

Power, Choreography, and Gymnastics: Assembling the Ideal Citizen through Bodily Practices to Consolidate Power

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.909000199>

Received: 09 September 2025; Accepted: 15 September 2025; Published: 04 October 2025

ABSTRACT

This paper offers a historical overview of how different regimes have shaped the ideal citizen through bodily practices incorporated into educational projects, focusing on elements of cultural training such as dance and gymnastics. Through a comparative historical approach, this study reveals key patterns in the construction of the ideal citizen through bodily practices and explores how the body has been used as a tool for expression, control and social transformation. The cases analyzed cover a broad ideological and chronological range, facilitating a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, including Ancient Greece, the French Revolution, the National Socialist and Marxist-Leninist regimes, as well as Bolivia's transformations in the 1950s and the government of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS-IPSP¹) from 2009 to 2019. Additionally, the article includes audiovisual sources accessible via links, which enable readers to visually engage with the historical material and thereby enrich their comprehension of the issues analyzed. This study builds upon and expands a section of a broader research project entitled *The Choreography of Power: An Analysis of Patriotic Spectacles through the Bolivian Case*, which examines highly planned and choreographed patriotic spectacles designed to exalt the image, narrative, and authority of specific governments or nations.

Keywords: dance; gymnastics; politics; power; bodily education; ideal citizen.

INTRODUCCIÓN

At first glance, political power, choreography, and gymnastics seem to belong to completely different spheres of human activity. Power is traditionally associated with governance, decision-making, and social control; it is manifested in political institutions and structures. Choreography, as the art of creating sequences of movements for dance, is linked to artistic and cultural expression. Gymnastics, in turn, is understood as a physical discipline focused on bodily development, health, and individual well-being. Each of these areas appears to operate under different logics and objectives. However, research on the political use of the body and movement, as well as on patriotic spectacles and bodily practices in republican educational programs reveals that these disciplines share a fundamental element: the human body as a means of expression, control, and transformation.

Research on the political use of the body and movement, still scarcely explored, is beginning to attract the attention of contemporary scholars from various approaches. Studies such as those by Guest (1996), Kant (2007), Jannarone (2015), Karina and Kant (2003), Kennedy (2016), Mickenberg (2017), Dickson (2016), and Yushkova (2022) reveal how choreography has been a tool for political expression, social control, and resistance. These studies make it possible to see the deep interconnection between bodily practices designed for "the people" and the promotion of a specific ideology through their public demonstrations.

Likewise, studies on patriotic spectacles involving gymnastics and dance demonstrations highlight their crucial role in mass mobilization and the dissemination of ideologies. Ozouf (1976) emphasizes how French revolutionary festivals aimed to create a new temporality and a new republican symbolism. Meanwhile, Mosse

¹ The Movement Towards Socialism–Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples (MAS–IPSP) governed Bolivia between 2006 and 2025, with a brief interval in 2020. In three terms, it was led by Evo Morales, and in the fourth, by Luis Arce Catacora.

(1975), who studied these spectacles from the Napoleonic Wars to Nazi Germany, analyzed the "aestheticization of politics" and the use of public rituals to create a "secular religion". In the Soviet context, Petrone (2000) examines how mass celebrations reinforced the cult of personality and the regime's mythology. Gentile (1996) proposes the concept of "political religion" to understand these phenomena, while Berezin (1997) discusses political spectacles and rituals. The latter also points out that these spectacles were not vehicles for social integration; on the contrary, they deepened divisions between those inside and those outside, as the participating groups were carefully selected.

From the perspective of education, scholars such as Soëtard (1994) and Emery (1961) remind us that cultural and bodily training responded to the idea of regenerating and/or reshaping a certain social group or society. This idea aligned with the interests of the ruling class and with nation-defense policies from the beginnings of republican education. The French Revolution, among others, applied this conception inspired by Greek education, both Athenian and Spartan. In this regard, the classic study by Jaeger (1945) on educational ideals in ancient Greece provides a broad philosophical framework for understanding the foundations of Western education.

These foundations have influenced global pedagogical thought. This is evident in the research of Pérez Monkas (2016) and Martínez (1999; 2021), who analyze the repercussions of the idea of regenerating and/or reshaping society through a civilizing discourse. This idea accompanied the education of bodies as part of educational projects in South American countries. Pérez Monkas (2016) reflects on the different bodily practices in Uruguay during the second half of the 19th century, seeking to understand the power relations that made their emergence possible. On the other hand, Martínez (1999; 2021) examines Bolivia's educational policies between 1898 and 1920, analyzing how the regeneration of "the race" was sought from an early age in certain social strata, applying civic education and bodily education in schools.

However, significant gaps persist in the research on the assemblage of the ideal citizen through choreography and gymnastics as bodily practices that allow for the consolidation of power. To contribute new perspectives on this, we carried out a necessary comparative analysis between various regimes, which reveals patterns and continuities in the use of the body as an instrument of expression, control, and social transformation. This comparative approach is crucial for a deeper and broader understanding of how these practices have been designed and adapted in different eras and political contexts, and to foster an interdisciplinary academic dialogue that has so far been limited.

Assembling The Ideal Citizen Through Bodily Practices To Consolidate Power

The Pythagoreans and the Orphics attributed a transformative power to metric structure and musical harmony. These beliefs were later reinterpreted in the context of Athenian democracy (García Gual, 1989, p. 37). The formation of the ideal citizen was closely intertwined with bodily practices that transcended the merely physical, encompassing spiritual, civic, and political dimensions. The fact that a democracy like Athens recovered the remembrance of rites and heroic myths from the early ages, as an educational foundation, and sought to use them within a democratic and egalitarian environment (García Gual, 1989, p. 37) is a significant phenomenon. However, it is not exceptional in the history of pedagogical and political practices. As will be observed below, cultural training has not lost its suitability to instill values and social norms that enable mobilization and social control. This suitability lies in its ability to ensure citizen loyalty and preserve the political regime, as well as to transmit values such as selflessness, material detachment, and even exclusive dedication to the service of the State.

In what follows, some examples are given of how the ideal citizen and their education were conceived since the times of Plato. Here are two fragments from the dialogue *Timaeus*² by the philosopher:

² This philosophical dialogue addresses topics such as the nature of the universe, the creation of the world, and the structure of society. The main characters are Timaeus, a mathematician and astronomer, and Socrates, the Athenian philosopher and Plato's teacher. While Timaeus presents a cosmology based on the idea of a demiurge who created the universe, Socrates guides the discussion around the nature of the State and its society.

SOCRATES: I should like, before proceeding further, to tell you how I feel about the State which we have described. I might compare myself to a person who, on beholding beautiful animals either created by the painter's art, or, better still, alive but at rest, is seized with a desire of seeing them in motion or engaged in some struggle or conflict to which their forms appear suited; this is my feeling about the State which we have been describing. There are conflicts which all cities undergo, and I should like to hear someone tell of our own city carrying on a struggle against her neighbours, and how she went out to war in a becoming manner, and when at war showed by the greatness of her actions and the magnanimity of her words in dealing with other cities a result worthy of her training and education.

SOCRATES: And what did we say of their education? Were they not to be trained in gymnastic, and music, and all other sorts of knowledge which were proper for them?

TIMAEUS: Very true.

SOCRATES: And being thus trained they were not to consider gold or silver or anything else to be their own private property; they were to be like hired troops, receiving pay for keeping guard from those who were protected by them—the pay was to be no more than would suffice for men of simple life; and they were to spend in common, and to live together in the continual practice of virtue, which was to be their sole pursuit.

TIMAEUS: That was also said.

(Plato [c. 427-347 a. C.], 1998)

In this dialogue, the duality between the mythical-religious and the rational-political is significant, addressing both transcendental and pragmatic aspects of human existence. This same approach reappears, albeit with nuances, during reformist movements of different ideologies starting from the French Revolution. While other thinkers before and after Rousseau — one of the main thinkers regarding education and the formation of the ideal citizen as conceived by it — considered education as a tool to remodel man, he insisted, more than on remodeling, on regenerating the citizen through education. He conceived education "as the new form of a world that had begun a historical process of dislocation" (Soëtard, 1994, p. 436). According to Emery (1961, pp. 1–10), Rousseau's notion of human regeneration stemmed from a rejection of the tyrannical and artificial aspects of the world and extended to an egalitarian natural condition — that of the Native Americans and the indigenous peasants — incorporating their concepts of freedom, wisdom, and happiness.

Paradoxically, while introducing the proposal for human regeneration and reflecting on the nature of man, he also proposed Sparta as an ideal to emulate. He idealized the strength of the Spartan man and the education of their children, stating that "the law of Sparta with the children of citizens makes the well-constituted strong and robust and lets all others perish, unlike our societies, where the State, making children burdensome to their parents, kills them indiscriminately before their birth" (Rousseau 1923, p. 14). Based on this conception, the original plan of the French Revolution was to follow the Spartan education model: the homeland would take in its infants from the age of five to return them to society at twelve, after teaching them to survive in community life with only the essentials (Betancor and Vilanou Torrano, 2013, p. 97).

Although this plan could not be implemented, a system of free and public education was indeed established, following the selective interpretative canon of Rousseau's work. Primary education, mandatory from the age of five, focused on a republican catechism that emphasized revolutionary and patriotic principles (Moreno, 2008, p. 10). In this way, republican education, by forming a patriotic consciousness from an early age in its citizens, also provided the essential nutrients for the growth, development, and maintenance of its army, which was indispensable at that time.

At the same time, public demonstration emerged as a crucial element of education. That is, public spectacles began to be organized in which these children, educated with patriotic consciousness, would embody the existence of the ideal citizen. For example, the young participated alongside elders and women in choirs of songs and dances from revolutionary works. These performances took place outside the stage space, both "around the guillotine and around the Tree of Liberty" (Macintosh, 2013, p. 317), as shown in figure 1.

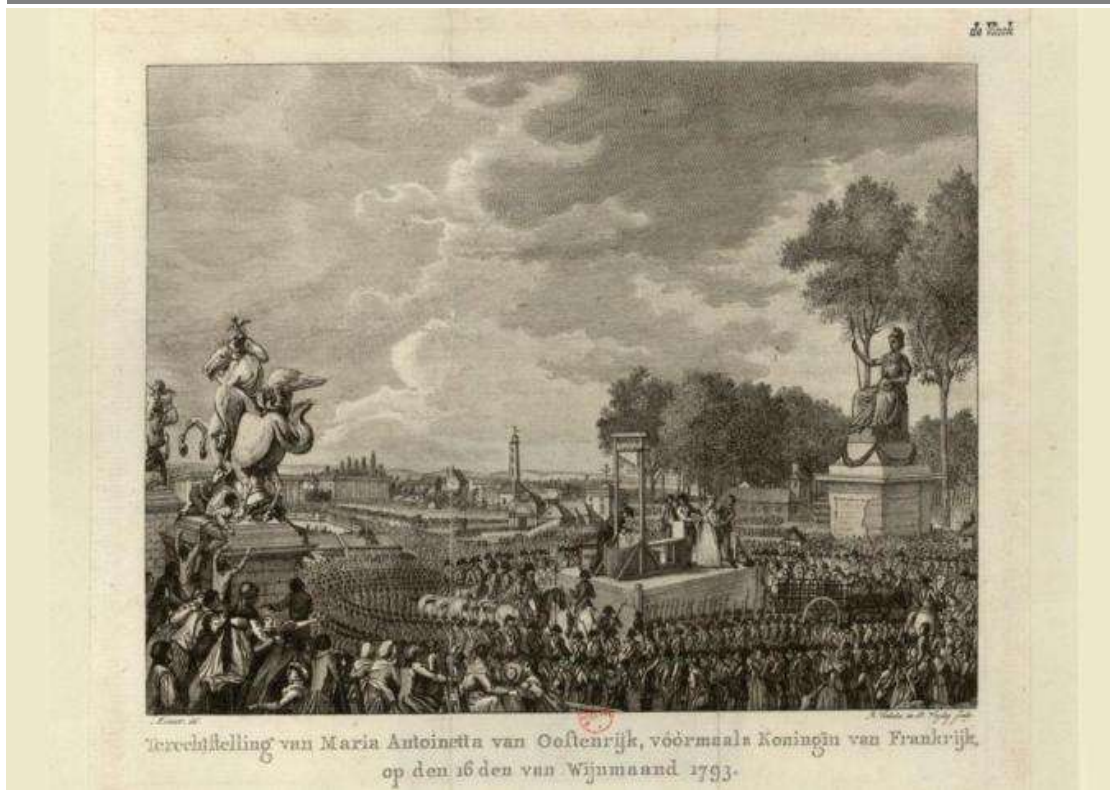


Figure 1. Reinier Vinkeles, *Terechtstelling van Maria Antoinetta van Oostenrijk, vöörmaals Koningin van Frankrijk op den 16 den van Wijumaand 1793* [estampe], 1803, Paris, France, National Library of France [BNF], Gallica Collection, [ark:/12148/btv1b6949962z](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:nl:po:bnf-12148-btv1b6949962z).

The participation of minors in these civic manifestations deserves analysis within the context of political socialization practices and the construction of national identity (Cajías Ponce, 2024, p. 421). Its relevance lies in showcasing educational practices whose ultimate goal is the regeneration of the population and the shaping of the ideal citizen, as evidenced in the plans (choreographies) of the revolutionary festivals. These plans—such as the one shown in Figure 2, translated below—were displayed as posters in cities to inform the population.

Plan and March of the Festival for the Supreme Being

At exactly 7 o'clock, mothers and daughters will proceed to the Chamber Square; they are invited, as much as possible, to dress in white. The mothers will carry bouquets of roses and the daughters, baskets of flowers. A commissioner will be there to direct their march.

At the same time, fathers and sons will proceed to the Republic Square, armed with swords, each holding an oak branch in hand.

At the same time, the sons of Brutus, wearing the red cap, will proceed to the street in front of the temple dedicated to the Eternal: they will carry a civic crown. A commissioner will be there to direct their march.

At the same time, the armed adolescents, as well as sexagenarians also armed with pikes, will proceed to the Law Square. A commissioner will be there to direct their march.

As soon as they reach the foot of the mountain, the signal of the first cannon shot will indicate to the fathers and sons to position themselves at the top of the said mountain, under the tree of liberty: here, the speech of the department president, and a hymn [...] Here, the sons of Brutus position themselves in the third cordon of the Mountain, around the Decennial Festivals; they will sing hymns to happiness.

Signed Viville, S. Jacque, and Trotebas. [Own translation]



Figure 2. *Plan marche de la fête a l'être Suprême* [Plan and March of the Festival to the Supreme Being], National Library of France (BNF), François-Mitterrand Site, FOL-LA32-721 (85), folio 1.

This same training approach, with some variations and nuances, held great importance in reformist movements and European totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century. This strategy repeatedly proved particularly effective in securing citizen loyalty, preserving political structures, and transmitting values such as selflessness, material detachment, and dedication to serving the State. The totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, in particular, refined their techniques by utilizing mass media. Standardized education, with its mandatory bodily practices and the public demonstration of their results (muscles, physical plasticity, self-discipline, and patriotism) in public rituals, proved to be both effective and efficient in shaping the ideal citizens.

For example, according to Hanley (2017), dance during the 1936 Berlin Olympics played a strategic role in the Nazi cultural programme, albeit with notable tensions between artistic expression and ideological control. This event reflected the contradictions of Nazism in regards to culture, highlighting how art, and dance in particular, were used both to project the image of the regime and to control and direct the cultural expression of the masses. The author emphasises the political and social impact of these practices in the context of Nazi power, where prominent figures such as choreographers Rudolf von Laban and Mary Wigman played an important role. It should be noted that Wigman's work was widely subjected to critical analysis by post-war historians and critics; while Rudolf von Laban's active role in fulfilling the aforementioned purposes during the regime was carefully removed from historiography.

Von Laban, one of the most significant representatives of German expressionist dance (*Deutscher Ausdruckstanz*), created a system of dance notation, as well as “movement choirs” (choreography for large groups performing coordinated dances and body movements *en masse*). These choirs were intended to contribute to the party and celebration, and culminated in an autonomous artistic work; they were designed primarily for performance by amateurs or semi-professionals. Their themes were rather symbolic, general and very broad: struggle, reflection, joy or consecration. Thus, any participant could find their own connection to the theme, so that movement choirs could be used by different ideologies for their own benefit and for the benefit of their creator. Beginning in the 1920s, these choirs were funded by socialist-leaning political parties; with the advent of the National Socialist regime, they were funded by the new order.

Regarding von Laban, Locatelli (2019) observes that McCaw's (2011) anthology on the choreographer's work makes no mention of the use of his choral practices for political purposes. He adds that, for McCaw, “the movement's choirs were in fact hijacked by Goebbels and diverted from their content and purpose for propaganda purposes” (Locatelli, 2019, p. 17). To this day, these narratives favour the image of the choreographer as a reformist and apolitical artist, alien to the reality of his time, and implicitly present him as a victim of the Nazi regime. However, Dickson (2016) asserts that von Laban was not only a creator during the National Socialist regime, but also a high-ranking official in cultural institutions: he worked in the

management of the Opera Ballet until August 1934, when he was offered the position of director of the Deutschen Tanzbühne (German Dance Theatre).

According to this same researcher, von Laban continued to rise “until he became responsible for all creative programming in German dance in general... He advocated obedience to Hitler and expressed anti-democratic opinions at every opportunity” (Dickson 2016, p. 5). The choreographer left National Socialist Germany only after his movement choir *Wind of Dew and New Joy* (Figure 3) was withdrawn from the 1936 Olympics programme following the dress rehearsal. As Hanley (2017) states, although the organizers attempted to include dance as an official artistic competition in those Olympics, it ultimately became a festival due to differences in genres and artistic standards, as well as censorship by the Nazi regime of proposals considered too intellectual or alien to the official ideology. Thus, von Laban neither suffered direct political persecution nor left the country to escape.



Figure 3. Rudolf von Laban, *From the Wind of Dew and the New Joy* (Olympics Essay), Dietrich-Eckart-Bühne, Berlin 1936, Cologne, Germany, University of Cologne, Theater Studies CollectionFIN05844, RXXFIN1631XX001.

At the same time, in the Soviet Union, the Komsomol [Комсомол] organised public dance and gymnastics demonstrations of equal magnitude, revealing the heyday of these practices as an instrument of education, renewal and national regeneration in the 20th century. The image and video below depict the Soviet Union's Physical Culture Parade, dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the Komsomol [Комсомол] organisation, on 24 July 1938 in Red Square. The video also shows the participation of different ethnic groups, homogenised in their gestures and actions: Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Armenians, Azeris, Chechens, etc.



Figure 4. Nikolai Vladimirovich Soloviev, *Цветущая молодость 1938 /Blooming youth* [Frame 1 by W. Cajías Ponce], 1938, Moscow, Russia. Central Museum of Documentary Cinema of Russia / Центральный музей документального кино [CSDF], <https://csdfmuseum.ru/>, <https://csdfmuseum.ru/films/110-%D1%86%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%82%D1%83...>



Video 1. Nikolai Vladimirovich Soloviev, *Цветущая молодость 1938* /*Blooming youth* [Video excerpt 1], 1938, Moscow, Russia. Central Museum of Documentary Cinema of Russia / Центральный музей документального кино [CSDF], <https://csdfmuseum.ru/>, <https://csdfmuseum.ru/films/110-%D1%86%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%82%D1%83...> Video accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h673iCcm8E4>

The Komsomol was one of the largest youth associations in the world; during the Soviet Union, it had around 160 million members. Its creation in 1918 was proposed by Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (Lenin) during the first Congress of Working Men's and Peasants' Youth Unions. In his essay *Higher Stage of Communist Society*, included in the publication *State and Revolution*, Lenin ([1917], 1935, pp. 78–85) stresses the importance of social control for the functioning of the first stage of communist society. He argues that this first stage would require all citizens to become State employees, with equal wages. Furthermore, he emphasises his personal notion of the citizen-soldiers of this new and grand undertaking:

Accounting and control: these are the main things necessary for the organisation and proper functioning of the first phase of communist society. All citizens here become employees hired by the State, which is composed of armed workers. All citizens become employees and workers of a national state ‘union’. All that is required is that they work equally, regularly perform their share of the work, and receive equal wages (Lenin [1917], 1935, p. 83). [Own translation]

In this same work, Lenin mentions how effective, efficient and profitable cultural training can be: “No special mechanism, no special apparatus of repression is needed; this will be done by the armed people themselves, as simply and easily as any crowd of civilised people, even in modern society, separates two combatants or does not allow a woman to be assaulted.” To illustrate the above, we present the memoirs of Professor Viktor Popov, which describe how training is conducted for the mass demonstrations (parades) of socialist youth.

From the memoirs of Professor Viktor Popov³:

Thousands of girls and boys were selected from sports clubs, universities and technical schools, where they underwent intensive training. From MGIMO [Moscow State Institute of International Relations], I was among the few recommended for the parade (apparently, my height and athletic appearance were factors). Our group trained at the Lokomotiv stadium on Novoryazanskaya Street (which I knew well because I used to go to its skating rink when I was in school) every other day and every day for two weeks before the parade.

Before training, we were given a hearty five-course lunch in the kitchen of a factory near the Krasnoselskaya metro station. There was also a card system, and getting a meal like that was every Muscovite's dream. The parade took place on Sports Day, 12 August. The entire Politburo, led by Stalin, was on the podium. General Dwight Eisenhower and his son, officially invited by Marshal Zhukov, were seated on the central podium.

³ See: <https://youtu.be/f8mMZl04wZA?feature=shared> (Accessed: August 7, 2023)

[Own translation]

On the other hand, choreography—which forms part of the triad of power, choreography and gymnastics that has prompted us to conduct this research on the assemblage of the ideal citizen through physical practices—also helped to achieve the goals set by the regime (video 2). In the USSR, for example, the movement choirs of choreographers such as Kasyan Goleizovsky and Igor Moiseev (or Moiseyev) [Игорь Моисеев] were the most sought-after in physical culture and youth parades. These parades were held annually from 1924 until the 1980s, with an interruption during the Second World War.



Video 2. Nikolai Vladimirovich Soloviev, *Цветущая молодость 1938* /*Blooming youth* [Video excerpt 2], 1938, Moscow, Russia. Central Museum of Documentary Cinema of Russia / Центральный музей документального кино [CSDF], <https://csdfmuseum.ru/>, <https://csdfmuseum.ru/films/110-%D1%86%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%82%D1%83...> Video accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YK13RIkzp28>

The sporting demonstrations differed from the choreographed ones because, in general, during the former, the young people represented a war group, soldier-athletes who marched or emulated Greek friezes. During choreographed demonstrations, on the other hand, young people represented, through folk dances, the productive group of peasants in their traditional costumes. This differentiation reflected the duality of the regimes of the time, which sought to project both military strength and cultural traditions.

Thousands of kilometres away, in Bolivia, the same phenomenon can be observed in 1952, during the Bolivian National Revolution government, on Flag Day. In video 3, we see the sports demonstration during this event, and in video 4, the folk dance demonstration.



Video 3. Waldo Cerruto Calderón de la Barca, First Video Excerpt, Flag Day, 1952, La Paz, Bolivia, Bolivian Film Archive, Film Department, Ministry of Propaganda and Information, Noticiero Boliviano N°4 [ICB], S3-E28-C1-F1, BO-0605. Video accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OIxHTAg4RUc>



Video 4. Waldo Cerruto Calderón de la Barca, Second Video Excerpt, Flag Day, 1952, La Paz, Bolivia, Bolivian Film Archive, Film Department, Ministry of Propaganda and Information, Noticiero Boliviano N°4 [ICB], S3-E28-C1-F1, BO-0605. Video accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4V4RU49QTXg>

The fact that a model or practice developed in Europe in the 1930s was replicated in Bolivia in the 1950s, despite not sharing the same ideology—National Socialism and Marxism-Leninism in Europe, on the one hand, and the National Revolution in Bolivia, on the other—demonstrates the capacity of these bodily and choreographic strategies to be adapted and reinterpreted in very different contexts. It is worth mentioning that Bolivia's National Revolution marked a profound change in the country's political, social and economic structure. It promoted agrarian reform, the nationalisation of key industries and the expansion of rights for historically marginalised groups, thus shaping a new national project with strong implications for Bolivian cultural and political identity (Herbert Klein, 2011).

This shows that regimes with different ideological foundations and discourses resort to similar forms of mobilisation and social control through the body and choreography. These become a means of constructing the ideal citizen and consolidating power. The continuity of these practices also reveals how body language and educational projects transcend specific ideological doctrines to function as tools of social control.

One might think that these bodily and choreographic practices respond exclusively to specific moments of the twentieth century or to a distant past. However, if we broaden the analysis to more recent times, we find that these forms not only survive but remain active over time and beyond prevailing political ideologies. For example, the need to shape the ideal citizen from childhood persists through gymnastics and bodily expression techniques with a militaristic focus. The aim is to achieve high levels of obedience, coordination, and efficiency using methods and practices derived from or inspired by the military: rigorous physical training, strict hierarchy, group synchronization, and the cultivation of values such as loyalty and sacrifice. As an illustration, we present: i) a record of a physical education class for sixth-grade primary students, broadcast online by the Educational Channel of the Ministry of Education of the Plurinational State of Bolivia in April 2022 (video 5); ii) a group of Bolivian preschoolers marching on Bolivia's Independence and Foundation Day in 2025 (figure 5); and iii) a live broadcast of the graduation of fourth-year physical education and sports students from the "Warisata" Higher School of Teacher Training, conducted by the students themselves via social media (video 6).



Video 5. Ministry of Education of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Educational Channel Bolivia, Gimnasia educativa [Educational Gymnastics], 2022, Bolivia, on @CanalEducativoMinedu [YouTube]. Video accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyKtFYZP27k>

TEACHER:

Alright children, what is educational gymnastics? It is simply our physical culture, it is receiving orders, but not orders like: "Go there!", "Do this!". No, these are command orders, exercise orders. These exercises help us to have more discipline for all boys and girls, for all students, like the example we saw today: standing properly, in a firm position [...]. I hope you liked the topic and that we can practice it, especially during civic hours, flag salutes, or on some special day in our educational unit⁴.



Figura 5. Wara A. Cajías Ponce, *Desfile escolar – Bicentenario de Bolivia*- IMG_20250805_111617, 2025, El Alto, Bolivia. Colección privada.

⁴ Ministry of Education of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Educational Channel Bolivia, Educational Gymnastics, 2022, Bolivia, en @CanalEducativoMinedu [YouTube].



Video 6. Students of the Higher School of Teacher Training “Warisata” 2024, Gimnasia militar [Military Gymnastics], fourth year demonstration of Physical Education and Sports students, ESFM WARISATA [Live Facetime broadcast], Warisata, 01 de agosto de 2023. En @esfmwarisata2022 [Facebook]. Video accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jerrJMpZY24>

The above examples demonstrate a paradigmatic continuity of a bodily repertoire that continues to be instrumentalized to foster social cohesion, national identity, and symbolic control, thus evidencing the durability and adaptability of these bodily strategies in contemporary contexts. As Cabezas Fernández (2015, p. 52) states, this may be due to the positive association of the compulsory military service "with the incorporation of subordinate men into the nation and citizenship and access to adult masculinity, but also with the need to civilize and discipline subordinates in their transition to citizenship". Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that on August 5, 2010, within the framework of the celebrations of the Anniversary of Independence and Foundation of Bolivia, military instruction by the Bolivian Armed Forces was confirmed for indigenous and peasant social movements in the country as well as for schools.

The ex Vice President of the country, Álvaro García Linera, confirmed the launch of a program that was aligned with the need of the Armed Forces “to broaden the civic training base which is an obligation to be provided to the citizens” (El Economista, August 6, 2010⁵). Hence, the Doctrine of Patriots was then established, under the presidency of Evo Morales Ayma, as an alternative to the Doctrine of War which was in force in the Bolivian Armed Forces at that time. The background of this doctrine states:

As the foundation of the Doctrine of Patriots, the fortitude and will to fight of the entire people, it is necessary to introduce national indoctrination programs in all educational and labor institutions nationwide, aimed at consolidating a national consciousness of self-recognition and national belonging that reverses the identity deficit, which currently has reached elevated levels, motivated by ethnic differences and excessive regionalism. (Bolivian Armed Forces / Tezanos Pinto Clavijo, 2010⁶)

Regarding the mass dance demonstrations —unlike what happens with gymnastics, especially in the Bolivian context, which hosts many festivals of this kind—these do not have a political or State mobilization purpose. Rather, they focus on community expression, cultural identity, and popular tradition. They are generally associated with patron saint festivals and local cultural celebrations.

⁵<https://www.eleconomista.es/politica-eD/noticias/2362841/08/10/El-Ejercito-de-Bolivia-da-instruccion-militar-a-movimientos-sociales.html>. Accessed on 05/23/2024.

⁶<https://es.scribd.com/doc/159511689/TEXTO-PATRIOTAS>. Accessed on 05/10/2023.

CONCLUSIONS

Cultural training, particularly through bodily practices such as dance and gymnastics, has proven to be a recurrent and effective tool for consolidating political power and shaping the ideal citizen. This phenomenon transcends ideologies and historical periods, suggesting the existence of a universal pattern in the use of the body as a means of control and social mobilization. From the French Revolution, through the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, to contemporary political movements such as the MAS-IPSP in Bolivia, these practices have been systematically employed to instill values, social norms, and loyalty to the State.

The persistence of this approach through such diverse contexts highlights its effectiveness as a mechanism of social and political engineering. Moreover, it reveals how governments and revolutionary movements have recognized the potential of the human body not only as an object of discipline but also as a powerful vehicle for the transmission of ideologies and the construction of collective identities.

However, it is striking that this approach, particularly military in its essence, keeps Sparta as an implicit and significant reference—just as Rousseau proposed in his reflection on civic virtue and the formation of the citizen. It is striking because there is a vast historical, cultural, ideological, and geographical distance separating contemporary societies from this ancient polis. Therefore, this idealization not only refers to a distant past but also functions as a normative reference that shapes the way the body, authority, and collective identity are conceived. Undoubtedly, it expresses the continuity of ancient military paradigms as the core of social and political order in contemporary contexts.

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