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Martial arts and civil society in Italy during Sixties and Seventies = Sztuki walki a społeczeństwo obywatelskie we Włoszech lat sześćdziesiątych i siedemdziesiątych XX w.

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The article begins with remembering the distrust of the socialist movement in the 20th century toward the sport and game. After that it explains this cultural distrust by all democratic political forces in Seventies invested in Italy the oriental martial arts in very drastic measure. A parliamentary debate about it is analyzed, too. The article ends in showing that, in spite of this cultural distrust, the Italian citizens associated in partnership for their passion in the oriental disciplines have known how to extend the ground of the politics over the narrow usual confinements. They introduced with their action tied up demands to the diffused mentality, to the custom, to the culture and the sensibility of the masses.

Introduction

The proletarian sporting organizations have been precocious in Europe, to already start from the German aggregations of gymnastics and bicycling existing in 1893 [Rossi 1989, 1998]. In the United States a gymnastic association was constituted even in 1850 inspired since to the Socialism in the name. It dealt with the attempt to create an autonomous sporting movement of the workers, in declared alternative to the sport of the bourgeois, as it happened in other fields what music, theater and cinema. Also through the recreational activities the workers vindicated in short the proper apparent alterity in comparison to the enemy of class [Wheeler 1978; Rossi 1988, 1998].

Yet this demand met consistent difficulty to be welcomed in the perspective of the apparatuses of the movement worker of the epoch, producing a distrust that dragged it for a lot of time instead. John Hoberman [1988, pp. 51] observed in worth that the sphere of the irrational one, therefore also the game and the sport, has been banished accordingly in its complex by the Marxism. It is also true that to react on this ground it have been the firm determination by Johan Huizinga to separate the immaterial quality of the game from every philosophy materialist, the "violent anthropological imagination" [*Ibidem*, p. 54] by José Ortega y Gasset and the criticism moved by Josef Pieper to the modernity as expression of the decline of the religion [*Ibidem*, pp. 75–76]. Criticisms therefore of strong conservative content that certain it didn't clear who contemplated too far not to the construction of a socialist society in a future. After all, the fervour for the athletic body has reached even the infatuation in the fascist ideology, that rather has expressed a doctrine aware of the body centered on the exaltation of the racial anthropology and

the virility. It is instead a datum of fact that any political and institutional form inspired to the Marxism has considered as practical virtuosos hinged on the experience of the itself in name of the prominence of the social and collective sphere. In the socialist movements, the proletariat's image – the social class able to engrave to the history the trajectory of the equality and for this same expression of the whole humanity – it coincided rather with bodies folded up by the job and by the social struggle, all anything else other than elastic and harmonic as those sporting.

Also with these premises, the organization of the sport is nevertheless gradually become during the 20th century a primary objective by the institutions of the communist countries and an important factor of the them same ideology [*Ibidem*, pp. 121–122], as in the capitalistic nations the political organisms of socialist and communist matrix have favored the birth of national sporting sections.

What has happened in Italy too, where the Catholic associations and then of other secular sectors of the society have also stirred on the same ground [Pivato 1981]. It would be nevertheless wrong to believe that the relationships among political Left and sporting movement has been linear, while the contrary one is true, that have been stamped that is by a notable complexity [Di Monte 2002]. The mass diffusion of the martial arts of oriental origin in Italy beginning from the Sixties results symbolic of this complex relationship. The parties of the Italian Left still reserved in effects scarce attention to the sporting phenomenon in its complex in the postwar period, even if the *Unione italiana sport popolare* was founded – Uisp, then *Unione italiana sport per tutti* – with a structure mainly supported by officials by communist matrix. Also granting space to the propaganda of the activities, the managership of the Left parties attributed scarce sociocultural meaning to the sporting initiatives because it didn't understand the importance of the mass sporting associations in the relationship with the territory and with the struggles workers for the social rights [Provisionato 1978].

The martial arts and the Italian democracy

The cultural distrust of the Left's parties toward the sport invested the oriental martial arts in very drastic measure, especially on the beginning of the Seventies. Japanese discipline like Jūdō, Karate and Aikidō were in stable plant in Italy respectively from the Twenties, from the immediate postwar period and from 1964: those were the only oriental disciplines enough diffused to the epoch. Cultural limits and political myopias played against martial arts, producing conjectures and equivocal but also some done concrete, in a tangle of real events and symbolic factors.

It is important to note the cultural correspondence between the Italian fascism and that Japanese, both soaked with suggestions patriotic militarists full of nostalgia for the radiant lost past. A symbolic example is the personal order by Benito Mussolini, leader of Italian fascism, to send an obelisk to Japan to celebrate the ritual suicide of the young people who in the 19th century did not want to surrender themselves to the western supremacy. In the place where this monument rises it renews still today an expiration annual rite, that celebrates the sad recurrence with clear references to the martial traditional Japanese culture [Martinelli 2003].

As it regards the most recent history, if in 1970 it was held in Japan the first world Karate championship, really astride the years Sixties and Seventies the Japanese martial arts found more and more also in Italy one organic structuring purchasing in public prestige, so that in 1971 the students of newborn Italian national Academy of Jūdō were received by Paul VI who judged their program of training as one “ascetic norm of life and study” [Toschi 2002, p. 104]. We must note that the Jūdō was partially saved from the distrust toward the martial arts thanks to his Olympic share and the clear educational intents that inspired his founder Kanō Jigorō. Its first development in military environments made it nevertheless suspect to whom during the Sixties saw how the threats to the Italian democracy originated really from the armed forces.

Some serious episodes contributed in fact to embitter in that same years the mistrust of the democrats towards the martial arts. For all reasons, the public opinion was inclined to believe those disciplines infected by a connatural complicity with the subversion practised by working reactionary strengths in the shade but rooted also in the institutions, particularly in some sectors

of the armed forces. In fact the period among 1969 and 1974 was afflicted by repeated slaughters and terrorist attacks referable to the so-called *strategy of the tension*, that is to the attempt to establish as a result a regime of police caused by the alarm created in the public opinion by such criminal actions. The contiguity among sectors of the secret services and the political formations of extreme political right – already reported during this period as the matrix of these actions – it would have been more and more subsequently documented [Crainz 2003, pp. 386].

Well, really in 1970 the writer Yukio Mishima had brought to conclusion in Japan the resounding action with which he concluded his life to the insignia of an excited militarism, saturated by symbolism referable to traditional martial culture. Besides, journalistic reports followed to the discovery of a tried coup d'état in December 1970 involved also the Aikidō, even though imprudently. In fact, the night of the tried coup d'état hundreds of conspirators were gathered in a great gym in Rome ownership of the national association of the parachutists. This side was already note as usual meeting to some among the most dangerous groups of the neofascist extremism of the time [Corsini 2004, pp. 59]. Nevertheless, in the same place – a vast district drawn by abandoned barracks – the Aikikai, principal organization for the diffusion of the Aikidō in Italy, was established. This organization, to the discovery of the tried coup d'état in 1971 and to the reopening of the inquiry in 1974, was indicated on the newspapers and on television like involved in the criminous conspiracy. In fact, in a published photo that withdrew the entry of the polyvalent gym appeared in the foreground really the plate of the association, “certainly the most beautiful and, unfortunately, the most fluorescent and illuminate than other plates” [*Cronache e attualità* 1974, p. 46]. After the protests by the Aikikai the photo did not appear anymore, but the stories about the tried coup d'état took root in the public opinion it publishes the conviction of the narrow relationships between the extreme right and the martial arts, if not really with the Aikidō [*La fabbrica del Judo atto secondo* 1976].

Besides, in 1974, the international and Italian press reported without fear of denials the Japanese multimillionaire Ryoichi Sasakawa. Incarcerated in the Thirties for activity criminal orders to the guide of a paramilitary ultranationalist formation [Boneau 2004], the magnate was described as a leading member of Japanese mafia, exponent economic among the most influential of Japan, fanatical admirer of Mussolini and leader of “a personal army of judo and karate students” [*Mussolini, banzai!* 1974, p. 49]. In fact, Sasakawa founded in 1970 to the first world organization of Karate, World Union of Karate-do Federation.

To measure the distrust towards the martial arts we must finally add the breakdowns generalized products to the image of those disciplines by the cinematography that spread after 1973, with contents full of violence surely not educational and still less referable to the search of harmony and spiritual serenity.

The martial arts in Parliament

The matter found way to be discussed in the fittest of the political centers, in a parliamentary Committee. The auditions happened at the end of 1974. To be listened by the commissioners of the Chamber of the Deputies they were the maximum executives of the sectors Jūdō and Karate working inside the Coni, the Italian section of International Olympic Committee but also in independent organizations of national level.

The commissioners asked for sporting executives about the dangerousness of Jūdō and Karate “not for the one that the practice, but for the possible damages that can derive to third” [Camera dei Deputati – Segretariato Generale 1979, p. 116]. A communist deputy said: “We have had many cases that confirm this fear; especially in the picture of the present political battle in our Country, we had cases of fascist aggression by groups belonging to gyms, by parafascist organizations, who used those disciplines to attach exponents of democratic parties” [*Ibidem*, p. 117]. A deputy belonging at central party of Christian Democracy launched in a sort of comparison with the environment of the American boxing that had been a forge of delinquency and vice. To raise the dose provided another communist deputy, who affirmed with safety that

“in a lot of these schools an education is not given finalized to the same sport and the formation of the young one, but an orientation and an education it is inculcated to turn to the aggression, to use the young people so trained not only in thughish activities in the field of the criminal acts, but of the political activities too. There are in Rome gyms finalized to actions of subversive character” [*Ibidem*, p. 118]. The same deputy arrived to affirm that was recently noted “that were trained some hooligans in some gyms really because they were able to act against the democratic institutions.” [*Ibidem*]

The consulted executives defended themselves affirming that: “Today it is fashion to say that a person has been killed by an hit of karate; before the judo entered to belong to the Olympic games, the same thing of it was said” [Camera dei Deputati – Segretariato Generale 1979, p. 126].

It is also true, nevertheless, that the martial arts, in general the oriental disciplines, have often contributed to consolidate the social fabric in the territories, where they has succeeded in taking root.

The laurels of Mars

Without generally waiting for the results of the auspicious but still today attended legislative reform of the sporting system, in Italy it has been somebody who kept on operating making to live in concrete the sport on plain manifold, from the agonism to the recreation, from the social insertion to the health, making to pulsate seriously what calls sport for everybody. Among the so many impossible experiences to be remembered in this article, it is possible to introduce one of it that certainly reflects the essence of the values that also in the least bright phases they have kept on having been driving from the Sixties to today the activity of the oriental disciplines in the Uisp, the organization sporting Italian neighbor to the political Left. If in fact the historical investigation distinguishes itself from the antiquarian harvests it is because it does not interest the past for love of its heirlooms, but to explain the changes through the individualization of moments and meaningful trials.

The oriental disciplines entered in the Uisp officially in 1972, but the bases of this movement were created before already at least ten years, with few numbers but just able to propose the presence of eight Italian judokas enrolled with the Uisp to the international meeting in Paris of May 16–17th 1964 on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of French organization of popular sport [Notiziario UISP 1963]. In 1966, the Judō occupied twenty-fourth set for percentage of membership cards on the national total of thirty-one sports [Bollettino UISP 1966, tab. 7]. However, in the forecast of the international sporting demonstrations for the celebration of the twentie anniversary of the Uisp in April 1968 it also showed up a team composed by ten judokas.

Finally, in 1972, two impassioned of Prato, border town with Florence, succeed in convincing the local executives of the sporting organization to start a center of Judō. How relates one of two empassioned, Luciano Gradi, the first tatami was set even in an old situated dance saloon below the city center of the Italian Communist Party. Later, it was directly the Commune to support the activity making a space available in a street where the discipline it is practised still today. The initiative consisted in the realization of activity purely managed directly by the Uisp with a different address from that competitive, to which was instead the action of the Coni.

Despite to persist of acute distrust towards the martial arts from the culture of the Italian Left and the same executives of the Uisp, the initiative departed from Prato it had such a success that in few months it was necessary to plan a structuring to national level [*Riunione gruppo promotore Lega Judo* 1973; *Judo Kodokan Nippo Budo* 1974, pp. 6–7]. In 1974, the first national championship of Judō was organized by Uisp in Prato, during which 280 athletes competed. After, the central worry was to develop the formation that was guaranteed organizing different national stages, also without losing sight the competitive moment. The quality of the formation was guaranteed by master Tadashi Koike’s supervision – black belt at fourteen years, then instructor of the police of Tokyo – sent in Italy in the Fifties by the Japanese authorities about Judō. Besides to work with Coni, master Koike accepted to collaborate with the Uisp, who kept then on inviting him for many years after his return in Japan.

It is interesting to underline that the local history of Judō in Prato would have given life to another important experience, still very meaningful in the city social fabric. The Commune has in fact granted some years ago a structure to a non profit association risen by that first experience on Seventies. In this structure an ample range of oriental disciplines are taught, martial arts or techniques for comfort and bodily expressiveness, but that it also works in collaboration with the public sanitary authority in the assistance to disabled persons and in the recovery of various forms of uneasiness [www.arcaprato.it]. The space is available for associations working in volunteers social actions and the area is an agorà more than to a gym. In fact, close to motor activities courses and cultural meetings are held, and the citizens can meet for discussing, to manage together sociability, to tighten jointly liable nets.

The national League of Judō and other oriental disciplines of Uisp was held in Prato in 1973, with the election of a managing group that understood representatives coming from different Italian regions [Judo Kodokan Nippo Budo 1974, pp. 6–7]. The others disciplines were Aikidō, Karate, Kendō, leaving however the open field to others.

At the end of the sporting season this League embraced 67 societies operating on the whole national territory [Archivio nazionale UISP 1974]. The newborn organism insisted from the beginning on the formative character of the interested disciplines, purely criticizing the division among their sporting aspect and that cultural that more and more it seemed to characterize the practice of these disciplines in circle Coni. The policy of League was also very careful to maintain low costs of formation, rather it is verified that really the polemic toward the high costs in Academy of Coni had represented the decisive flywheel for the fast growth of the martial arts in the Uisp [Archivio nazionale UISP 1982].

Just two years after, the new League counted 7.000 membership cards with a formative activity in continuous consolidation [Judo Kodokan Nippon Budo 1975, p. 2]. Yet, in “many committees there is still a diffused mistrust towards the companions that organize the so-called martial arts: it is a mistrust that has been deriving for years of federal monopoly and sometimes even fascist”, it complained about the national managership of the association [*L'impegno dei comitati...*, 1975]. So, a certain mentality kept on being well rooted, but the League kept on growing changing besides the name from Judō League and other similar disciplines in more correct Martial Arts League. It also continued the polemics – often sour and taken back by the national press [*La fabbrica del Judo atto secondo* 1976] – with the organism of the Coni provost to the martial arts, accused of pursuing too much a facing address the agonism and to denaturalize so the essence of art of the oriental disciplines.

The sporting year 1976–77 opened with 204 affiliated societies, that were tripled in two years [Archivio nazionale UISP 1976]. In 1978 the League counted 13.630 membership cards [Archivio nazionale UISP 1978, p. 3]. A tumultuous development even if supported by notable technical abilities that had made the League a reference for the whole environment of the Italian martial arts. In the first years Eighty, the League martial arts it overcame the 15.000 affiliate also reaching a more mature organizational consolidation. It opened a new phase in which the central objective was the improvement of the technical preparation. The development in this sense was guaranteed by some important measures: editing of a national bulletin-board of the black belts; uniformity of the methods of examination and the courses for teachers developed to regional level with a national unique program and concluded by an examination conducted by a national errand in an only annual expiration; planning of national championships embracing all categories; competitions share and international seminars; structuring of the regional organizational level in tuning with the other managing institutions of the association.

The searches of archive have returned a 1982 document, produced inside the League [Archivio nazionale UISP 1982]. The document distinguished in three phases the development of the same League. The first phase had been of start, characterized by a diffused but messy adhesion, accompanied therefore by the risk to intend not itself in the environment of the martial arts with an enough qualified presence. The second phase had involved the administrative and formative reorganization that had allowed both the qualitative growth of the technical profile and the link

between executives of League and general executives of the association. The third phase opened really then, opening to the executives of the League the new challenge of “to produce proposals that go beyond its inside confinements, in a valid perspective for the whole activity of the Martial Arts in Italy, and therefore able to recompose and to understand the sense of the different experiences through which is filtered in West, and in our country particularly, this complex of oriental disciplines” [*Ibidem*, p. 4].

That challenge was still picked with imagination and tenacity with a rich run of future perspectives. In the last ten years a lot of oriental disciplines are organized by Uisp – Gatka, Taekwondo, Taijiquan, etc. – but some very distant from the techniques of fight as Qigong, Shiatsu, Yoga. The oriental disciplines in the Uisp pick up by now around 40,000 membership cards, with a careful offer more and more to the question of wellbeing and sense that the civil society turns to the sporting organizations. In fact, in 1998, the Martial Arts League changed his name one more time in Oriental Disciplines Area.

In conclusion, we can see that the citizens associated in partnership for their passion in the oriental disciplines have known how to extend the ground of the politics over the narrow usual confinements, introducing with their action tied up demands to the diffused mentality, to the custom, to the culture and the sensibility of the masses. Developing with tenacity an aware formative activity these in partnership citizens they constitute an interlocutor of great interest for political institutions, not a simple drive belt of ideologies elaborated by the political parties.

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Statement acknowledging

Sergio Raimondo states the genuineness of the following text *Martial arts and civil society in Italy during Sixties and Seventies* and agrees to publish it in “Idō – Movement for Culture”.

SUMMARY

Material

The cultural distrust toward the sport by the dominant ideology in worker’s movement in XX century – just underlined on international historiographical debate – invested the oriental martial arts in very drastic measure on the beginning of the Seventies in Italy. The article examines the experience of some associated citizens to promote oriental martial arts in a national organization of sport for all linked to Left’s parties in reference to political and cultural context of period.

Methods

The sources of article are: Acts of Italian Parliament; UISP (national association of sport for all) archive documents; oral sources; periodical press and newspapers.

Results of research

The research allows to enlighten the development of martial arts in Italian civil society.

Conclusion

The Italian citizens in Sixties and Seventies associated in partnership for their passion in the oriental disciplines introduced with their action tied up demands to the diffused mentality, to the custom, to the culture and the sensibility of the masses. They constitute an interlocutor of great interest for political institutions, not a simple drive belt of ideologies elaborated by the political parties.

Słowa kluczowe: sieci stowarzyszeniowe, obywatelstwo, wymiany kulturowe, historia sportu

STRESZCZENIE

Material

Kulturowa nieufność wobec sportu ze strony dominującej ideologii w ruchu robotniczym XX wieku – podkreślana w międzynarodowej historiograficznej debacie – wpłynęła w sposób drastyczny na orientalne sztuki walki na początku lat 70. we Włoszech. Niniejszy artykuł bada doświadczenia niektórych zrzeszonych obywateli w promowaniu sztuk walki w ramach narodowych organizacji sportowych powiązanych z partiami lewicowymi w odniesieniu do kontekstu politycznego i kulturowego tamtego okresu.

Metody

Materiały źródłowe do artykułu obejmują: ustawy włoskiego parlamentu, archiwalne dokumenty UISP (narodowe stowarzyszenie sportu dla wszystkich), przekazy ustne, prasę.

Wyniki badań

Badania te rzucają światło na rozwój sztuk walki w społeczeństwie włoskim.