



### BRAZILIAN WOMEN IN OLYMPIC COMBAT SPORTS: A DISCUSSION THROUGH LIFE STORIES

**Abstract** – With the rise of the Olympic Games (OG) in the Modern Era, there could be seen an increasing opportunity to promote encounters between countries, encouraged by sports dispute. In this process, the participation of Brazilian women has been recognized and reconfigured, while facing a double challenge: to be a sportsperson in Brazil, as a woman. This study aims to understand how female participation in Olympic Combat Sports (OCS) – Judo, Boxing, Olympic Fighting, Fencing, Taekwondo and Karate) occurred, notably from the life stories of the athletes. As a methodological procedure, this research was carried out based on the reports in Atletas Olímpicos Brasileiros (Brazilian Olympic Athletes) by Katia Rubio, adding some narratives brought in through other studies that addressed the theme of women in the OCS. Throughout the analysis we note similarities and differences among the modalities. All of them converge on the important challenges that women have taken in the process of conquering spaces in a predominantly masculine field, like sports in general or in the Martial Arts & Combat Sports (MA&CS) domain. The discussion corroborate most of the findings in the literature, however research is needed to focus on the pre-reflexive and embodied dimension of their experiences or in the daily life of their practices, which would allow us to point out if these differences can be confirmed beyond their discourses. These aspects also highlight the need for new research at gender issues in its transcultural, racial and transsexuality nuances, as well as in other MA&CS. Further studies on women in sports are expected, especially those done by women themselves and/or considering their reports, narratives and experiences, seeking to break a historical process in which both science and sport are made by men, and women have played the role of object or spectators, and rarely of an active subject.

**Keywords:** martial arts; combat sports; gender; life stories; narratives.

### MULHERES BRASILEIRAS NOS ESPORTES DE COMBATE OLÍMPICOS: UMA DISCUSSÃO ATRAVÉS DAS HISTÓRIAS DE VIDA

**Resumo** - Com o surgimento dos Jogos Olímpicos (OG) na Era Moderna, percebeu-se uma oportunidade cada vez maior de promover encontros entre países, estimulados pela disputa esportiva. Nesse processo, a participação da mulher brasileira foi reconhecida e reconfigurada, diante de um duplo desafio: ser esportista no Brasil, como mulher. Este estudo tem como objetivo compreender como se deu a participação feminina nos Esportes de Combate Olímpicos (OCS) – Judô, Boxe, Luta Olímpica, Esgrima, Taekwondo e Karatê, notadamente a partir das histórias de vida das atletas. Como procedimento metodológico, esta pesquisa foi realizada a partir dos relatos em Atletas Olímpicos Brasileiros, de Katia Rubio, agregando algumas narrativas trazidas por outros estudos que abordavam a temática da mulher nos OCS. Ao longo da análise, notamos semelhanças e diferenças entre as modalidades. Todas convergem para os importantes desafios que as mulheres têm assumido no processo de conquista de espaços num campo predominantemente masculino, como os desportos em geral ou no domínio das Artes Marciais e Esportes de Combate (MA&CS). A discussão corrobora com grande parte dos achados da literatura, porém é preciso pesquisas que foquem na dimensão pré-reflexiva e corporificada de suas vivências ou no cotidiano de suas práticas, o que nos permitiria apontar se essas diferenças podem ser confirmadas além de seus discursos. Esses aspectos também destacam a necessidade de novas pesquisas sobre as questões de gênero em suas nuances transculturais, raciais e transexuais, assim como em outras MA&CS. Espera-se novos estudos sobre mulheres no esporte, principalmente realizados pelas próprias mulheres e/ou considerando seus relatos, narrativas e vivências, buscando romper um processo histórico em que a ciência e o esporte são feitos por homens, e as mulheres têm desempenhado o papel de objeto ou espectadoras, raramente de sujeito ativo.

**Palavras-chave:** artes marciais; esportes de combate; gênero; histórias de vida; narrativas.

### MUJERES BRASILEÑAS EN DEPORTES DE COMBATE OLÍMPICO: UNA DISCUSIÓN A TRAVÉS DE HISTORIAS DE VIDA

**Resumen** - Con el auge de los Juegos Olímpicos (GO) en la Era Moderna, se vislumbraba una oportunidad cada vez mayor para promover encuentros entre países, alentados por la disputa deportiva. En este proceso, la participación de la mujer brasileña ha sido reconocida y reconfigurada, frente a un doble desafío: ser deportista en Brasil, como mujer. Este estudio tiene como objetivo comprender cómo ocurrió la participación femenina en deportes de combate olímpicos (OCS) – judo, boxeo, lucha olímpica, esgrima, taekwondo y karate), en particular a partir de las historias de vida de las atletas. Como procedimiento metodológico, esta investigación se realizó a partir de los reportes en Atletas Olímpicos Brasileiros, de Katia Rubio, agregando narrativas aportadas a través de otros estudios que abordaron el tema de la mujer en las OCS. A lo largo del análisis notamos similitudes y diferencias entre las modalidades. Todos confluyen en los importantes desafíos que las mujeres han asumido en el proceso de conquista de espacios en un ámbito predominantemente masculino, como el deporte en general o en el ámbito de las Artes Marciales y Deportes de Combate (MA&CS). La discusión corrobora la mayoría de los hallazgos en la literatura, sin embargo, se requiere investigación que se enfoque en la dimensión pre-reflexiva y corporificada de sus vivencias o en la cotidianidad de sus prácticas, lo que nos permitiría señalar si estas diferencias pueden ser confirmadas más allá de sus discursos. Estos aspectos también resaltan la necesidad de nuevas investigaciones en temas de género en sus matices transculturales, raciales y de transexualidad, así como en otras MA&CS. Se esperan más estudios sobre la mujer en el deporte, especialmente los realizados por las propias mujeres y / o considerando sus relatos, narrativas y vivencias, buscando romper un proceso histórico en el que tanto la ciencia como el deporte son hechos por hombres, y las mujeres han jugado el papel de objeto o espectadoras, y rara vez de sujeto activo.

**Palabras-clave:** artes marciales; deportes de combate; género; historias de vida; narrativas.

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## Introduction

With the rise of the Olympic Games (OG) in the Modern Era in 1896, there could be seen an increasing opportunity to promote encounters between countries, encouraged by sports dispute. In this process, the participation of Brazilian women has been recognized and reconfigured, although, in the scope of the OG, they started participating in 1932, in its tenth edition. Regarding the Olympic medals won by Brazilian women, the first came only in 1996, which made women more visible as athletes in Brazil. The absence or precariousness of support, structure, resources and narratives of little interest and credibility with regard to sports have been the many obstacles that permeate the history of Brazilian women's participation in the many editions in which they have managed to compete.

More than the participations in the OG, it is relevant to consider the history that precedes – and continues to color – the first women's participations, including the barriers they face, which do not appear to male competitors. Without any exaggeration, it is through their own trajectories, marked by overcoming personal and social barriers, that emerge lessons of achievement that contradict the circumstances of a country where, historically, it is not uncommon for sport to be treated under the stereotype of elite activity or that of vagabonds<sup>1</sup>. In this sense, Brazilian Olympic athletes face a double challenge: to be a sportsperson in Brazil, as a woman. We will briefly discuss the history of Brazilian women in sports, and then explore their participation in the field of Olympic combat sports (OCS).

Maria Lenk in Los Angeles 1932 was the first Brazilian woman to compete in an Olympic edition. From then on, Brazilians began to follow the world of Olympic sports from the perspective of women's presence in competitions that demand and exhibit their techniques, skills, abilities, as well as often hiding the investments, daring, resistances, accommodations, cordialities, limitations and also disenchantments<sup>2</sup>.

Considering sporting context as deeply related to social and cultural issues of a given period, the entry of women into competitive sports follows this movement of the transformation of gender roles<sup>3</sup>. It is a process which did not happen without adversity, whether through indifference, disdain or explicit opposition, as these women were proposing to enter a domain privileged to men.

If these discussions took place throughout the twentieth century in the field of martial arts and combat sports (MA&CS), it seems they are extended into the first decades of the 21st Century. Although it does not appear in the framework of Olympic modalities, the most recent and controversial example is that of MMA (Mixed Martial Arts), a spectacularized mode of combat whose authorized physical contact is so intense and potentially harmful that, in addition to how it is portrayed in the media in general, alludes to what appears to be the most unrestrained violence. Among the biggest organizations of this modality, the largest one, the UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship), only began to count on women's fights from 2013, after years of resistance to what was considered 'not something for women'. In the daily practice and institutional management of MA&CS, environments in which hierarchies are strongly established, the positions that imply greater power, such as that of teachers, masters, coaches or leaders, are rarely occupied by women<sup>4</sup>.

We note that virility and sport have found their first transformation as they could no longer be attached exclusively to the male body, since women took part in this space, bringing to the motor expression of their bodies a renewed and questioned virility. In this context, the OCS (Judo, Boxing, Olympic Fighting, Fencing, Taekwondo and, now, Karate that debuts in Tokyo 2020) bring along important issues to be discussed in contemporary social, historical, and psychological spheres, among others<sup>5</sup>.

In addition, according to Telles<sup>4</sup>, throughout the history of women's participation in MA&CS, we perceive constant discriminatory statements, sometimes based on scientific discourse (women would be weaker, less agile, etc.). It remains to be seen how these processes of female participation occurred in each of these modalities, as it will be shown next, notably from the life stories of these athletes. As a methodological procedure, this research was initially carried out based on the reports contained in the book *Atletas Olímpicos Brasileiros* (Brazilian Olympic Athletes) by author Katia Rubio<sup>1</sup>, adding some narratives brought in through other studies that addressed the theme of women in the OCS.

### **Women in Olympic boxing**

Boxing was contested only by men until the 2008 Olympics. It was present in all editions since St. Louis in 1904, with the exception of the Stockholm 1912 Olympic

Games (when a Swedish law banned the practice of Boxing). Women began to have their space as of the IOC's approval in 2009, which was favorable to the inclusion of the female category in the London Olympics, which occurred in 2012<sup>6</sup>. However, while men had ten weight categories, women debuted with only three. It was also a controversial beginning, since the obligation of skirts in the female categories was tested, however without success. In addition, in professional Boxing rules, different from those of Olympic Boxing, the knockout was allowed in women's boxing only in 1987<sup>4</sup>.

In Brazil we can mention three athletes of this modality that were highlighted in the study of Rubio<sup>1</sup>: Adriana Araújo, Érica Matos and Roseli Feitosa. The slightly advanced age for her to start practicing Boxing, at 18 years old, did not stop Adriana from winning several titles. From Salvador, Bahia, her first OG participation coincided with the debut of the women's category in London 2012, where she earned a bronze medal, the country's first medal in women's boxing. Adriana also competed in Rio 2016, with no medals. Andreia Bandeira was another important boxer in the recent history of the Brazilian Boxing, also representing the country in this last edition of the OG, reaching the quarterfinals.

Taking into account the pedagogical and political dimensions of the sports environment, disputed by powers and knowledge, it is understood that Adriana's life story and her struggles affirm the existence of expressions and representations of femininities which are distinct from the hegemonic ones. Moreover, the sporting environment in which they are immersed, the world of boxing, not only influences their own motor and expressive behaviors, but also affects their personal opinions and beliefs and thus plays a social role in the construction and representation of possible femininities<sup>7</sup>.

According to Wacquant<sup>8</sup>, in this eminently masculine space\*, women like Adriana, Andreia, Érica and Roseli construct their stories and end up provoking a struggle for power within this sports field. The political sphere ends up being reordered with the increasingly significant presence of women in an environment historically relevant to men. We highlight the social actors or, as Elias and Scotso<sup>9</sup> suggest, the established ones,

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\* "The training room is an eminently masculine space, in which the intrusion of the female gender is tolerated only to the extent that it remains incidental: Boxing is for men, it is about men, it is the men. Men who fight other men to determine their value, that is, their masculinity, excluding women [...] women are not welcome to the gym, because their presence disturbs if not its good material functioning, at least the symbolic ordering of the pugilistic universe (p. 69–70).<sup>8</sup> .

personified in men, and the outsiders, represented by women, who compete for larger social spaces.

Erica dos Santos Matos, also interviewed in Rubio<sup>1</sup>, is from Salvador and started her practice with Boxing at an even older age than Adriana. At 22 years old, she encountered the modality through a friend. In 2005 and with only 5 months of training she became a Brazilian champion. Her debut in the OG was along with that of the modality, in London 2012, where she finished in 9<sup>o</sup> place. Érica, like Adriana, was interviewed in a study by Fernandes et al.<sup>7</sup>: “[...] in order to understand how these bodies bring the transience and the possibilities of construction of the feminine (p. 367)”. This unravels important discussions for an understanding of the significance of female presence in OCS. After all, how do these female combat athletes interpret and react to the confrontation of the feminine with the masculine?

When answering about influences on her body and her femininity due to the technical and corporal demands of her modality, Adriana reported she does not perceive such a relationship. In her opinion: “[...] femininity is always with women. Regardless of what she does, she will never fail to have her femininity, [...] it can be Boxing, like swimming or Judo, whether she’s fighting or not (personal communication)”. Érica made a comparison with the Walt Disney movie *The Beauty and the Beast*, highlighting the existence of two characters, one inside the ring and another outside it: “up there I am the beast and down here I am the beauty (personal communication)”, both sentences presented in Fernandes et al.<sup>7</sup>.

In this context, Brazilian women boxers make a sort of dual and ambiguous arrangement: they manage to deal with these contraries, showing flexibility, despite keeping gender stereotypes demarcated, as the example of the *Beauty and the Beast* (one is only beautiful outside the ring, and one is only a beast inside it). On the other hand, there were Swedish boxers who claimed not to be respected as fighters, as if fighting was understood only as a hobby simply because they were women<sup>4</sup>. It is suggested here the relevance of carrying out cross-cultural studies on the subject.

Roseli Amaral Feitosa, contemplated in Rubio<sup>1</sup>, also began to train Boxing late, at 18 years old. Her parents were from Pernambuco, but Roseli was born and raised in the south of São Paulo city<sup>10</sup>. She won the São Paulo and Brazilian championship and is considered the first Brazilian to win a gold medal at the Amateur World Boxing

Championships. At the London Olympics in 2012, she participated in the historical women's première of Boxing. In the following year, the nightmare of her career as an athlete would begin. Roseli was cut from the Brazilian team because of conflicts with the confederation. She then tested positive on an anti-doping test, being punished with a year of suspension. These events are directly related to the depression that affected her, resulting in her withdrawal from the rings and training sessions. Roseli Feitosa lost her funding from the federal government, then administered by the recently defunct Ministry of Sport, and began working as a saleswoman in a shoe store. After a month of sales, she decided to return to training, beginning to work as a Boxing coach in gyms.

It is noticeable the influence that the practice of Boxing had on the life of these Brazilian women, bringing new opportunities, recognition, and visibility. Women can be considered in this world of combat sports as "invaders" of a space that has historically been dominated by men. Other issues, such as race, participate in this field by sharpening obstacles to sports practice<sup>11</sup>.

### **Touché: the Brazilian fencing**

According to Alves<sup>12</sup>, in the history of fencing, equality of opportunity to compete was submitted to certain conditions, since it could only be practiced by nobles<sup>†</sup>. This was modified after the French Revolution (1789-1799), when the manufacture of firearms multiplied. Later in the nineteenth century in France, laws prohibiting the carrying of any weapon, including a sword, contributed to the reduction of military activities, as well as to its loss of usefulness on a daily basis by becoming 'merely' a hobby. Thus, reduced to an amusement, fencing has become increasingly practiced in clubs and weapons rooms and, in some contexts, as a military exercise, even with the rise of firearms and laws of restrictions. This contributed to its peak in the aspects of fencing theory reaching significant levels of perfection until arriving in contemporaneity<sup>12</sup>.

Fencing is also associated with some studies in psychology in which the control of emotions and more civilized behaviors were embraced. In the eighteenth century,

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<sup>†</sup> According to Mattoso<sup>40</sup>, "nobility means, above all, the capacity to effectively exercise the seigniorial powers, that is, the power to judge, to collect taxes, to command people with weapons and to exercise authority. This capacity does not result from a delegation of royal power; it is acquired by birth; therefore, when one of these powers is not effectively exercised, as it is the case of the landless knights, it is enough to acquire some land domain in order to have the right to exercise them all (p. 13)".

fencing schools served to educate the behaviors and gestures of their practitioners, helping their movements to be contained, becoming more effeminate<sup>14</sup>. The movements were also more detailed (well-executed) and elegant (attractive) with lighter and more delicate weapons, all conditioned to a teaching that valued morality and grace<sup>12</sup>.

In the first edition of the modern OG, in Athens 1896, most of the participants were nobles. Historical documents show that the participation of women in this modality is prior to the OG, but they could only compete from 1924 on, in the foil category. Equity between genders would only happen later, in Athens 2004, when the female saber was added. An important feature in the programming of this sport is that since 2008 the team tournaments take turns. Thus, one of the categories is left out in both the masculine and the feminine category. In Brazil we can mention three athletes who stood out in the history of Fencing in our country, from Rubio<sup>1</sup>: Élora Pattaro, Hilda Puttkammer and Maju Herklotz.

According to Farah<sup>14</sup>, Élora is from São Paulo city and a large part of her travels were financed by the Lottery which was reverted by the Brazilian Olympic Committee. Her biggest achievement was to become a world vice-champion in 2003. She also managed to get a good place in the Pan-American Games, ranking 4th in Santo Domingo in 2004. In her curriculum there is also the participation in the Olympics in Athens 2004, at 18 years old.

Going back in time, we find in the history of Hilda Von Puttkammer the pioneering of Brazilian fencers in the OG. She was affiliated to the Athletico Paulistano Club, becoming champion in 1929, at 17 years old. Hilda was the first South American woman to compete in fencing in the OG, participating for the first time in 1936 in Berlin<sup>1</sup>. In this process, some women understood that the field of sport was also a field of political struggle

Aware of the importance of a female presence, she then led a movement to organize selections so that another athlete would go in her place. This attitude, considered a rebellion, cost her a ban from the Olympic sport, but she was welcomed by her club, where she assumed the position of honorary director of the sport (w/p.)<sup>15</sup>.

We perceive with this history the need to value women through their political acts, although some agents considered them to be transgressors. It is worth emphasizing the

importance of such acts to occur collectively, especially given the difficulty of collective mobilization of women from the sports environment. Menesson<sup>16</sup> warns that it is often more common for female athletes to feel closer to sportsmen than to non-sportswomen, usually from different backgrounds.

Maju Herklotz met Fencing through a colleague at school. Her trainings were initially in the Paulista Federation of Fencing and she reported not liking to compete. She participated in the Winnipeg Pan-American Games in 1999 and was a bronze medalist at the South American Games in Rio de Janeiro in 2002. She also attended the Pan American Games in Santo Domingo in 2003 and competed in the Athens OG in 2004. She retired from competitions in 2008, when she founded and became president of the Brazilian Association of Fencers. Even if they are punctual, the elements of these careers' trajectories help us to understand how Fencing was structured in Brazil<sup>1</sup>.

We can approach the history of these female fencers in contrast to the social and historical status of Fencing in Brazil. Mainly practiced by the Brazilian elite, fencing in the lives of these women was tied to restricted social spaces where physicians, judges, businessmen, engineers and frequenters of the big clubs were commonly found. In Élora's life story, for example, her parents sponsored her travels to competition. We noticed, in analyzing the history of Maju, her relationship with the Pinheiros Club, where she initially learned to swim. Another common point, highlighted by Élora and Maju, is that they both trained in the Paulista Fencing Federation, which has been a pioneer institution in training great athletes. In addition to the gender stereotypes, common in the OCS, the participation of women in fencing still faces the challenge of breaking their dependence if they are located or socially inserted in a hegemonically elitist mode of sports.

In 2016, the Olympics in Rio counted on six female Brazilian fencers: Nathalie Moellhausen (individual sword and team), Rayssa Costa (individual sword and team), Taís Rochel (individual foil), Bia Bulcão (individual foil), Marta Baeza (individual saber). Brazil still does not have medalists in the modality, but it is relevant to highlight that Nathalie Moellhausen was the first Brazilian to reach the quarterfinals of fencing.

### **Brazilian judokas**

Judo is, today, the Olympic sport with the largest quantity of medals in Brazil, surpassing established sports in the country, such as soccer and volleyball, including



women's categories. Nunes<sup>17</sup> presents an overview of Brazilian Judo athletes in the OG and considers that, from 2008 in Beijing: “versus two men's medals, both at the 2010 World Championships in Tokyo and at the World Championships of 2011 in Paris, women athletes have won as many or more medals than men (p. 68-69)”<sup>17</sup>.

However, it is relevant to mention that when we look at the historical aspects of Judo, even from its modernization carried out by Jigoro Kano, we see that the presence of women in the modality is recent and still not very evident, either in the competitive field or even in the teaching field.

In the historical record of Judo, the names of disciples of Jigoro Kano are mentioned, who participated in the dissemination and popularization of the modality, both in their teaching and as excellent competitors. All men. [...] No women (p. 54)<sup>11</sup>.

According to Brum<sup>11</sup>, the history of women's judo in Brazil can be divided into three phases: the first one (1950-1979), with the ‘outlaw judokas’, who started judo under the Law 3.199/41, which prohibited practices ‘incompatible’ with women nature; the second phase (1980-2001), in which women's participation was officially permitted on national mats and their participation in competitions was encouraged; and the third moment, from 2001 on, characterized by the rise of Brazilian women's judo. In this context, projects that increase women's participation are growing and, in the Brazilian Judo Confederation (BJC), policies aimed at women's judo are no longer treated as an ‘appendix’ of the men's modality.

Under this discriminatory law, four Brazilian judo athletes participated in the 1979 South American Championship, in Uruguay, with men's names, a fact that triggered the substitution of the provision of the council. In 1985, a National Sports Reformulation Commission was created, which proposed changes in the legal structure of Brazilian sport (p. 174)<sup>18</sup>.

Regarding participation in the Olympics, female Brazilian judokas began appearing in 1992 in the OG of Barcelona, with Andréa Guedes (who also participated in 1996), Edilene Andrade (who was also in 1996), Jemima Alvez, Patrícia Bevilacqua, Rosicléia Campos (who also participated in 1996 and is the coach of the Brazilian women Judo team since 2005), Soraia André (who was part of the Judo debut as an exhibition

modality in 1988 in Seoul). In 1992, she claimed payment of funds that had been diverted by BJC and she was excluded from the national team. As a protest, she dyed her kimono in black, ending her career as an athlete and Tânia Ishii. More recently, in Beijing 2008, Ketleyn Quadros became the first Brazilian judoka to win an Olympic medal, a bronze one<sup>1</sup>.

We highlight the participation of Sarah Menezes, first Brazilian woman to win an Olympic Judo gold medal in London 2012. We also underscore the participation of Rafaela Silva, who repeated the conquest of Menezes with the gold medal in Rio 2016, and becoming the first female Brazilian judoka to obtain both the titles of world champion (in 2013) and Olympic champion. In addition to Rafaela Silva, Brazilian Judo in Rio 2016 also featured Sarah Menezes, Erika Miranda (who also competed in London 2012 and went to Beijing for the 2008 Olympic Games, but was injured before the competition), Mariana Silva (London 2012), Maria Portela (2012 and 2016), Mayra Aguiar (winning a bronze medal in both the 2012 and 2016 Olympic Games. She also participated in the 2008 edition) and Maria Suelen Altheman (who ranked 5th in 2012)<sup>1</sup>.

We mention other important names that made history in Brazilian female judo, such as Andressa Fernandes (2008), Cristhiane Parmigiano (1996 and 2000), Daniela Polzin (2004), Danielle Zangrando (1996, going to the semifinals of the tournament, and 2004), Danielli Yuri (2008), Edinanci Silva (one of the Brazilian judokas who competed for the longest time and participated in 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2008), Fabiane Hukuda (1996 and 2004, when she later moved to Austria, became naturalized and won the bronze medal in the Fukuoka tournament, an Austrian women's competition), Mariana Martins (2000), Mônica Angelucci (1988, in Seoul, when Judo participated as a modality of exhibition, reaching 5th place. She was injured on the eve of the OG 1992, in Barcelona, and could not participate, despite being selected), Priscila Marques (2000, 7th place), Tânia Ferreira (2000) and Vânia Ishii (2002 and 2004, being the sister of Tânia Ishii and they both are daughters of Chiaki Ishii, the first Olympic medalist in Brazilian Judo). They were all interviewed in Rubio's study<sup>1</sup>.

These life stories highlight some important aspects, such as gender stereotypes (characterized by what is socially expected of someone who is considered as male or female, for example, from the judgement that women cannot or should not fight); invisibility behaviors (disregarding, not paying attention to or not recording the conquest

of a certain social group – women, in this case – like the commentators of Brazilian Judo fights, who are mainly men, even if in the last editions of Olympics women have equaled and even surpassed men's category in the number of medals); and processes of weakening and mistrust, which may derive from invisibility behaviors, consisting of making it difficult or not trusting that the other is in situations of hierarchy and/or greater power – in this case, when a woman occupies these stations. Regarding this last point, Rosicléia's position in Judo is remarkable, since she is now the only woman to be a coach in a Brazilian OCS, coaching the Brazilian national team of women's Judo since 2005.

According to Souza et al.<sup>19</sup>, because they are involved in sports that do not conform to the conventional ideas of femininity, women are often questioned, either in relation to their sexual orientation, or in relation to their identity. This association may be related to symbolic power relations, as power disputes are observed between the established (men) and outsiders (women), as theorized by Elias and Scotson<sup>9</sup>. These questions arise an important debate on gender and sport<sup>19</sup>. Throughout the history of the Brazilian judo, women have overcome adversities, however prejudice still exists. Further research is needed on women in sports, especially in modalities considered more suitable for men<sup>20</sup>.

### **Brazilian Olympic wrestling**

Olympic wrestling is one of the modalities disputed in Antiquity, already in the first OG in 776 a.C.<sup>21</sup>, in a relationship with the competitions in honor of the dead heroes, such as funeral ceremonies of religious character, even in Homer, in the *Iliad*, on the occasion of the death of Patroclus<sup>‡</sup> (or *Patroklos*), games were performed to honor him. This historical fact seems to be the most accepted by specialists in the field<sup>22-24</sup>.

This event lasted five days and several cultural activities were held in parallel (festivals, musical performances and discussions). Olympia was the meeting place of the athletes, but also of philosophers, historians and lawyers. They also performed sacrifices for the gods on the altars in the sanctuary of the city<sup>24</sup>. More than two thousand years

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<sup>‡</sup> “From these Funeral Games we have a more precise idea based on the funerals of Patroclus as recorded by the Homeric poetry and archaic figurative representations which, like all funerary ceremonies in ancient Greece, corresponded to a ritual of reinvigoration of the dead and, in consequence, of the community. In this context, the meaning of the Olympic Games in ancient Greece is enriched, which in its origin, would also be enlivening the social group (p. 45)<sup>23</sup>.

later, “Athens would enter History as the first seat of the Olympic Games of the Modern Era in 1896, with the representation of thirteen countries in the dispute of 42 competitions in nine modalities, with a total of 311 athletes (p. 56)”<sup>25</sup>. However, there was no women's participation in this first edition of the OG of the Modern Era, but since 2004.

We can highlight some athletes in the last 15 years, namely: Joice Silva (obtained 2 bronze medals in Pan American Games, 2005 and 2006); Aline Ferreira (got the first medal in the Junior World Championship, becoming runner-up); Rosângela Conceição (bronze medal at the Pan American Games in Rio in 2007). In the following year, this latter participated in the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, even though she did not get medals, her presence carried a historic feat, as she was the first Brazilian to participate in the Olympic Games. This achievement also yielded the defeat of an opponent, a five-time world champion Japanese athlete, who was a favorite for the Olympic title; the athlete Gilda Maria, in 2011, won the gold medal in the Cerro Pelado tournament in Cuba, a traditional competition of the modality<sup>26</sup>.

When interviewed during the 2016 OG by Matsuki (27), Aline Silva, Gilda Oliveira and Laís Nunes reported the prejudice of those who do not know this sport. Laís, for example, points out that sport breaks down barriers, “A woman can be whatever she wants. I think nowadays this has already been broken a lot (personal communication)”. On the other hand, Aline points out that as “the Olympics is the focus of everyone's attention and we see many women shining, this is proof that a woman's place is competing. The women from Olympic Fighting have been representing very well and bringing good results to Brazil (personal communication)”. Gilda addressed another aspect: this sport is not traditional in Brazil and we got to the Olympics. I hope that more and more women will participate in our struggle (w/p)”<sup>27</sup>.

In the OG edition of Rio 2016, Joice Silva also participated in the Brazilian team, with four women and one man in Olympic wrestling. Although the competitions included Greco-Roman wrestling and freestyle wrestling, in the last OG in Rio de Janeiro, women could only compete in the freestyle modality. Still, there were no Brazilian medals at the time<sup>1</sup>.

We can consider the Brazilians Joice Souza da Silva and Rosângela Conceição pioneers of Olympic wrestling in the OG. Joice, from Rio de Janeiro, encountered Olympic wrestling through Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, which she used to practice at 19 years old.

In her experience with Olympic wrestling, Joice participated in the 2007 Pan-American Games in Rio de Janeiro and in Guadalajara in 2011, when she won the bronze medal. She participated in London 2012, achieving the twelfth ranking. Rosângela, known as 'Zanza', was born in São Leopoldo, Rio Grande do Sul. In her childhood, she practiced ballet and passed through Athletics, Handball, Volleyball and Basketball at school<sup>1</sup>.

At the age of 10 she encountered Judo and at 15 years old, she participated in a selection for the national team and in the following year, she entered the Brazilian national team. In 2000 she went to the OG of Sydney as a reserve of Edinanci Silva, a famous judoka. In 2003, seeking other opportunities, she moved to Olympic wrestling. In 2007, at the Pan American Games in Rio de Janeiro, she won the bronze medal. Following that, she went to the Beijing Olympics in 2008, being considered the first Brazilian woman in Olympic wrestling to reach the quarterfinals<sup>1</sup>.

These stories highlight an interesting phenomenon, namely, that of women practicing different MA&CS, until competing in Olympic wrestling. According to Carvalho and Souza<sup>26</sup>, the reasons for the permanence and adhesion of women who practice this sport are associated with personal fulfillment and financial reasons. Therefore, given the financial conditions for maintaining the training, the athletes remain in the sport for a longer time; thus, they end up competing, in case they are selected to compose the Brazilian Team, competitions such as the Pan American Games, World Games and the Games Olympic.

### **Brazilian women in taekwondo**

The history of Taekwondo is rooted in the Korean military. In 1955, General Choi Hong Hi, after returning to Japan, where he practiced and obtained the black belt of Shotokan style Karate, proposed the union of different schools of South Korean martial arts, standardizing them under the name Taekwondo<sup>28</sup>. According to Moenig<sup>29</sup>, between late 1930s and early 1940s, many Koreans who studied or worked in Japan had some contact with karate.

With the expansion of Japanese imperialism during the first half of the 20th century, Korea was one of the first countries to be occupied by Japan in 1910 (30). In this context, there were several exchanges of knowledge, and the Koreans had the opportunity

to train Japanese martial arts. Many of them went to mainland Japan for this, as Moenig<sup>29</sup> reported.

The philosophical values and guiding principles of Taekwondo that we know today were also established at that time: courtesy, integrity, perseverance, self-control, indomitable spirit<sup>31</sup>. In 1964, there was the establishment of the Korean Taekwondo Association, as well as the first world championship in its history<sup>32</sup>. In 1970, it was introduced in Brazil. Its recognition by the IOC in 1980 paved the way for the affirmation, consolidation and future establishment of Taekwondo in the sports field of the OG. This historic moment was an important milestone for this modality, legitimating legal mechanisms that collaborated with the existence of such rising sports field<sup>28,33</sup>.

There have been several attempts for Taekwondo to be included as an Olympic modality. In Seoul 1988 and Barcelona 1992 this modality was present as a demonstration sport, thus not counting for the table of medals. Its official debut in the OG therefore took place only in Sydney 2000. We can consider the following Brazilians as pioneers of women's Taekwondo in the OG: Carmen Silva, Débora Nunes and Natália Falavigna.

According to Rubio<sup>1</sup>, Carmen began her relationship with Taekwondo at the age of 12, motivated by her brother. Born in Londrina, Paraná, she participated in an international competition for the first time fighting for the Brazilian junior team in 1995. In 1997, she reached the national team, finishing second in the South American Championship. She conquered a spot in the OG of Sydney in 2000. In 2002 she ended up winning a bronze medal in the Japan World Cup, and she was also South American champion. Debora Fernanda da Silva Nunes was born in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul. She was bullied during her childhood at school, which led her mother to enroll her in Taekwondo classes as her neighbor's training in a garage had already drawn her attention to the sport.

Thus, following the example of Carmen, at 12 years old she began to train Taekwondo. When she was 20 years old, she moved to São Paulo. Subsequently, she participated in the Pan American Games of Rio 2007, and in that same year she won the trials to compose the Brazilian national team that would go to the OG of Beijing 2008. Even with a knee injury, occurred days before the OG, she competed until the dispute of third place. She ended up losing the bronze medal at the golden point<sup>1</sup>.

Natália Falavigna was born in Maringá, Paraná, but she was raised in Londrina. At the age of 14, through a friend's invitation, she began her training in taekwondo. At 16 years old, she became a junior world champion. In 2004 she earned a spot to compete in the Olympics in Athens 2004, ranking 4th. She then decided to better reorganize her training schedule for the next OG, which would take place in Beijing in 2008. She decided to put together a multidisciplinary team to support her. Thus, she conquered many important titles, reaching her peak with the conquest of an Olympic medal in Beijing. In 2005 she was world champion, in 2007 she got silver in the Pan American Games in Rio de Janeiro, and in 2008 she obtained the bronze medal in Beijing. Falavigna still participated in London 2012, this time without a medal. The three athletes mentioned here (Carmen, Débora and Natália) have a degree in Physical Education and work with Taekwondo today, either as coaches, or as Falavigna, in the promotion of sports talents<sup>1</sup>.

Finally, when we go back to the most recent edition of the OG, in Rio de Janeiro, in 2016, Brazil had the participation of the taekwondokas Iris Tang Sing and Julia Vasconcelos, both without Olympic medals.

### **Tokyo 2020<sup>§</sup> and karate: a Japanese promise**

Since its departure from the island of Okinawa in the 19th century, as a Chinese martial art with Chinese terminological elements, Karate has transformed and continues to be transformed, deriving different styles and even influencing the emergence of other forms of combat, such as the full contact<sup>34</sup>. Its historical trajectory goes from the japanization and then through the sportization and globalization processes of its practice as a martial art and a combat sport<sup>35</sup>.

The inclusion of Karate as an Olympic modality was accompanied by intense controversy not only regarding the rules that should predominate, but also the benefits of having this martial art join into the OCS<sup>36</sup>. If, on the one hand, its debut as an exhibition modality<sup>\*\*</sup> in Tokyo 2020 may increase the interest and participation of women in Karate,

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<sup>§</sup> Karate's debut is scheduled for 2021 (until the publication of this book), due to the postponement of OG because of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19).

<sup>\*\*</sup>There will be eight categories: both the male and the female will have the competition of kata (forms) and kumite (fighting), two athletes for kata (one male and one female) and six athletes for kumite (three male and three female), that is, each country can send up to eight participants. Between July 2, 2018 and June 30, 2020, qualifications will be made to compose the Brazilian team. Also, in the OG each category will have 10 athletes of different nationalities for the dispute of medals. Countries may not have more than one representative per weight category (valid only for fights – kumite). With regard to the vacancies, the athletes

on the other hand it is relevant that we consider the strong possibility of not having this modality in the next OG: in the list presented by the organization of the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, Karate is not among the sports presented, giving way to Breakdance.

It is important to highlight that Karate has been looking for its Olympic spot for a long time. According to Lopes<sup>37</sup>, one of the variables that contribute to this statement is the fact that Karate is among the official modalities in the Pan American Games. From 1995 to 2015 the female Karate team from Brazil achieved a total of 14 (fourteen) medals in Pan American Games, counting 5 (five) gold medals, 4 (four) silver and 5 (five) bronze medals.

To think about these women in Karate is also thinking about social relations and the position they occupy in society. According to Oliveira, Telles and Barreira<sup>38</sup>, this modality is gaining space in several sectors (media, social and governmental projects, educational institutions, armed forces among others). When we look at women's insertion in Karate history, especially in the first Japan Karate Association (JKA) championships, we realized that they happened in the same period as feminist movements gained force in the 20th century.

The first Karate championship was held in October 1957 in Japan, months after the death of Gichin Funakoshi, considered the 'father of modern karate'. However, the first female categories only started after 1974 and strictly with the division of kata. Only in 1985 the female kumite division began<sup>38,39</sup>.

In fact, there were several achievements that women earned throughout this process of Karate history as a sport in the world. However, many challenges remain. Japan, for example, has projects that seek to increase the number of female Karate instructors (still meek compared to that of men), which would favor the deconstruction of the stereotype of MA&CS as a masculine field. On the other hand, according to Telles<sup>4</sup>, it is necessary to demystify such themes as they have invariably always been in this environment, being more or less effervescent depending on the historical and social context approached. Discrimination plays a key role in this context, as it permeates power relations through expected behaviors (male and female). It is important to emphasize that this is not only part of the Karate or AM&EC field, but also of the sports environment,

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will be able to use the position in the ranking, the qualification tournament or the continental representation combined with the ranking<sup>41</sup>.



since “the question of virility appears historically linked to sports practices in general, due to the characteristics of strength, performance, among others (p. 186)”<sup>4</sup>.

### **Final considerations**

Throughout the analysis of female participation in each OCS, we note similarities and differences among the modalities. All of them, however, converge on the important challenges that women have taken in the process of conquering spaces in a predominantly masculine field, like sports in general or in the MA&CS domain. The discussions here corroborate most of the findings in the literature, with the exception of the reports of Brazilian boxers, who pointed out that they did not feel changes regarding their sports practices and the perception of femininity, which does not seem to occur in studies with Swedish boxers<sup>4</sup>. However, research is needed to focus on the pre-reflexive and embodied dimension of their experiences or in the daily life of their practices, which would allow us to point out if these differences can be confirmed beyond their discourses.

These aspects, therefore, highlight the need for new research on a topic that is far from being exhausted in its main issues, especially if we take a closer look at gender issues in its transcultural, racial and transsexuality nuances, for example. Also, it is reinforced that this study was conducted focusing on the Olympic modalities of combat sports, with some issues which cannot be simply generalized to other MA&CS, although there are obviously important points of intersection between these two fields.

As a potential outcome of this study, more research on women in sports are expected, especially those done by women themselves and/or considering their reports, narratives and experiences, seeking to break a historical process in which both science and sport are made by men, and women have played the role of object or spectators, and rarely of an active subject.

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