

The Cross-Frontier Spread and Economic Beneficiaries of Capoeira, Breaking, and Hip-Hop: From Chattel Slavery to Sports Drinks to the Olympics

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Abstract:

Hybridization and glocalization are two types of cross-frontier movements that encompass the interflow of ideas and commodities. Hybridization in hip-hop and capoeira is a result of their African roots and transatlantic spread. Hip-hop and capoeira have two similar appearances in marginalized African diasporic communities in North and South America. First, historically, both dance styles had been condemned by Old World colonial rulers and have recently been misappropriated by colonial-like neoliberal authorities and corporations. Second, these arts have been overhauled and have spread globally throughout majority non-African or non-black nations by large corporations in contemporary times. Glocalization (also known as global cultural homogenization and global cultural uniformity) as mentioned by Pieterse can be critically viewed as a cultural genocide, where the originating culture's arts have been spread either voluntarily or involuntarily across ethnic, racial, and national borders so extensively that it has been completely transformed (and sometimes renamed) and separated from its roots (2015). Consumerism, driven by the neoliberal ideal of a free market economy, allows culture and arts to be disseminated globally and consumed by anyone who wants to buy them. As a consequence,

the fundamental roots and soul of hip-hop and capoeira have become lost and forgotten. The past, present, and future of one of hip-hop culture's pillars, breaking (break dancing), have been dominated by the neoliberalist search for increased economic profits which employs cultural misappropriation tactics under the guise of global cultural homogenization and global cultural uniformity.

Keywords: *hybridization, glocalization, breaking, hip-hop, capoeira*

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Globalization is a result of the flow of ideas and commodities across frontiers to create global cultural uniformity (Pieterse, 2015, pp. 16-17). This essay explores the emergence of capoeira and hip-hop from predominantly Black areas in Brazil and the USA and their transformation into the current glocalized, misappropriated forms that have nearly erased their original Black/African significance. These contemporary misappropriated forms are a consequence of cross-frontier movements. Two types of cross-frontier movements that encompass the interflow of ideas and commodities are cultural hybridization and glocalization. The first of these, hybridization, creates a multitude of combinations by blending cultures together (Ritzer & Dean, 2015, p. 215). For instance, Brazilian historian Assunção asserted that the hybridization of capoeira in contemporary times, specifically in the United States, was seen by Afrocentric scholars and militants as an important tool for promoting African American pride (2002, p. 25). Another case of hybridization has appeared in hip-hop culture's global reach. In the early 2000s

in Japan it was tremendously simple to purchase American hip-hop music on CDs and vinyl records. Major music stores such as Tower Records, Disk Union, and HMV had shelves dedicated to promoting both popular and underground (less commercialized) hip-hop artists, with music categories including both Black music and Japanese hip-hop. African American historian Hanifu Osumare observed that Japan was developing its own style of the music, in Japanese vernacular, where locals would create their own hip-hop aesthetics then sprinkle African American styles over them (2010, p. 31). Examples of glocalization occurred at Japanese hip-hop concerts where the artists were wearing Black American hip-hop designer clothes and spat their catchy rhymes in an Americanesque Japanese accent.

Stripping Black/African Identities by Hybridization

The transatlantic slave trade, also known as the Middle Passage, was one type of global flow. This movement of people along with goods such as sugar and salt served to build economic wealth for European monarchies by subjugating various African nations to the horrors of chattel slavery (Bulhan, 2015, para. 5-6). While separating African families by murder and enslavement, the European colonial powers were simultaneously discrediting any positive contributions to civilization and arts that had been made by African peoples. For example, according to Assunção, Western scholars refused to acknowledge any commonalities amongst the enslaved Africans (2002, p. 33). This divisive action by academia in the global North sought to distort any humanizing characteristics of Africans (Assunção, 2002, p. 33).

One contribution by Africans to the modern global North's artistic expressions is capoeira, which is a Brazilian martial art with a complex history that stemmed from centuries-old cross-continental flows out of western Africa to the south-eastern Americas. Capoeira was devaluated and stripped of its African-ness by Brazilian elitists during the 19th century (Assunção, 2002, p. 206). Another contribution by Africans to contemporary art is breaking. From the five pillars of hip-hop (breaking, understanding hip-hop culture, DJing, graffiti drawing, and MCing) breaking has its roots in Africa via Black American and Caribbean youth in 1970s' New York City (Osumare, 2002, p. 32; *The Hip-Hop Fundamentalist*, 2011).

During its early years breaking experienced a lack of respect from the ruling American government and from wealthier unmarginalized groups because hip-hop and breaking were associated with youth rebellion (Baker, 2012, p. 12). Hip-hop and its pillars were also underrated outside of the United States. As Chile's economic gap between the wealthy and the poverty-stricken was widening during the 1980s, unemployed youth from the ghettos of Santiago used American hip-hop culture as a form of escapism and political resistance (Lindholm, 2017, p. 75, 79). In the latter part of that decade, hip-hop was almost banned by South Africa's apartheid government because Black South Africans used it to build strength against the racist regime which reiterated hip-hop as a historical anthem of resistance amongst the subaltern (Osumare, 2010, p. 165). American hip-hop historian Baker adds that hip-hop had not initially been welcomed in the USA by political and social activists because of its misogynistic and homophobic lyrics (2012, p. 10-11). Hip-hop's early years were not filled with admiration from the American masses either. Rather, it took almost a decade for hip-hop culture to become

mainstream and climb to the peak of teenagers' preferences in 1996, thus gaining more respect as an influential profit maker for the music industry (Morgan & Bennett, 2011).

Menaces to Society: Capoeira, Breaking and Hip-Hop

The history of breaking began in the New York City borough of the Bronx, in the 1970s. This was around the same time that capoeira had made its way to the United States from Brazil (Delgado, 2011). Breaking and hip-hop, which local hegemonic lawmakers perceived as menaces, started in the streets of marginalized inner-city neighbourhoods across New York City. Breakers – or b-boys and b-girls – were often prevented from dancing in the streets and were, for the most part, youth. Breaking was an opportunity for working-class youth (Black and Latino teenagers in the case of early breaking) to rebel (Vito, 2019, p. 9). These adolescents were less inclined to follow outdated hegemonic rules and were able to raise a middle finger to them by creating the vibrantly strong style of dancing which began in the New York City streets (Vito, 2019, p. 9). Breaking was the teens' way to express themselves in a fashion that, unbeknownst to them, mimicked some capoeira movements, yet held onto its own identity. “Prince” Ken Swift claimed that breaking was his *raison d’être* because

this is our world — this is what made me so interested in being a part of it. There was nothing my mother, my teacher, the governor, the president - anybody could say about what I did on that floor at that time. (Delgado, 2011, para. 13)

Swift was a mentor to the youth in New York's inner cities. His dance style and development of his own lingo demonstrated to kids in his community that they were capable of artistic

expression (Delgado, 2011, para. 13). Another breaking pioneer, Richard Colón, better known as Crazy Legs, described the feeling he had when he first encountered breaking as euphoric and came to the realization that breaking was made for him (Kawalik, 2018). Hip-hop heads – aficionados of the genre and its pillars – would agree since Swift and Crazy Legs are considered gods of the art of breaking (Gonzalez, 2016, para. 2).

Hybridization and Glocalization of Hip-Hop and Breaking

Since hip-hop's emergence, globalized hybridization has occurred and has resulted in fascinating cultural *mélanges*. For example, in the last decades of the 20th century, popular Japanese DJ Fujiwara Hiroshi first shared American hip-hop with his club audiences (Attride, n. d., para. 1). Also, Indian rapper Baba Sehgal first mimicked American hip-hop styles during that period (Chandigarh, 2019, para. 4). Glocalized hybridization (glocalization) which combines global and local identities to form varying products around the world has also occurred (Ritzer & Dean, 2015, p. 215). Glocalization has placed breaking and hip-hop in the minds and hearts of youth in marginalized communities around the world, from West Coast Filipino American kids to Tanzanian b-boys and underground Hong Kong rappers (Vito, 2019). Glocalized hip-hop can also be seen in Sweden's *förorten* (working class suburbs) where its large immigrant population is credited with the country's unique Swedish Latin American swagger (Lindholm, 2017, p. 83-84). McCarren notes that glocalized hip-hop has appeared in French as *le hip-hop*, and

dancers may bring their own minority cultures or local aesthetic to the form as much as they adopt a global American form, or they layer it with any of the world movement forms visible in French cities: capoeira, yoga, Bharata Natyam, African dance of all kinds (2013, p. 41).

On the African continent, glocalized hip-hop has made its way towards the reaffirmation of African contribution to the arts. For instance, festivals such as Gabao Hip-Hop Festival in Gabon and Ghana's Afro Nation target millennial travellers from across Africa and its diaspora who wish to make a musical pilgrimage for a few days to create a unified spirit in social critiques, dance and music (Afro Nation, 2019; Osumare, 2010). Lastly, hip-hop has also been glocalized in Japan. Shigekix, a 17-year-old Japanese b-boy had been honing his craft on the streets of Osaka for the past decade with the hope of being crowned the Red Bull BC One championship winner. Although, he lost the title, Red Bull did invite him to be a BC One All-Star breaker (Adelekun, 2019). In a positive spin for Shigekix, he holds the title as the first youth Olympic bronze medalist in the breaking category (Adelekun, 2019).

Capoeira, Breaking and Hip-Hop: Not for Profit

In the past, breaking and hip-hop have offered a voice to the voiceless. Today, the pillars of hip-hop have amassed large fortunes for corporate music moguls via record label deals and endorsements. For example, Baker writes that “billions of dollars” have been generated along with “millions of people” who have been swayed by hip-hop culture (2012, p. 8 & 10). American record labels with deep pockets paid top dollars to buy out and control smaller independent

studios. In 1989, major cable network MTV's decision to air its rap show attracted a much broader audience with the USA's white suburban youth. The popularity of "Yo MTV Raps" cemented hip-hop's marketability and commercialization amongst American youth of all backgrounds (Flores, 2012, para. 9-10). Assunção states that along with capoeira in the early 20th century, hip-hop's primitiveness and its proximity to stereotypical dangerous Black males were replaced by Eurocentric realizations that African and African American arts were indeed major contributors to contemporary culture (2002, p. 125). Capoeira, hip-hop, and breaking - so-called simplistic arts of the lower classes - have since been able to fill a void in American and European civilizations with energy and vitality, especially after the bleakness of the world wars (Assunção, 2002, p. 126). When hip-hop began in the latter part of the 20th century rappers, dancers, and DJs were promoting themselves in their local communities at rap battles and parties for small profits. In the 1990s hip-hop was a music genre that was blamed for the ills of American inner cities. Yet today, hip-hop is the largest money maker for US record labels (Hale, 2019). Approximately \$70 billion US dollars has been amassed by record companies from hip-hop performances and recordings (Hale, 2019).

As they have expanded globally, capoeira and hip-hop culture (specifically breaking) have become more commercialized and glocalized (Osumare, 2002, p. 38). This commercialization has meant that these arts now have corporate backing whose primary goal is financial profit. The current state of capoeira contrasts with its origins. First and foremost, capoeira was meant to help build communities through ancient rhythms and dance. The creators of capoeira and breaking were driven by creativity, spirituality, political defiance, rebellion, and resistance rather than economic gain (Osumare, 2002, pp. 30-31). The rebellious image of capoeira was a product of

colonial stereotypes to equate African Blackness with poverty and violence. Capoeira was used at times by former enslaved Brazilians to defend themselves against the colonial forces which sought to maintain dominance (Hotopf, 2014, p. 8). However, rebellion was not the primary focus of capoeira.

Besides their shared African-influences capoeira and breaking are linked by their similar athletic moves. Both arts are played out in the middle of a circle and accompanied by syncopated rhythms that are produced electronically or with wooden instruments. Another similarity between these contributions to civilization is that breakers and capoeiristas experienced physical abuse from law enforcement or were used as counter-hegemonic messengers during their early years (Assunção, 2002, p. 205; Osumare, 2010, p. 162). Yet a significant difference between capoeira and breaking is that although breaking and capoeira moves are similarly rooted in African traditions, the former was not a direct extension of its Brazilian cousin (Delgado, 2011, para. 12). Moreover, capoeira's present-day glocalised, for-profit version is far from its origins.

Misappropriation of Capoeira's Blackness

Capoeira has its roots in colonial Brazil in the early 19th century when Black people were deemed inferior to the White hegemony. The art was practiced by marginalized African- and Brazilian-born slaves. It represented the epitome of barbaric lower classes which had to be eradicated in order for Brazil to develop (Assunção, 2002, p. 10). At that time, most of the slaves were negros (dark skin Black people), while the lighter skinned mestiços enjoyed a somewhat

greater freedom of mobility and social status. For capoeira to be at its current level of global popularity where it has become misappropriated, its history had to be rewritten to suit the motivations of the politically powerful classes. According to Assunção the evolution of capoeira's popularity began when Brazilian elitists in Rio de Janeiro, in the late 19th century up to the mid 20th century, attempted to remove and disassociate capoeira's African origins so that it would appear to be inherently Brazilian (2002, p. 11). Further reduction of the African influence upon capoeira occurred in the 1920s, also in the capital city. The former slave class proletariat, mestiços, were ultimately preferred to represent Brazil's newly found national sport in rejection of capoeira's Blackness. In other words, the social stratification of race provided more rights and privileges to lighter-skinned people than darker ones. Those darker hued residents' (African-born people in Brazil were not permitted to be called Brazilian) skill at capoeira was not acknowledged, and any perceived quality would have been attributed to lighter-skinned Brazilians (Assunção, 2002, p. 18). Inezil Penna Marinho, a capoeirista from the 1940s claimed that

more intelligent than the black and more dexterous than the white, the mulatto became the ideal type of capoeira, excessively arrogant in his worry to show that he had not the deference of the black slave. (Assunção, 2002, p. 19)

Another example of the removal of African-ness from capoeira refers to the state's involvement in promoting capoeira as homegrown calisthenics (Assunção, 2002, p. 19). Without acknowledging Brazil's brutal history of enslaving Africans capoeira's beginnings were credited more to the mestiços and whites than to negros (Assunção, 2002, p. 19). Discrediting capoeira's African roots was a secondary step toward the art form's glocalization by creating an outcome further removed from its origin. However, during the 1930s and 1940s, capoeira's African

origins would not be forgotten as a resurgence of Angolan pride took over the Brazilian state of Salvador de Bahia (Assunção, 2002, p. 148).

The descendants of the marginalized groups who first started capoeira in Brazil have benefitted somewhat financially from capoeira's domestic expansion. As the years progressed, capoeira in Brazil continued to cross economic and racial boundaries from the traditional poor negros and mestiços to the more financially secure whites in the "developed economies" in the southern regions of the country (Assunção, 2002, p. 178). People who were interested in learning capoeira could easily afford to attend academies taught by mestres who hailed from poorer areas. These mestres were role models in their neighbourhoods. Their influence led other poor and/or Black uneducated youth towards careers as capoeira teachers (Assunção, 2002, p. 178). As mestres' talents became more well-known locally, capoeira's reach was also expanding worldwide.

Global Spread of Capoeira, Hip-Hop, and Breaking

Today, capoeira has grown in popularity around the world. The Capoeira in the World website lists capoeira academies from 30 countries on 6 continents (n.d., para. 1). Observations from anecdotal experiences in Canada, Japan, and the United Arab Emirates witnessed capoeira classes taught by Brazilian mestres who used original Portuguese terminology as well as English, French, and Japanese to make sure that all their students could properly master the extensive moves. Capoeira also received its own high-profile event, courtesy of energy drink giant, Red Bull, called Red Bull Paranauê, in 2017 and 2018 (Lee, 2017; Rodriguez, 2018). Calado, a capoeirista, who was one of the observers of the event, notes that participating mestres receive

sponsorships and are promoted to a group of local and international fans. He explains that Red Bull Paranauē could be a great promotional tool to grab newcomers (2018, para. 3). On the other hand, Calado also suggests that Red Bull's foray into capoeira sponsorship could make the art more "vanilla" and "homogenous" (2018, para. 7). The glocalization of capoeira by Red Bull could remold the art from its original regulations to those that may alter fighting styles or even judging outcomes. Therefore, the more hybridized capoeira could become, the more likely it would be steered from its origins for the sake of increase revenue and profits by Red Bull (Rodriguez, 2018).

Neoliberalism

The Red Bull phenomenon described by Rodriguez is a clear example of neoliberalism; an ideology which creates an open playing field for capitalist entities to compete in a free-market economy and directs the amount of political intervention required to enable optimal free-market engagement and profits (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2021, para. 4). The neoliberalist facilitation of capitalist interests within the hip-hop and breaking cultures cannot be ignored and has influenced the division of financial benefits in the contemporary music industry. While breaking pioneer Crazy Legs has signed endorsement deals with multinational beverage companies such as Coca Cola and Red Bull (Oto, 2007), he does not hold control over the direction of hip-hop culture, nor have they amassed the same fortunes of the corporate music industry heads. According to Morgan and Bennett, hip-hop generates billions of dollars globally and remains intrinsically an African American art form through its inclusion of African

American vernacular (2011, p. 182). However, two of the biggest corporate players in the hip-hop multi-billion-dollar industry are white Americans, Lyor Cohen and Jimmy Iovine (Wang, 2016), whose names have been penned into catchy tunes by hip-hop lyricists Jay-Z and Macklemore. The global consumption of hip-hop music in the 1990s that flowed from the USA, first to English-speaking countries such as England and South Africa, then to France, Japan and China, and then finally to the Middle East, proves that hip-hop music is longer made in the USA for export. Rather, commercial hip-hop music and its current iterations are driven by cross-continent interest in its culture (Morgan & Bennett, 2011, p. 184).

The spread of hip-hop music caught the interest of record labels who had previously ignored its impact on American youth culture. In a method that was similar to the Portuguese colonialists' blatant disregard for any of capoeira's meaningfulness due to its close ties to Africa and Blackness, hip-hop and breaking are still regarded as American ghetto music (Osumare, 2007, p. 5). Inner city music is bound closely to institutionalized racist policies such as racial profiling by police while also birthing some of the USA's most gifted artists of the generation and producing multimillion dollar profits for Hollywood and multinational music industries (Osumare, 2007, p. 5). As the heads of multinational music empires, Cohen and Iovine represent the powerful free market of music making. This has been the fear of many independent breakers and rappers since the mid-1990s. According to Vito,

Within this shift, large corporations were able to corporatize hip-hop music into a commodity sold in the mainstream market. The culture then saw a shift toward homogenization in musical content and cultural influences as it became predominantly consumed by whites in American culture. (2019, p. 72)

The future of breaking, through hybridization and more specifically, glocalization, is as an official Olympic sport in 2024. For a sport to be officially included in the Olympic Games Programme, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) stated that it must be

governed by an international federation which undertakes to follow the rules of the Olympic Charter, a basic condition for recognition by the IOC. It must be practised widely across the world and meet various criteria. After that, the IOC's Executive Board may recommend that a recognised sport be added to the Games programme, if the IOC Session approves it. (Olympic Games, n.d.)

Initial deterrents to the induction of breaking as an Olympic sport such as Crazy Legs acknowledged that they had not known who was prompting breaking to be registered as an Olympic sport because none of the dedicated veteran breakers had ever been approached (Meyers, 2018, para. 6). Breaking pioneers had not been invited to the table where large-scale paradigm shifts in breaking were being engineered. It must be noted that there is a difference in the ethnic make-up of early breakers versus contemporary ones. Similar to capoeira, there are less Black/African breakers currently in the world spotlight as a result of hybridization. Current breakers are less likely to originate from New York's inner cities. The majority of Red Bull BC One all-star breakers hail from Asia and Europe, and they are not Black/African (Red Bull, n.d.).

Breaking followed the required steps in attaining official IOC sport status in that it became a member of an international federation called World DanceSport Federation (WDSF) (World DanceSport Federation, n.d.). One contemporary breaking star, Serouj "Midus" Aprahamian, who petitioned for breaking not to be registered with the IOC, maintained that the involvement of the World DanceSport Federation could create negative consequences, such as the sport being

culturally misrepresented (Yu, 2017, para. 10). He also questioned whether money raised from potential sponsorship would be invested back into the breaking community (Yu, 2017, para. 10). WDSF's vision is a neoliberalist and globalist's dream and a nightmare to breakers such as Midus and Crazy Legs because it clearly seeks to "promote the sport on the strengths of a greater constituency, of the broadest demographic appeal, and of benefits arising from economy of scale" and to "make DanceSport even more global, more ageless, more accessible, and more relevant" (World DanceSport Federation, n.d.). In doing this, breaking has lost its African American roots and its appeal to the counter-hegemonic youth masses who seek solace in expressing themselves.

Conclusion

Hybridization and glocalization have benefited the economic agendas of large corporations. These phenomena have misappropriated capoeira and hip-hop/breaking. Breaking and hip-hop have moved from being an avenue for unrepresented Black youth in New York inner cities to express themselves to possibly becoming an Olympic sport; a competition where contestants do not reflect the origins of the art. Capoeira, a Brazilian martial art which was created by African slaves and condemned by the former ruling Portuguese colonialists as inferior, is now accepted (with some whitening of its African-ness) as part of Brazil's modern identity by its contemporary government, and has spread globally. Its global coverage has enabled poor mestres to gain clout among their students and has created a means for the mestres to earn an income and tour the world to spread capoeira techniques. However, it has shape-shifted and become extremely

profitable for corporations. For example, neoliberalist corporations such as Red Bull have profited from capoeira and hip-hop culture by sponsoring global events such as the Red Bull Paranaúê and the Red Bull BC One which have amassed nearly one million subscribers on their respective unofficial and official YouTube pages (Capoeira Movies, 2020; YouTube, n.d.). Breaking may become an Olympic sport with minimal tributes to the pioneers of the hip-hop pillar. The American hip-hop music industry has profited from the lowly beginnings of hip-hop in New York City. The creativity along with the social issues (which spearheaded the birth of hip-hop) that plague marginalized Black communities in the Americas have lined the pockets of hegemonic powers. Hybridization and glocalization perpetrate the potential cultural genocide of capoeira, breaking and hip-hop. These arts have been replaced by commercialized, for-profit versions and intentionally stripped of their African cultural connections. A mestre warns the neoliberalists:

Capoeira has riches, but it's not for sale. He who sells Capoeira...they will understand (sic). Capoeira came from Africa, to give us freedom. He who sells Capoeira, my friend, will return to slavery. (Rodriguez, 2018, para. 16)

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