

CONSTRUING RIVALRY AND VIOLENCE AMONG CAPOEIRA GROUPS FROM PIÚMA/ES

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Abstract

In this study, we identify and assess the reasons for rivalry and violence within capoeira groups in Piúma (Brazil). This study is descriptive and interpretative. The data was collected by using semi-structured interviews performed with all capoeira teachers of such municipality and interpreted by Critical Discourse Analysis. The reasons for rivalry and violence in capoeira are different in all senses, since each subject interprets such problem differently. Such reasons show an analysis which stresses the need to keep and weight the rivalry and violence to comprise capoeira groups; simultaneously, pointing out the solidarity as an option to establish a new basis for interaction.

Keywords: Capoeira - Rivalry - Violence - Solidarity

Introduction

Arisen from the slavery, the capoeira is a Brazilian art-fight¹. It appeared as a resistance movement of Afro-descendants to the regime of oppression and violence to which they were submitted. The capoeira, according to its history, symbolic and motor richness, became one of the main expressions of the Brazilian popular culture. The capoeira experienced a long course from illegal practice, criminalised

1-In this study, we use such term as a broader synonymous for capoeira. The idea defines capoeira as '[...] a synthesis of African elements with other forms of body expression here, in Brazil, before and after the slavery period. It is mixed with—game, fight, dance and/or even sport—show—a set of other elements helped by the body and important for Afro-descendent culture (MWEWA; VAZ, 2006, p. 46).

by the Penal Code of 1980², to the Intangible Heritage of Brazilian Culture³, recognised in 2008. The capoeira arose from the slave period. Nowadays, it occupies more and more different spaces, e.g. schools, universities, clubs and gyms in different social environments, especially the exterior one.

Contrarily to its social integration, the capoeira is still having some stigmas which keep it excluded symbolically. Such stigmas are not only in the past, they are updated frequently by the relations established by sundry practitioners and in the manner the practices are produced.

Associating rivalry with violence as features that show the relation among capoeira groups is recurrent in scientific production. Such fact, in addition, hinders the development of such art-fight and who practices it. In the field of historiography, e.g. in studies of Silva (1993), Araújo (1997), Soares (2002), and Falcão (2006), one can realise the use of violence by capoeira groups as strategies to control politics and spaces of the city. The violence took shape as lifestyle and performed as factor of organisation for such groups. For Testa (2008, p. 31), 'historically, such fact became more complex from the advent of the urbanisation and resulting urban violence, with frequent confrontations between men and social groups due to street fights and feud among groups'.

Elias (1994) stresses that the physical and sports activities performed a relevant role in the process to civilise the humanity. It meant possibilities for aggressiveness and violence had been conducted to activities socially acceptable. Similar to other physical and sports activities, in capoeira the 'impulse towards barbarism⁴, is not controlled yet, what cause violent relations, in especial among groups. In such perspective, when investigating the profile of capoeira practitioners,

2-Such code, by the Decree No 847, named 'Dos vadios e capoeiras' [Pertaining to idle and capoeira practitioners], sanctioned sentence from two to six months' imprisonment for people who practise it on public streets and squares any sort of body skill use know as capoeira. There was also the unfortunate result, considering it was from some sort of 'band' or 'group'. For the heads, the sentence would be twice (MELLO, 1996).

3-Title granted by the IPHAN (National Artistic and Historical Heritage Institute).

4-Mello and Silva (2008) show an interpretation for the civilizing process and barbarism in capoeira.

Viana and Duino (1999, p. 121) verified, by interviewing capoeira practitioners, the satisfaction and pride they possess in showing superiority when fighting against rival groups. According to Dunning (1992), such public demonstration of superiority reverts to a higher status and acceptance of subjects within their groups, what encourage them to take part in more confrontations.

Comprehending the reasons for conflicts among capoeira groups can provide us helpful traces to overcome such problem. In this wise, we identified and assessed the rivalry and violence causes among capoeira groups of Piúma⁵, and the participants in this study were the teachers of such art–fight in such municipality. First, to assess the capoeira meaning a tough fight, we seized the category event proposed by the Critical Discourse Analysis and the concept of identity, construed by Stuart Hall (1990, 2000). Second, to demonstrate disputes and fights competitive by the capoeira monopoly among the assessed groups, we used the concept of field, created by Bourdieu (1989). Finally, to assess the discursive production presented by the interviewed teachers on chance to overcome the rivalry and violence among groups, we used the notion of solidarity, construed by Rorty (1994).

To achieve our proposed aims, we performed a study making use of description and interpretation. For this study, we collected data from semistructured interviews with capoeira teachers of Piúma and from the interpretation of the Critical Discourse Analysis (FAIRCLOUGH, 2001). Such analysis method focuses on revealing the power connection with language based on the functionalist perspective, in which the language is made up as social life uncompromising part, holding as central concepts the discourse and social practice.

The interest of the Critical Discourse Analysis falls on the discourse related to event illustration, social relation construction, structure, hegemony opposition and reaffirmation. It focuses on the dialectical relation between discourse and society, trying to reveal ideologies that become apparent implicitly, in favour of the ones who are at disadvantage concerning power connections.

5-Piúma is a coastal municipality in the southern state of Espírito Santo, in Brazil. It has approximately 16 249 inhabitants. You can find this information in Brazilian Portuguese at <<http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/populacao/contagem2007/defaulttab.shtm>>. Accessed on 11 Dec 2009.

Rivalry, violence and solidarity: a dialogue with capoeira teachers from Piúma

The data presented and assessed in this topic came from semistructured interviews with 16 capoeira teachers from Piúma. They form four groups, which develop their activities in such municipality. The option to study capoeira in such municipality came from the contact of researchers with the region groups, and because they know the disturbed relation they keep among themselves.

Considering the total of interviewees, six were born in the municipality of Piúma, nine are from neighbour municipalities (e.g. Iriri, Marataízes, Guarapari, and Cachoeiro de Itapemirim), and one is from other state, i.e. Rio de Janeiro. The time for teaching performance varies from 1.5 to 16 years.

Five of the interviewed teachers took part in the capoeira Group A (interviewees 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5)⁶. They are nationally known, with works abroad and in several Brazilian municipalities. The chief for such group, in Piúma (interviewee 3), is the teacher with more performance time in such municipality. He formed the others (interviewee 1, 2, 4 and 5). Concerning the interviewees 6, 7 and 8, they are part of the capoeira Group B, which for five years has developed activities in Piúma.

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The Group C is the most old in the region with activities since the first half of the 1990s. Three of the four teachers with over eight years of teaching performance (interviewees 9, 10 and 11) compose the Group C; in addition, the interviewees 11, 13 and 14. The other two teachers (interviewees 15 and 16) are part of the capoeira Group D, which started the activity in the municipality in 2004. The teacher

6-To keep ethics in this study, we did not expose the subjects' name, as well as their groups' name.

from the State of Rio de Janeiro is part of such group (interviewee 15).

When they were asked on the rivalry and violence among capoeira groups of Piúma, all interviewees were unanimous in saying yes. Six of them, however, claim that in the past it was more explicit:

Interviewee 15: The rivalry today, thank God, is much better, but it's still strong. There was a time that for a sheer touch people used to fight.

Interviewee 9: That's it, mate, we all know about that. For sure that in the past it was stronger, but it didn't stop yet.

Interviewee 2: Absolutely! We can see that the rivalry is really enormous. It was worse, although today it's still hindering the capoeira.

Five interviewees were questioned on the conflict reasons among the capoeira groups of the municipality. They answered that the rivalry and violence are typical of capoeira, i.e. an unchangeable tradition. The talks below illustrate such perspective:

Interviewee 3: [...] I'm in it since the beginning and it looks like never gonna end. While there is capoeira practitioner, the rivalry will prevail.

Interviewee 8: We should, however, consider: the rivalry is part of capoeira and there is nothing to do about that.

Interviewee 5: The impact of rivalry is normal for me. There are people scared, but the rivalry is part of the capoeira.

The interviewees' conversation shows that the rivalry 'is part of the capoeira', an essence, a universal value associated to its practice always present. We use the category 'event' (FAIRCLOUGH, 2001) to comprehend the statements of such interviewees since it presents an identity in the discursive construction, indicating how the message speaker is in charge of its aim. The event present in snatches of the previously exposed conversation explains a broad conception on the

rivalry in capoeira, having therefore the production of a conversation, in which the individual marks are not clear. In the assessed case, the subjects justify the rivalry in capoeira as something inherent in its practice. It is a consolidated representation that cannot overcome such problem among groups.

Castro (2002) asserts that in the body culture phenomenon the subjects seek for expressing cohesive and stable identities in a social and changeable context, with fast changes, recalling to continue a mythical or idealised past. However, as Monteiro (1996, p. 26) states, the capoeira is '[...] as a flexible clay, which is modelled and changed as the social determining factors in each time'. In this wise, we believe that one can construe new performances to ground the relation among the capoeira groups of Piúma. As asserts Vieira (1998, p. 4), is necessary avoid that

[...] the capoeira continue in such paradoxical course of develop technically and regress ethically. Shortly, while the society is in the technology era, sundry capoeira practitioners is still in the roughnes era.

Contrasting the opinion of Vieira (1998), one can realise in the talk of some interviewees the importance of the rivalry and violence as actors to encourage training and develop technique and body of capoeira practitioners. The confrontation among the groups, in this case, is seen by such interviewee as a positive point, as we can verify:

Interviewee 6: Indeed, I don't want that the rivalry finishes, because 'this' is what make me train more and more. I think this is for the day when I'll be face to face with those bloody mates. So, I'll be prepared.

Interviewee 16: [...] we have to admit that the rivalry gives some spice to the capoeira.

It is possible to realise that the identity formation of the subjects who take part in capoeira groups is build up as each member goes seizing the place they occupy and their different crossing. Thus, even with factors that form conversation grounded in a broad interpretation, is possible a general reading of the interviews and observe the identity

as a '[...] production, which is never complete, which is always in process and formed in and not out of the performance' (HALL, 1990, p. 222). The author proposes a movement of the modern forms for the signifier 'identity' and a 'new meaning for subject', exposing that the present societies do not offer more spaces for a conception of cultural identity with stability and togetherness (HALL, 2000, 2005).

Part of the interviewees justify the rivalry and violence in capoeira for the impossibility of a group back out faced with insults and conflict situations caused by others. This way, Vieira (1998) states that in the capoeira there is a sort of 'ethics of warrior', in which denying the provocation from other groups is a signal of weakness, of cowardice. The conversation bellow illustrates it:

Interviewee 5: [...] the guys visited my gym and started to argue with my students. No way, huh? I had to face them.

Interviewee 13: [...] I wouldn't get a beating. I wouldn't let my group become mockery. I put the uniform and went fight!

Interviewee 7: [...] the guys think they have the right to come here to mock our roda (circle). So, mate, the situation got difficult and we have to act.

The arguments presented by the interviewees are fundamental in a natural premise during a roda of capoeira: 'A capoeira practitioner never can flinch in the face of a challenge'. Santos (2009, p. 130, author's emphasis), by deep studies, realised that the courage defines bigger or smaller prestige of a subject inside a certain social group; and that in sundry capoeira groups, '[...] An excellent physical condition or a 'great fighter' fame, or both, are attributes that provide certain status often desired by practitioners'. For Stoer, Rodrigues, and Magalhães (2004), in the present society, the body and body practices become 'places' of social inclusion and exclusion. In such bodies there are signals of belonging and identity, thus, accepting some social values, and, as a result, denial. In this assessed case, the interviewees hold courage as way to assure it in front of other members of the capoeira community.

The argument most used by the interviewees (11 subjects) to justify the rivalry and violence in the capoeira in Piúma is the competi-

on among the different groups:

Interviewee 6: [...] what make me bloody sick is that the pals do not accept we are better than they are.

Interviewee 1: [...] no one accept that a group is better than another one, and this somehow is bad.

Interviewee 10: [...] how a group can is bothered by another one just cos its presentation.

In this wise, to comprehend the competition existing among the capoeira groups, we used the concept of field. This was proposed by Bourdieu (1989), and can be shortly understood as a dispute space based on the objective relations (material or symbolic) of the social groups that seek for performing a monopoly over other groups, which consist of a specific means.

In the context of capoeira, the groups establish dispute relations for power, which seek for asserting a certain perspective over another. The fights faced by the groups to dominate the field look like the disputes of the capoeira groups of Rio de Janeiro, in the beginning of the 19th century, to mark out their piece of ground (SOARES, 2002). The real difference, nevertheless, presented in the current time is for what they dispute, i.e. the resources that are at stake. In this study, the interviewees used different symbolic resources to legitimate potentially such field domain. The elder capoeira practitioners, who teach for a longer time in the municipality, defend the respect to a hierarchical relationship. It occurs because they are at the top of the pyramid, as you can see below:

Interviewee 3: Many factors made such rivalry come about. But the first reason of all was the fact that three persons didn't accept a hierarchy, so all this got under way.

Interviewee 11: I think it should begin with a word known as hierarchy. The guys should respect it. And who brought the capoeira for the municipality should be more respected.

Interviewee 9: in my point of view, they oughta respect the el-

der people. There are people here with more than 20 years of capoeira without being respected.

By contrast, there are younger teachers of Piúma who want to assert themselves in the field by using physical resources: the game of capoeira. They defend the performance in the roda as principal value to legitimate the capoeira. They also assert that such aspect is what establishes the superiority of a group over another. One can see such perspective in the citations below:

Interviewee 6: Here, in Piúma, there're some old people who think that the capoeira have to be respected by the time they practise it, and not for what it represents within the roda.

Interviewee 16: For me, the most complicated [...] is cos there are some nitpicking groups, which talk more nonsense than really play.

Interviewee 7: There are some guys... I cannot believe it [...] they should be in a Museum with a microphone, so that they could keep talking about capoeira. It's unbelievable! They just like to talk and don't play at all.

The specific authority that is at stake is a state of the relation of strength⁷, as a concept studied by Ginzburg (2002), including the capoeira teachers in the fight for power to be known at times as authorities, with legitimacy recognised. This way, they can interfere and talk in the name of capoeira of the municipality. According to Bourdieu (1989, p. 90):

[...] the fights of which the space is the field focus on a monopoly of an authentic violence (specific authority), which is typical of the considered field, i.e. definitely the preservation or subversion of the structure to distribute specific resources [...].

7-For Ginzburg (2002, p. 43), all document, witness, namely, all 'evidence' possesses intention from whom perform it, hence, the need to read that '[...] the witness inside out, against the intention of whom performed it. Only this way one can consider both power relations and what is uncompromising to it'.

The specific resources, basis for the power or the specific authority (typical of a field) tend to strategies of preservation—those that in field to produce cultural objects tend to defend the orthodoxy. By contrast, those with fewer resources (often the newcomers, and, thus, most often, the youngers) tend to strategies of subversion, i.e. of heresy.

When assessing the conventional space for the game in the environment that formed the field of capoeira, we found in the elder teachers' conversations the strategies for preservation grounded in hierarchy. The youngers, however, use as tactics for subversion the physical resources⁸. Despite the difference, such two groups have a fundamental interest in common: the seek for specific resources to be recognised as authentic authority in the field of capoeira.

It is still interesting observe, in the conversation of interviewees, that the reasons that create the rivalry and violence are attributed to the way capoeira is organised — groups that compete one another, and most interviewees do not seek for reasons out of the specific resources, i.e. reasons that go beyond the disputes among groups in the municipality.

The research subjects did not consider that emotionally unbalanced people caused the problem, as if the violence was an inborn trait of personality. The rivalry and violence causes are linked to how the relationships are established within institutions (capoeira groups). Such fact strengthens the theory of Aquino (1996), who knows that the manner the institutions are organised can make more effective the development of violence. From the 16 interviewees, just one, in fact, considers that the rivalry and violence are caused by capoeira external

8-By using the studies of Certeau (1994, p. 46) as a theoretical support, the concept of strategy is used as '[...] the calculation for power relations that become possible since the subject who wants and can should be isolated from a 'environment'. The concept requires a place able to be limited as a specific place, and, hence, able to be as basis to manager its relations with different things from the outside. For Certeau (1994, p. 46-47), '[...] the tactics depends on the another's field. Trying and trying, in order to get something. One can say that the tactics is in a permanent movement (realised in the air) to obtain legitimacy in the another's field, and this ensures a strategic non-place'. Santos (2005) and Santos, Nunes and Ferreira Neto (2009) show the use of such author as reference for studies involving PE daily life.

reasons, e.g. '[...] innumerable things cause violence: woman, work, daily pressure. Considerably many things make such rivalry blow up [...]'. (INTERVIEWEE 15).

The interviewees' conversation, then, is quite marked by conflicts caused by the strategic actions or strategic tactics, or both, in which the power relationships established by the groups evidence the search to monopolise the field of capoeira in Piúma. Although the dispute is expressly showed in communicative actions of the research participants, when they were investigated on what could be done to soften rivalry and violence among groups, the interviewees' large portion points out the 'guidance for difference'. Such guidance is a present matter in the discursive interaction, and it is a resource used by the subjects. Thus, they can relate to one another cooperating, competing or dominating (RESENDE; RAMALHO, 2006). In the case of this study, the guidance for difference shows in nuance of cooperation, as we can see in the next talks:

Interviewee 4: I think there's only a way to end this: the teachers oughta seat and exchange ideas, forgetting about problems like that.

Interviewee 1: I think people should respect more one another etc [...] Can you imagine a roda with all groups?

Interviewee 12: I think that should have a commonsense as for capoeira older people here in Piúma. They should exchange some ideas and stop with such nonsense of rivalry.

The guidance for difference in the interviewees' conversation leads us to think on solidarity, in which we try to fit hugely different people from us for the roda of us all⁹. For Rorty (1994), the solidarity helps us to learn how the socialisation bonds are built by using the sense of belonging. Such fact, however, should not be comprehended as a universal value, i.e. an inherent feature to the human character. For the author, one built it, hence, it is not natural. In this wise, time and space for a certain context perhaps influence individuals on different behavioural means, and such fact hinders to find a merely place for

9-'Roda of us all' means a circle including all persons from all groups.

human lives be explained and comprehended. The solidarity, thus, shows in the environment we are, and we express it for those we consider one of us. The sense of belonging, as stated, can be seen in:

Interviewee 11: We should get the ideas together and trying one single work, aiming for a good quality as for our capoeira teaching.

Interviewee 4: [...] if the groups were together, the capoeira could grow here, in Piúma.

Interviewee 14: The best choice would be become such groups in a single one.

Although most assessed conversation can potentially overcome the differences among capoeira groups in Piúma, a small part of the interviewees considers impossible such overcoming, not surmising any alternative for conciliation. See the example of such statement: 'I'd consider it only if everyone was born again, because there are some people who make everyone think they are capoeira practitioners and, in fact, they are abadá¹⁰ thieves (INTERVIEWEE).

However, irrespective of believing in the possibility or not of a peaceful coexistence, among the capoeira groups in Piúma, the interviewees agree that rivalry and violence affect capoeira image in society. The next talks show:

Interviewee 3: [...] it hinders a lot, since we cannot show our work for society.

Interviewee 2: Nowadays, the capoeira could be seen differently. We could have much more respect from society, but such fights somehow blacken the capoeira image.

Interviewee 8: [...] it could be good: capoeira being respected by the society, but we know we didn't have a good image for it.

Interviewee 10: How could the society like something that cau-

10- 'Abadá' is the caoeira pants (or clothes).

se violence and blacken people's image? For sure the impact is negative. I've got no way to be well seen with such bloody rivalry.

Interviewee 13: I think that the rivalry caused a spot for the capoeira in Piúma; for me, there is no way anymore to clean such spot up.

Thus, you can say that despite legal today, the capoeira is still seen as an excluded practice. The society imagination strengthens part of such stigma by the frequent violent situations, caused by capoeira groups. Considering the interviewees' accounts, we realised that sundry capoeira practitioners, held to the conception of rivalry and violence, build up an identity discourses that establishes fighting competitively. So, such discourses become respected within the field of capoeira.

Final considerations

When we identified and assessed the reasons that caused rivalry and violence among capoeira groups in Piúma, we also pointed out that both are provoked, including other factors, by the dispute for legitimacy in the field of capoeira. In such dispute, older teachers defend the hierarchy as main resources for authentication; younger teachers, by contrast, as for recognition.

The reasons for rivalry and violence in capoeira, based on the interpretation of subjects, are different in all senses, since each subject interprets such problem differently. It is interesting, however, observing the manner such polysemous discourses produce different identities and form the relations among teachers and capoeira groups. At the same time the subjects asserts a need to keep and weight the rivalry and violence to comprise capoeira groups; simultaneously, they point out the solidarity as an option to establish a new basis for interaction among the capoeira practitioners in the municipality.

In this wise, we stress that this study analysis revealed a problem to be faced, whatever be the influence on rivalry and violence to produce a capoeira practitioner identity and its implications to form the different groups.

We can state that, however, the discussion does not regard only to

capoeira groups in Piúma. It is also present in the different intervention spaces of PE, revealing that is necessary to produce new studies, both for capoeira, broadening the research subjects and their geographical cutting, and for other fields. Thus, we will be able to observe how such phenomenon expresses itself in different contexts respecting production.

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