in 1957, many meetings and piquet lines organizations took place at amateur football clubs in the neighborhoods.²⁵

The supposed borders between the world of labour and the world of residence were frequently crossed by these organizations, reflecting an inclusive class perspective, which took in consideration the diverse dimensions of the workers' lives. Based on informal relations and on diverse social networks, these local associations not necessarily created permanent entities. Actually, this organization discontinuity was one of the features of these social movements, although this rarely meant absence of struggles for rights. Often leisure activities could be the basis for demanding movements. The old trade unionist Waldomiro Macedo, for instance, affirms that “many recreational associations themselves used to claim benefits for their neighborhoods.” At the football clubs, recalls Nelson Bernardo, an amateur footballer in the district of São Miguel, “it was common the lads started to talk about politics and the neighborhoods' problems.”²⁶

Nelson's brother, Tarcilio Bernardo, a council man in São Paulo during the 50s, depended very much on the local football clubs to constitute his large political base in the district of São Miguel. Through these clubs, Bernardo got information about the residents, their problems, and established a fundamental network contact during the electoral period. Local politicians from different political parties also established similar connections with the clubs. It helped them to reinforce their claims of belonging to specific localities, communities or even to the working-class.

Amateur football clubs were key elements of the working-class culture and political action during the 1950s. They were deep connected with the process of fast industrialization and urbanization in São Paulo and interacted with both the formal and

²⁴ Aesp, Deops sector (social and political police). Dossier 50-Z-591, fls.57.

²⁵ See, as an example, Aesp, Deops sector (social and political police). Dossiers 30-C-1, fls.1.641.

²⁶ Interviews with Waldomiro Macedo and Nelson Bernardo conducted by the author.

informal world of the workers at that period, helping us to understand the varied faces of the working-class lives, their solidarity and conflict aspects. The creation of new football clubs and teams by informal groups in the different districts and streets of the city also opened a space of workers relatively autonomy facing the control by the companies, the entrepreneur organizations concerned with the working-class leisure and the state. Football as a leisure practice was very much part of a dispute of different meanings, different values between the social classes in the Brazilian society, a representation struggle, which help us to understand not only the working-class culture, its sociability and cleavages, but also the classes relations in a vital moment of the city and the country history.