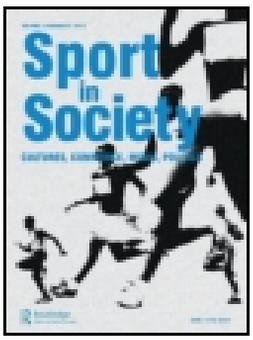

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History of Swiss feminine gymnastics between competition and feminization (1950–1990)

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ABSTRACT

Between 1908 and 1985 in Switzerland, there was a clear division between female and male national gymnastics associations. Beyond some links, the two institutions conducted their own policies and promoted their own practices and forms of gymnastics. They made different choices in the 1960s and 1970s, and on the whole female gymnastics saw greater changes and was more innovative, with the emergence of rhythmic gymnastics as a 'flagship' competitive discipline, early experiences in modern physical culture and fitness, etc. Across these developments, this article analyses successively the conditions of the preservation of control over female gymnastics in the 1950s, how those gymnasts and the female national association's leaders used their institutional autonomy to develop many practical innovations and break technical and institutional boundaries during the 1960s and 1970s, before managing the reunification process with male gymnastics, and facing new symbolic boundaries.

Introduction

> … I was really disappointed … by the tendency to make women become men. 'Acting' as a man, wearing the same clothes, smoking as much as him, is surely in better taste for Occidental women.
>
> This tendency to 'masculinity', evoking the desire to struggle, and the appetite for wrestling, calling for power and strength as tool for domination, tends to destroy our own house: gymnastics and sport. (*Education Physique Féminine*, June 15, 1952)

As a proof of the importance of gymnastics in Switzerland, a male-only Société Fédérale de Gymnastique (SFG) has existed since 1832. It was founded before the creation of a modern federal State, which originated with the Constitution of 1848. Since then, the country has never ceased to cultivate its original model of physical culture with a compelling domination of gymnastics (Burgener 1952), as a part of the training of future citizen-soldiers but also as a matrix of an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991), where people share values, representations and rights without knowing most of their fellow-member, and more especially for Switzerland where boundaries between men and women has remained an effective organizational principle until the second half of the twentieth century.

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Originally an entirely masculine sport, gymnastics saw the emergence of feminine practices promoted by physicians and pedagogues at the end of the nineteenth century (Craig 2013),[1] when modern sports were also beginning to be developed and diffused all over the country, and some conflicts occurred between the two models of physical activities (Bussard 2007). If many Helvetic citizens were also soon involved in the spread of modern sports across Europe, especially masculine football (Koller 2010), some were also promoting pedagogical innovations, for example Jaques–Dalcroze's 'eurhythmics' in Geneva.

As in other European countries (Pfister 2013), the feminization of Swiss gymnastics accelerated during the first years of the twentieth century and an Association Suisse de Gymnastique Féminine (ASGF) was created in 1908. In Switzerland an institutional distinction remained between the ASGF and the men's organization, the SFG, until the 1980s both at a national and at a cantonal level. This creates a unique situation for historians interested in gender and sport history, since Swiss feminine and masculine gymnastics slowly developed a kind of internal competition between them. During the twentieth century, female gymnastics developed from within an autonomous institution, which became the main sporting federation in the country by the beginning of the 1980s in terms of the number of active members.

Framework and hypothesis

This paper is written as part of a larger research project exploring history of rhythmic gymnastics in Europe since the middle of the twentieth century, and partially supported by the French Olympic Committee through a research grant (Quin 2014b). Our project, which is firstly an attempt to gather original documents about female gymnastics, is from then on underpinned by a substantial documentary source base covering various levels of the development of female gymnastics in Europe (local, national and international), since the official recognition of the practice by the International Federation of Gymnastics (IFG) in the early 1960s, including documents from Bulgaria, Romania, France, Germany, Portugal, Italy and Switzerland. Thus, our ambition is to reveal how an only women sport can expand and shift gender boundaries (Lamont and Molnár 2002), while using masculine symbol or characteristic like competition and preserving stereotypes about femininity.

In Switzerland more precisely, we draw on printed documents from local clubs, from cantonal federations, but also very broadly from the SFG and the ASGF (minutes, annual reports, official bulletins, correspondence, status, etc.). Besides, we also use sources (all printed documents consulted comprehensively) from the IFG (minutes, technical report, official bulletins, etc.), from the Swiss Ecole Fédérale de Gymnastique et de Sport (EFGS: where individuals and groups are trained since the 1960s), and we have made some 'life stories' interviews with all the national trainers (and their assistants) since 1974 (five interviews), all the technical directors and/or presidents (three interviews for rhythmic gymnastics especially) and all the administrative officers (five interviews) from both federations (male and female), but also more randomly some former gymnasts and local trainers, for a total of 30 interviews conducted in Switzerland (between 2012 and 2014).

Many hypothesises inform our analysis of the rise – and its obstacles – of female gymnastics; the idea that competition is 'essentially' masculine, the supposed greater creativity of feminine gymnastics – for instance around the development of 'rhythmic gymnastics'[2] – but also the idea that women used gymnastics as a social space where they could shape greater autonomy (given that the political vote was granted to Swiss women only in 1971) in a

country where a conservative vision of women's role and status will remain more efficient until the end of the twentieth century (Studer 1996). As the archives are numerous in Switzerland some historical works, like those by Burgener (1952) or more recently Bussard (2007), are well documented and integrate some small gender perspectives on physical education at school, while Monica Aceti and Christophe Jaccoud provide a more sociological collective book (2012). However, Bussard and Burgener both stop their analysis around the Second World War, so the whole second half of the twentieth century remains widely unexplored even though it is a crucial period regarding the inclusion of women into the sport system and the transformation of gender norms and practices. Furthermore, Swiss sport history suffers from a lack of interest in archival research, mainly due to the recentness of the emergence of sport science departments – in several universities: Lausanne, Neuchâtel, Zurich or Basel – since the 1990s, and especially around gymnastics, which remained the national sport and the biggest federation in the country. It explains the absence of chapters focused on the Swiss case in many books analysing gender issues in sport (Hartmann–Tews and Pfister 2003; Bruce, Hovden, and Markula 2010). Besides, some 'historical works' about gymnastics are themselves questionable as they sometimes produce nonsense and incomprehension about some practices (Manidi 2002), in spite of initial good intentions. Eva Herzog's work is an exception, but it is focused on one canton (Basel) and thus is less effective for the country overall (Herzog 1995).

Within this framework, this article tries to combine an institutional history of female gymnastics in a country where it is considered as a 'national sport' and an analysis of the processes leading to the recognition of an only women competitive discipline to understand the way it challenges structural and symbolic boundaries in a particular society, both within female activities and also in their relation with male sports. Successively, this article analyses the conditions of the preservation of control over female gymnastics and more broadly over women by banning competition in the 1950s, and further it explores how female gymnasts and the ASGF leaders used their institutional autonomy to develop many practical innovations and break technical and symbolic boundaries during the 1960s and 1970s, even though it leads them to promote a practice that is highly feminine in its visual code. More concretely, our aim is then to use the ASGF as a case study, to demonstrate links between the transformations of mentalities, representations and practices, especially when, as part of the subsequent reunification process within Swiss gymnastics, gender boundaries became no longer 'institutional' but (again) symbolic, without losing any of their effectiveness (Lamont and Molnár 2002).

1950–1966: Barring women from competition

Since the late-nineteenth century, Swiss feminine gymnastics have been based on ideas of moderation and control rather than emancipation (Herzog 1995). They are deeply rooted in an 'imagined community' made of conservative values and representations, which places women in restricted social spaces and roles, but are also linked with larger continental processes (Pfister 2013). Inside all the clubs affiliated to ASGF, competition was forbidden from the creation of the institution in 1908. This was re-emphasized in a text promoted by the general assembly of 1950, which took place in Glaris (ASGF 1983). Actually, this position was also nurtured by a rich iconography showing women in stereotypical poses and practices, performing collective exercises in front of mountain landscapes, which are

themselves part of a nationalism forged in the cult of a 'primitive' Switzerland arisen from the Alps (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008).

If some critical voices were already heard in the 1940s and despite some debates in the 1950s – especially when the city of Basel hosted the World Championships for Artistic Gymnastics where no Swiss women participated – the official ASGF position endorsed a vision of the fit, graceful female body as symbolizing the nation and also as indicative of women's place in Helvetic society in the 1950s. Actually, the resolution voted by the general assembly in Glaris clarifies that the:

> … ASGF wants, chiefly, [to] bring the Swiss woman to have better physical health and also a good moral and spiritual balance through reasoned and reasonable practice of games and physical exercises. On the other hand, it considers that preparing and training girls for big athletic events is a huge mistake. (*Education Physique Féminine*, November 15, 1950)

The ASGF's view was not exceptional in Switzerland, where physical education was not compulsory for girls in every canton in the 1950s and where the hygienic and moral ambition of female exercises influenced literally the whole Swiss sports field, drastically limiting women's access to international competitions in all sports.

Besides, both for men and women, elite (competitive) sport had only limited support from the State in the 1950s, in spite of reforms following the poor results of Swiss athletes at the Berlin Olympics in 1936 (Favre 2004). As a consequence, public interest was only important for some international football matches, and specifically around 'national games' (hornuss, stone throw (traditional shot put) or Swiss wrestling) and gymnastics events, like the Fête Fédérale de Gymnastique organized every four, five or six years, and whose 'feminine section' also forbade competition until the 1960s (Herzog 1995). Nevertheless, thanks to the organization of events like the gymnastics World Championships in Basel (1950) or the football World Cup (1954), public opinion became more engaged with the highest sporting level and came to appreciate that despite ideological speeches about the dangers of sporting excess, those practices could also have certain virtues, including for women.

Nevertheless, at the onset of the 1960s, mentalities within gymnastics societies and organizations were still quite reluctant, not to say resistant, towards the idea of authorizing competition for women and all its potential excesses and endangerments of their bodies. In an interview, published in the ASGF's official bulletin, Charles Moret, who was also a member of the Central Board, recalled that 'the idea which presided over the foundation of the Swiss Association [was to]: "develop women's physical strength and spread physical exercises. Through physical exercise, it look[ed] for the harmonious development of the body, spirit, soul"' (*Education Physique Féminine*, April 15, 1960, 26).

In some ways, the debates around the question of giving women the right to vote presented similar arguments, when mentioning that the 'right place for women is at home', and that 'the disaggregation of the family is due to the emancipation of the women, more occupied outside their house' (Studer 1996, 369). Such very conservative viewpoints were broadly shared within the elite governing physical and gymnastic activities in Switzerland at that period, even across a split between defenders of modern sports and proponents of gymnastics, which had been in contention since the early twentieth century (Bussard 2007).

Lastly, but significantly, until the 1960s the ASGF's Central Board and many committees still consisted of men, whose activities and gendered representations contribute to the preservation of a 'conservative' frame around Swiss female gymnastics. In the mid-1960s, positions and representations started to change very slowly, creating the conditions for the

emergence of new possibilities for women in sport. So in 1964, on the occasion of a symposium organized in the Swiss 'College' of Sport in Macolin, participants were requested to address the theme: 'Should young women devote themselves to sport and gymnastics?' It is notable that this was still phrased as a question, demonstrating the trouble caused by this topic in a society that still refused women the right to vote at the federal level (Studer 1996).

The same year, the Olympic Games in Innsbruck are a turning point for the development of the Helvetic 'sports field', as the delegation returned without any medals, a situation that initiated more serious discussions about opportunities to reform the sport system. Early consequences of those debates were the creation of a National Committee for Elite Sport (CNSE), an increase of the federal subvention to national federations and more significantly the constitutional and legislative modifications of the years 1970–1975, which would make physical education compulsory for girls in all the cantons. The ambition was to empower elite athletes in the key disciplines, but at the same time without losing sight of mass sports and gymnastics, including at schools (Quin 2014a).

At the same time, in 1966, the question of letting women participate in gymnastics competitions returned to the forefront during an ASGF cantonal presidents' conference, which recognized the liberty of each member to practice competitive gymnastics (ASGF, Central Committee, May 20, 1966). In the book published on the occasion of the ASGF's seventy-fifth birthday, a few years later, the authors make this position clear, explaining that, 'at the time, the public and the younger gymnasts could no longer understand our attitude, even if it was based on valid ethical and medical considerations' (ASGF 1983). Thus, ethical and medical boundaries stayed firm, but the desires of a younger generation started to weaken them.

Besides this new position, inside the national institution as inside local societies, the situation remained complex, also because of the administrative hierarchy that existed between the ASGF and SFG, where SFG remained the only Swiss institution recognized by the IFG and was thus responsible for the registration of Swiss gymnasts for every international competition. As usual in Switzerland and after the ASGF allowed their better gymnasts to participate in competition (a decision made at the General Assembly of November 1966), a consensus emerged whereby the SFG was recognized by contract as 'responsible for the training of elite female gymnasts' (ASGF, Central Committee, May 15, 1966) and their registration for competitions for artistic gymnastics. While allowing competitive practice, this 'delegation of power' was also an opportunity for the women's institution not to speak too much about its new arrangement on competition, as opponents were still active and numerous.

1966–1974: Between competitions and innovations

While the opposition to women's participation in sporting competitions tells us a lot about the long-term 'conservative' vision of women in Helvetic society, there is also behind this opposition another characteristic of the Swiss sports field, namely a real distrust of elite sport due to a worship of amateurism, which prevailed for a long time during the twentieth century (Vonnard and Quin 2012). In an article published in 1968 in the ASGF's official bulletin, an official regrets the period:

> … when our competitors were fighting with others from other nations, trained in conditions more or less similar, who did not place training before their jobs and also who did not consider the national prestige as so important. At that time, there were only few 'state' amateurs. (*Education Physique Féminine*, October 15, 1968, 98)

During the second half of the 1960s, as discussions about the restructuring of the Swiss sport system continued, authorities were also committed to 'recognize female gymnastics as an advanced requirement' (*Education Physique Féminine*, February 15, 1969, 14) and establish compulsory physical education in primary and secondary schools all over the country.

At the same time, and far from taking the increasing membership as an end in itself, the ASGF encouraged innovation and diversification of its activities, taking advantage of the effervescence of 'youth' in those years (Klimke and Scharloth 2008) and its desire for new activities. If competition was now possible, the subordination to SFG did not completely satisfy the leaders of the women's association, like Anna Grob, technical president from 1965, who argued in favour of the participation of ASGF gymnasts at the 1969 Modern Gymnastics World Championships, in Varna (Bulgaria) (ASGF, Central Committee, July 11, 1968). This form of gymnastics, exclusively feminine, based on music, choreography and work on rhythm (Langlade 1966), could contribute to create a special practice for the institution – hence separate from SFG's guardianship – and was also seen as something that could be positively considered by proponents of a more traditional gymnastics, while promoting an acceptable and traditional vision of femininity.

Thus, regarding those processes, innovation around competition and specialized practices was not the only horizon for the leaders, as they continued actively to promote the mass practices more deeply rooted in the traditional mode of feminine activities. In 1969 they organized a jubilee for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of a special category of young gymnasts ('Pupillettes') and the fifth Gymnastraeda in Basel. If the latter was not an entirely 'feminine' event, it was a sort of incarnation of the changes happening inside female gymnastics, because though the event did not include competitions or rankings, it created some opportunities for demonstrations of the new way of doing gymnastics (Meckbach and Lundquist Wanneberg 2011).

At the beginning of the 1970s, as competition had been recognized and authorized, even if it was under the supervision of the SFG for training and athletes' preparation, the ASGF came to develop its own elite practice. As the SFG presented female gymnasts for the first time at the highest level,[3] the leaders of women's associations made the choice to develop 'modern gymnastics' as their specific form of elite gymnastics. Formal organization began in 1970 when a 'demonstration group from the ASGF' went to Rio de Janeiro to participate in an international festival of modern gymnastics (*Education Physique Féminine*, February 15, 1971, 14). The event was not competitive, just an occasion to discover new practice and 'to experiment [with] continuous movements, precision and gestural elegance, and musical arrangement' (*Education Physique Féminine*, February 15, 1971, 16). A few months later, again outside any formal competition, the committee for mass gymnastics organized two courses in modern gymnastics, the first surprisingly supervised by a man: Fernando Dâmaso. A Portuguese physical education teacher, embodied in a Latin culture, he was about to become the main innovator in a women's institution that though previously very conservative was contending with changing times and was now administered only by women. Thus, it is important to emphasize that the accession of women at all the main ASGF's governing functions leaded to the promotion of an activity presenting all the characteristics of the traditional ways of thinking female bodies.

Having first attended the Swiss Sport College in Magglingen in the late-1950s, Dâmaso obtained his degree at the German Sport College in Cologne between 1954 and 1957, where he learned gymnastic practice from Medau and Bode, before contributing to the diffusion

of modern gymnastics in Portugal during the 1960s (Interview with Fernando Dâmaso, former Swiss national coach, October 18, 2012).

From then on, the major turning point in the institutionalization of modern gymnastics in Switzerland, as in many countries, was the 'ASGF's official observation mission' sent to the modern gymnastics World Championships in Rotterdam, in November 1973. Anne–Lyse Fragnière – president of the committee for non-competitive gymnastics – went together with Fernando Dâmaso, to study the highest level of practice and to imagine possibilities to develop it back in Switzerland. After Prague, Budapest, Copenhagen, Varna and La Havana (in 1971), Rotterdam was the first competition to be organized in western Europe, and it was a 'shock' both for the participants and the spectators; Jenny Candeias – sent by the Portuguese federation to study the practice – told us about the tears running down Dâmaso's face during the Bulgarian exercise (Interview with Jenny Candeias, former Portuguese international judge, March 27, 2013), and as Dominique Muller (present on behalf of the French federation) also told us, she felt similar (Interview with Dominique Muller-Lauth, former French Technical president, January 12, 2013).

Returning from Holland, the two Swiss observers were soon able to share this enthusiasm by introducing the practice within local clubs and creating the condition of a national recognition by the ASGF. Not later than 2 February 1974, they showed some movies taken in Rotterdam to demonstrate the specificity of modern gymnastics to cantonal technical presidents, though their first reaction was one of the hesitation, because of 'the possible saturation of the gymnastics scene and more especially about difficulties to find trainers and instructor[s] for this new practice, above all in the smallest clubs' (ASGF, Technical Committee Minutes, February 2, 1974, 5). There were still residues of old ways of thinking and reservations around the 'modernity' of 'modern gymnastics' in particular its competitiveness and its specificity regarding the duration of the trainings. Dâmaso immediately tried to reassure his audience, by proposing they start with an 'experimental group', whose first mission would be to contribute to the diffusion of the practice in the country, after a basic training under his own supervision. He also emphasized that this development should not signify 'the rapid production of an elite group', and that 'each participant will be selected after the end of her mandatory school period' (ASGF, Technical Committee Minutes, February 2, 1974, 6).

At the beginning, between February and August, the idea was to gather in Magglingen, all the young women interested in the new practice and to select an 'experimental group' of women from 18 to 26 years old. This process culminated on 14 and 15 December 1974 with the official selection, during which Dâmaso examined the apparatus and rhythmic work, strength, flexibility and mobility, and also at some specific modern gymnastics exercises.

1974–1985: On the international scene

In spite of Dâmaso's initial promises, the experimental group quickly became involved in international competitions, even participating at IFG's seventh World Championship in Madrid in November 1975. The situation was then quite unique in sports history, with a national team competing before there were any gymnasts in local clubs. It was especially significant for the ASGF, since the international team was organized under its own banner.

It is therefore all the experiences and practices of a traditional 'school of the body' (Interview with Cathy Fanti, former member of Swiss national team, November 5, 2012), promoted in each ASGF club since the inter-war period, that were the basis of the practice

more than any special training or courses given during the previous years, even for Dâmaso who was still a neophyte and met some opposition because he was a man.[4] Those technical underpinnings were enough to earn the Swiss team the 10th place in Madrid. Modern gymnastics was still in some ways imprecise in its rules and in the interpretation made by the judges (Interview with Egle Abruzzini, former IFG technical president, September 24, 2014). Incidentally, the 10th place for a first World Championship can also be explained by the absence of almost all the Soviet countries after the death of Franco several days before the beginning of the competition. The ASGF annual report for 1975 emphasizes that the competitive development of the practice was very important during this second year of its existence on Swiss soil, with one course for the cantonal leaders, four weekends for future trainers, one weekend for future judges and already 27 weekends training for the national team (ASGF, Technical Committee, Annual Report 1976, 6). If Dâmaso's selection was based on physical abilities, it was also motivated by the idea of developing the practice all over the country, which explains why half the team was composed of future physical education teachers (*Frauenturnen*, October 15, 1976, 12–13) from all the education centre in the country (Basel, Zurich, Lausanne, etc.). His ambition was to promote modern gymnastics but also to deal with all the governing levels of the sporting field, as cantonal organizations were still powerful, especially regarding financial support.

A few years after women got the right to vote in Switzerland, modern rhythmic gymnastics saw many social and sporting changes, promoting competition for women but in the meantime maintaining them in a very traditional feminine frame. Quoting words, first published in *24 Heures*, the ASGF official bulletin, *Frauenturnen*, points out the great increase of women's involvement in gymnastics, and that:

> … every man with a normal sexual instinct has to admit that, performance set apart, media coverage of the last Olympic Games in Montreal shows us several beautiful faces and silhouettes, by far more interesting than … the 'fat bottom[s]' that our fellow countrywomen show us at the beach or at the swimming pool. (*Frauenturnen*, November 1, 1976, 7)

A vector of contradictory representations, the article praises both some positive attributes of women involved in competition (voluntarism, resistance, etc.), but also presents them as 'eye candy' to attract men, mostly on the basis of their plastic qualities. The 1970s emancipation of women was evident but ambivalent, both in the sphere of gymnastics and society as a whole. Thus, modern gymnastics is ambivalent as its development resulted from a women initiative but which promoted 'traditional' movements and gestures.

More broadly, those changes are also visible in the wider transformations of the sporting field, where military control of physical education weakened, and the institution 'Jeunesse et Sport' replaced the compulsory 'military instruction'. This allowed girls and young women – as well as boys and young men – to become instructors, facilitating the 'development of women's sport' (interview with Gilberte Gianadda, former Swiss technical president, March 15, 2013), but not any form of coeducation at all, as girls and women were trained for female practices (gymnastics, dance, etc.).

Early involved in Jeunesse et Sport, and the first person in charge of the Gymnastic and Dance branch, Fernando Dâmaso was not only involved in the promotion of competitive gymnastics. He also participated in the first introduction of gym-jazz in Switzerland, a form of practice based on a mixture between gymnastics and dance, executed to jazz music. Considered as a means of expression, gym-jazz can be seen as something near rhythmic gymnastics both in its claims to creativity and its aesthetic dimensions. The aim was to get

'a real preparation for dance … where the gymnasts will be able to feel self-fulfilment, and where youth will find both health and enjoyment' ('Jeunesse et Sport', Official bulletin of the institution, September 1977, 214). A great success in Switzerland in the second half of the 1970s, those practices prefigured aerobics and fitness, which became very popular about 10 years later and were part of a deep change of physical cultures.

In the meantime, in 1977 Switzerland hosted the eighth rhythmic gymnastics World Championships, two years only after its first participation. In the specific context of the development and the promotion of a new sport, the organization of such a great event was very significant for the national federation, following the Netherlands in 1973 and Spain in 1975, and preceding London in 1979, Munich in 1981, Strasbourg in 1983 and others. In Basel, where the competition was organized, the Swiss group confirmed its 10th place, and Suzanne Zimmermann finished in 39th place. Damasco had completely changed the composition of the group since 1975, calling on a younger generation and returning the girls from the 'experimental group' to their original cantons. Seen as a 'transition year for Rhythmic Gymnastics in Switzerland' (ASGF, Annual Report, 1978, 7), 1977 also saw the ASGF organize a first national tournament (*Eco di Locarno*, March 26, 1977, 9) in March in Sion, though this was not a truly 'national' event since only few clubs were in a position to participate. This competition nevertheless promoted modern gymnastics and specifically encouraged clubs to create dedicated sections (interview with Mariella Markmann, former Swiss national assistant coach, February 21, 2013, 203). Nevertheless, two years later, Fernando Dâmaso still reported that:

> … the organization of national competition remains a concern. It appears that, besides the clarification made during courses, trainers and clubs are too much influenced by what is done by the national team. They fear this high level. The new organization should allow more space and time to explain how the practice can be progressive. (ASGF, Annual Report, 1979, 10)

From then on, the diffusion inside the country progressed more rapidly, and between 1977 and 1980, a growing number of instructors and trainers discover an interest in rhythmic gymnastics. The practice broke down barriers very quickly, moving the boundaries of Swiss feminine gymnastics towards more physical performance, new structures of training – both with very young children and with adult gymnasts – and towards new body representations, disturbing the dominant model(s) of femininity inside the country and urging the central institution to revise its governance even faster.

It becomes clear that innovation had a cost to the ASGF, whose budget grew rapidly during the 1970s. If in 1970, the budget was balanced around CHF 400,000, it exceeded CHF 1,500,000 at the beginning of the next decade, just before ASGF was reunited with the male institution. A more detailed analysis of those budgets shows that the growth was mainly due to the new 'elite sport' and its organization. In 1977, rhythmic gymnastics were the first budgetary item above CHF 100,000, with a total of CHF 700,000.

Those evolutions also concerned the practice itself as Fernando Dâmaso introduced professionalism among his gymnasts and his team of trainers, breaking another totem of the Swiss sporting field. For the gymnasts, though it did not amount to a concrete salary, it meant that assiduity would be rewarded each season, to compensate expenses incurred by the federation and their family. In its four-year plan for 1985–1988, Dâmaso emphasized that 'it is the role of a federation to promote sport at all levels and, in specific cases, to make more resources available for the better gymnasts, in a way that they can realize their desires' (ASGF, Rhythmic Gymnastics Committee, Training Planification 1985–1988, 8). For the

Table 1. Compared statistics from SFG and ASGF (in 1970 and 1984) (Le Gymnaste Suisse, no. 39, 1970; Le Gymnaste Suisse, no. 19, 1984).

1970	SFG (masculine)	ASGF (feminine)	Total
Youth	42274	39760	82034
Total	120753	103683	224436
1984	SFG	ASGF	Total
Youth	45735	75011	120746
Total	141858	177288	319147

gymnasts, where it was necessary to have a full-time training, many reward systems were tested at the end of the 1970s, such as prize money depending on results, but it remained mainly linked to their presence at each training session. It was never possible to make it like a real salary, as the gymnasts were not of full age, but the gymnasts could repurchase their training hours for CHF 8 each (by their attendance), which means CHF 8000 a year approximately (which is also the estimated level of the annual expenses for such an activity ranging from 15 to 20 h weekly).

If results were not immediately as high as expected – and promised by Fernando Dâmaso – rhythmic gymnastics modified the landscape of Swiss feminine gymnastics, giving a real autonomy to the ASGF even if, around 1980, the leaders of both ASGF and SFG started to discuss more seriously a future reunification of their institutions.

1985–1992: Reunification and new boundaries

Some first attempts were made in the mid-1970s, with a first planning commission, whose report was then sent to the central committees of the two institutions. If the project did not succeed at that time for many reasons, the situation with two separate institutions is presented as:

> … on the one hand, not at all balanced regarding the relative importance of feminine and masculine gymnastics in the country; and on the other hand not fair for equality between women and men. An equality that has become more obvious nowadays … (ASGF, Reunification Commission, October 7, 1975, 9)

Nevertheless, the delegates made no clear proposal on how to resolve the situation and due to a lack of will on both sides the situation did not change. The masculine institution in effect refused to pursue the topic, whereas the leaders of the ASGF pointed out the insufficient guarantees given to feminine practices and their specialisms, adding that they did not want to make the refusal too abrupt, in order not to 'damage the relations with the SFG' (ASGF, Annual Report, 1976, 2). In fact at that period the ASGF outstripped the SFG in terms of its membership and the information (see Table 1). It became the biggest sports federation in the country, and continued the innovation in its speciality feminine gymnastics. Both these developments enhanced the credit of its leaders when in discussion with their male counterparts. At the same period, 10 years after getting the right to vote, feminist movements obtained Constitutional equality between women and men.

It seems then significant that women gymnastics leaders claimed to act without using 'feminist militancy' (ASGF, Annual Report, 1981, 1), underlining again their concern about the balance of power in a new united federation, when in May 1980 discussions began again between the two institutions. After five years of discussions behind the scenes, a more official 'planning commission' started work during the spring, with the mandate to focus especially

on the balance of power between feminine and masculine practices (Whitson 1994), and more broadly to secure the place of gymnastics in the Swiss sporting field.

In spite of interesting discussions during the first months and some proposals, the balance of power issue pushed women delegates to refuse temporarily any reunification during the General Assembly of 1982 in Luzern: 'In a future unique association, we [women] will have to make efforts at all times in order to protect the interests of our gymnasts and to continue the promotion of a beautiful and genuine gymnastics, while keeping our femininity' (*Frauenturnen*, March 1, 1983, 5).

Gilberte Gianadda, who represented the ASGF on the planning commission as a vice-president of her own association, told us that the women were genuinely afraid of being relegated to the position of only the 'secretary of the new unified federation' (Interview with Gilberte Gianadda, March 15, 2013). At the same period the SFG was experiencing a crisis of vocation amongst its volunteers, especially locally in the clubs and in the cantonal organizations. But the discussions continued and finally succeeded in 1985. Effective on 1 January 1986, the reunification led to the dissolution of the previous feminine and masculine associations, which were then gathered under the new name of *Fédération Suisse de Gymnastique* (FSG).

In the early 1980s, the ASGF – and soon the FSG – were confronted by a new form of practice, which came directly from the United States and which was going to revolutionize the sporting field and its institutions. Its name? Aerobics. Promoted by film star Jane Fonda, it was soon analysed in every newspaper in the continent as:

> … an endless suite of exercises (no muscle, no ligament, no curves are spared), to be repeated three times a week, by increasing the duration if possible ('each exercises needs to be a new challenge'), whose aim is to burn as many calories as possible, to modify the body shape and to soften it while strengthening heart and lungs. (*Journal de Genève*, January 15, 1983)

Heavily promoted in the media and practised to very fashionable 'disco' music arrangements, aerobics created a major upheaval of the image of women throughout the West and in Switzerland especially. Resolutely modern, aerobics represented several characteristics of its period including individualization, a search for health through physical activities, the unveiling of bodies and a quest for an eternal youth. The inclusion of this practice in the programmes of the Swiss gymnastic clubs was not immediate. This was not least for institutional reasons, as aerobics was something that was initially practiced in front of the television and not within a classic gymnastic club. But the presence of advertisements for equipment and clothes dedicated to aerobics in the official bulletin of the ASGF and FSG (since 1983) shows that the practice was of some interest for the institutions.

In the second half of the 1980s, as aerobics was introduced in the gyms, rhythmic gymnastics came to know its first growing pains. Between 1975 and 1985, Swiss gymnasts were always present for international competitions, including when in 1984, rhythmic gymnastics made its first appearance at the Olympic Games in Los Angeles. Nevertheless, as a national team and as individual competitors, they always remained in the second half of the ranking. As he could not manage to qualify his gymnasts for the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul, Fernando Dâmaso left office at the end of that year, making necessary the restructuring of the practice at all levels.

Newly associated with trampoline and artistic gymnastics (both feminine and masculine) in an 'elite sports' division of the FSG, rhythmic gymnastics seems nevertheless, in a contradictory way, to have been able to become firmly established in sections of local

clubs and even in totally new clubs dedicated to this practice. But as there were no further possibilities to participate in international competitions, some tensions seem evident at the beginning of the 1990s and the process of growth slowed. In 1992, the decision of FSG's Central Committee to cut the budget for rhythmic gymnastics by half, due to the lack of international results, created a first conflict inside FSG. Pointing the relative lack of diffusion inside the country, the delegates tended to emphasize that the fate of the elite sport was not mirrored by the mass participation through local clubs.

Conclusion

Four years after the deletion of half the budget, the threat become more direct, when FSG's Central Committee aimed to abolish the 'elite sport' status of rhythmic gymnastics, because of the continuous lack of results. The sport was in some respects a victim of its greater popularity in the French-speaking part of Switzerland, while the FSG was controlled by delegates from the German-speaking side – a specific case of the very pronounced linguistic cleavage in Switzerland (Chollet 2011). However, rhythmic gymnastics saved itself because of a large mobilization of local clubs, proof of its successful implantation.

If rhythmic gymnastics shifted landmarks of a gendered symbolic and institutional order, through the valuation of competition and of an institutional modernity, the ASGF also remained a vector of a more traditional and conservative discourse about feminine gymnastics until the late-1980s, also promoted by rhythmic gymnastics itself. Thus, boundaries were mainly shifted within women gymnastics, and the masculine domination was never really endangered (Aceti and Jaccoud 2012). After the reunification in 1985, the abolition of the institutional border allowed a new greater efficiency of symbolic boundaries (Barker-Ruchti 2009), drawing on new expressions of gender stereotypes and new distrust of feminine gymnastics. For instance, in the official newspaper of the new federation and even after the integration of several women in the editorial team, female gymnastics was then still presented in a very traditional way – and also practised in the same way, putting attention on non-competitive practices more than on competitive aspects like in rhythmic gymnastics. In the meantime, even if competition is now accessible entirely and if women are more numerous than men during the Fête Fédérale de Gymnastique (since 1991), lots of interviews reaffirming the prime importance of gymnastics as a means of empowering girls and women are also celebrating and justifying a traditional vision of their place and role in society (Swiss television documentary, June 15, 1991, http://www.rts.ch/archives/tv/information/tele-journal/4800452-emancipation-feminine.html).

Far from being a new situation, this sounds like a 'classic' in the history of female sports, as had already happened in the inter-war period, when initiatives from Alice Milliat ended with the integration of women's sports in the Olympic programme and in several international sporting institutions, while failing to make women's sports immediately more legitimate (Pfister 2001).

More broadly, our case study highlights the continuous negotiations that accompanied the transformation of feminine sporting practices in the specific context of a Swiss 'imagined community' balanced between extraversion and conservatism. If we give due attention to Swiss women's movements, gymnastics allow us to understand 'political battles' which went alongside those leading to the acquisition of greater political rights, and to discover the existence of social areas where a feminine power existed throughout the twentieth century.

Notes

1. The first feminine gymnastics clubs from Switzerland opened in 1893 in Zurich (Herzog 1995).
2. This 'sport' changed its name many times since its recognition by the international federation in 1961. It was known as 'modern gymnastics' from 1961 to 1971, as 'modern rhythmic gymnastics' from 1971 to 1973, as 'sporting rhythmic gymnastics' from 1975 to 1998 and as 'rhythmic gymnastics' since then. For practical reasons and to be well understood, we will use 'rhythmic gymnastics' in the whole article.
3. Swiss female gymnasts made their first appearance on the Olympic scene in Munich (1972).
4. At that time, it was not possible for him to go with his team near the carpet as the area was forbidden to men by the IFG's rules.

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