THE GLOBALIZATION OF CAPOEIRA

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WHAT AT THE DAWN OF THE 20TH CENTURY WAS A PRACTICE LARGELY CONFINED TO FORMER SLAVES IN BRAZIL HAS NOW, AT THE OPENING OF THE 21ST CENTURY, BECOME A PRACTICE TAKEN UP BY PEOPLE OF EVERY ETHNIC BACKGROUND FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE IN OVER 130 COUNTRIES.
In recent years, many capoeiras have left Brazil in search of recognition and a better life. Through this diaspora they have not only been instrumental in popularizing this martial art style, but they have also helped carry Brazilian culture abroad through talks and presentations describing capoeira as something "exotic, tropical, and very Brazilian."

Back in the days of slavery in Brazil, blood flowed from the overseer's quill – as the saying went – a reference to the cruel communications of power that circumscribed in person and psyche slave owners' interests. Today, the martial style is treated very differently by the political state. That much is evident in the number of initiatives recognizing and elevating this important symbol of Brazilian culture. Just as the times then were different from what they are now, capoeira practitioners of those days pursued the practice with many different agendas. Even today, they are by no means a monolithic bloc. Capoeira in Rio de Janeiro was closely bound up with the organized mobs, street fighting and ward politics of the second Empire (1889–1893). In Salvador, capoeiras cultivated friendly rivalries with train owners, gangsters, and even the unemployed gathered around bars, parks and open boulevards to gossip, drink and gamble. To them, capoeira was both a source of entertainment and a way of protecting their turf. Nowadays we see professionals from many areas engaged in capoeira as a form of recreation. To many it is a job, a profession, a means of livelihood. A large number of other young people hope to find in capoeira opportunities for employment they cannot find at conventional institutions and companies.

With impressive creativity, they find in this form of cultural democratization a source of slash, sketch, of income. They overlooked no possibilities in efforts to escape the fate of those pioneers – considered by many the grand masters of capoeira – who died in absolute poverty, mourned, such as Patrícia, Rômulo, and Valdemar Acosta Braga, to name a few, who "stood at the crossroads of fame and famine." (ABEUS, 2003, p.14) At the turn of the 20th century, they are regarded as the pillars of capoeira, in the eyes of new generations, those great men were inflicted by a pattern of exploitation more remote to repeat.

The Globalization of Capoeira from Symbol of Brazilian Identity, to the Cultural Heritage of All Mankind. When Brazilian capoeira starts becoming the country in large numbers in the early 1970s, there was already an interest in the "exotic" and "tropical" features of the world, and this new trend in capoeira started to be recognized as a symbol of a cultural identity. In the 1980s, capoeira started to be seen as a form of resistance to oppression, a form of resistance against the oppressive powers that have been ruling the country for centuries. This new trend in capoeira was also seen as a way of expressing the identity of the Brazilian people.

Brazilian capoeira became a form of "resistance fighting" against exploitation. Others believe this process is contributing toward fostering an increased appreciation of African cultural marks, even as it intensifies interest in Brazilian and Brazilian culture.

Many authors claim that capoeira in the USA is helping to strengthen ties between African-Americans and their African roots – stretched nearly to the breaking point by the violence extending centuries of segregation. It is enough to bring many Americans to Brazil to see the "true" face of this dance-forming, a number of establishments in the city of Salvador, considered the "Mecca of Capoeira," have practically become centers to capoeira festivals from all over the world, where the "Academia de João Péricles," in the borough of Forte Santo Antônio, or the Fundação Almeida Braga, in Barra.

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We should bear in mind that the interest among foreigners to learn more about capoeira also kindles in them the desire to get to know Brazil as a whole. For one thing, many masters and teachers giving classes overseas make a point of conducting their training in Portugal to add the appeal of "tradition" in their tours for an identity based on Afro-Brazilian traditions; many instructors go so far as to ban translations of the names of techniques, songs, lyrics and even the names of capoeira instruments. Speaking Portuguese all capoeira classes is a requirement that acts as a kind of "shell of approval." This, surprisingly enough, has opened up unexpected job opportunities. Hunter College, a new bold step, has become the first university in the world to offer a regular course in Portuguese in response to the demand generated by capoeira (UNES, 2001, p. 3).

By way of contrast, we have Masters João Capoeira, a former student of England, who settled in New York, and 10 years ago and was granted a doctorate in Philosophy from Uppsala University in New York in 1996. He teaches his class-\es in an academic setting at the West Village, in a private room in the city, to attract a large number of foreigners in search of "authentic Brazilian" capoeira.

In this complex give-and-take of globalization, capoeira has been gaining admissions in the most remote of outer reaches. Movies and the Internet have contributed to this process. The first of these was The Golden Lion (Pagode do Prêmio), winner of several international awards. But American productions such as Only the Strong Survive and Roof Tops really made the difference when it came to popularizing the martial form.

The worldwide expansion of capoeira is most easily seen in the United States and Europe. Aside from isolated at-\ents to "give back," this fighting style in Africa stresses efforts are currently targeting the so-called developed countries. The fact of the matter is that capoeira has conquered the world and becomes one of the most important expres-sions of Brazilian culture abroad. It is an exuberant propagand-\ for Brazil. By 2003 there were capoeira schools in all 50 states – 15 in New York alone. What is most surprising is that demand for capoeira classes stateside is concentrated primarily in public schools. This martial arts form has estab-lished a reputation for helping to build self-esteem and trust in youngsters who have learning disabilities or poor social skills. It is therefore a "twenty gate" for young people who are troubled by drug or alcohol problems (UNES, 2001). The movie Old, the Strong Survives, examines those possibilities.

Public schools, however, are not the only venue in which capoeira has been successful with Americans. It is also used as training to prepare actors and actresses for roles in action films. That was the case with The Devil's Advocate, where the demon lover, played by Alec Baldwin, the most famous actor to date, used capoeira moves to an impressive extent. He also used it to swing "American girls are very attracted to capoeira, for it can be a form of personal defense, and also a good workout. It is exciting, and people who practice it convey a certain charm." (BERGAM, 2004, p. 50).

Other Hollywood movies have included capoeira scenes, among them, Meet the Parents (2004), Ocean's Twelve (2004), The Round-Up, the Queen Anne Pond and The Great Gatsby and Batman. Video games such as Tekken 3, 4 & 5, Eternal Champions, Dark Resurrection: Street Fighter V, Fatal Fury: Rage of the Dragons, World of Warcraft, Bushido: A Crossed Puckamon, The Matrix, WRE Snapdown and Here Comes the Pain, have also contributed to the popularization of capoeira worldwide.

As a result of this process, certain "colors" hold high and stoutly defended in the past, such as oral tradition, improvisation, the "mandinga" strategies, and the culture of resistance, have all been deemphasized in favor of other categories. In "in line," with the moment, such as "ethnic merchandising," "free-spotted," "working out," "enantia-

Significant Examples of Capoeira Abroad

Important research and teaching institutions, especially Colleges of Physical Education, see capoeira as an extracurricular activity, and at some of them, systematic capoeira pro-
gams have been organized as extension projects, at which Brazilian capoeira teachers are hired for a specific period to teach interested parties. That is the pattern for the Estudos Universitário at the University of Lithunia, the University of Warsaw, Universi-

ity of Oslo, University of Bristol and the Technical Univer-

The dedicated work and commitment of many masters and instructors made it possible to build on the initiative of Nestor Capoeira, so that this particular style could gain traction, diversely, a place in the sun and prestige in Old World society.

The »traction« gained in Europe came from the fabulous cultural heritage that forms the core of its songs, movements and background. These are the features that
Capoeira, true enough, has grown tremendously, bringing with it this "stamp" of Brazil inherent in its songs and movements. It is currently a way of bringing together people from everywhere on Earth, thereby acquiring a supranational identity.

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Brazilian Capoeira Teachers: Their Experiences in Europe. Most of the capoeira masters and instructors working in Europe are from the northeastern part of Brazil, especially the cities of Recife and Salvador. But there are other instructors as well, from practically every state in Brazil, teaching this style in the Old World.

Capoeira from many groups in Brazil have been moving to Paris since the early 1970s. Orlando, who settled in France over a dozen years ago, claims that when she arrived there, very few people knew about capoeira. Nowadays, in spite of a few poorly-trained individuals claiming to be masters without having gone to any academy, capoeira is very popular. It is not at all uncommon for "women to outnumber the men in classes" (CARVALHO, 2002: p. 17).

The attraction of teaching capoeira abroad, which engages many Brazilians with or without proper papers, is very different from conventional employment with regular hours — the sort of thing that, until recently, we thought of as working at a job.

Yet there are the very real opportunities that turn up, and young capoeira professionals "tight tooth and nail" for those positions, regarding as great adventures. Unsteady as they may seem, these type of job opportunities sometimes work out. They may provide a livelihood for most of these far-flung, espalade "professionals," but also help to serve up capoeira seasoned with healthy doses of randomness and improvisation.

The struggle to survive and the desire for the recognition to be gained from new experience, those are the primary reasons so many capoeira instructors leave Brazil for the uncertain promise of a "good life" abroad. What they often find, however, are scattered and unpredictable work opportunities. They typically work as freelancers, as an alternative way to "make a living."

The arrival of capoeira instructors in Europe is usually full of surprises. What follows is a statement by Mestre Mães, of Minas Gerais, who moved to Switzerland in 1989 and currently works in many cities in that country. His experience echoes that of many other masters and instructors, outward bound in search of better opportunities.

My arrival in Switzerland was really tough. I looked for a living place barely in the snow, a train station, you see, because none of the capoeiristas there had found a street-address. I walked the street by myself, sometimes playing my berimbau. I would do some suits, some nutty stuff. It was also a way of getting myself free. The berimbau was my companion, it was a way to escape the anguish the hopelessness, wishing to be back in Brazil, serving my students and colleagues. That is one cold country. It is a rude awakening when you arrive and don't know anyone, not even the language. So I went through some very tough times, but, thank the Lord, I overcame all of that. Today I am not going to tell you how perfect I am, but I speak it well enough. Mestre Mães, personal correspondence. Madrid, Spain June 29, 2003.

The bottom line is that although desperate situations, and even deportations, are not uncommon, some capoeira teachers perceive a possibility of earning money, status and recognition they would not easily obtain in Brazil. "I'm a blackbody who has the body," says Orlando, "I feel like I'm already there," while brandy statements, often toned off in Portugal by a strong-willed巴西版 from Recife. He has been living a life of high adventure, with many ups and downs, often caused by bullying, but artfully, and with plenty of good cheer.

The hurdle in the way of finding a steady job with benefits may lead many capoeira instructors in Europe — burdened with a comfortable immigrant status — "to get by," working odd hours at dangerous and dirty jobs until such time as they are able to obtain legitimate legal and formal employment. And so it is, it fits and starts, that they work along tortuous and unpredictable career paths in a struggle for upward mobility and social acceptance.

Their dreams and years are constantly interwined with fear and worry. These instructors have been opening up new horizons in the field of informal education — education that is growing ever more popular with society, at large, especially among the lasting in pursuing power. Mestre Mães, speaking from experience, brings this home.

The idea of social work is one that sits me deep. I've always worked on the fringes, around the boulevards of Sambadrom, in Brazil, and it was no different here. (I began as an intern at a reform school in Casel, off the Casel rail-road Line a correction center. It's a lot like a prison for minors. It was tough work, with lots of African students and lots of Portuguese students — and there we were all mixed together. I approached the institution with my proposal for an internship. Fortunately the director had spent 20 years in Brazil. As a result, she knew about capoeira and when she read my proposal knew it had nothing to do with chicken or chicken corps — which was a real good thing. She hired me as an intern. After the internship she gave me a job, and at the close of the deal the group was hired by the Ministry of Justice, where I work to this day. (Mestre Mães, personal correspondence. Lisbon, Portugal June 27, 2003).
“You’ll find a lot of Germans playing capoeira. Angola as well as or even more than – many capoeiristas who have never been outside of Salvador, or never left Brazil. So what will you say to that? Is it because they’re German? No. It’s because they are capoeiristas.”

(Mestre Unni, personal correspondence, Amsterdam, August 18, 2005)

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The Ministry of External Relations
Text from Brazil

prestige and recognition to the extent that they possessed certain skills, had command of a specialty that was made in Brazil, which amounted to a seal of approval very much sought after by young Europeans. These instructors therefore have “ethnic” and “cultural” knowledge, the likes of which, in a way, challenges traditional thinking about entering into a job market – to the extent of resetting the world job market, currently fraught with turbulence and instability.

In the struggle for survival these young instructors put their improvisational skills to work coming up with atypical sources of income. Many of them establish intricate mutual support networks, through their many contacts acquired at events, workshops, persons or even paying visits to where their fellow capoeiristas are performing their own “work.” Groups seek as halls or competitors in Brazil to remain or work around their favelas, the better to cope with the travels all immigrants from Brazil must face.

These alternative ways of working with capoeira may include presentations at theaters, putting on workshops at schools or colleges, or providing guidance to young students. To a capoeira professional in Europe, opportunities to work are often haphazard and fleeting. Occasional pans of capoeira gigs and supplies help boost the budgets of these impromptu pioneers.

Nevertheless, the great majority of these Brazilian instructors serve a sense of personal worth from working with capoeira in foreign countries. After all, these fearless adventurers are well aware that they are the legitimate purveyors of a culture deemed “Antikythera” and an endless source of fascination to foreigners.

Many of these instructors manage to acquire some security through agreements with established public and private sector institutions. One distributor in Portugal explained that, during an event in Lisbon, he left very apprehensive as a “capoeira teacher” in a public institution. Another common thread in the experiences of many Brazilian capoeiristas in Europe has to do with the way these cultural demonstrations – through their competitive events – bring together people from all social strata under a single roof. Generally speaking, a mestre or teacher will alternate between performing in nice surroundings and living “social work.”

During weekends, or at these events, the people who call these various workplaces their own get together to enjoy their capoeira rods.

Mestre Bimbi’s capoeira classes take him into starkly contrasting neighborhoods in the City of Porto, in northern Portugal.

I teach in the borough of Caparica, a neighborhood with a lot of problems. It is a transient section the people around there call Hell. I also teach Capoeira in another transient neighborhood in Porto. It’s social work. After I leave these slums, I go to a gymnasium where only wealthy businessmen go to train. (Mestre Bimbi, personal correspondence, June 6, 2003)

This act of living – oftentimes as surviving as an immigrant and for capoeira – doesn’t always lead to success stories. It does, however, call attention to productive teaching experiences in the field of informal education, experiences that intersect with, and often complement the formal education process.

In a world that is currently globalizing, capoeira, a thoroughly cultural manifestation, is steadily losing its own identity and is reaching the “fundamentals” to people of vastly different cultures and origins, thereby helping to do away with taboos and stereotypes built up during its own historical rise. If capoeira were Brazilian and “in our blood,” how it is taught to people with no Brazilian blood in their veins? (Traverso 1999, p. 260)

That is a question we heard something written in the blood, minds and bodies of some, but not others?

There are many capoeira adepts in Europe who – besides passively desiring themselves to the style – develop an interest in other arts and forms found within Brazil’s cultural “halls,” such as the favela, sao bento and maracatu, and fall in love with Brazil. This is clear in a statement by an outstanding teaching in Lisbon: “Many Europeans are more intensely dedicated to capoeira than a lot of Brazilians, and really have Brazil in their hearts.” (Professor Mário Antunes, personal correspondence, Lisbon, Portugal, August 13, 2003)

As countless non-Brazilian instructors complete their training, capoeira encounters and incorporates new elements into its “fundamentals.” In this evolving process, these fundamentals are constantly rewritten in both training and competitions in which economics, culture and subjective factors play their parts.

Mestre Bimbi, who has been in Europe since 1982, told us in an interview about the first European capoeira workshop in Porto. It was in 1988, the 1st International Capoeira Workshop in Porto, organized by myself and Mestre Conha. After dedicating 20 years to his art, this Italian master completed his training under Mestre Carvalho do Bispo de Janeiro’s Grupo, Manhã. But this is not the end, for we need to peer deeper into this unfolding context, one that is sure to contribute immensely toward a rethinking of the entire capoeira phenomenon from a broader and subtler perspective.

We do know that there’s a certain amount of discounting on the part of Brazilian masters and instructors – and even practitioners – with regard to non-Brazilian instructors; so these instructors feel a sort of additional responsibility to better their grasp of the fundamentals of capoeira. The dilemma is simply illustrated in a statement by an instructor who teaches at the University of Lisbon’s College of Human Movement:

Simply because I am not Brazilian, I feel I have to prove something extra. Before they see me practice or sing, people expect me I’m going to swallow all my vows, or perform a mediocre capoeira. I’ve been to many places where they don’t dare to introduce me as an instructor, but simply as Ar-noz Dacor, from Portugal. As to the way I stack up against others, however, I see that once the once gets moving, they forget all about that. “Brazilian or European capoeira is capoeira, and a node in a node. I remember to do that so much more than a lot of Brazilians. This is an important part of life” (Professor Arno Dacor, personal correspondence, Lisbon, Portugal, November 25, 2003)

Our analysis of the intricate and involved movement toward the globalization of capoeira leads us to the following three basic observations: A) Over the past 10 years capoeira has solidly established itself and gained visibility and symbolism to the point where it is now one of Brazil’s foremost picture postcards abroad. B) The emotions shared and sig-
Capeoira may very well be “our own” Brazilian thing, but to the extent that it can also be taught, practiced, transmitted, constructed, shared, imparted and multiplied, it also belongs to the world.

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The significance learned through its practice are closely bound up with the intensity of the practice and the endurance of the experience. Capeoira, driven, motivational, teaching ethno-cultural, political, historical and economic aspects of life in human society. Finally, Capeoira is subject to the same sort of division into social status as a society with its classes, yet expresses itself in many different ways, much like the classes within the stratified society in which it is practiced.

Closing Remarks. Our survey of the systemic aspects of capeoira ahead of moving on to reflect on the possibility that this symbol of Brazilian ness - that is, an unifying foreigner’s rapidly mounting numbers - opens up for us. It’s clear from our observations that capeoira has consolidated itself as an trans-ethnic phenomena. Furthermore, its rapid global expansion since the 1970s has created political actors out of the field of culture, but rather, issued them new challenges.

Much of the experience gained with capeoira overseas has confirmed and even emphasized those transnational features that so contributed to its development. As a result, it has resulted in their foundations arguments urging that this is a practice better suited to certain levels of the population, and associated with easily identifiable ethnic groups. The complex and dynamic nature of capeoira is revealed itself in its accelerating process of globalization. It is expanding horizontally, down the pathways and followways of capeoira throughout the world, and vertically, through its demonstrated capacity to permeate different social strata. Although we still hear it is repeated that this is something “of our own” which, if true, would make Brazilians the exclusive purveyors of its “mandinga,” the experience we’ve documented here shows that this line of reasoning is most easily caught in terms of conflict and ambiguity. Capeoira may very well be “our own” Brazilian thing, but to the extent that it can also be taught, practiced, transmitted, constructed, shared, imparted and multiplied, it also belongs to the world.

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