81 - THE CAPOEIRA GAME AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH POWER THE MYTH ACCORDING TO PIERRE ANSART

Prof. JORGE FELIPE FONSECA MOREIRA
PPGEFUGF UNIPLI. Rio de Janeiro Brazil
jorgecoluma@ig.com.br
Prof. Ms. SIMONE FREITAS CHAVES
PPGEFUGF - UNIPLI
Niterói - Rio de Janeiro - Brazil

Capoeira, because of its hybridism of dance, fight, sport and game, has attracted more and more followers, maybe due to the fact that it became a sports modality, which granted it the *status* of Brazilian martial art. Its practitioners are now considered athletes or sportsmen, with a quite different status from the "capoeira" players of the past, who used to be arrested and persecuted by the establishment of the time.

Along with the process of being proclaimed a sport modality, capoeira federations and associations were created and they have spreading and promoting this modality both in Brazil and abroad. These associations, or groups, as they are also called, seem to work as ruling and orienting elements of their affiliates' actions, operating as companies, with a franchising and branches system. In several countries, capoeira is taught in Portuguese and its history, movements and songs based on the Brazilian masters' teachings are reproduced.

These capoeira players have, consequently, a capitalization opportunity and by making use of their know-how in this Brazilian art form, they start to have good professional possibilities in this new expanding international marketplace. Countries such as France, Italy, the United States, and Germany receive many Brazilian capoeira players to teach this sports modality. They also come to educational institutions (BARBIERI, 1993). Studies carried out by the Atlas of Sports in Brazil show that capoeira has around six million practitioners, and approximately thirty five thousand schools in Brazil alone, and it is also present in as many as a hundred and fifty six countries (Viera, 2005).

Visibly ascending in society, capoeira has been spreading not only in the world of sports but also in the cultural field, as it can be seen in cinematographic, literary, musical and artistic productions (Araújo, 1999). Among all these nuances and characteristics present in capoeira, the most striking characteristic is the possibility of existence of myths that may emerge from the discursive utterances sung and narrated by the practitioners of this game.

According to Barthes, (no date) the myth is expressed in oral or written form or in any representations. Thus, we acknowledge the existence of a symbolic universe underlying the *capoeira* game, whose meanings may be unveiled through a study of the myth and its narratives, in an attempt to understand, or decipher, some peculiarities connected to the modality being considered.

Our purpose is to understand this phenomenon following Pierre Ansart's analysis, and revisiting his work *Ideologies, Conflicts and Power*, we suggest some reflection over the social imaginaries and the capoeira practice in the present context.

The author states that the imaginary connects a given group to this group itself, thus allocating social identities and roles through a collective and internalized code, regulating behaviors aiming at common results and purposes to achieve. According to Ansart, social imaginaries are produced both by modern societies as well as by the ones without a writing system. In both there exists a collective code of symbols which speaks for itself, setting rules, behaviors and values according to which the social actors recognize themselves and interact in a social context determined by this symbolic set.

The author analyses the symbology and ideologies and argues that it is essential to insist that meaning be inserted in practice, since the meaning imposed by specific groups may be fundamental for hegemonic and collective actions inside them.

For Ansart the social imaginaries are built upon three pillars, namely: myth, religion, and ideological discourse.

The question of the myth leads us to reflect upon the existence of a meaning system within which the social practices adjust, and the myth is considered an important element to maintain this system. According to the author "the myth is not exactly a belief and even less an act of faith. It is the daily experience, the experienced imaginary, the kind of relationship of men with themselves, with the world, and with the other" (p.23).

The world order may be explained and analyzed in its totality by the cluster of meanings provided by the mythical narrative. In this case, the myth becomes a hierarchy-generating factor and contributes to the allocation of roles in the societies it rules. Ansart concludes that the myth logic is transferred to the social logic.

The different practices may find meaning and explanation in the mythical narrative, which implicitly contains "*the essential purpose of collective life*" (p.24). The myth, then, undertakes the feature of an arrival point that is renewed and justified by the rite. Thus, "the rite justifies the rhythms of collective life" (p.24). Regarding hierarchy-generation, the philosopher reminds us that "the unifying myth that unites does it by accepting the differences, expresses the diversity of values and serves as the base for the authority relationships between both females and males" (p.25). We may find this idea in the creation myths that suggest the roles to be performed by men and women.

We may state that rites such parties and religious ceremonies may feed with narratives and metaphors the myths which provide meaning to the social practices and build the collective memory of certain groups. Let us take the capoeira baptism ceremony, a rite of passage created by master Bimba that initiates and ranks the capoeira players in a festive ritual, when the mythical narrative is present in the songs sung during the ceremony and in the traditions which seems to search for a liaison to the mythical past. In addition to making the rite meaningful, these narratives seem to contribute to the myth-construction process of renowned capoeira masters. Let's hear:

cry capoeira, capoeira cry, cry capoeira, mestre Bimba is gone. Mestre Bimba is gone, but left a beautiful game, he must be playing now in a *roda* (circle) in the infinite. Capoeira master, there are many around, but no one that can be compared to Mestre Bimba, will ever exist. Mestre Bimba is gone, and will never come back, said goodbye to capoeira and went to heaven to rest. Attention capoeira players, please, take off your hats because Mestre Bimba is playing in a *roda* there in heaven (dp)

After his death, Mestre Bimba starts living in the pantheon intended for idols and divinities. The narrative shows us that Bimba is unique and irreplaceable, a true divine exception, who lives in heaven and plays capoeira with other illuminates in Aruanda lands, the eternal mythical home of the Afro-Brazilian gods (Lopes, 2003).

Because of this, Mestre Bimba acquires a mythical character among his followers, who now possess an authority set up in the mythical figure of Mestre Bimba and can so ascribe values using the master's voice, such as "Bimba ordered us to play, he ordered, Bimba ordered us to sing, he ordered, Bimba ordered us to kill, he ordered." (dp)

Pierre Ansart argues that the essence of meaning can only be achieved through transpositions of meaningful

1- In 1890 capoeira was included in the penal code and its practitioners were physically punished; some were sent to prison and in some cases were banished to Fernando de Noronha Island (Soares, 1994).
2- Manoel dos Reis Machado, (1900-1974), a renowned *capoeirista*, fighter and founder of the regional capoeira (CAPOEIRA, 1997 P.64)
3- Vicente Ferreira Pastinha, (1889-1991), the best-known master of angola capoeira (capoeira, 1997.p.82)
4- *Pai de santo*, custodian, *pai -de- terreiro*, the master, earthly guide, spiritual governor and the candomblé manager (CASCUDO, 2001. P59.).

experiences, as "the mythical experience is responsible for the desires*"* (pg. 24). Due to their spectacular and heroic aspects, these experiences have the identifying and transposing power in different layers, since the heroic narrative can relate to different contexts, increasing the scope of incorporation and seduction within the social groups. Thus, the mythical narratives told and sung by the capoeira players are full of meanings that may be incorporated in the practitioners' daily routine.

We find this idea expressed in an interview of a capoeira master in a specialized journal. When asked about the musical aspect in the *rodas*, he says: *"I try to live every song I sing as if I were there"* (Efrain, 2005 p1). This means that music seems to enable the capoeira player to carry himself to the song locus, incorporating metaphors or mythical narratives present in the lyrics sung by the singer, who, with the song and music, leads the practitioners towards its archetypes and origin myths.

According to Ansart, religion and ideology do not account for the blending of meaning with practice because they do not contain the relationship between experience and meanings, that is, there is not a transference that justifies the social actions experienced in the groups. On the other hand, the mythical narrative, because of the experiences undergone by it characters, provides a satisfactory support for this liaison. Ansart says he worries about this connection of the essence of meaning to experience in the mythical context because societies that have the myth as a symbolic mechanism may have imperfections and also contradictions.

The mythical narrative may qualify social practices and rank them hierarchically, adding values to the subject concerning the myth. This way, the one who gets closer to the mythical narrative will be the most prestigious within the group. In capoeira, we can see that there is a pursuit of this hierarchy, when one searches for a direct liaison with mythical figures such as Mestre Bimba, Mestre Pastinha and others, revealing, thus, a real power-based relationship. Da Mata (2001) says that "in the regional and in the angola capoeira, the capoeira master has become an all-mighty and his followers are subordinate to his power" (pg. 27). It is worth emphasizing that, when they take the master's "voice" in a narrative as their own, they resort to a mythical figure who legitimizes the discourse implicit in the song, and so the master can impute almost unquestionable values to his followers *"hey yes,, yes, yes, hey no, no, no, if my master master says yes nobody dares say no..." (dp)*

Ansart shows us that collective life runs the risk of losing meaning and coherence if this meaning is not updated. For this purpose, the rites, feasts and ceremonies are important because they not only update but also refresh certain myths, reinforcing the meaning system. This system relates the globalizing meaning of the myth to an explanation of the world and of the things that exist and happen in this world, appointing hierarchies and powers in the collectivity.

Regarding the powers, it is relevant to point out that they are socially constructed and determined among the members of the group, who acknowledges the other as either apparently superior or inferior, according to selected references. For the author, these references may be selected according to the myth that composes the group within a context. Power is straightly connected to the access to specific mythical codes solely restricted to the chosen few within the group, because "the mythical knowledge, unevenly acquired by different members, constitutes, to a certain extent, a rare benefit and its acquisition will favor the access to a privileged position" (Ansart. p27).

In capoeira and in other Afro-Brazilian manifestations, we may find these signs in rituals where tradition establishes that only the ones having this symbolic knowledge, such as masters or *Babalorixás*, may have a privileged place because they take the mythical narrative as their own and are acknowledged within the group as priests and supporters of the rites essential to the harmony and meaning present. These "masters" become essential to the system, as "the older men will be in charge of keeping and passing on this knowledge, finding in this appropriation of the symbolic goods the origin of a privileged social status or the means to ascend to other social wealth" (Ansart p.28).

Today, we often find capoeira masters who live exclusively on the name acquired in the *rodas*, and teach classes in different places in Brazil and in the world, claiming they are teaching the *pulo do gato* for practitioners of this modality. This symbolic capital represents a social status within the group, which only the ones mastering this mythical knowledge have.

We may notice that capoeira mythical figures, such as Bimba and Pastinha, are used as reference to maintain an ideological discourse in order to keep certain groups or capoeira associations cohesive. While Bimba is the father of the regional capoeira, Pastinha is the leading figure in the angola capoeira. The songs tell us: *Yê! The history of Bahia / has an immortal name / learned at the age of ten with an African master / something valuable / that he brought from his homeland / the angola capoeira / with all its magic / his name is Pastinha / the master of the masters / of capoeira players from Bahia (Bola sete).* Mestre Bimba is also praised: *Manoel dos Reis Machado / he is extraordinary / he is Mestre Bimba / founder of regional, camará... (dp)*

Pierre Ansart states that with tensions and rivalries, the groups and sub-groups start reinventing or adapting the myths in order to attend either personal or collective interests within the groups. And thus, while the ones who have the power restate or even manipulate the myths that support them and reassure their superiority, the ones that struggle to free themselves from their subordinate condition try to create symbolic mechanisms supported by the myth, which denies inferiority condition, utilizing the same manipulation or mythical reinvention used by their opponents.

André Lace (1999) shows in his book *A Volta do Mundo da Capoeira how* Mestre Bimba's work was altered with the objective of consolidating a corporative discourse of the group that represents him today. In the first edition of the book that comes together with Mestre Bimba's record and his regional capoeira contains the following text: "his creative spirit used elements from savate, jiu-jitsu, Greek-Roman fight and judo, and created his own method, known today as the regional bahiana, based on 52 types of attacks" (p. 350). Lace says that in the latest edition of this book the part referring to the non-Brazilian fights contained in Bimba's regional capoeira was removed from the paragraph, and the text now reads as follows: "his creative spirit produced his own method, known today as the regional bahiana, based on 52 types of attacks" (p. 350).

The regional genealogy had been subtlety altered, but this was decisive for the rise of an ideological discourse that pointed out the beating as the sole element that contributed to the formation of Mestre Bimba's capoeira. After this reinvention, Mestre Bimba defends himself from the accusation of having made capoeira lose its main characteristics and starts to be praised as the founding myth of the "new capoeira", the regional one. According to Ansart, this is nothing but:

Transforming or reinventing the myth to adapt it to private requirements, or else, party requirements. A group in an inferior condition and that makes an effort to rise in the prestige and power hierarchy manipulates the myth, remove the part of the narrative that explained this inferiority, replacing it for another one that legitimates its superiority (pg. 29).

The author concludes that the myth may be useful both to maintain the supreme power of some groups over the others, as well as to change this state of affairs. And so we understand that the symbolic tool may be manipulated, favoring a narrative where a group outstands, always over-shading the other. Thus, for the capoeira practitioners, Master Bimba and Master Pastinha are considered real myths that represent and "speak" for their schools and for their followers through their achievements, lives and through the usually told, sung and reinvented narratives throughout the times.

5- Resource which consists of escaping with dexterity from a disadvantageous situation (AURELIO SEC XXI)
6- Terminology used by Pierre Bordieu to define symbols of power (2002, pág. 15)
7- Popular fight of African origin also known as *ox-beating*. A capoeira mode well practiced in cities from Bahia such as Cachoeira, Santo Amaro and also in the capital, where the beating is a synonym of capoeira or *pernada* (Cascudo, 2001. pág.59)

BIBLIOGRAPHY
ALMEIDA, Ubirajara Guimarães. Água de beber câmara, um bate papo de capoeira. 1 ed Salvador, EGBA, 1999.
ANSART, Pierre. Ideologias, conflitos e poder.
ARAÚJO, Rosângela Costa. Sou Discípulo que aprende, meu mestre me deu lição: Tradição e educação entre os angoleiros baianos (anos 80-90). Dissertação de mestrado. São Paulo, USP, 1999. 37p.
BARBIERI, César. Um jeito brasileiro de aprender a ser. 1 ed Brasília, DF CIDOCA, 1993. 33p.
BOURDIEU, Pierre. O poder simbólico. 7 ed Rio de Janeiro, Bertrand Brasil, 2004. 10p.
BURGUÊS, Mestre. Cânticos de capoeira. 1 ed. 1982
CAMISA, Mestre. Cantigas de Capoeira. 1 ed. Rio de Janeiro, Abadá Edições, 1997
CAPOEIRA, Nestor. Capoeira: Os fundamentos da malicia, 3ed Rio de Janeiro, Record, 1997. 64, 82p.
CASCUDO, Luis da Câmara, Dicionário do folclore brasileiro. 11 ed, 2001. 35, 59p.
DA COSTA, Lamartine Pereira. Atlas do Esporte no Brasil. 1 ed Rio de Janeiro, Shape, 2005. 39p.
DA MATA, João. A liberdade do corpo: soma, capoeira angola e anarquismo. São Paulo, imaginário, 2001.27p.
EFRAIN, Mestre. Entrevista concedida ao jornal Vício no Din din dom. Rio de Janeiro. 2 ed, 2005, 1p.
LOPES, Nei. Novo dicionário banto do Brasil. 1 ed Rio de Janeiro, Pallas, 2003. 32p.
LUIZ, André Lace Lopes. A Volta do mundo da capoeira. 1 ed Rio de Janeiro, Coreográfica 1999. 350p.
PEREIRA, Carlos. BÔRI, Mônica. Cantos e ladainhas da capoeira da Bahia. 1 ed. Ed Via Bahia, Salvador, Bahia. 1992. 122p.
SOARES, Carlos Eugênio Líbano. A negregada instituição, os capoeiras no Rio De Janeiro. 1 ed. Rio de Janeiro: Secretaria municipal de cultura, 1994. 8p.

Address: Rua Fernandes Sampaio, 240/ bl. 02/ aptº 305. Sulacap Rio de Janeiro, CEP 21741-200. Email: ***jorgecoluma@ig.com.br***

THE CAPOEIRA GAME AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH POWER THE MYTH ACCORDING TO PIERRE ANSART

Abstract:
This study aims at discussing the power relationships that permeate the *capoeira* game and consolidate in the master's mythical figure. We acknowledge the existence of a symbolic universe underlying the *capoeira* game, whose meanings may be unveiled through a study of the myth and its narratives, in an attempt to understand, or decipher, some peculiarities connected to the modality being considered. The dialogue between myth and capoeira was built according to the anthropologist Pierre Ansart's theoretical perspective, revealing the extent to which the mythical narratives are organized, contributing to the preservation of the social relationships inside the groups. The myth may hierarchize and suggest values, orienting both the actions and practices of the social groups, getting incorporated in the capoeira songs and legitimating the master's discourse.
Key Words: myth, *capoeira*, social imaginary.

LE JEU DE CAPOEIRA ET LES RELATIONS DE POUVOIR LE MYTHE DANS LA PERSPECTIVE DE PIERRE ANSART

Cette étude a le but de discuter les relations de pouvoir qui interviennent dans le jeu de capoeira et qui se fondent dans la figure mythique du maître. Nous admettons l'existence d'un univers symbolique sous-jacent au jeu de capoeira, dont les sens puissent être dévoilés moyennant l'étude du mythe et de ses récits, pour essayer de comprendre, ou déchiffrer, quelques particularités liées à la modalité en question. Le dialogue entre mythe et capoeira a été bâti sous la perspective de l'anthropologue Pierre Ansart, e montre combien les récits mythiques sont organisés et contribuent au mantien des relations sociales à l'intérieur des groupes. Le mythe peut hiérarchiser et suggérer des valeurs pour directionner les actions et les pratiques des groupes sociaux, en les incorporant aux chants de capoeira pour légitimer le discours du maître.
Mots-clés : mythe, capoeira, imaginaire social

EL JUEGO DE CAPOEIRA Y LAS RELACIONES DE PODERÍO EL MITO EN LA PERSPECTIVA DE PIERRE ANSART

Esta investigación tiene el objetivo de discutir las relaciones de poderío que intervienen en el juego de capoeira y se funden en la figura mítica del maestro. Admitimos la existencia de un universo simbólico subyacente al juego de capoeira, cuyos sentidos puedan ser revelados a través del estudio del mito y de sus relatos, para intentar comprender, o descifrar, algo de las particularidades vinculadas a la modalidad en cuestión. El diálogo entre mito y capoeira se construyó bajo la perspectiva teórica del antropólogo Pierre Ansart, quien muestra cuanto los relatos míticos se organizan y contribuyen para el mantenimiento de las relaciones sociales dentro de los grupos. El mito puede jerarquizar y sugerir valores para orientar acciones y prácticas de los grupos sociales, se incorporando en las canciones de capoeira y legitimando el discurso del maestro.
Palabra-llave: mito, capoeira, imaginario social.

O JOGO DA CAPOEIRA E AS RELAÇÕES DE PODER O MITO NA PERSPECTIVA DE PIERRE ANSART.

RESUMO
Este estudo tem como objetivo discutir as relações de poder que permeiam o jogo da capoeira e se consubstanciam na figura mítica do mestre. Admitimos a existência de um universo simbólico subjacente ao jogo de capoeira, cujos sentidos possam ser desvelados através do estudo do mito e suas narrativas, a fim de tentarmos compreender, ou decifrar, algumas particularidades ligadas à modalidade em questão. O diálogo entre o mito e a capoeira foi construído sob a perspectiva teórica do antropólogo Pierre Ansart, mostrando o quanto as narrativas míticas organizam-se e contribuem para a manutenção das relações sociais no interior dos grupos. O mito pode hierarquizar e sugerir valores, norteando ações e práticas dos grupos sociais, incorporando-se nas cantigas de capoeira e legitimando o discurso do mestre.
Palavras chaves: mito, capoeira, imaginário social.