

# Capoeira: An Alternative Instrument to Foster the Citizenship Process of African Descendents from a Social Work Perspective

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to promote the study of Capoeira and its relevance to the social and cultural formation of black youth. This Afro-Brazilian symbol has been recognized worldwide with its thematic set as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Brazilian Humanity by IPHAN and UNESCO. The study brings elements to understand the capoeira cultural capital of the Afro-Brazilian people and also as an alternative instrument, so that the Social Worker can find ways to overcome the challenges encountered in their daily praxis. The proposal is to resort to this culture as a way to enable the awareness of black youth and thus empower and promote citizenship for these individuals, who were historically stigmatized in Brazilian society. It is a theme that requires a new teleological perspective, which understands that race relations permeate the expressions of the social issue, so that not only an inclusive practice of Social Work, but a practice that is socially and culturally transformative, can be exercised. Thus, the use of capoeira/Afro-Brazilian culture, within the scope of the National Policy of Living Culture (PNCV), Law No. 13.018/2014, which may aspire and enable the materialization of Afrocidadanization of young black people.

**Key words:** capoeira, culture, afrocidadanization, social service

## 1. Introduction

This article aims to develop a discussion about the possibility of recognizing and thinking of Capoeira as an alternative instrument to foster the citizenship process of the black youth in Brazil, from the perspective of Social Work. This Afro-Brazilian symbol has been recognized worldwide with all its themes as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Brazilian Humanity. In the sense, this work seeks to bring elements to understand Capoeira as the cultural capital of the Afro-Brazilian people and as an alternative instrument for the Social Work, from a new teleological perspective, to broaden and arouse debates in his professional praxis between Capoeira culture and Social Work, in the sense of empowering and

promoting citizenship to these individuals, who are historically stigmatized in Brazilian society.

From this purpose, the discussion developed here will be to address; the historical context of capoeira and its oscillations, to present how this is no longer a marginalized and forbidden practice and how it obtains the recognition of Roda de Capoeira and Capoeira as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity; reflect the laws 11.645/08 — which discusses the obligation to teach Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous History and Culture in schools; identify how Social Work can use Capoeira to foster citizenship process of the black youth, in the 13.018/14 — which establishes the National Policy of Living Culture (PNCV).

The concept of fostering the citizenship process of African descendents, according to Guimarães [1] represents a utopia of thinking ways to transform the historical conditions experienced by individuals of the

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black population in Brazilian society, as an alternative to what has been understood as the “Brazilian racial democracy”. It aims to concretize and empirically incorporate the achievements of meaningful and pertinent rights for individuals in a democratic and just society. That is, it would be conceived as the effective realization of full citizenship for individuals of the black population, historically subordinated in our society. The concretization of *Afrocidanização* represents and encompasses several references: the recognition of racial identity as positive; the recognition of the protagonism of the black population as founder and builder of Brazilian society; the right to equality and liberty; the right to difference. The right to achieve social benefits in equal opportunities and conditions, that is, the fostering of the citizenship process of African descendants would be the realization of a true “racial democracy”, a social equity in which black individuals are contemplated and established in Brazilian society.

The development of this study involves some important axes: the first refers to the sign of capoeira as an instrument of resistance of individuals of the black population in Brazil, as well as for the preservation of the culture, habits and customs of Africans who came here enslaved. The second point refers to the analysis of capoeira as a marginalized culture to its recognition as a cultural heritage, besides discussing the threat of the desculturalization of capoeira as an African matrix culture, since the advent of capoeira gospel; Another relevant point concerns the understanding of culture and education as an instrument for the recognitions of Afro-Brazilian identity in a globalized society, through which the acquisition and incorporation of cultural capital by young black Brazilians is discussed. The last point discussed discusses the possibility of Social Work, fostering the citizenship process of African descendants through the use of the sign of capoeira, in their daily professional praxis.

In this way, our discussion about capoeira as a cultural sign of resistance of Afro-Brazilian men and

women, presents the historical context of this symbol and its oscillations, which occurs in the periods of Brazil Colony, First Republic and in the contemporaneity of a forbidden practice considered as a social problem, the recognition by the Institute of National Historical and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN) as a cultural issue.

## **2. Capoeira: A Cultural Sign of African-Brazilian Resistance**

In the midst of diverse Afro-Brazilian cultural expressions, we have Capoeira — a socio-cultural heritage, derived from the African and Afro-Brazilian peoples, who, after a trajectory marked by slavery, struggles, persecution, and social marginalization, took shape and is a sign of resistance of individuals of the black population of Brazil. Capoeira was used by the enslaved as a strategy to maintain social unity, preserving their customs and religious rituals, as well as the preservation of body expression that were inherent to the black people.

Capoeira, as a culture generated in Brazil, diverges in academic research. Some research versions of this art - fight date back to the 17th century with reports of escapes and acts of defense of the enslaved, but for some researchers the most detailed record emerged in the 19th century, with detailed descriptions of body manifestation. However, the question persists as to whether capoeira arose in the African continent or in Brazil. The researchers who approach this theme agree with the thesis that with the advent of Africans brought to Brazil by the Portuguese to be enslaved, they brought body movement, but capoeira in its essence would have been created in Brazil by black Africans. Janes highlights that<sup>1</sup>.

Currently, capoeira stands out as being the only sport originally from Brazil, based on the cultural roots of

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<sup>1</sup> “There is no data in recent historiography in Brazil, which makes it possible to state that Capoeira comes from Africa. Certainly, it was developed by slaves in Brazil. Therefore, Capoeira is legitimately and genuinely Brazilian. Records that determine dates for its origins dates ranging from 1578 to 1632” [2].

Afro-Brazilian matrix, which may have arisen due to need for liberation and defense from punishment. The origin of the capoeira nomenclature generates debates among several authors however, Areias conceptualizes capoeira<sup>2</sup>. Capoeira began to be identified by the sound of berimbau, tambourines and atabaques, associated with clapping and chanting, which rock and dictate the rhythm of the game, the fight and the dance. Throughout history, capoeira has been present in the process of building the identity and resistance of the black people in Brazil, which went through the periods from Brazil Colony to Brazil Republic.

### **3. Capoeira in the Colonial, Imperial and Republican Periods**

The practice of Capoeira in the period of colonial Brazil was used as an instrument of defense by enslaved slaves fleeing from the slave quarters to the quilombos. In their eagerness for freedom, they used corporal expression as a means of survival through struggle and shrouded in the resistance of repression to the black body, which suffered abuse from the orders of the colonizers. The enslaved who were caught playing capoeira were immobilized and had the calcaneal tendon cut as one of the forms of punishment. The first official records that report the repression of Capoeira and Capoeiragem were made official from the structuring of a police force in Rio de Janeiro in the year 1626, according to the Philippine Ordinances. With the arrival of the royal court in 1808, the first police secretariat in the state of Rio de Janeiro was created. Vidor e Reis [4], report that in 1824, the penalty provided for those who practiced capoeira era 200 lashes, executed by the police at the time of arrest, falling to 150 lashes in 1845, sometimes punishment was accompanied by thrashing or compulsory work.

After the signing of the Golden Law, on June 09, 1888 the Redeemer Black Guard was founded,

composed of some former slaves. This guard was formed by two groups of capoeira that different in the way they wore their hats, they were known as the Guaiamuns Maltas and the Nagoas Maltas - they had in their hats white ribbons and red ribbons overlapping each other, their hats had flaps strokes forward, or flaps tapped on the sides according to their roots in African slave traditions. There were other Maltese groups, but the records point to these two groups as capoeiristas, who guarded the princess.

With the proclamation of the republic in 1889, the Maltas were imprisoned or exterminated, ending the Redeemer's Black Guard. The ban on capoeira was officially decreed on October 11, 1890, by General Manoel Deodoro da Fonseca, published in the new Penal Code in Decree - Law 847 Chapter XIII art. 402 to 404, which brought determinations because it was considered a crime, a threat to public order, and security to citizens, with the penalty of one to three years imprisonment. Despite being persecuted and repressed, capoeira continued its course being practiced by blacks hiding in the alleys, in the religious yards, on the beaches, in the backyards. In 1918, Mestre Bimba organized the Clube União em Apuros, and in 1928 created the Capoeira Regional in Bahia. Capoeira remained prohibited until the Vargas era and was repealed by Decreto-Law Nº 2.848 of December 07, 1940, effective January 01, 1942, where its practice was disregarded as a crime.

Thus, the practice of capoeira is no longer considered a socially marginalized practice and has been pointed out as a "popular sport" and symbol of Brazilian nationality or "spontaneous cultural manifestation" - folklore, facilitating the social domain in an authoritarian way, taking into account Since the popular manifestations had to comply with the norms and rules established by the State and the capoeira should be practiced by suitable people and in closed places, and had a graduations according to the martial fights in the colors of the Brazilian Flag, in which it used the ropes or twine by the capoeirista groups. In the

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<sup>2</sup> "As Music, poetry, party, play, fun and, above all, a form of struggle, manifestations and expression of the people, of the oppressed and man in general, in search of survival, freedom and dignity" [3].

midst of this scenario, two reference masters emerged for the social expansion of capoeira.

Mestre Pastinha-Vicente Joaquim Ferreira (1889-1981) learned capoeira at the age of 08 from the African Benedito. He was a naval officer, taught capoeira to his military friends, leaving the corporation at the age of 21 to devote himself to painting as a professional craft, and represented capoeira and black art in various countries. In 1941, Pastinha founded the Capoeira Angola Sports Center, Capoeira's first academy-school with the fighting style known as Angola, which was governed by discipline and organization. Pastinha was considered by Mestre Decânio, "the first popular capoeirista to analyze capoeira as a philosophy and to worry about the ethical and educational aspects of his practice" [3].

Another reference name in capoeira was Manoel dos Reis Machado (1899-1974), known in capoeira by the code name of Mestre Bimba. At the age of 12, he began learning in traditional capoeira that used the natural body movements of the African Bentinho in Salvador. In 1937, he founded the Regional Physical Cultural Center with the teaching of the Bahian regional fight, innovated the style by inserting technique, balance, attacks and defense against weapons and the game from above, because, previously, the game was basically practiced near the ground. Thus, capoeira gained "competitive, objective, status and projection, on the other, it loses much of its characteristic of spontaneous popular manifestation" [3]. Twenty years after his death, he received the title of Honorary Doctor from the Federal University of Bahia.

#### **4. Braided Skists**

The practice of capoeira appears in the story told as an environment of skills and bravery focused on the male gender. However, this environment had the presence of females with physical and body skill as aggressive as men. The oldest record of women in this space was in the newspaper "The Constitution"

published in 1876 with the headline "What a Capoeira Woman!", with the arrest of "Cafuza Jerônima" a capoeira and enslaved woman.

These social spaces were conquered by women some considered orderly and disorderly, such as Adelaide Presepeira, who wielded a razor and caused rioting in the streets, as well as Anna Angélica, known as Angelica Endiabrada, who resisted arrest and beat a guard. Civil. The fast were published in newspapers that reported cases of rioting such as Zeferina de such, who was arrested for a moment of fighting with punches and kicks with her partner Maria do Sacramento, and the case of Maria Isabel, who was arrested for being with a razor in hand promoting disorder in public ways.

Women like Maria Salomé, good at the low strike, who braided her skirt to enter the capoeira wheel and attended the terreiro samba with her friend Maria dos Anjos, used to hide a razor amongst her hair. Both defend each other if anybody bothered either of them. Salomé was a woman of restless personality and may have been a student of Maria Felipa, known as Maria twelve men, who was respected and feared to have fought with twelve men and participated in the circles of the Model Market and the Golden Wharf. And Candida Rosa de Jesus, who was codenamed Rosa Palmeirão and considered the queen of capoeiragem, was an inspiration for Jorge Amado in his book *Mar Morto* (Dead Sea). Another important woman was Dandara, queen and warrior wife of Zumbi dos Palmares. She was a capoeirista and led the female army, in the face of attacks in defense of the Palmares quilombo.

Women like Nega Didi, Satan, Trousers and Mara Para Bonde, used the body's skill and dexterity, impersonated men and occupied a space considered male normative of roguery, marking the female trajectory in the streets and the circles of capoeira, which was considered as a marginalized practice. These female personalities, among others, who fled the considered ideal standard of female behaviour, were

treated by derogatory terms such as: hair in the wind, scabbards, rioters, rowdy shovels, were honorable and brave women who conquered their space in society and “Actively contributed to the construction and transformation of this Afro-Brazilian cultural practice and the establishment of a tradition” FOLTRAN [5].

### **5. Capoeira: From Marginalized Practice to the Recognition of Cultural Heritage of Brazilian Society**

In the early 1960s, there was a change in the profile of capoeira practitioners. Capoeira came to be seen as the “Brazilian martial art” and was part of the curriculum of the Rio de Janeiro Military Police school and, thus, it was mixed and practiced by new social actors. According to Munanga and Gomes (2016, p. 160) “The history, social and cultural dimension and black resistance of capoeira mixes with new ideas and new practitioners. Gradually, the middle class, intellectuals, militants, politicians, liberal professionals begin to practice it”. Being so, the profile of capoeiristas has changed. Consequently, there has been a change in the historical, political and cultural aspects of capoeira, in which the original characteristic of the capoeiragem of the black people got a bit lost. However, the right to practice it in closed places was not entirely secure due to an advance in the policy of prohibition towards it. In the period of the military dictatorship from 1964 on, capoeira was once again seen as a “marginal thing”, considered to be the practice of blacks and poor people from slums and tenements. However, in 1972, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) recognized capoeira as a sporting activity and, as such, began to be modified and diluted by the country’s historical and political context, and was no longer interpreted as a struggle. The recognition of capoeira as a sport during the dictatorship period was a political subterfuge, in which the ruse of the Vargas era populist movement was repeated.

Capoeira has gained prominence, importance and recognition in the political, social and cultural agenda

in Brazil and in over 150 countries. Enabling the teachings of this cultural heritage to be passed down from generation to generation by safeguarding Capoeira culture. On July 15, 2008, Roda de Capoeira was recognized by the Institute of National Historical and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as Brazilian Intangible Cultural Heritage, and the recognition of the Masters de Capoeira as professionals who transmit Afro-Brazilian practices and values. On July 15, 2008, Roda de Capoeira was entered in the Book<sup>3</sup>.

On November 26, 2014, there was another milestone for black culture, Roda de Capoeira received the title of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity during<sup>4</sup>.

Despite the advances achieved through the recognition of Afro-Brazilian history and culture, the inclusion of Afro-Afro-Brazilian education, through the approval of Law N° 11.645, and the recognition of capoeira/cultura as a Brazilian heritage and through the oscillations in its historical trajectory permeated by prohibitions and permits and permits through political interests, we now face a practice of capoeira that differs from the traditional one, putting the authenticity and conservation of heritage at risk, which is “gospel” capoeira, “denying much of the fundamentals and precepts, the manipulated and forgotten memory of resistance and Afro-descendant struggle [...]”

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<sup>3</sup> of “[...] registration of Forms of expression in 2008 — is a structuring element of a cultural manifestation, space and time, where the singing, the playing of instruments, the dances, the blows, the games, the jokes are simultaneously expressed. The symbols and rituals of African heritage — notably Bantu — recreated in Brazil. Deeply ritualized, the capoeira circle brings together songs and movements that express a worldview, hierarchy and code of ethics that are shared by the group. In the capoeira circle the beginners are baptized, the great masters are formed and consecrated, they transmit and reiterate Afro-Brazilian practices and values” [6].

<sup>4</sup> “The 09th Session of the Intergovernmental Safeguard Committee approved, in November 2014, in Paris, the Roda de Capoeira, one of the most internationally recognized symbols of Brazil, as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. UNESCO’s recognition of Roda de Capoeira is a very important achievement for Brazilian culture and express the history of black resistance in Brazil during and after slavery” [7].

CAMPOS [8]. The denial of the Afro-Brazilian cultural heritage in its entirety, with all its characteristics, including the religions of the African matrix, strengthens and maintains the process of subalternity and whitening, which distances the recognition of Afrocentricity, reinforcing the ideology of the dominant in the capitalist and neoliberal system, fostering social and racial inequalities, intensifying expressions of the social question (prejudice, religious intolerance, racial discrimination). Therefore, through such factors, Afro-Brazilian cultural manifestations and the effectiveness of Afro-citizenship are subtracted and unfeasible.

## **6. Culture and Education as a Tool for Recognizing the Process of Citizenship of African Descendants in a Globalized Society**

The theme of difference highlights an equation that is not very easy to solve, which is how to think of democratic solutions to social inclusion for members of historically discriminated and excluded groups. Therefore, the debate on identity issues and, on the conquest of citizenship, becomes a field of struggle for the recognition of the existence of plurality of values and cultural diversity, thus constituting a fertile ground for thinking about ways to promote oneself equality of opportunity. Thus, Claude Lévi-Strauss points out that<sup>5</sup>.

Thus, cultural diversity comes to be constituted by means of habits and customs, in which it is understood that it is not possible to exist civilization without history and without culture, considers Santos [10] as a reference for society, through “social existence of a people or nation” by expressing their way of being, thinking, feeling an acting, and developing their material and social life. Through social existence,

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<sup>5</sup> “The diversity of cultures goes beyond the boundaries of time and space, being here, there, everywhere and always, building, constantly evolving at different rates; points out that the sensible claim is that this diversity should be realized in a way that contrabutes to a greater generosity of others, and one must understand at this point the inexorable path of respect for different cultures, which goes beyond the meaning of tolerance” [9].

social development occurs from the relationships of individuals with nature and with one another, and thus cultural patterns are constructed. For Franz Boas [11], each culture would be unique, endowed with a particular style and consequently, through this it would be possible to express the integrity and uniqueness of the human being, and respect and tolerance for cultural diversity.

The recognition of the social identity of afro-Brazilian individuals would be possible through culture, which among different groups, social differences are unique to the subjects, who depend on relationships with each other, which allow realizing the universal value for the preservation of own cultural and individual identity. Amid this diversity, Afro-Brazilian culture faces challenges such as prejudice, intolerance and racial discrimination, facts that make it difficult to recognize racial identity as an Afro-Brazilian citizen.

Taking into account the relevant aspects of the recognition of identity, it appears that “Culture is a system of symbols and meanings. It comprises categories or units and rules about relationships and modes of behavior” [12]. From the above we realize the relevance of public policies in he field of education in the midst of a mixed and globalized society, aiming to stimulate the process of citizenship of African descendants, and thus understand that the symbols shared through culture can define us as a cultural being. Given the relevance to the emancipation of black youth, it is considered important to understand how considerable is the recognigtion of Capoeira as cultural capital attributed within the scope of school education, which, through this, it would make it possible to break the intellectual, social alienation, economic and cultural background of black people. The concept of cultural capital approached by Pierre Bourdieu enables us to reflect on the society and social structure in which we operate, where capital exercises hegemony over the subjects who, for the author<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Refers to: “social structure allows the distribution of different types and subtypes of capital, at a given moment, in time, in

Thus, cultural capital is also made as a constituent element of the social and family environment, in which they would favour and facilitate learning and school performance. This capital can be constituted in three forms: in the form of “objectified state” through cultural goods; in the form of an “institutionalized state” which would be obtained through titles, diplomas and certificates; and in the form of an “embodied state”, which would be body-oriented and assimilation resulting from work that would occur personally as a family or social class habitus, present in environments where subjects could acquire it according to perceptions and actions in a social array, arranged in the corporal, cultural, symbolic dimensions, among others and, thus, the habitus would be the concept that makes possible to articulate the individual and the social one. However, for Vasconcelos [13], the *habitus*<sup>7</sup>.

Thus, from the *habitus* it would be possible to understand social and family relations, where knowledge and references of cultural capital could facilitate learning and provide the articulation between the family world and the cultural universe of education. Both would favour school success and the cultural transformation of having, would become being as an integral part of the “person” that in this context corresponds to black youth.

In this perspective, education, knowledge and recognition of Afro-Brazilian culture, through the pedagogical learning of capoeira, are fundamental as a transforming element of the subordinate condition for the intellectual condition of young blacks, which according to Paulo Freire<sup>8</sup>, and also configures itself in

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space, as representative of the structure of the social world [...]” [1].

<sup>7</sup> “A matrix, determined by the social opposition of the individual that allows him to think, see and act in the most varied situations. *Habitus* thus translates into lifestyles, political, moral, and aesthetic judgments. It is also a means of action that allows one to create or develop individual or collective strategies”.

<sup>8</sup> “It does not restrict itself to recovering the vilified humanity of the oppressed human, but is placed as na agent that revitalizes the stolen and vilified humanity of each member” [2].

a process of formation. That would enable the decision and commitment of the Afro citizens through their choices regarding the qualification of their life in society.

## 7. Social Work and a New Look to Foster the Citizenship of African Descendants

And how could the Social Worker foster the citizenship of black youth? The Social Worker, acting in various equipments, may foster socialization, guided by his Ethical-Political Project and in the with the Code of Ethics — law 8.662/93, when performing a critical and reflexive analysis in his work process, which enables them to understand and use Afro-Brazilian culture, especially Capoeira, as an instrument that enables them to transform social subjects, as well as to realize that it is important to preserve and recognize racial identity. From this process, it will be possible to enable the empowerment, emancipation, citizenship and social justice of the black population, which suffers, from antagonism, social and social inequalities arising from the capitalist and neoliberal system, which promotes the expressions of the social issue, such as prejudice, racism, racial discrimination and religious intolerance, anchored by the myth of racial democracy. All these constitute obstacles to their intervention and to the fight against racial discrimination and racism. Thus, according to the Racial Equality Statue Law N° 12.288<sup>9</sup>/2010.

This, it can be seen, that racial discrimination and racism threaten human dignity and, accordingly, also threaten the rights of the black population, exposing them to humiliating and vexatious situations. In this perspective, the Social Worker would have as an alternative in his praxis, through his interventional process resorting to capoeira/Afro-Brazilian culture,

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<sup>9</sup> The definition racial or ethnic racial discrimination is “any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent or national or ethnic origin which has as its object to nullify or restrict the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on equal terms, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic fields, social, cultural or any other Field of publico r private life (Brazil, 2010).

under the National Policy of Living Culture (PNCV) Law N° 13.018, sanctioned on July 22, 2014, created to ensure the expansion and access of the population to the means of productions, circulation and cultural enjoyment; aiming to consolidate itself as an eminently community-based policy, enabling the broad exercise of cultural rights by the Brazilian population as a whole and exploring the potentialities of culture, as a transversal axis of sustainable social and economic development, aiming to aspire and enable the materialization of the afro-nationalization of young black people.

Considering that the expressions of the social question are multifaceted and inherent to the Capoeira debate, the understanding that Afro-Brazilian culture is intrinsically linked to the racial debate is a challenge for the Social Worker, who through, from a new perspective, Capoeira can be used not only as a transformative action through social inclusion, but as an action that can encourage the social and cultural transformation of the black population. The effectiveness of social rights is essential to provide equity, citizenship, emancipation, social justice and, consequently, the safeguarding and appreciation of the Afro-Brazilian cultural heritage, Capoeira, as a Brazilian Intangible Cultural Heritage, as well as safeguard their heirs- the young black people.

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