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The Brazilian Peoples' Knowledge

-“**Capoeira is Brazilian peoples' knowledge.**” This is how Master Angoleiro (J. Bamberg), Master Bimba's apprentice, tells us how Master Bimba use to define Capoeira. Nowadays, Master Angoleiro feels bothered by the “new traditions” in Capoeira... Quite a fellow!

Some time ago, when arriving at an event, Master Angoleiro was presented before starting the roda playing his berimbau viola. To his surprise, the responsible for the group said: “-Master, here is the gunga for you!” Still, Master Angoleiro insisted on playing his berimbau and yet another comment followed: “-Here in this group the gunga **comands** the roda and, since you are the oldest master here, you **must** play the gunga.” The Master stood¹ outside of the roda for a while, without playing either instruments, patiently waiting until the end of the event, and then thanked everyone before leaving.

It seems that people with more refined thoughts, such as Master Angoleiro, attract this sort of situation, and the interesting thing to observe is the kind of reflection that these thoughts bring to us, always something obvious and very important about what happened. And even though the reflection is obvious, most people wouldn't have noticed a thing. The Master, on the other hand, said something very interesting: “-Its only in the minds of these “oligofrênicos” that a “thing” (or an object, referring to the berimbau gunga) can be of more importance then the importance of a Masters knowledge”. “Oligofrênico” is a generous nick-name given by the Master to the students that are full of muscles and empty headed.

This is only another story, among many, that call out attention to the re-invention of traditions to legitimate the “cultural heritage”. These re-invented rituals may lead us towards a process in which education and the true meaning of Capoeira – Brazilian peoples' knowledge – are put aside. What matters to those people is merely showing how much they know or, in some occasions, how much the other one does not know about the re-invented traditions of a certain Capoeira school.

That is how traditions and rituals that were meant to keep alive our popular culture end up bringing a competitive, exclusive and oppressive environment into the Capoeira practice. In this situation, always giving more emphasis on so called differences between schools and groups rather than on what we all have in common – we are all human beings, all Capoeiras.

¹ In the original text, this sentence was a lot more into the Capoeira Cultural Context. “O Mestre gingou um pouco... (sem entrar na roda), não tocou nem um nem outro, esperou o desenrolar do evento educadamente, não “comandou” nada e... Ao fim do evento agradeceu a todos e foi-se embora.”



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As Master Angoleiro would say: “-**This is market’s Capoeira, boy! This is not Capoeira!**” He also tells us that these strict rituals, these generalized rules that said to be “traditions” and “fundaments”, are in fact re-inventions, part of a process of remaking traditions in Capoeira. This is an organized movement created by some people to justify their strict behavior in an attempt to inherit a cultural legacy built by true Masters of the popular knowledge. Those were the ones capable of teaching with simplicity, commitment and devotion. They did have their rituals and methods, each one in his own way, but always with a view to passing on their knowledge – Capoeira to their similars.

The late Master Iziquiel leaded the rodas singing his chulas and playing his pandeiro and, nowadays, Master João Pequeno leads rodas with only a baqueta in his hand. Master João Grande uses a white uniform in his school instead of black and yellow uniform of Master Pastinha’s football team, the Ipiranga. All of them are great masters, very much respected, that built their traditions and rituals during years of commitment, transferring their knowledge to their similars. Their knowledge, rituals, tradition and dedication are instruments of freedom that were inherited from their cultural ancestors.

I have no doubt that these wonderful people that made Capoeira a practice (and not a profession!), would never put their rituals and traditions above education and good manners towards others. Even though the berimbau is a sacred instrument, to agree with Master Angoleiro, I believe we cannot replace a true Master, education and good common sense by a group of re-invented traditions! Education, good common sense and good manners must always come first. Before any ritual, tradition or fundament, must come respect to others and good values. Knowledge in Capoeira must serve to all, must free the oppressed, include the excluded, must be above everything else serving solidarity!

However, there is one more reason that supports the radical behavior, the re-making of traditions in Capoeira by some of the followers of such actions: adapting to the market! Knowledge is kept in the hands of few and the power and money are restricted to a closed circuit. Out of this circuit lies a large amount of young teachers waiting for acknowledgment and acceptance that will never come. This for a simple reason, those young teachers are the largest market of the few radicals that for financial purposes shut the doors that they themselves used one day. “-**It’s a shame! They are erasing their own path**”, says Master Angoleiro.

We must beware! Today, a great part of the Capoeira World is suffering changes to fit into a market that only views profit. We must not forget to ask ourselves: What is this market we are adapting ourselves to? What are our true objectives while teaching and practicing Capoeira?



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Very well, to be able to change something we should not accept the “truths” that are “taught” to us or sold to us as Capoeira! We must listen, study and practice a much more coherent truth! As Master Cláudio Danadinho (Professor in Architecture and one of the founders of the Senzala Group) would say: “-**Capoeira is a method that prepares one for live, a path to universal happiness**”. To Dr. Angelo Decanio (one of the oldest apprentices of Master Bimba) “**Capoeira is an instrument of Christian Citizenship**”.

Capoeira is our instrument to improve the world around us! But to achieve that goal we must be familiarized with our instrument, extract all of its teaching and learning possibilities. And, in this sense, sound knowledge is worth while, knowing how to practice and teach the Capoeira of Masters Bimba, Pastinha, Valdemar, Traíra, Paulo dos Anjos and many others. As Master Suassuna would say: “-**We must practice a Capoeira without labels**”.

While building the future it is important to bare in mind the life we live in our society. We should teach and practice a Capoeira that will criticize and evaluate our mistakes and bring to us more human values. Researching the past, the fundamentals and traditions of the past, not to imprison us, but as a way to prepare for being better Masters of the Popular Knowledge in Capoeira, we will also be helping to build a better society.

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