

Capoeira for a Global Understanding of the Idea of Difference

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In 2002, I left in Brazil many esteemed people when I first arrived in Kyoto. Among them, the Grupo Nzinga that I used to meet, since 1995, for three times a week during the six years period before my arrival in Japan. I participated in the early stage of the group's foundation at the Psychology Department of the University of São Paulo. When I arrived in Japan, only few people practiced Capoeira Angola far away in Kanto region. Thus, I stopped the practice, but it remained in my heart. In 2007, a friend announced a new funding call for cultural exchanges from the Brazilian Ministry of Culture. My desire to meet again the Grupo Nzinga founders led me to engage in the preparation of a project to invite them to Japan, which unfortunately did not happen.

It was in January 2014 that Kosuke Arakawa first contacted me. This young Japanese enthusiastically joined the Grupo Nzinga during his Master studies in Brazil and was living there when he first contacted me. He asked my collaboration to prepare a funding proposition with the Brazilian Ministry of Culture. My previous unsuccessful experience led me to decline at first, but I offered my support to the extent possible. Arakawa was determined to bring the Nzinga masters to Japan, and if necessary, he was ready to cover part of the expenses privately. However, two Capoeira masters who are also professors at Brazilian public universities needed formal invitations in order to be able to temporarily leave their teaching duties. To solve this question, in 4 May 2014, Arakawa asked again my support. This time we would start a social-academic collaboration negotiated inside CIAS at Kyoto University.

At that moment, joined in two fundamental partners: Emilie Tsuru Devaux, who practices capoeira and researches about Brazil, and Liulan

Wang-Kanda, a cultural anthropologist specialized in diaspora. Since January 2014, Devaux, Arakawa and Yoshiko Nagai had started discussions about the organization of practical workshops. For the establishment of this social-academic collaboration, together with Devaux, Wang-Kanda and Hiroshi Fukuda, then an assistant professor at CIAS, we started intensive discussions. For making the project fit the academic interests of the department, we worked together over the first draft of the practical workshops' rationale and program brought in by Devaux. The result of this discussion successfully allowed the project to receive funds from the Japanese Consortium for Area Studies (JCAS). Moreover, under Devaux's suggestion, and the skillful negotiation of Wang and Fukuda, the project also received funding from the Kyoto University, Center for the Promotion of Interdisciplinary Education and Research (CPIER). It was through the enthusiastic initiative of Arakawa, the extensive and permanent efforts of Devaux and Nagai, and the crucial support from Wang and Fukuda, that this project has been successfully realized.

A lot has changed since my early participation in the Grupo Nzinga. The beauty and passion of their Capoeira teaching allowed a vigorous expansion of their activities. Moreover, the serious issues raised in the practical and academic activities of their members are actual and relevant in Brazil and internationally. The discussion of these issues are also valid for a country undergoing fast changes, such as Japan, where nowadays occurs a heated debate about internationalization, multicultural interactions and the reinforced integration of women in the workplace. I hope our efforts will contribute to the continued expansion of this art practice and to promote a global understanding of the idea of difference in its varied systems, forms, and colors.

