MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES

THEME

THE INVENTION OF MARTIAL ARTS

ABOUT THE JOURNAL

MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES

Martial Arts Studies is part of a network of projects that connect academics, practitioners and institutions as they contribute to this rapidly expanding field of studies.

MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES JOURNAL

Open access peer-reviewed journal published twice a year to share the latest research and scholarship in the field
martialartsstudies.org

MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES RESEARCH NETWORK

Connecting and engaging researchers and practitioners to shape the multidisciplinary field of Martial Arts Studies
mastudiesrn.org

MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES MONOGRAPHS

An academic book series of Martial Arts Studies monographs from Rowman and Littlefield International
goo.gl/F0o3DX

MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES CONFERENCE

The Annual International Martial Arts Studies Conferences
goo.gl/gRyzf2

EDITORIAL

Paul Bowman and Benjamin N. Judkins

The idea behind the title and theme of this collection – 'the invention of martial arts' – first emerged as a question: In an era when academics have an obligation to be familiar with arguments about the 'invention of tradition' [Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983], 'imagined communities' [Anderson 1991], 'imagined geographies' [Said 1995; Said 2005], and so on, how are scholars to approach the question of the history, or histories, of martial arts?

We feel that this question has particular currency for the emergent field of martial arts studies not least because (without naming any names) quite a bit of scholarly work on martial arts history still seems to be undertaken and produced without taking into account any of the simultaneously enriching and complicating insights and arguments that have become necessary and common knowledge in the fields not only of historiography but also of social and cultural studies more widely. The title, 'the invention of martial arts', seeks to evoke the insights and arguments of such historiography, and to invite scholars to explore the invention of martial arts, when the word 'invention' is read in terms of such ground-breaking texts as *The Invention of Tradition, Imagined Communities, Orientalism*, and the many other works of cultural studies, postcolonial studies, cultural history, and cultural geography that have been stimulated in response to these seminal contributions.

However, our interests extend beyond the field of history. The questions and concerns of martial arts studies are not merely those of history or historiography. But the idea of 'invention' is equally apposite in relation to the very broad spectrum of questions that we wish to encourage scholars working in the field of martial arts studies to address.

Accordingly, we invited proposals that would engage critically with any significant aspect of 'invention' in, around and of martial arts – from the origin myths, folklore and popular cultural imaginings of traditions, to motivated political or ideological interventions and inventions, to the most modern, commodified, mediatized and spectacular inventions of martial arts, and beyond. We proposed that contributions could include (but without necessarily being limited to) studies of: origin myths and lineage narratives in traditional martial arts; rediscovered and reconstructed martial arts; the appropriation of martial arts in nationalist, nation-building, social management and other political processes; the dissemination, development, and transformation of martial arts; the commodification and international trade in martial arts; comparative considerations of the 'same' martial art in different contexts; the place of martial arts in contemporary culture, society and economy; the relationship of martial arts to tradition, modernity, postmodernity, coloniality, postcoloniality, neocoloniality and globalisation; and martial arts and/as/in ideology.

Perhaps martial arts studies will always be interested in such questions. Or perhaps interest in themes like these will wane in response to new

cultural issues, theoretical and methodological developments, as they emerge in unpredictable ways and from unexpected quarters. Certainly, what came in, in response to our call, surprised us.

Benjamin Judkins, for instance (one of the editors of this journal) initially began to write what he thought would be a small piece for this editorial. However, as his research into and analysis of this area was already so expansive, what had originally started life as a short introduction to the topic soon grew into a fully-fledged research paper. Consequently, it appears here as the first article, 'The Seven Forms of Lightsaber Combat: Hyper-reality and the Invention of the Martial Arts' [Judkins 2016]. As Judkins argues, martial arts studies has entered a period of rapid conceptual development. Yet relatively few works have attempted to define the 'martial arts', our signature concept. His article evaluates a number of approaches to the problem by asking whether 'lightsaber combat' is a martial art. He asks: what is the link between 'authentic' martial arts and history? Can an activity be a martial art even if its students and teachers do not claim it as such? Is our current body of theory capable of exploring the rise of hyper-real practices? Most importantly, what sort of theoretical work do we expect from our definition of the 'martial arts'? These fundamental questions are compellingly explored by Judkins.

Thomas A. Green responds to different, yet in some key ways related, questions and concerns in his article, 'The Fifty-Two Hand Blocks Re-Framed: Rehabilitation of a Vernacular Martial Art' [Green 2016]. As he notes, from the late 1980s, a cluster of related African-American vernacular fighting styles became a focus of contention among martial artists. Over the next twenty years, evidence drawn from popular culture, social science, and sport validated the existence of vernacular styles such as 'Jailhouse Rock' and 'the 52s'. These were never taught systematically, but were an accumulation of tactics, rhythms, and attitudes, learned hands on. Green observes that the style that has received the greatest exposure is based on a boxing paradigm, and he discusses the attempts to commercialize it, before moving on to discuss the efforts of martial arts researcher Daniel Marks, 52s practitioner Kawaun Akhenoten, filmmaker Kamau Hunter, and fitness innovator Hassan Yasin – all of whom have sought to recognize, record, and revitalize the 52s and related physical traditions. Re-framing the 52s as a heritage art, Green argues, has involved making claims about a uniquely African-American expression for cultivating health, fitness, and ethnic pride, as well as the development of a structured, culturally-based curriculum; all of which has sought to rehabilitate an 'outlaw' art into a viable expression of contemporary physical culture.

Using a different methodological approach, Allyson Quinney explores questions of gender and feminism in the UFC, in her article, 'The @ UFC and Third Wave Feminism? Who Woulda Thought?: Gender, Fighters, and Framing on Twitter' [Quinney 2016]. As Quinney notes, most professional sports, such as hockey, tennis, and basketball, separate men's and women's sports leagues. In 2013, the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) disrupted this pattern by showcasing its first women's mixed martial arts (MMA) fight in a once male-only fight league. As Quinney argues, while the UFC's inclusion of female fighters is a step forward for gender equality, the change does not come without issues. Her essay focuses on the framing of female UFC fighters

on Twitter over a four year period. Through an intersectional feminist analysis, it examines how Twitter users frame female fighters' bodies in relation to gender, race, class, and sexuality. It argues that there is an imbalance in attention paid to female fighters in regards to gender, race, class, and sexuality, and this constructs contradictory messaging about feminism, female fighters' bodies, and the UFC on Twitter.

Perhaps responding most directly to the initial impulse behind our call for papers, George Jennings' article is called 'Ancient Wisdom, Modern Warriors: The (Re)Invention of a Mesoamerican Warrior Tradition in Xilam' [Jennings 2016]. As he demonstrates, *Xilam* is a modern Mexican martial art that is inspired by pre-Hispanic warrior cultures of ancient Mesoamerica, namely the Aztecs (Mexica), Maya and Zapotec cultures. His argument is that it provides a noteworthy case study of a Latin American fighting system that has been recently invented, but aspires to rescue, rediscover and relive the warrior philosophies that existed before the Spanish Conquest and subsequent movements beginning in 1521. Using the thought-provoking work of anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *México Profundo*, Jennings analyses the Xilam Martial Arts Association through the way that they represent themselves in their three main media outlets: their official webpage, their Facebook group and their YouTube channel. He argues that their portrayal of the art as a form of Mesoamerican culture and wisdom for current and future generations of Mexicans is contrasted to contemporary Mexico, a Western (Occidental) project that is far removed from the foundations of this diverse country. Jennings argues that certain elements of Mesoamerican civilisation may be transmitted to young Mexicans through a mind-body discipline, which in turn acts as a form of physical (re)education. He concludes that xilam is both an invented tradition (in a technical sense) and a re-invented tradition (in a cultural sense), which provides lessons on the timeless issues of transformation, transmission and transcendence within the martial arts.

In a related work, Paul H. Mason's article is entitled 'Fight-dancing and the Festival: Tabuik in Pariaman, Indonesia, and Iemanjá in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil' [Mason 2016]. As he argues, festivals bring people together in affirmations of community. This article looks at two festivals in coastal locations in Indonesia and Brazil, with a close inspection of performances of fight-dancing included within both festivals. Both Indonesia and Brazil have a colonial past, he points out, and he examines performances of fight-dancing in festivals in two geographically distinct contexts. He argues that the improvisatory or choreographed organization of the fight-dancing performances echoes the manner in which the festivals themselves are assembled, and that as these festivals grow in popularity, the process of inventing tradition is heterogeneously co-constituted by those parties who actively invest in the symbolic capital of the events. Verbal and non-verbal forms of expression reinforce each other in the construction of a multivalent sense of regional traditions. The corporeal engagement of organisers and participants blurs the boundary between embodied remembering and narrative accounts. Based on archival research and ethnographic fieldwork, this article explores the interweaving of fight-dancing with the history, growth, and post-colonial expression of regional festivals.

Augustin Lefebvre looks at the corporeal engagement of organisers and participants of aikido, in 'The Pacific Philosophy of Aikido: An Interactional Approach' [Lefebvre 2016]. The article engages with the question of the invention of martial arts by examining the case of this important modern Japanese style. Relying on existing schools of traditional martial arts, Morihei Ueshiba (1883-1969) created his system with the goal of transforming techniques aiming at killing the opponent into techniques which could positively benefit both partners. Instead of becoming stronger than the opponent, the goal of aikido practice is rather to improve the individual's behaviour during their physical interaction with their partner. The question Lefebvre examines here is how practitioners manifest such philosophy during their practice and through their embodied conduct. One central organizational device for structuring aikido practice, he argues, is a key pair of participation categories: *attacker* and *counter-attacker*. Using them, Lefebvre focuses specifically on how practitioners simulate a situation of conflict through *semiotic structures*, through which they construct a world of movement in which anticipating the attacker's movement becomes possible. Because practitioners are organized with such a framework, they can, through movements of the whole body, pacifically produce and resolve the situation of conflict. Using ethnomethodology, multimodal studies, and the analysis of video recordings of naturally occurring interactions, this study contributes to understanding how a practical philosophy is implemented within the practitioners' bodies and is manifested during social interaction.

The issue ends with a range of reviews of books, conferences and a new DVD documentary. First is a review of Barry Allen's *Striking Beauty: A Philosophical Look at the Asian Martial Arts* [Allen 2015], by Hiu M. Chan; second a review of Alexander Bennett's *Kendo: Culture of the Sword* [Bennett 2015], by Andrea Molle; and third, a review of Lee Wilson's *Martial Arts and the Body Politic in Indonesia* [Wilson 2015], by D. S. Farrer. Daniel Jaquet then provides an overview of three recent conferences focusing on Historical European Martial Arts studies. Finally Douglas Wile provides a fascinating and extremely insightful and provocative review of the new DVD documentary, *The Professor: Tai Chi's Journey West* [Strugatz 2016], which focuses on the impact of Cheng Man-Ching on his American students.

This issue demonstrates that martial arts studies, as a research area, not only benefits from the various concepts of 'invention' discussed here. It also has the potential to bring unique insights and greater depth to a variety of debates as they are taking place in a number of disciplinary contexts. As such, the contributors to this volume have made an important contribution to the development of interdisciplinary research. Of course, while the articles and reviews in this issue are diverse and global in their ramifications, much still remains to be explored. We hope that scholars in our field will continue to research and illuminate these areas for years to come.

REFERENCES

Allen, Barry. 2015. *Striking Beauty: A Philosophical Look at the Asian Martial Arts.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism - Revised Edition.* London: Verso.

Bennett, Alexander C. 2015. *Kendo: Culture of the Sword.* Oakland, CA.: University of California Press. http://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520284371.

Green, Thomas A. 2016. 'The Fifty-Two Hand Blocks Re-Framed: Rehabilitation of a Vernacular Martial Art'. *Martial Arts Studies* 2, available at http://martialartsstudies.org
http://dx.doi.org/10.18573/j.2016.10062

Hobsbawm, Eric and Terrance Ranger eds. 1983. *The Invention of Tradition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jennings, George. 2016. 'Ancient Wisdom, Modern Warriors: The (Re)Invention of a Mesoamerican Warrior Tradition in Xilam', *Martial Arts Studies* 2, available at http://martialartsstudies.org
http://dx.doi.org/10.18573/j.2016.10064

Judkins, Benjamin N. 2016. 'The Seven Forms of Lightsaber Combat: Hyper-Reality and the Invention of the Martial Arts', *Martial Arts Studies* 2, available at http://martialartsstudies.org
http://dx.doi.org/10.18573/j.2016.10067

Lefebvre, Augustin. 2016. 'The Pacific Philosophy of Aikido: An Interactional Approach', *Martial Arts Studies* 2, available at http://martialartsstudies.org.
http://dx.doi.org/10.18573/j.2016.10066

Mason, Paul H. 2016. 'Fight-Dancing and the Festival: Tabuik in Pariaman, Indonesia, and Iemanjá in Salvador Da Bahia, Brazil', *Martial Arts Studies* 2, available at http://martialartsstudies.org
http://dx.doi.org/10.18573/j.2016.10065

Quinney, Allyson. 2016. 'The @UFC and Third Wave Feminism? Who Woulda Thought?: Gender, Fighters, and Framing on Twitter', *Martial Arts Studies* 2, available at http://martialartsstudies.org
http://dx.doi.org/10.18573/j.2016.10063

Said, Edward W. 1995. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient.* London: Penguin.

Said, Edward W. 2005. 'Invention, Memory, and Place', in *Cultural Studies: From Theory to Action*, edited by Pepi Leistyna, 256–69. Oxford: Blackwell.

Strugatz, Barry. 2016. *The Professor: Tai Chi's Journey West.*

Wilson, Lee. 2015. *Martial Arts and the Body Politic in Indonesia.* Brill.

CONTRIBUTOR

Benjamin N. Judkins is co-editor of the journal Martial Arts Studies. *With Jon Nielson he is co-author of* The Creation of Wing Chun: A Social History of the Southern Chinese Martial Arts *(SUNY, 2015). He is also author of the long-running martial arts studies blog,* Kung Fu Tea: Martial Arts History, Wing Chun and Chinese Martial Studies *(www.chinesemartialstudies.com).*

THE SEVEN FORMS OF LIGHTSABER COMBAT
HYPER-REALITY AND THE INVENTION OF THE MARTIAL ARTS
BENJAMIN N. JUDKINS

KEYWORDS

Star Wars, Lightsaber, Jedi, Hyper-Real Martial Arts, Invented Tradition, Definition of 'Martial Arts', Hyper-reality, Umberto Eco, Sixt Wetzler.

CITATION

ABSTRACT

Martial arts studies has entered a period of rapid conceptual development. Yet relatively few works have attempted to define the 'martial arts', our signature concept. This article evaluates a number of approaches to the problem by asking whether 'lightsaber combat' is a martial art. Inspired by a successful film franchise, these increasingly popular practices combine elements of historical swordsmanship, modern combat sports, stage choreography and a fictional worldview to 'recreate' the fighting methods of Jedi and Sith warriors. The rise of such hyper-real fighting systems may force us to reconsider a number of questions. What is the link between 'authentic' martial arts and history? Can an activity be a martial art even if its students and teachers do not claim it as such? Is our current body of theory capable of exploring the rise of hyper-real practices? Most importantly, what sort of theoretical work do we expect from our definition of the 'martial arts'?

INTRODUCTION
WHAT ARE MARTIAL ARTS?

'It [Ludosport] started in 2006 in Italy. A few friends got some lightsabers as gifts and being into martial arts and re-enactment fanatics they decided to see if there was a way they could make it into a sport, and they did. They spent hundreds of hours consulting many different martial artists and fencing coaches to make sure that they got a really good sport. It's not a martial art. We're not trying to teach people how to cause physical harm, in fact that's exactly the opposite of what we're trying to do. We want something that's fast and fun, that people can enjoy'.

Jordan Court, Instructor of the Ludosport England, Lightsaber Combat Academy in Bristol (UK), as quoted in the *Bristol Post*, 29 January 2015.

[Flynn:] 'People laugh at us and say, "That's not a real martial art! I say, "Why don't you pick one up and try? '

[Damon Honeycutt:] 'They can say all they want ... you know what I mean? But the fact is, we are practicing and they are not'.

'Flynn' and Damon Honeycutt. *Reclaiming the Blade*, DVD2. Bonus Feature: New York Jedi. 2009. 4:14 min.

Is lightsaber combat a martial art? This seemingly odd question may have important implications for how we understand critical concepts within the field of martial arts studies. It also promises to shed light on the fundamental processes by which the traditional martial arts have been revived, reimagined and invented in the modern era.

As both a relatively new and radically interdisciplinary research area, martial arts studies is currently enjoying a period of rapid conceptual development. Nowhere is this more evident than in attempts to define the term 'martial art'. While it is in many ways synonymous with the field, only a minority of the foundational texts in our literature have attempted to define this concept or to explore it in ways that would point to new avenues for research. Nor has the existing literature coalesced around a single definition [Wetzler 2015: 22-25].

Researchers have adopted at least three distinct strategies when attempting to craft their understanding of this concept. The first, and most widely used, might be referred to as the 'sociological approach'. It simply accepts the social or cultural consensus on the question as it has arisen within a tightly focused research area.

Given that everyone in 21st century Japan simply 'knows' that kendo, karate and aikido are martial arts, there may not be an urgent need to further explore the matter when discussing some aspect of Japanese martial studies.[1] This is especially true as so many works currently being produced adopt an 'area studies' approach which calls for a deep examination of the historical, social or even linguistic forces affecting developments in only a single region or state. It may seem beyond the bounds of a given research project to explore what characteristics make both kendo and karate martial arts given their many historical differences. The existing consensus is simply accepted as a social fact.

Nevertheless, future theoretical development within martial arts studies requires a greater emphasis on comparative case studies. This research strategy often necessitates comparing practices that have arisen in very different times or places. For instance, what makes both capoeira and kendo martial arts, and how can both be understood in light of the economic, political and social changes that swept the globe in the 19th century? In cases such as this it is no longer possible to avoid definitional discussions. For better or worse, classification and categorization are at the heart of the comparative enterprise.

Towards this end scholars have attempted to define the martial arts in at least two different ways. First, they have advanced short, universal definitions meant to identify those activities deemed to be 'martial arts' within the broader category of all social practices. A good example of this approach can be seen in Peter Lorge's 2011 volume, *Chinese Martial Arts*:

I define 'martial arts' as the various skills or practices that originated as methods of combat. This definition therefore includes many performance, religious, or health-promoting activities that no longer have any direct combat applications but clearly originated in combat, while possibly excluding references to these techniques in dance, for example. Admittedly, the distinction can be muddled as one activity shades into another. In addition, what makes something a martial art rather than an action done by someone who is naturally good at fighting is that the techniques are taught.

---

1   Many researchers, in fact, have provided in-depth treatments of specific fighting systems without finding it necessary to first wrestle with the definition of the martial arts in general. For examples, see Wile [1996], Hurst [1998], Bennett [2015], and Judkins and Nielson [2015].

Without the transmission of these skills through teaching, they do not constitute an 'art' in the sense of being a body of information or techniques that aim to reproduce certain knowledge effects.
[Lorge 2011: 3-4]

This discussion is clearly superior to the sorts of vernacular definitions that one might find in a dictionary or within popular culture discussions.[2] First, it de-centers Asia from the image of the martial arts, recalling that similar combat practices have been observed in practically all human societies at one point or another. Indeed, the term 'martial art' has a long and distinguished history in Europe where it has also been used to describe western fighting systems. While popular discussions tend to focus only on Asian styles, martial arts studies needs a more robust concept.

Secondly, Lorge directly addresses the fact that martial arts are, by their very nature, social activities. They are not simply physical responses to acts of violence (no matter how effective they might be in the moment). A given body of techniques only becomes an 'art' when it can be effectively transmitted from one individual to another. Still, as Sixt Wetzler has cautioned in his own discussion of this definition, the 'transmission' of techniques is not always reducible to formal classroom instruction [Wetzler 2015: 24].

Historically, most martial arts existed as what Thomas A. Green has described as 'vernacular' fighting systems, where instruction tended to happen in the field and be a good deal less formal than what we might expect today [Green quoted in Svinth 2011: 10]. On the other side of the spectrum, literate martial artists in Europe, China and Japan have been writing detailed fighting manuals for hundreds of years with the explicit goal of passing on techniques to fellow students who they would never meet in person [Shahar 2008: 56-71; Kennedy and Guo 2005; Hay 2015]. The current era of cheap video and social media has also revolutionized the way that techniques are shared, tested and debated [Spencer 2014]. The insight that knowledge must be transmitted from one generation to the next seems to be at the heart of the martial arts in any period that we examine.

While a solid starting point, this definition still presents scholars with challenges. It is certainly the case that many martial arts arose from

combat practices. But is this central to our understanding of them? Archery may have been used in hunting and ritual before it was used in warfare. Indeed, it is interesting to note how much of Hurst's discussion of the evolution of military archery in Japan actually focuses on these other activities well into the medieval period [Hurst 1998: 105-112; also see Selby 2000: 27-83].

How should we think about the many unarmed arts? While wrestling has long been part of Western and Eastern weapons training systems (and as such it could be argued to have real military value) boxing appears only sporadically and even then mostly as a type of recreational activity [Lorge 2011: 46-47]. Even General Qi Jiguang, who did more to promote the practice of boxing within the Chinese military than anyone else, saw it as having no actual place on the battlefield. He introduced it as a new type of training for his troops because of its ability to build mental and physical strength rather than its inherent martial value or long pedigree in combat [Lorge 2011: 177].

It would be possible to multiply examples, but the basic point is clear. The links between modern martial practices and their supposed battlefield origins are more complicated than current mythmaking might lead one to suspect. Often these genealogies exist only in the realm of popular lore.

Attempts to produce a simple definition of the 'martial arts' have proved challenging. And there are other issues to consider. While a universal concept, such as that advanced by Lorge, might succeed in identifying 'martial arts' in the abstract, it does not give us all of the analytical tools that we will need to investigate these social institutions.

At the most basic level, how can we tell where one style ends and the next begins? Are wing chun, weng chun and white crane three completely different arts, or simply three local interpretations of the same regional fighting tradition? Scholars need a concept of the martial arts that can help us to investigate questions such as this.

To address these issues a second group of authors have developed definitions that seek to classify the wide range of observed martial arts along different metrics. Some authors, such as Donn F. Draeger, sought to separate the truly 'martial' from the 'civilian' fighting systems [Draeger 1981: 6-9]. Unfortunately his system seems to be based on a now dated understanding of Japanese military history. And in any case, it is not always possible to draw a clean distinction between the military and civil realms.

Other students have looked at the specific goals motivating individuals to practice the martial arts. Perhaps the most common division in the

---

2   Note how the 2015 online edition of the Merriam-Webster Dictionary [http://www.merriam-webster.com/] defines the martial arts: 'Any of several arts of combat and self-defense (as karate and judo) that are widely practiced as sport'. While it does not explicitly state it as such, definitions like this tend to reinforce the popular notion that martial arts exist only as an aspect of Asian culture.

literature is a three part typology separating the competitive combat sports, traditional styles (focused on self-development and health) and self-defense or combat arts [Channon and Jennings 2014].

The great advantage of this move is that it accurately reflects the ways in which the martial arts are often discussed in popular culture. This makes the concept relatively easy to apply. Unfortunately this approach has trouble dealing with the huge amount of variation found within any single tradition.[3] In China it is not that hard to find wushu coaches who approach the taijiquan forms as competitive sports, while some of their students will go on to teach similar material as traditional health practices.

Lastly, Wetzler has proposed that we move away from efforts to definitively place certain practices in one conceptual box or another. He argues that we should instead acknowledge that the martial arts owe much of their popularity to their fungibility. The fact that a single set of practices can play many social roles in a student's life gives them great practical utility. It is precisely this multi-vocality that allows these hand combat systems to function as central organizing symbols for their practitioners.

Wetzler suggests that the best way to understand a martial art, and to compare various schools or approaches, is to examine its impact on five dimensions of social meaning [Wetzler 2015: 25-26]. Briefly these are:

1. Preparation for Violent Conflict

2. Play and Competitive Sports

3. Performance

4. Transcendent Goals

5. Health Care

Unfortunately this is more of a framework for analysis than a traditional, easily applied definition. Wetzler freely admits that future researchers may find it necessary to add additional categories to his list.

Nor does his approach solve the problem of sociological relativism. The flexible nature of Wetzler's concept opens the field up to a wide range of activities that not all researchers might be willing to accept as martial arts. For instance, would realistic combative movements learned from

a video-game count as a 'martial art' if their practitioner claimed them as such?[4] What about the many apps currently on the market to help students learn taiji or wing chun? Is this simply a novel way of teaching an old art, or is it something very different? Do we simply accept as a martial art anything that claims to be one?

The problem of relativism can also be seen on the other end of the spectrum. Because the martial arts are often seen as somewhat odd, eccentric or socially marginal, some individuals may try to evade the label all together [Bowman 2016]. Students taking a 'boxing essentials' or even kickboxing class at the local YMCA might claim not to be studying a martial art, even though any martial arts studies conference will include multiple papers on participation in amateur boxing and kickboxing activities.

It would seem that self-identification is a poor metric to judge what activities qualify as a martial art, or how we as researchers should structure our comparative case studies. Indeed, this has always been a potential weakness of the sociological approach. Lacking a universally agreed upon definition, how should we move forward?

This puzzle is a useful one in that it helps us to clarify our goals. When we ask 'Is lightsaber combat a martial art?' we must be clear that this question does not intend to establish a value hierarchy in which the researcher draws on their expertise to offer a binding opinion on what does or does not qualify as a 'legitimate' combat system. Nor are we even asking whether a given activity is worthy of consideration in martial arts studies as a research area. After all, our interdisciplinary literature routinely tackles a variety of topics and sources (including novels, films, community festivals and public rituals) that are not the product of any specific training hall.

As Paul Bowman recently stated, the problem with narrow debates over definitions is that:

> we are in great danger of moving the debate into a deeply problematic kind of obsession with categorising and hierarchising. This is only one step away from switching our role as 'interpreters' into [that] of 'legislators' (to use Zygmunt Bauman's terms). I think this is a trap that many people who are trying to work in and around martial arts fall into, again and again: they move from trying to make sense of it all, to imagining a system, to regarding that system as law. [Bowman, personal correspondence, 2016]

---

3   Sixt Wetzler notes the common case of modern karate schools that actively teach in all three divisions. This makes it difficult to classify their style [Wetzler 2015: 24].

4   For a study that pushes these questions even farther, see Chris Goto-Jones' forthcoming book **The Virtual Ninja Manifesto: Gamic Orientalism and the Digital Dojo** [2016].

What this question really points to is the relationship between our object of study (in this case lightsaber combat) and the theoretical toolkit that we have developed to explore these sorts of systems within martial arts studies. Put slightly differently, do we expect that our core concepts and theories will help us to make sense of lightsaber combat in the same way that they might be useful when thinking about the rise of judo or jeet kune do? And if they fail in this specific case (as theories often do), will the lessons learned improve our understanding of more traditional martial arts as well?

Within the social sciences progress rarely comes from theoretical development or empirical observation in isolation. It is the triangulation of approaches that is the most likely to lead to the development of a successful research program. Do all martial arts arise from authentic combat activities? Must they be historically grounded? Can an activity be a martial art even if its students and teachers do not claim it as such?

These are important questions as they help us to expand the borders of martial arts studies and demonstrate the utility of our field. They are also the sorts of issues that deserve to be empirically examined rather than simply accepted or dismissed by definitional fiat.

GETTING A GRIP ON THE LIGHTSABER

Any attempt to define lightsaber combat as an authentic martial art will face a number of objections. The typical lightsaber class usually introduces students to some combination of forms practice, practical drills, competitive fencing and stage combat/choreography training. The emphasis on each activity varies from school to school and depends in large part on the goals of the instructors. In short, the typical lightsaber training session does not appear to be all that different from other martial art classes taught in a typical community center.

Yet the lightsaber is neither a historical nor even a real weapon. The idea that one might be able to systematically study 'lightsaber combat' is a relatively recent notion inspired by a uniquely successful film franchise. In that sense we are dealing with a 'hyper-real martial art'. By this we mean that it is an invented tradition that everyone acknowledges is based on a fictional text rather than a more or less

accurate transmission of some historical practice.[5]

Lightsaber combat presents students of martial arts studies with a set of theoretical fighting systems coalescing around the image of a (wildly popular) fictional weapon.[6] Nevertheless, many of the individuals working to develop lightsaber combat programs are traditional martial artists with extensive training in both Eastern and Western fighting arts. Their historically grounded skills are being married to the mythos and world view of the *Star Wars* franchise and then marketed to the public. Finally, the resulting synthesis is presented to new students in classroom environments that practitioners of the traditional martial arts would find very recognizable.

Nor is the practice of lightsaber combat limited to a few isolated individuals. The renewed popularity of the *Star Wars* franchise following the release of the prequel films in the early 2000s (Episodes I-III) and then Episode VII in 2015 has given rise to a dramatic increase in demand for practical lightsaber training. With a number of additional films already in the works, we may be well-positioned to watch the birth of a substantial new hyper-real martial movement. But are these systems true martial arts?

Using Wetzler's five dimensions of social meaning I explore the various ways in which lightsaber combat functions as an authentic martial art for its practitioners. Some of these may be obvious, others will be less so. Ultimately this discussion suggests that a set of activities functions as a martial art not because of its historical authenticity or connection to 'real-world' combat. Rather, the martial arts have always been defined primarily through their modes of social organization and the individual, group and systemic roles that they play. At heart they are social institutions rather than collections of isolated techniques. More specifically the modern martial arts are a social project by which individuals hope to improve multiple aspects of their personal and social destinies, and not simply their physical safety.

---

5   The term 'hyper-real martial art' draws heavily from the concept of a 'hyper-real religion' (a system of worship or spiritual observance based in large part on elements drawn from popular culture) as developed within the religious studies literature. **Star Wars**-inspired belief systems are also an important element of this spiritual category. Readers interested in investigating the question of hyper-real religion (including Jediism) may want to see Possamai [2012]. This concept is also indebted to the work of Umberto Eco who sees the roots of 'hyperreality' in a strong desire for the experience of reality that leads one to construct an artificial system of signs which is then consumed in the place of reality [Eco 1986: 7, 16, 41-48.]. One would be hard pressed to articulate a better description of many aspects of lightsaber combat and **Star Wars** fandom.

6   For an academic discussion of the image of the lightsaber and the material culture of the **Star Wars** universe, see Wetmore [2007].

This should not be understood as a new development. We see this same pattern at the very moment of the genesis of the Asian martial arts. Japanese warriors did not need formal sword schools organized as ryūha to ply their trade or survive on the battlefield. They had succeeded in these tasks quite nicely for hundreds of years without them.

As Alexander C. Bennett has cogently argued, these institutions were created as a means of demonstrating social sophistication and self-discipline when Bushi warriors found themselves transitioning to political roles in urban areas which brought them into direct contact with Japan's highly cultured aristocracy [Bennett 2015: 36-40]. The original Japanese swords arts functioned just as much as a source of social legitimization as martial capital. These schools again saw massive growth under the later Tokugawa government, a period of protracted peace in which they once again served mostly social, cultural and economic functions [Hurst 1998: 64-68].

While history is not unimportant (indeed, we will see that it is deeply implicated in the creation of even hyper-real martial arts) researchers may ultimately wish to pay more attention to how ideas and beliefs about the martial arts, as a social project, are created and transmitted from one generation to the next. Nor is this set of conclusions unique to the world of lightsaber combat. The existence and rapid growth of hyper-real martial arts requires us to reevaluate what we think we know about the invention of the traditional martial arts more generally.

CREATING THE SEVEN CLASSICAL FORMS OF LIGHTSABER COMBAT

While various 20th century science fiction stories had mentioned weapons like the lightsaber,[7] the image of this now-iconic blade seared its way into the popular consciousness in 1977 when George Lucas released his first *Star Wars* film (Episode IV: A New Hope). Luke Skywalker igniting his father's arctic blue lightsaber ('an elegant weapon for a more civilized age') in the presence of the mysterious Obi-Wan Kenobi became a symbol that defined the hopes and aspirations of an entire generation of filmgoers.

---

7   See for instance Edmond Hamilton's story 'Kaldar: World of Antares' [published in the April 1933 issue of **The Magic Carpet Magazine**], Isaac Asimov's 'force-blades' in **Lucky Star** (1952), and the 'rod' in Gordon R. Dickson's **Wolfling** (1969), which in many ways resembles the original concept art for the lightsaber. The idea of an 'all-cutting' energy sword used for personal defense was already well-attested in the science fiction genera prior to the release of **Star Wars** in 1977. For more on these literary parallels see the Star Wars Origins page on lightsabers at http://www.moongadget.com/origins/lightsabers.html.

They too wished for an adventure that would allow them to take their first step into a larger world. What better weapon for the knights-errant of the quickly dawning technological age than the lightsaber? It captured the romance and esoteric promises of our half-remembered, half-imagined collective past, while pointedly reminding us that it was an 'artifact' from the distant future. The symbolism of the lightsaber seamlessly combines a weapon of truly fearsome destructive potential with the promise of spiritual renewal. Once seen it is an image that is not easily forgotten.

The lightsaber's strangely hypnotic blade has now gone on to colonize the imagination of multiple generations, spawning countless novels, comic books, video games, collectibles, sequels and, most recently, entire combat systems. It goes without saying that in the absence of the *Star Wars* film franchise, and the immense marketing empire that surrounds and supports it, there would be no lightsaber combat training today. Our first conclusion must be that these media-generated images led directly to the creation of later combat systems, albeit with a somewhat puzzling delay.

One strongly suspects that the first fan-based 'lightsaber duel' was probably performed with broom sticks the day after Lucas' original vision was revealed to the public in 1977. Yet there is very little evidence of organized attempts to institutionalize and spread specific ideas about what lightsaber combat might look like until the early 2000s. Systematized lightsaber fencing, as it currently exists, dates only to the middle of that decade.

This presents us with our first challenge. Given the immense popularity and huge cultural impact of the initial three movies, why did lightsaber combat organizations emerge only in the 2000s? More specifically, what was its relationship to the less popular, and critically reviled, prequel trilogy chronicling the Clone Wars and the rise of Darth Vader?

The answer to both of these questions can be found in the complex mix of materiality and mythos that lies at the heart of the *Star Wars* enterprise as well as the efforts to market its merchandise to the public. What is more powerful than a myth whose relics can be held in one's own hands?

Indeed, with certain 'artifacts' fans can even attempt to replicate iconic scenes from the *Star Wars* movie franchise. This actually makes replica and 'stunt lightsabers' (simple swords without elaborate sound effects created by third party vendors for the express purpose of dueling) somewhat dangerous. On the one hand their metal hilts and heavy, glowing, polycarbonate blades provide the same sort of intuitive psychological gratification that comes from handling any other sort of weapon.

At the same time, the fact that we all know that these replicas are 'not real' can lead to problems. While not actually filled with jets of hot plasma, the pure kinetic energy that a rigid one-inch polycarbonate blade can deliver is roughly equivalent to any wooden stick of similar length. It is certainly enough to cause pain or injury if full contact dueling is attempted without some basic safety equipment. In short, corporate liability issues may have initially limited the creation of licensed replicas of these iconic weapons. The fact that large costuming groups, such as the 501st Legion and Jedi Council, have a no combat/choreography policy would also have diminished the demand for more durable prop replicas.

There would have been technical issues to consider as well. Most sabers today utilize LED technology to 'ignite' their blades. These can withstand more forceful blows than delicate incandescent bulbs and they do not burn out. Integrated circuit boards with motion detectors can also be added to provide programmable sound effects and special lighting displays.

By the early 2000s the technology to mass produce convincing replica lightsabers became cheap enough to make the project economically viable while at the same time a new generation of (now adult) fans was in place to spend hundreds of dollars on each new model. It was the appearance of relatively high-quality replica (and later stunt) sabers which sparked the sudden boom of interest in practical lightsaber combat.[8]

These marketing efforts were also supported by the expansion of other aspects of the *Star Wars* universe. Particularly important were the writings of Dr. David West Reynolds, the holder of a PhD in Archeology from the University of Michigan. As an employee of George Lucas' Skywalker Ranch in California, he had already written a number of *Star Wars* reference books [1998, 1999, 2002a]. Following the release of Episode II in 2002, he turned his attention to the lightsaber. In October of 2002 Reynolds published an article in *Star Wars Insider* [#62] titled 'Fightsaber: Jedi Lightsaber Combat'. While a short article published in a fan magazine, this essay would have a profound impact on the subsequent development of the lightsaber combat community.

It is interesting to note that the actual movies say almost nothing about the details of lightsaber training. Reynolds, though not a martial artist, attempted to rectify this oversight in world-building. Drawing on his knowledge of ancient civilizations and cultural history, he wrote an article revealing the 'seven forms' of lightsaber combat as taught within the Jedi Order.

Each numbered form was given a short description outlining its philosophy as well as its strengths and weaknesses. Later publications augmented these with exotic sounding names (such as 'Shii-cho' for Form I) and associated them with mythic creatures from the Star Wars universe in ways that intentionally mimicked the use of animal imagery in the Asian martial arts (Shii-cho is 'The Way of the Sarlacc') [Wallace 2011: 41-43]. They also concocted increasingly complex backstories for each form.[9]

Reynolds set in motion a story-development arc which created a rich body of invented lore around the seven forms. This gave them an alluring feel of verisimilitude. Unburdened by the limitations of culture, history and politics, he created the image of a martial art that felt more 'realistic' than the actual models it was based upon. It drew from social streams that had already proved popular with consumers (most of the individuals buying replica lightsabers in 2005 would have had vivid memories of *The Karate Kid* [1984] and various martial arts films) and then offered them something more, an improvement upon the reality that they already knew [Eco 1986].

By the early 2000s *Star Wars* fans had been given access to both a steady supply of replica lightsabers, a new trilogy of films which featured many iconic lightsaber battles, and an increasingly complex system of invented lore explicitly designed to create a history for lightsaber usage that would feel realistic. While the *Star Wars* franchise has always emphasized the role of merchandise, the situation for would-be Jedi and Sith acolytes was more favorable in the 2000s than it was in the 1980s.

The next major step forward took place in 2005. Inspired by some short fan-films in which lightsabers had been digitally recreated, 'Flynn', a

---

8   The first official replica lightsabers with LED blades and sound effects were released by Master Replicas in 2002. Within a few years a greater number of models had been released at lower price points expanding the appeal of these products. By 2006 multiple third party manufactures had entered the market producing their own versions of these weapons, often aimed at individuals who wanted more specialized blades for choreography, dueling or display.

9   Given the diverse nature of the **Star Wars** product line, it is interesting to note that much of this subsequent elaboration was popularized through officially licensed videogames. Craig Page has noted that **Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords** (2004) did much to spread the names and basic descriptions of the 'seven forms' of lightsaber combat throughout the fan community [personal correspondence]. A number of individuals who I have interviewed over the course of my ethnographic study have stated that they were first introduced to the lore of lightsaber combat through videogames. While fans may have been inspired by the **Star Wars** films to pick up a lightsaber, it was the expanded universe of magazines, books, comics, cartoons and videogames that established the weapon's complex fictional history.

founding member of the group NY Jedi, bought two Master Replicas lightsabers, took them to the roof of his New York City apartment building at night, and began to duel with a friend.

The resulting enthusiasm on the part of his neighbors was great enough that he then decided to bring a larger group of sabers to the 2005 Greenwich Village Halloween parade where their demonstration was again met with great fervor and numerous inquiries as to where one could go to learn to fight with a 'real' lightsaber. The group NY Jedi was formed shortly thereafter, and has offered weekly lessons taught by a variety of martial artists, choreographers and stage combat coaches [History of NY Jedi (2010): 0:01-2:00 min].

The simultaneous worldwide dissemination of the newly created mythos and marketing of replica sabers makes it difficult to reconstruct a single linear history of lightsaber combat. Nor is it entirely clear which group or individual staged the very first public lightsaber performance. Some of the earliest clubs appeared in the Philippines and Russia.[10] Interestingly all of these efforts seem to post-date the release of the first officially licensed replica sabers and cluster closely in time indicating the importance of market forces in the emergence of this movement.

Nevertheless, NY Jedi was active very early in this period and earned a great deal of publicity for its efforts. It raised the public profile of lightsaber combat and inspired the creation of a number of other similar groups all along the east coast of the United States. Some of these emphasized costuming and performance, others attempted to focus on the creation of a 'pure' martial art.

Only a few months later three friends in Italy (all trained martial artists) brought a bunch of replica lightsabers to a birthday party. They were impressed with the technical flexibility that this new training weapon allowed. Almost immediately they started to develop their own martial system (Ludosport) based on the physical characteristics of replica lightsabers as well as elements of the *Star Wars* mythos [*A Story of Light* (2014): 2:26-5:03 min].

Most lightsaber groups seem to combine multiple elements in their training. While NY Jedi mixes traditional martial arts training with a heavy emphasis on stage combat and performance, Ludosport instead emphasizes the development of lightsaber fencing as a type of competitive combat sport. They have since opened branch schools across Europe and organized a system of international tournaments and rankings.

---

[10] I am grateful to Greg Ember (who has researched the individual histories of the various groups that comprise the lightsaber combat community) for bringing these cases to my attention after reviewing an early draft of this article..

As the introductory quote suggests, members of Ludosport appears to have distanced themselves from the claim that lightsaber fencing might be considered a martial art. In their vernacular terminology, an activity only qualifies as a martial art if it is aggressive in nature and focused on causing harm. For their own marketing purposes they seem to have decided to emphasize the athletic and competitive aspects of their practice.

Other groups, such as the Terra Prime Lightsaber Academy, have instead stressed the degree to which lightsaber fencing is, and should be thought of as, a martial art [TPLA Mission Statement 2012]. After all, the fight choreography seen in the *Star Wars* films was influenced by a variety of traditional martial arts including kendo, kali, wushu and historic European practices such as longsword fencing [*Star Wars*: Evolution of the Lightsaber Duel 2015; *Star Wars* Featurette: Birth of the Lightsaber 2004].

Many of the instructors teaching lightsaber combat today also bring their own backgrounds in the martial arts to the table. For them the challenge is to find ways to recreate the seven forms of lightsaber combat outlined in the *Star Wars* mythology using historic techniques, concepts and strategies. Drawing on their individual training, and the unique physical properties of commercially available stunt lightsabers, they have attempted to 'recreate' effective and historically-grounded systems of lightsaber combat which are still true to the texture of the movies and the *Star Wars* mythology. All of this has then been packaged in a way that it can be taught to succeeding generations of students in something that very much resembles a standard classroom environment. Some instructors even see in lightsaber combat a possible tool for promoting, preserving and disseminating traditional types of martial knowledge [TPLA 2012].

FIVE SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF LIGHTSABER COMBAT

While this review has helped to ground our discussion, it has not resolved the more basic question of whether lightsaber combat is an authentic martial art. At best we are thrown back on the statements of various practitioners. Some look to their own backgrounds and goals to assert that they are in the process of developing and teaching a martial art. In their view the media-driven origins of these practices have no bearing on their classification. What is important is the nature of the techniques used and taught.

Other individuals, even those deeply involved in the lightsaber community, are not so sure. Some see 'combat sports' and 'martial

arts' as mutually exclusive categories. And given the degree of cultural discomfort that still follows the traditional martial arts [Bowman 2016: 1-2], a few groups may have decided that it is more economically feasible to market lightsaber combat as a sporting, fitness or recreational activity.

Nor would it be difficult to find practitioners of more traditional sword arts who might claim that lightsaber fencing simply cannot be a martial art at all. So many of the small details that are critical in traditional forms training or cutting practice (e.g., edge control) simply disappear when we begin to discuss fictional all-cutting plasma blades. For them the potent symbolism of a futuristic sword cannot displace the historically-grounded reality of the blade.

This sort of indeterminacy has always dogged both the sociological and universal strategies for defining the martial arts. The current essay seeks to move beyond this impasse by empirically examining the practice of lightsaber combat in light of Wetzler's theory of the 'five dimensions of social meaning'. This will provide us with an appropriate baseline from which to explore whether the fictional origins of lightsaber combat alters the sorts of social functions that it provides in the lives of its students. It should also suggest something about the utility of the existing martial arts studies literature in making sense of these practices.

1. Preparation for Violent Conflict

New students of the martial arts often claim that they have been inspired to join a school by a need for self-defense training. There has always been a link between (some) martial arts and the perceived need to prepare oneself for the reality of violent conflict. Yet students of martial arts studies have observed that many of the sorts of techniques that are commonly used in these systems lack an element of 'realism'.

Scholars of Japanese military history have noted that high school kendo training as it evolved in the early 20th century did a poor job of preparing Japanese military officers to actually use their swords in the field. This led to a number of changes in the way that swordsmanship was taught in the 1940s [Hurst 1998: 164-165; Bennett 2015: 128-154]. Practitioners of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), for their part, often complain about the lack of 'realism' in more traditional styles. Yet weapons are for better or worse a common element of actual criminal assaults and they are banned from the Octagon.

One cannot escape the conclusion that the ways in which the martial arts attempt to prepare their students for the future cannot simply be

reduced to 'violence simulators' of greater or lesser degrees of accuracy. Equally important has been the building of physical strength, mental toughness and a tactical toolkit in environments that are quite different from what might be encountered in an actual attack.

Lightsaber combat also has a complex relationship with Wetzler's first dimension of social meaning. The chance of an individual being called upon to defend themselves from an actual lightsaber attack today is only slightly less than the probability that they will encounter a villain wielding a three-meter-long spear in a dark alley. Which is to say, very few people take up traditional weapons training because of its great utility 'on the street'.

Yet in a kendo class one will be called upon to defend against a mock (but still very spirited) sword attack. Likewise, in a modern lightsaber duel fencers will be called upon to defend themselves against a determined opponent who has been systematically trained in a variety of techniques. A failure to do so (especially if proper safety measures are not observed) might result in injury. In that sense lightsaber students are preparing themselves for combative encounters. All of this also contributes to the creation of a degree of physical and mental resilience.

Many forms of traditional weapons training have become functionally obsolete in the current era. Spears, swords and bows are no longer encountered on the battlefield and they play a limited role in any discussion of self-defense. While lightsabers can be placed further along the continuum of abstraction, these are fundamentally differences of degree rather than kind.

2. Play and Competitive Sports

There can be no doubt that for most students the fundamental appeal of lightsaber combat is to be found in its recreational value. The central mythos and symbolism of the exercise derives from the realm of film and commercial entertainment. Of course, in the current era what most of us know about past military battles and personal duels is also heavily mediated by media representations rather than firsthand experience, a fact that is too frequently ignored by martial arts studies researchers [Bowman 2015a: 7].

Even in Hong Kong in the 1950s-1970s, a supposed golden age of traditional martial arts practice, wuxia novels and martial arts films were the medium by which most individuals were introduced to, and developed an interest in, the martial arts [Judkins and Nielson: 222-225, 233-237]. While not as frequently discussed, the traditional martial arts

have always been tied to the closely related worlds of folk history and storytelling [Green 2003: 1-11].

The very nature of lightsaber fencing has also contributed to the development of a strong sporting impulse. Whether in the form of Olympic fencing or Japanese kendo, in the current era the sword arts have come to be seen largely as combat sports. Students of lightsaber fencing will approach their new practice with an already well-established set of ideas about what a proper match should look like. Inevitably this includes safety equipment of some type (eye protection, fencing masks, armored gloves, other protective gear), one or more judges to call points, a transparent scoring system and a limited number of timed rounds.

All of these practices come from previous innovations in other arts. Yet they are immediately available to lightsaber fencers. The end result is that for many students lightsaber combat is primarily thought of as a fast-paced, highly enjoyable combat sport.

As I have interviewed various instructors in the field, some have pointed to these sorts of matches as sites for 'technical research'.[11] A few have asserted that the traditional martial arts might benefit from a 'neutral' platform where students of Western, Chinese, Japanese or South East Asian fencing systems can come together to compare techniques with those whose training is different from their own.

The physical simplicity of a stunt saber (which is essentially a smooth polycarbonate tube), and the ease with which it can be used by a variety of styles, has even led to some discussion of whether lightsaber combat might develop as a type of 'mixed martial art' for swords (albeit one with a very different worldview). While this possibility is not what attracts most new students to their local lightsaber combat group, it is certainly something that is being considered by key teachers and promoters of the practice.

3. Performance

The anthropologist D. S. Farrer has argued at length that every martial system contains both a practical and performative aspect. Further, these two elements cannot easily be separated [Farrer 2015]. While all sorts of practitioners may find that they have an economic or a social motive to promote their practice as a 'pure fighting art' (or alternatively, and

---

11   For a discussion of how the practice of technique can act as a laboratory for new and innovative research, see Spatz [2015: 60-64].

probably more lucratively, as 'pure combat choreography') this is usually far from the truth. Developments in the practical realm tend to drive new innovations in the realistic portray of the martial arts on stage. Further, the public discussion of these recreational images has inspired new thoughts about the more practical aspects of violence [Bowman 2015b: 10-12].

For example, throughout Asian history, archery did double duty as a cornerstone of public ritual as well as being a critical military skill [Selby 2000: 27-87]. Even the periodic military exams held by the Chinese government in the late imperial period tended to draw a large crowd and functioned as public spectacles as much as a rational mechanism for choosing the best military recruits (well into the age of the gun). Nor can we forget about the important social place of practices such as 'wedding silat', dance-like capoeira matches or the public performance of traditional martial arts styles on the stage of southern China's Cantonese Opera. All of this has a long and established history within the cultural realm of the martial arts.

Still, the relationship between the practical and the performative aspects of the martial arts is one of the most vexing aspects of these systems for current scholars. The development of lightsaber combat has the potential to contribute much to this aspect of the martial studies literature.

When looking at the variety of lightsaber combat groups, some scholars may be tempted to separate them into two categories. They might conclude that on the one hand we have those doing 'real' martial arts (here understood as including the combat sports), such as Ludosport, Terra Prime Lightsaber Academy or The Force Academy. These groups focus almost exclusively on the practice of historically-derived techniques or competition. On the other hand we have a number of schools, such as NY Jedi, The Capital City Jedi Knights or Fightsaber (in South East Asia), whose main activities are the staging of elaborate public spectacles through choreographed duels and storytelling.

Yet none of these organizations function in pristine isolation. One of the most interesting aspects of this global community is the density of communication between groups, often conducted through discussion boards or social media accounts. As a result, innovations in one area tend to diffuse to others.

While NY Jedi is known for its stage combat and public choreography, a number of its members (and former members) are also martial artists. One such individual is Damon Honeycutt. A longtime practitioner and instructor of the Chinese martial arts, he developed a basic lightsaber training form corresponding to 'Shii-cho'. This has gone on to become

perhaps the most widely distributed training tool within the lightsaber community. It is commonly practiced by both theatrically- and martially-oriented groups and both seem to find it quite useful.

The development of Shii-cho also points to the complex relationship between the historical and the hyper-real within the martial arts. In Dr. Reynolds' fictional account of lightsaber training, 'Form I' (also named Shii-cho) was hypothesized to have been organized around a basic set of infantry skills, originally developed for metal swords and later adopted by the ancient Jedi for use with their newly developed lightsabers. As such the form was described as betraying elements of its bladed origins. It was also simple and could be taught to all Jedi younglings, giving them a firm foundation for more specialized training in the future [Page 2011: 8].

Honeycutt wished to develop a training form that would accurately capture the feel of this fictional vision. To do so he looked to his own background in the Chinese martial arts. More specifically, he drew on the work of Yu Chenghui who, during the 1960s and 1970s, had attempted to reconstruct a method of fighting with long, double handed straight swords (*shuang shou jian*) which, according to the Ming era martial arts writer Cheng Zhongyou, had been lost at the end of the Tang dynasty [personal correspondence].

To accomplish this task Yu, himself an accomplished wushu performer specializing in the drunken sword style, examined a number of still existing forms for similar blades and studied reprinted versions of Ming era manuals dealing with double handed weapons. He also drew on his own martial genius, completing his form only after watching a praying mantis deal with heavy drops of rain during a sudden storm [Oh and Ching 2012: 39-46].

While Wushu's governing bodies eventually accepted his reconstruction as a 'historical routine' for competition purposes, scholars would be more likely to classify it as a classic example of an 'invented tradition'. Simply put, there are no existing documents detailing sword training methods dating to the Tang dynasty (though it should be pointed out that Yu did draw on authentic Ming and Republic era sources). His efforts reflect a desire to recapture a lost element of China's cultural legacy rather than a simple continuation of a documented or living tradition. Indeed, the desire to shape the expression of future social values by recapturing some essential element of the past is a common theme throughout the modern development of the martial arts [Gainty 2013: 142-146].

When looking for an ancient historical analog to the lightsaber, Honeycutt realized that the *shuang shou jian* was in many ways a natural fit. It too was a long straight weapon what would have been wielded

with two hands (as the invented lore for Shii-cho required). Further, Yu's dedication to historical detail meant that his reconstructed method contained a number of very practical cuts, parries and steps that would be of great value to students approaching a new class of weapon for the first time.

It also seemed poetic that lightsaber combat, a newly formed hyper-real martial art, should look to another invented tradition within the Chinese martial arts for its inspiration. On a more personal level, Honeycutt wished to pay his respects to Yu Chenghui whom he had the opportunity to study with while the latter was visiting the United States. In this way an important example of research and innovation conducted by one of China's more influential modern martial artists has become the basis of much of the lightsaber training that is happening around the globe today [personal correspondence]. Given the dual nature of Yu Chenghui's career as both a martial arts researcher and actor, it is perhaps fitting that variants of Shii-cho are practiced with nearly equal enthusiasm by groups interested primarily in lightsaber dueling and public performance.

Nor is there always a clear division between the sorts of individuals who will be attracted to more 'traditional' martial training and those who might find themselves making and posting fan-films on the internet.[12] Rather than having two distinct sets of practitioners, often what we see are related practices used to fulfill multiple sets of social goals by the same individuals. While on the surface this might appear paradoxical, it has always been part of the appeal of the traditional Asian martial arts. Current developments within the lightsaber combat community are useful precisely because they serve to illustrate this possibility.

4. Transcendent Goals

Even if lightsaber combat succeeds as a fast-paced combat sport, or as a channel for martial performance, what psychological or spiritual value could it have? In the current era many individuals turn to the traditional (usually Asian) martial arts precisely because they see in them a font of ancient wisdom [LaRochelle 2013: 46-47]. For the less esoterically-inclined, the physical and mental discipline of the martial arts has also been seen as a way to 'develop character'.

---

12   It is interesting to note that within the school where I have been conducting my own ethnographic research the students most skilled in combative lightsaber dueling are also the individuals most enthusiastic about costuming. While most groups within the lightsaber community seem to emphasize one sort of activity or another, individuals can be, and often are, drawn to an entire range of related activities.

While many actual martial arts instructors go out of their way to avoid discussing their practice in these terms, the idea that the martial arts should be a pathway to some sort of 'transcendent attainment' seems firmly fixed in the popular imagination [Berg and Prohl 2014]. It is one of the promises that draws students to these practices. Much of the commercial success of the traditional martial arts appears to be rooted in a near mystical faith in their ability to promote balanced development in both children and adolescents. One wonders how much of this belief (in the West) we can attribute to Luke Skywalker's very public journey to adulthood, aided by the dual disciplines of the Force and the lightsaber training, during the 1970s and 1980s?

Can lightsaber students find transcendent values in a practice grounded in what they know to be a set of fictional texts? The fact that we now have a literature on the existence of hyper-real religions strongly suggests that the answer is yes [Possamai 2012]. The underlying values that students can detect in a story and practice in their lives are more important for many people than their connection to an authentic ancient history [Morehead 2012].

My own ethnographic research conducted with a lightsaber combat group in a mid-sized city in the North East United States has revealed a surprising degree of dedication on the part of many of the students. The oft-repeated mantra that it is all 'just for fun' notwithstanding, it is clear that many students are approaching lightsaber combat as a key organizing symbol in their lives. The weapons may be fictional, but the feelings that are invoked through practice are authentic and profound. Nor are the sorts of mentoring relationships that students seek from their instructor any different from what one might find in a traditional martial arts institution.

Given the resources being dedicated to lightsaber combat, it should come as no surprise that students so often see their norms and beliefs (or perhaps those that they aspire to hold) reflected in these practices. The Jedi and Sith are readymade symbols ripe for spiritual or psychological appropriation.

When addressing a related point in an interview, Damon Honeycutt of NY Jedi said:

> **You can bring about things in a subculture; you can create change through that. You can elevate consciousness through it. That is what I would like to see it do, really bring people to a heightened potential of what they really are. To be a lens for that, outside of comicons or conventions or competitions or forms or fighting or sparring or whatever people think that they are doing with it. That really would be the greatest thing.**

> **With NY Jedi we are making ourselves better people to serve humanity, you know, the same thing that I do with the Kung Fu school. In a lot of ways they are the same. Its just that the myth behind it is different. The lineage behind it is different. The world view is different. But the overall goal is the same. [Reclaiming the Blade – New York Jedi: min 11:01-11:46]**

This description matches my own preliminary observations. Future research might fruitfully focus on the underlying social changes that have opened a space for hyper-real martial arts to play these roles at this particular moment in social history.

5. Healthcare

The martial arts are more than simple collections of combat techniques. They play a number of distinct social roles in the lives of their practitioners. In the current era individuals often turn to the martial arts to defend not just their physical safety but their personal health.

Many martial arts studios offer basic fitness and conditioning classes. Weight loss is a frequently advertised benefit of all kinds of martial arts training. And every month a new set of articles is published about the medical benefits of taijiquan for senior citizens in both the Western and Chinese press.

This may seem like yet another example of the commercial appropriation of the martial arts. Fitness is a multi-billion dollar industry and the average individual is constantly subjected to powerful media discourses extolling the health benefits of athleticism. Is it any wonder that all sorts of hand combat teachers attempt to link their practices to the culturally dominant athletic paradigm?[13]

In light of this it may be necessary to remind ourselves that the links between the practice of the martial arts and health promotion are actually quite old. Meir Shahar has demonstrated that by the end of the Ming dynasty unarmed boxing training was gaining popularity around China partially because of the unique synthesis of self-defense and health-promoting benefits which it offered [Shahar 2008: 137-157].

While less pronounced than some of the other dimensions of social meaning, it is clear that lightsaber combat is viewed as an avenue for

---

13   For a discussion of the ways that modern 'healthism' and athleticism have shaped both the perception and development of practices such as yoga or the traditional martial arts, see Spatz [2015: 83-86, 93-97, 105-109].

promoting physical health by many of its students. In this case the emphasis is less on esoteric practices and Daoist medical ideas than Western notions of physical fitness and exercise. Many of the new students that I have spoken with mentioned the need to 'get in shape' and 'stay active' as primary motivations for taking up lightsaber combat.

Fitness also plays a role in the ways that lightsaber combat is discussed by more experienced martial arts teachers. Every instructor and expert whom I have interviewed has noted that these classes attract individuals who might otherwise have no interest in setting foot in a martial arts school or gym. Lightsaber combat gives such students a unique means to stay active and an incentive to get in shape.

For some students lightsaber combat also sparks an interest in other martial arts. Indeed, one suspects that this is exactly why so many traditional martial artists are currently opening classes dedicated to the subject. They have the potential to expand the appeal of the martial arts to groups of consumers who might not otherwise have ever been attracted to them.

The health benefits of any martial art depend in large part on how it is introduced to students and subsequently practiced. The same is certainly true for lightsaber combat. Once again, when comparing this practice to historically-grounded martial arts what we find are differences in degree rather than kind.

CONCLUSION
LIGHTSABER COMBAT AS A MARTIAL ART

Is lightsaber combat a martial art? The answer is almost certainly yes. At its core are a group of combative and performance techniques almost all of which have been gathered from preexisting martial traditions. These have been developed into pedagogical systems capable of transmitting not only physical practices but also elaborate pseudo-histories, invented identities and a mythic worldview that seem to be no less potent for their fictional origin. All of this provides students with a variety of tools to create social and personal meaning in their lives.

An examination of Wetzler's 'five dimensions of social meaning' suggests that students of lightsaber combat understand their practice in much the same way as traditional martial artists. More importantly, both sets of activities play broadly similar roles in the lives of students and respond to the same social forces. As such we have no a priori reason to believe that the theories developed within martial arts studies cannot be applied to the investigation of hyper-real combat systems.

More importantly, our brief investigation of lightsaber combat may suggest a few ways to improve our understanding of the social meaning of these systems. Martial artists are often reluctant to discuss the economic consequences of their practice. Many individuals make a living teaching these systems, and students sacrifice notable resources (in money, time and opportunity cost) to practice them. In the current era the distribution of martial knowledge is closely tied to economic markets.

Yet openly discussing this fact seems like a violation of an unspoken norm. Among both practitioners and members of the public there is a strong presumption that the martial arts 'cannot be bought or sold'. It is hoped that the attainment of excellence in this realm will somehow transcend such base considerations. Given that many academic students of martial arts studies are also practitioners of these same systems, such attitudes can easily shape our own research as well.

The rapid growth of lightsaber combat over the last decade is interesting for a number of reasons. One of the most important is what it suggests about the power of economic markets to shape the development of martial arts systems and the ways that consumers encounter and experience various fighting systems. At the most basic level there would be no lightsaber combat without the production of successive generations of *Star Wars* films and massively expensive campaigns to market them to the public.

More specifically, the exact timing of the boom of interest in lightsaber combat owes much to the creation (and marketing) of high quality replica and stunt lightsabers in the early 2000s. While particularly pronounced in this case, the basic situation parallels the role of the media in sparking the sudden waves of interest in the traditional Asian martial arts which gripped the public in the 1970s and 1980s [Bowman 2015a: 96-98].

Economic considerations can be seen in other places as well. The major manufacturers of stunt sabers host message boards and social media groups that play a critical role in creating a sense of community. Individual teachers have turned to lightsaber fencing as a means of spreading the message of the martial arts beyond the horizons of the normally reachable market. And it is sometimes surprising to realize how much money individuals are willing to pay for a personally meaningful replica lightsaber, or for the opportunity to attend a seminar with a specific instructor or group. It is even interesting to contemplate why different lightsaber organizations adopt various economic models.[14]

None of this is all that different from what we see in the world of the more traditional martial arts. The ability to offer instruction can become an important source of personal income [Frank 2014]. The sudden appearance of a popular new action film can lift a little-known fighting system out of obscurity [Bowman 2015a: 115-117]. As a result, economic markets strongly condition how the martial arts will be taught, and who they can potentially reach, at any given point in history [Judkins and Nielson: 114-124].

While these sorts of considerations receive little attention in many of our studies, they simply cannot be avoided when thinking about the origin of lightsaber combat. As such we should consider adding a sixth category to Wetzler's discussion of social meaning within the martial arts. Economic markets are a means by which scarce resources are distributed within society. The martial arts have often served similar functions through their attempts to control community violence, support new status hierarchies and even create social capital.

We should not be surprised to see powerful synergies emerging through the interactions of these systems. In fact, no student or teacher can approach the martial arts in the current era without taking their economic aspect into careful consideration. This suggests that students of martial arts studies should also be more mindful of this dimension of social meaning.

Critics of the time and energy being devoted to the development of lightsaber combat may voice a number of complaints. Stunt lightsabers, despite their seeming versatility, are essentially cylindrical sticks rather than copies of true blades. And given the unique mythology of this weapon, there is no incentive to imagine it as a metal sword for the purposes of practice and training. As such lightsaber combat is bound to depart from historically-derived sword techniques in important ways. Ultimately an hour invested in the investigation of German longsword fencing, or even kendo, would probably grant a better understanding of real military history than an equal amount of practice with a lightsaber.

Though it may be possible to find key norms within the practice of lightsaber fencing, or while the rich symbolism of the Force and the Jedi may point some students towards transcendent themes, the development of these ideas within the *Star Wars* universe is still shallow compared to the depth of lived religious experience that can be found within real Buddhist, Daoist or Christian monastic communities. Again, why invest scarce resources in a second-order reflection of reality when the real thing is available?

These are valid concerns. Ultimately most martial artists will not be interested in lightsaber combat. Then again, most martial artists also have little interest in kendo, wing chun or any other specific style. Many of these complaints also revolve around questions of taste rather than objective conceptual categories. Why practice that style when 'everyone knows' that mine is superior?

The very fact that lightsaber combat can so easily be drawn into this all-too-familiar mode of debate is yet another indication that it is seen as residing within the set of practices which we call 'martial arts'. Yet as Wetzler reminded us in his discussion, when it comes to definitions, scholars must rely on more objective measures. Ultimately the student of martial arts studies cannot become merely a critic of good taste in martial arts practice [Wetzler 2015: 23-25].

Instead we should ask why, when so much information about many historical styles is readily available, these specific individuals are choosing to study a hyper-real martial art. Why are seekers suddenly more open to finding transcendent meaning in a fictional story than in actual organized religions which espouse many of the same values

---

14   Many groups that focus on costuming and choreography seem to have organized themselves as non-profits dedicated to raising money for specific charities. This allows them to cooperate with other non-profit costuming groups (such as the 501st Legion) in the staging of large, high profile public spectacles without running afoul of the corporate interests that own the Star Wars brand. Traditional martial arts schools which have branched out into lightsaber combat seem to be less interested in this sort of cooperation. Their institutions instead reflect the fundamentally market driven 'style' and 'lineage' based models of organizations that have come to dominate the traditional martial arts community.

and views? How have consumers appropriated the products of a vast commercial entertainment empire to create independent social groups that better allow them to exercise their agency in creating more empowered identities?

None of these puzzles are unique to lightsaber combat. In reality we could ask a very similar set of questions of most of the traditional martial arts that are practiced in the world today. We seek to understand the invention of the martial arts because every hand combat system must find a place for itself in the social system of its day if it wishes to survive. Their many solutions to this dilemma reveal critical data about the nature of social struggle as well as the societies that we live in.

All arts, even the most historically-grounded, are caught in a continual cycle of renewal and reinvention. Practices such as lightsaber combat are valuable precisely because they force us to focus on the details of how that process unfolds within specific communities. Yet to be fully realized, we must first understand that hyper-real combat practices can be authentic martial arts.

REFERENCES

A Story of Light, Part I. 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWO49R-F1yQ

Bennett, Alexander C. 2015. *Kendo: Culture of the Sword*. Oakland, CA: California University Press.

Berg, Esther and Inken Prohl. 2014. '"Become your Best": On the Construction of Martial Arts as Means of Self-Actualization and Self-Improvement'. *JOMEC Journal 5,* available at: http://goo.gl/p1mGql

Bowman, Paul. 2015a. *Martial Arts Studies: Disrupting Disciplinary Boundaries*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

Bowman, Paul. 2015b. 'Mediatized Movements: Martial Artistry & Media Culture'. Keynote given at the *Martial Arts & Media Culture Conference Köln* [Cologne], 17th July 2015, available at: https://goo.gl/3Nevul

Bowman, Paul. 2016. 'The Marginal Movement of Martial Arts: From the Kung Fu Craze to Master Ken'. Working Paper. Research Group Meeting, *'East Asian Martial Arts as Global Culture: Transmission, Representation, and Transformation in Japan, the United States, and the United Kingdom'*. Waseda University, Tokyo, March 2016.

Channon, Alex and George Jennings. 2014. 'Exploring Embodiment through Martial Arts and Combat Sports: A Review of Empirical Research', *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics* 17.6, 773-789.

Draeger, Donn F. 1981. 'The Martial-Civil Dichotomy in Asian Combatives', *Hoplos* 3.1, 6-9.

Eco, Umberto. 1986. *Travels in Hyperreality: Essays*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company.

Farrer, D.S. 2015. 'Efficacy and Entertainment in Martial Arts Studies: Anthropological Perspectives', *Martial Arts Studies* 1, 46-59, available at: http://goo.gl/S28w5i
http://doi.org/bjqd

Frank, Adam. 2014. 'Unstructuring Structure and Communicating Secrets inside/outside a Chinese Martial Arts Association'. *JOMEC Journal 5*, available at: http://goo.gl/FmWcC9

Gainty, Denis. 2013. *Martial Arts and the Body Politic in Meiji Japan*. New York: Routledge.

Green, Thomas A. 2003. 'Sense in Nonsense: The Role of Folk History in the Martial Arts', in *Martial Arts in the Modern World*, edited by Thomas A. Green and Joseph R. Svinth. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1-11.

Goto-Jones, Chris. 2016. *The Virtual Ninja Manifesto: Gamic Orientalism and the Digital Dojo.* London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Hay, Alexander. 2015. 'The Art and Politics of Fence: Subtexts and Ideologies of Late 16th Century Fencing Manuals'. *Martial Arts Studies* 1, 60-71, available at: http://goo.gl/BGD5Qz
http://doi.org/bjqf

History of NY Jedi. 2010.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eKMcZYDm5nk

Hurst, Cameron G. 1998. *Armed Martial Arts of Japan: Swordsmanship and Archery*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Judkins, Benjamin and Jon Nielson. 2015. *The Creation of Wing Chun Kung Fu: A Social History of the Southern Chinese Martial Arts.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Kennedy, Brian and Elizabeth Guo. 2005. *Chinese Martial Arts Training Manuals: A Historical Survey*. Berkeley, CA: Blue Snake Books.

LaRochelle, Dominic. 2013. 'The Daoist Origins of Chinese Martial Arts in Taijiquan Manuals Published in the West', *Journal of Chinese Martial Arts,* Spring], 46-52, available at: https://goo.gl/evsy6Y

Lorge, Peter. 2011. *Chinese Martial Arts: From Antiquity to the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Morehead, John. 2012. '"World without Rules and Controls, without Borders or Boundaries": Matrixism, New Mythologies, and Symbolic Pilgrimages', in *Handbook of Hyper-real Religions*, edited by Adam Possamai. Leiden: Brill, 111-128.

Oh, Gigi and Gene Ching. 2012. 'The Two-Handed Sword Reborn', *Kung Fu Tai Chi* July/August, 39-46.

Page, Craig. 2011. 'Seven Forms of Lightsaber Combat: A Discourse', available at: https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/17111310/7%20Forms%20of%20Lightsaber%20Combat.pdf

Possamai, Adam [ed]. 2012. *Handbook of Hyper-real Religions*. Leiden: Brill.

Reclaiming the Blade. 2009. DVD2. Bonus Feature: New York Jedi.

Reynolds, David West. 1998. *The Visual Dictionary of Star Wars, Episodes IV, V, & VI: The Ultimate Guide to Star Wars Characters and Creatures*. DK Children.

Reynolds, David West. 1999. *The Visual Dictionary of Star Wars, Episode I - The Phantom Menace*. DK Children.

Reynolds, David West. 2002a. *The Visual Dictionary of Star Wars, Episode II - Attack of the Clones.* DK Children.

Reynolds, David West. 2002b. 'Fightsaber: Jedi Lightsaber Combat', *Star Wars Insider* 62, 28-37.

Shahar, Meir. 2008. *The Shaolin Monastery: History, Religion, and the Chinese Martial Arts*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Selby, Stephen. 2000. *Chinese Archery*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Spatz, Ben. 2015. *What A Body Can Do: Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research.* New York: Routledge.

Spencer, Dale. 2014. 'From Many Masters to Many Students: YouTube, Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, and communities of practice'. *JOMEC Journal 5*, available at: http://goo.gl/DzV53V

Star Wars: Evolution of the Lightsaber Duel. 2015. ESPN. Aired 12/15/2015.

Star Wars Featurette: Birth of the Lightsaber. 2004. *Star Wars* [original trilogy] DVD. http://www.starwars.com/video/star-wars-featurette-the-birth-of-the-lightsaber [accessed 4/6/2016].

Svinth, Joseph. 2011. 'What are Martial Arts?' *InYo: The Journal of Alternative Perspectives on the Martial Arts and Sciences* 11.1, 7-13.

Terra Prime Lightsaber Academy. 2012. *TPLA Mission Statement*. http://www.terraprimelightarmory.com/home/tpla-mission-statement [Accessed: 4/6/2016].

Wallace, Daniel. 2011. *Star Wars: The Jedi Path.* Chronicle Books.

Wetmore, Kevin J. 2007. 'Your Father's Lightsaber: The Fetishization of Objects between Trilogies', in *Culture, Identities and Technology in the Star Wars Films: Essays on the Two Trilogies*, edited by Carl Silvio, Tony M. Vinci, Donald E. Palumbo and C.W. Sullivan III. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Wetzler, Sixt. 2015. 'Martial Arts Studies as Kulturwissenschaft: A Possible Theoretical Framework'. *Martial Arts Studies 1*, 20-33, available at: http://goo.gl/Kie0ab
http://doi.org/bjqg

Wile, Douglas. 1996. *The Lost Tai-Chi Classics from the Late Ching Dynasty*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

CONTRIBUTOR

Thomas A. Green earned his PhD in Anthropology from the University of Texas (Austin). After teaching at Idaho State University and the University of Delaware, he joined the faculty in Anthropology at Texas A&M University. Folklore and cultural anthropology comprise his primary teaching duties. He has conducted research among groups ranging from urban gang members and Northern Chinese martial artists to Native American political activists and African-American cultural nationalists with a focus on the ways that traditional art forms identify and manage cultural conflict. He currently collaborates with Chinese colleagues on the vernacular martial culture of the contemporary PRC. In addition to academic articles, he has published twelve volumes on these topics, including Martial Arts of the World: An Encyclopedia of History and Innovation, *co-edited with Joseph R. Svinth. Green has served in editorial roles for academic journals in the U.S. and Europe, including the* Journal of American Folklore.

THE FIFTY-TWO HAND BLOCKS RE-FRAMED
THE REHABILITATION OF A VERNACULAR MARTIAL ART
THOMAS A. GREEN

KEYWORDS

Vernacular martial arts, African-American, aesthetics, cultural revitalization, US prisons.

ABSTRACT

From the late 1980s, a cluster of related African-American vernacular fighting styles became a focus of contention among martial artists. Over the next twenty years, evidence drawn from popular culture, social science, and sport validated the existence of vernacular styles such as Jailhouse Rock and the 52s. This paper examines the recent 're-framing' of the 52s as a heritage art, a uniquely African-American expression for cultivating health, fitness, and ethnic pride, as well as the development of a structured, culturally-based curriculum which began in order to ensure its embodied preservation.

INTRODUCTION

The Fifty-two Hand Blocks (aka the 52s) is an African-American vernacular martial art (VMA) that is generally regarded as a variant of Jailhouse or Jailhouse Rock (JHR), an umbrella term for those VMAs historically associated with penal institutions in the United States ('jailhouses' colloquially).[1] According to most practitioners, the fighting style does not literally utilize fifty-two blocks, although at least one entrepreneur does a thriving online business selling DVDs on which he demonstrates the use of the fifty-two blocks of his system. A definitive etymology for the name has yet to be determined. Oral tradition suggests several sources for the selection of the number '52'. One popular explanation traces the name to the 'Divine Mathematics' of the Nation of Gods and Earths (NGE), also known as the Five Per Cent Nation of Islam or 'Five Percenters', the 5% of black men who have knowledge of self. These 'gods' are male members of the group; women are designated 'earths'. The religion was established in the mid-1960s by Clarence 13X (born Clarence Smith) a former member of the Nation of Islam. The number 7 according to the mnemonic system for memorizing NGE theology ('Mathematics') has divine significance (5 'Power' plus 2 'Wisdom' equals 7; this in turn describes God, or perfection [Swedenburg 1997]).

Adherents to this theory draw evidence from lyrics of the New York hip hop group the Wu-Tang Clan, of which many members are also NGE members, which appear to allude to the 52s. Consider, for example, the lyrics to the song 'Soul in the Hole' (the title song on the soundtrack for the 1997 basketball documentary *Sole in the Hole*):

> **Yo, we throwin' 52 blocks at outside shots to bubble up the snot box / No penalties or shot blocks, its similar to Comstock kid / You catch an elbow in this hell Hole of concrete.**

These lyrics not only reference the fifty-two blocks, but also Comstock (a New York State Correctional Facility) and the use of elbow strikes (a technique favored by many 52s fighters). Although the NGE connection is intriguing, the most widely accepted explanation associates the name with the prank game '52 Card Pick-Up'. Like 52 Card Pick-Up, the Fifty-two Hand Blocks entails trickery and demands the spontaneity and creativity to 'play the hand one is dealt' in a fight [see Green 2003, 2012].

The freedom of expression that prevails in the 52s typifies VMAs. Herein lies one of the major differences between VMAS and codified

martial arts that pursue continuity and claim to avoid deviation from traditional (i.e., received) solutions to conflict scenarios (solutions that are commonly embodied in pre-arranged formal exercises such as kata in Japanese martial arts and the *bunkai* drawn from these choreographed routines). VMAs, by contrast, do not rely on structured curricula to establish common levels of progress from basic to more complex skills. In fact, it is common for at least a portion of one of these fighting methods to be learned solely through observation of actual street fights as distinct from instruction isolated from the flow of authentic combat in which a martial arts student is shown a technique. Thus, knowledge usually is transmitted face-to-face and in a casual fashion.

Teaching, meanwhile, often takes the form of an experienced fighter passing along techniques in a random fashion to a favored novice. This transmission, as suggested above, should not be characterized as inheritance in the traditional sense; when attribution is noted, individuals credit teachers because the mentor was influential, out of the student's respect for the teacher, or to enhance a protégé's own reputation by association with a locally prestigious fighter. The ubiquity of bricolage, the appropriation of physical bits and pieces that are consistent with the prevailing habitus of the local movement traditions (e.g., dance, games, and motor habits acquired through work) that informs VMAs, further militates against static continuity. Finally, while demonstrable proficiency matters to practitioners, and contesting for status and prestige within the social group is pervasive, this differs radically from a mastery of a physical canon to attain rank as developed in standardized, globalized, bureaucratized martial arts. These factors combine to make VMAs ephemeral phenomena.

The Fifty-two Hand Blocks is best characterized as a regional style of JHR associated with one of the boroughs of New York, most often Brooklyn, although this may be the result of media attention in the early 21st century. New York martial arts teacher, professional fighter, and former hip hop club bouncer Novell Bell [personal communication, 2009] describes the following local variations of the 52s:

> **Brooklyn cats was known for they aggressive, fast, crazy, wild attacks. These cats were mostly face hunters, always throwing wild blows to the face trying to knock a person out, and most times they did, because of the fast, aggressive attack. Many brothers from Queens didn't like Brooklyn cats, because they were the kind of people that if you beat one of their boys in a one on one fight in their 'hood, they still jump your ass!**

> **Queens 52 Blocks practitioners utilize more strategy, generally Queens 52 was more of counter fighters, they like to evade, redirect and catch opponents off balance then finish their**

---

opponent. Queens cats were more of showmen. When a Queens cat fought using the

52 style they like to look good kicking your ass, and some Queens cats was so nice with their hands that they would talk shit [to make an opponent lose his cool] at the same time kicking your ass.

Bronx 52 style in my opinion was more kickers, sweeps and grappling. I say this because every God I saw and met from the Bronx that fought using the 52 always try to apply low kicks to attack the legs of their opponent. I think the Bronx 52 style use their legs more because of all the hills they have to walk up in that area.

[Bell, personal communication, 2009; see also Green 2012]

In general, the African-American VMAs such as the 52s exhibit principles that Robert Farris Thompson identifies in West African dance aesthetics [Thompson 1999: 72-74]. In this aesthetic, opposites are brought together to form a sense of balance and order. In terms of the interplay of the opposing elements of the 52s, the 'sick' ('good', in this case because of a capacity to inflict damage) is balanced against the 'sweet' (controlled virtuosity). Roger Abrahams' notion of the tensions between sweet talk (sensible, decorous, harmonious) and broad talk (aggressive, intrusive, contentious) in creolized African Caribbean performance also sheds light on the 52s [Abrahams 1983].

The 52s is characterized by 'a particular mindset, a collection of strategies, techniques, rhythms, and attitudes learned in the heart of the fight. On this issue, everyone who has actually been exposed to the 52s agrees' [Green 2012: 291]. The system is dictated not by adherence to a structured curriculum, but rather, by the application of an aesthetic similar to a disk jockey's freestyle or a jazz musician's improvisation; it is a riff, a variation on a theme which may be derived from the available kinesic repertoire [Wilson 1999]. For example, oral tradition suggests that there is a connection between the 52s and urban dance (uprocking and break dancing). The aesthetic, then, is the 'sweet' frame into which the martial bricoleur fits his 'sick' techniques. This is quite different from those standardized martial arts in which one learns a canonized physical repertoire.

IN SEARCH OF THE 'LOST ART'

Africanists claim that there is a direct line of development from Continental African systems to JHR and the 52s. [Marks, personal communication, 2005; Newsome, 'Jailhouse Rock']. These methods survived into the present due to their being taught in prisons, where they remained a black method of defense, in a country in which racist courts and penal laws have created a system of de-facto slavery. There is in fact compelling evidence that the roots of African-American martial culture are deep. A close examination of the historical record hidden in biographies, newspaper articles, court cases, and similar venues reveals the survival of creolized African-descended fighting styles. One such case is the autobiography of escaped slave Henry Bibb in which he gives an account of the practice in 19th century Kentucky of forcing bondsmen to fight on Sundays and holidays for the entertainment of their masters. In the distinctive fighting style described by Bibb, 'the blows are made by kicking, knocking, and butting with their heads; they grab each other by their ears, and jam their heads together like sheep' [Bibb 1969 (1849): 68; see also Wiggins 1977]. This African-American fighting method is often identified as 'knocking and kicking' [Kouri 1992, Desch-Obi 2008], although the art has been given other regional labels such as 'pushing and dancing' as described in a 1733 South Carolina newspaper notice (the notice offered a reward for the capture of a runaway slave who was a 'famous Pushing and Dancing master' [Rath 2000: 109-111]).

A Reconstruction era court case (1868-1876), also from South Carolina, featured the prosecution of African-American Paul Harris, who was charged with assault and battery for a 'knockin' attack consisting of strikes to the eyes, kicks to the shins, and a head-butt to the belly of the plaintiff [Gonzales 1922]. An article in the *Brooklyn Eagle* dated November 23, 1902 describes several episodes involving an African-American farm worker who achieved notoriety in rural Louisiana as a street-fighter by use of his skill at head-butting. The art persisted well into the 20th century as demonstrated by a passing mention in John Gwaltney's *Drylongso*, in which he wrote that Jackson Jordan, Jr. 'still gives occasional lessons and demonstrations [of] knocking and kicking' [Gwaltney 1981: 94]. Ten years later, Yale student Christopher Kouri, through interviews with Gwaltney and new field research, added additional credibility to the existence of knocking and kicking [Kouri 1992]. Most recently, historian Thomas J. Desch-Obi's *Fighting for Honor* (2008) offers an extensive account of Gullah (the descendants of enslaved Africans who lived in the Lowcountry regions of Georgia and South Carolina) fighting methods, one of which is knocking and kicking, in the contemporary Southeastern U.S.

Debates regarding the origin, name, and differences between local variants notwithstanding, there is a consensus that the 52s evolved from prison styles mentioned above under the blanket label of Jailhouse or JHR [Green 2003, 2010, 2012]. Evidence of such a style has appeared in print from time to time. In 1974, a former inmate reported in an article published in *Black Belt* magazine that 'the different [New York state] prisons … have their own fighting styles' [Darling and Perryman 1974: 21]. In the same article, poet and playwright Miguel Piñero, who was incarcerated repeatedly from the age of eleven through his mid-twenties, identified fighting styles he had learned while imprisoned:[2]

> **The first thing I did in the joint was to check out the style and learn to fight with a home piece – somebody from my neighborhood on the streets. I learned the Woodbourne shuffle, an evasion technique that first was used in the joint at Woodbourne [New York State Correctional Facility] and got passed around. Then I learned wall-fighting, and somebody taught me the Comstock [Great Meadow Correctional Facility in Comstock, NY] style.**
> **[Darling and Perryman 1974: 21]**

Thirteen years later, Terry O'Neill briefly documented the prison fighting style JHR in a popular article about the film *Lethal Weapon* (1987) and its star Mel Gibson [O'Neill 1987]. Gerard Taylor also references an interview on the Warner Brothers website with Gibson in which the actor discusses his introduction to JHR by Dennis Newsome, one of three fight choreographers for the film along with Cedric Adams (capoeira) and Rorion Gracie (Brazilian Jiu-jitsu) [Taylor 2007]. In the years following the initial publicity campaign for *Lethal Weapon* (and as recently as this year [Kurchak 2016]) Gary Busey, the film's antagonist, has made numerous statements about JHR, including one on his IMDb biography where he makes the puzzling claim that he is a JHR black belt. The conversation revolving around JHR, and often debating its existence, continued for a short time, primarily in martial arts circles. Dennis Newsome maintained a media presence, but this most often focused on capoeira with JHR as a secondary topic.

As discussed above, in the 1990s, references to the Fifty-two Hand Blocks appeared in the lyrics of the hip hop group the Wu-Tang Clan. However, one frequently referenced phrase from the album *Liquid Swords* [Geffen Records 1995] – 'Your fifty-two Hand Blocks was useless [against guns]' – supported the contention that the firepower and rules of engagement of urban gang warfare had made the unarmed fighting methods of the 52s obsolete. As the decade was drawing to a close, 1999 saw the publication of a book titled *Street Kingdom: Five Years inside the*

Franklin Avenue Posse in which author Douglas Century documented the Brooklyn hip hop scene of the late 20th century through the life of aspiring recording artist, former convict, ex-boxer, and 52s adept Kawaun Adon Akenhoten VII, aka 'Big K'. Two years later, Century published an article in *Details* magazine titled 'Ghetto Busters' [2001] in which he documented and included photographs of techniques demonstrated by Brooklyn practitioners whose names had become legendary during the 1970s-1980s.

In 2001, Century's primary resource on the 52s remained incarcerated and anonymous; therefore, Dennis Newsome, by virtue of the publicity surrounding *Lethal Weapon*, continued to be regarded by the general public as the most valuable source of knowledge on prison-based martial arts styles. Newsome's reputation was enhanced in 2001 when John Soet published *Martial Arts Around the World, Volume 2* featuring him demonstrating JHR techniques. Newsome's appearance in this context is puzzling. Although he offered instruction in the Brazilian art of capoeira, an African-descended martial art that continued to ride on a similar media-driven wave of popularity generated by *Only the Strong* (1993), he remained closed to requests to do the same with JHR, especially to non-African-Americans.

By the end of the 20th century, the internet had generated innumerable new avenues for communication and debate. Forums devoted to martial arts provided the venue for heated debates regarding the existence of the 52s and, if they existed, their etiology and characteristics. Douglas Century and martial arts practitioner-scholars such as Jason Couch, Daniel Marks, and 'Stickgrappler' (only known by this screen name) proved to be key figures in the debate. While Couch and Stickgrappler conducted non-academic research at a very high level, their investigations had no larger agendas. On the other hand, Daniel Marks, like Newsome, believed that African-American VMAs represented not only effective fighting methods but unique cultural treasures, as well. He has often used the term 'gems' to refer to the African-descended arts. Marks' agenda sought to promote the 52s as a martial art and as a heritage art to serve as a vehicle for self-actualization and community self-esteem, an agenda he advanced when, in 2003, Century facilitated contact between Marks and Big K, his primary resource for 52s information and the protagonist of *Street Kingdom.*

---

2   Piñero was also photographed for the article in a Comstock defensive posture.

'CLIMATE OF THE TIMES'
SOCIAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE POPULARITY OF THE 52S

Diverse social factors contributed to the rise of interest in the 52s early in the 21st century. Influences date back to the 1960s Afrikanist movement which promoted the martial arts as means of community self-defense by training in Asian arts, both individually and as members of groups such as the Nation of Islam's (NOI) self-defense branch the Fruit of Islam. For example, notable African-American martial artists Moses Powell (Musa Muhammad) and Lil' John Davis were associated with the NOI. According to oral tradition, Powell's Asian-derived Sanuces Ryu system was influenced by 'Jail House Boxing' [Daniel Marks, personal communication, 2004].

More aligned with the cultural missions of Daniel Marks and Dennis Newsome are those Afrikanist martial arts that sought to bridge the cultural gap imposed between African-Americans and Continental Africa by the New World Diaspora. Some of these are eclectic martial arts, such as Kupigana Ngumi grounded in African philosophical systems [Shaha Maasi, personal communication, 2008] used to promote pan-Afrikan solidarity. Kupigana Ngumi drew on karate, kung fu, and bando and was created by Nganga Tolo-Naa (born Raymond Cooper) and Shaha Maasi (born William Nichols) during the late 1960s [Hinton and Rahming 1994: 94]. During the 1970s, Kilindi Iyi, a boxer and practitioner of Asian martial arts, turned his attention to African martial culture; as he observed, 'if all people around the world have martial arts, well, Africans must have martial arts also' [Green 2004]. He eventually developed what he characterizes as a blend of African martial arts which he continues to teach from his Ta-Merrian Institute in Detroit, Michigan [Green 2004]. This list of African-inspired martial systems is far from exhaustive, but it suggests the strength of the desire on the part of African-Americans to reclaim a martial heritage that had been obscured by the rigors of bondage in the American Diaspora. This quest is one of the influences that served as a catalyst for the '52s fever' at the turn of the 21st century.

In 1975, Jelon Vieria introduced capoeira to the US as a dance form. Over the next decade, African-descended martial culture increasingly drew the attention of mass audiences. Even before Vieria's tour, television audiences in 1973 had been introduced to the martial dimensions of capoeira in the *Kung Fu* series (Season 1, Episode 13) in which African-American actor Moses Gunn portrays a Brazilian capoeirista. During the 1980s, the popularity of capoeira grew as its martial characteristics were featured in films such as *Brenda Starr* (1989); *The Mighty Quinn* (1989), a film which, like *Lethal Weapon*, relied on Cedric Adams for fight sequences; and the major commercial

success *Only the Strong*. In many cases, the capoeiristas were distinctively Caucasian. Adams and Joselito Santos (capoeira name: Mestre Amen), who portrayed protagonist Mark Dacascos' mentor in *Only the Strong*, were notable exceptions.

Dennis Newsome provides an important historical link in the causal chain from capoeira to the 52s. Perhaps because of his JHR/*Lethal Weapon* connection, his African Reconnection Project in San Diego, California has been particularly high profile. According to Newsome (capoeira name: Mestre Preto Velho), his capoeira training, when combined with training in African dance and related ethnic traditions, 'reconnects the youth to their African Cultural past, modifying thought processes and recapturing their African sense of morals, ethics, and artistic Aesthetics' [World Beat Center 2002a]. Newsome characterizes the adult portions of the program as an 'entity' conceived to train African-Americans, who in turn will train others. This intent also informed the 'each one, teach one' philosophy of Moses Powell [Muhammad, Final Call 2-12-2014]. Newsome adds: 'The motivation behind this program is to restore and maintain the moral and cultural heritage and strength of African-American communities through the practice of Capoeira Angola Sao Bento Grande' learned from Antonio Oliveiro Benvindo (capoeira name: Mestre Touro) [World Beat Center 2002b]. Besides capoeira, Newsome's curriculum incorporates Caribbean and African stick fighting systems and an African system of head-butting that he learned from Ethiopian, Joseph Tewolde [Planet Capoeira 2002; personal communication with Dennis Newsome, 2002 and 2016].

These influences created conditions that generated an appreciation for African and African-descended martial systems. Along with the appreciation for this martial heritage came a perception of the loss of this heritage among African-Americans. This led in turn to efforts to fill the lacunae in the historical record imposed by the repressive conditions of bondage.

Of course, other factors contributed to a wider-than-East Asian view of the martial arts in the closing decades of the 20th century. Exposure to and a growing interest in Filipino martial arts arose in the late 1960s and 1970s due to the careers of Florendo Visitacion (instructor of Moses Powell and Lil' John Davis) in New York, Dan Inosanto in California, and Bruce Lee (with whom Inosanto exchanged information) globally; the popularity of *Bloodsport* (1988), which helped launch the career of Jean-Claude Van Damme and stimulate further cinematic explorations of exotic martial arts; and, in 1993, the debut of the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), which led to the explosion of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) and which served as fuel for the continued search for the fighter's Holy Grail – the ultimate martial art.

REVITALIZATION AND RE-INVENTION

With the 're-discovery' of African-American VMAs, researchers with diverse agendas worked to reconstruct JHR, the 52s, and related fighting arts. As noted above, some sought to promote them not only as martial arts but as heritage arts that could be vehicles for self-actualization and community self-esteem. From an anthropological perspective, these efforts can be compared to cultural revitalization projects [Wallace 1956]. More precisely, these projects were nativistic, they were attempts to revive or perpetuate elements of a group's 'original' culture [Linton 1943: 230]. Such enterprises operate to preserve cultural integrity in the face of an external threat by drawing on models constructed from an idealized past [Green 1981]. A coherent view of the past provides explanations for present conditions and traditional models for reorganization. Such reframing is necessary for formulating strategies to defend social and cultural integrity and to arrive at a more satisfying future. In the case of the African-American Diaspora, the histories were not always in agreement, and at times gaps in the historical documentation were filled with speculation. The ethnic bond enabled by the narratives, however, is more important than the authenticity of the bonding agent. In instances of cultural revitalization, all versions of the group's story focus on strengthening a common identity. As the debate over African-American VMAs heated up at the end of the 20th century, long-standing racial conflicts added fuel to the fire.

As a confirmed Africanist, Dennis Newsome asserts that the roots of JHR are in the fighting systems that slaves brought with them to the Western Hemisphere during the colonial era [Capoeira Angola 2002c; Dempsy 1999]. He advocates the following scenario. The parent arts of JHR developed as local forms during the plantation period. One of these VMAs, 'Barnyard', can be traced to the era and locale of Nat Turner, he claims [personal communication 2002].

Newsome's historical narrative argues that these systems survived into the present due to their being taught in prisons [Planet Capoeira 2002a]. Even after Emancipation of the slave population, social factors – bigoted legislation, racist courts, and the oppressive penal system – operated in tandem to maintain a system of de-facto slavery in the U.S. that followed African-Americans (migrations from the American South to the North notwithstanding). In his words, the 'politics and racism that continue to influence the penal system in the U.S. make this prison combat system thrive as a functional necessity of modern African-Americans' [Capoeira Angola 2002b]. Whereas Newsome notes the JHR influences in the unconventional tactics of certain African-American professional boxers, he minimizes any influence from European culture on JHR – such as the colonial era boxing that others have cited as an arena in which cross-fertilization between

African-descended and European fighting methods occurred [Green 2003]. As a result, during a 2003 interview, he objected to my bringing up the possibility that the distinctive fighting styles of boxers Floyd Patterson and Mike Tyson, both of whom are cited as bringing the JHR style to international boxing, had been passed along by manager/trainer Constantine (Cus) D'Amato (1918-1985). Newsome insisted that Tyson brought elements of JHR to his fights and strenuously resisted counter-arguments. He continues to object to teaching JHR as a part of his open curriculum. As noted above, the arts he promotes (in addition to his primary public art of capoeira) are the African arts (as he labels them) of Caribbean Kalenda and Nguni (Zulu) stickfighting.

Research has consistently been the first order of business for Daniel Marks. As his biography from his original website dedicated to the 52s and related arts such as hip hop states:

> **For over 30 years. Mr. Marks, who possesses a Black Belt in karate [as well as expertise in boxing, jiujitsu, and kali], has researched African-American martial arts. He first heard of 52 Blocks from fellow officers at the beginning of his decade-long military career in the 1980s and was intrigued by the genre but found that information and tutelage was scarce … In 1993, Mr. Marks moved to New York, pursuing a social work track and working in a group home as well as completing a degree in Computer Science. At that point, he [began] … researching the culture and its connectors more intently, meeting with practitioners … recording their narratives … [and] piecing together the puzzle that is Black Martial Culture. Mr. Marks supports his passion and his research with earnings from his own LLC as well as his position within the field of high end IT technology and computer applications.**
> **[http://fwape.com/bio.php]**

The martial project that Marks undertook involved both 'library' research (especially on potential parent forms of Continental Africa and creolized VMAs in the Americas) and oral history to document practitioners of the 52s from what has been considered the 'golden age' of the 1960s-1980s. Marks' historical re-construction coincides with Newsome's up to a point. Although his primary focus became VMAs as they emerged in the urban Northeastern US, particularly Brooklyn, New York, his earliest efforts, which had been launched prior to the 'web wars' of the late 1990s, included African-descended martial culture in the South. In his words: 'We can't forget the Gullah [African-Americans of the Georgia Sea Islands] influence on this fight' [Marks 2004, personal communication]. Family members provided some of his earliest data on the African-American martial culture of the South. He reports the following concerning his grandfather:

He's from Greenville South Carolina. He has never heard of the names like K&K [knocking and kicking]; he's 68, but he knew of the fighting, especially butting. 'Man, I don't do no butting. They'll kill you with the head, them guys'. He said that the fighting that they learn[ed] was for survival. He was also in the military. Another quote, when asked about his knife skills, his reply was, 'Man listen, I ask a cat to hold a quarter out [extended his hand]. Draw my razor and put it back before the quarter hit the ground'. Could be a tall tale, but it shows the type of skill one would need to use the razor for survival. And his favorite words were 'don't let me have to pop my blade cause I cut you quicker than s**t'.
[Marks, personal communication, 2004]

Marks' research led him from the Gullah enclave in the Georgia Sea Islands to the Nation of Gods and Earths to hip hop [Green 2003, 2012]. Throughout the work on this project, Marks maintained his conviction that his was a martial reconstruction with deep historical roots that had the potential to impact the future of the African-American community. In his words:

I'm just trying to do what needed to be done a long time ago. Which is shed a little light on this side of the globe. To see so many young people give up on life before they have a chance to live. Simply because they don't believe that they matter or have made contributions to this world. This isn't about false Pride or following the yellow brick road. It's about real people with real problems struggling to survive the best way they know how. Then realizing that they got played, and now they want to pass on a little bit of what they learned. I'm just glad that I was put in a spot to gain from these Brothers [older members of the African-American community who have expertise in JHR and the 52s] before they pass into faded memories and urban legends.
[Marks, personal communication, 2003]

As the existential controversy over African-American VMAs raged on, in 2003, Douglas Century created opportunities for Big K to connect with Daniel Marks. As noted above, Marks had been working to reconstruct the 52s through interviews with skillful fighters from the 1970s and 1980s for the art's value as not only an effective fighting method but also for its unique cultural contributions relating to music, dance, and sport. There are thus important differences between the original 'street practices' and the re-framed 52s, the most important of which is that Marks took the 52s out of the shadows and sought to promote them as a martial art and as a heritage art.

Drawing on the street arsenals of surviving experts and especially on the skills of Big K, the work of developing a structured curriculum

began. The goal was to develop a coherent, embodied preservation of the 52s as distinct from the piecemeal and generally fortuitous survival that is the inevitable fate of most VMAs. I have argued above (and at length elsewhere, e.g. Green [2012]) that the 52s incorporate an African-descended aesthetic traditionally expressed in the polarities of hot-cool, sweet-sick, sweet-broad [see also Abrahams 1983]. This aesthetic system values improvisation and variations on a central theme, as in the jazz concept of 'riffing'. Following that traditional practice, the re-invented 52s mindset served as a catalyst for improvisation on the mechanics of a base art. Boxing was a reasonable choice for a martial foundation. Marks argued both in the martial arts forums and on his original website fwape.com (*Fwape* is from Haitian creole and means 'to strike or throw to the ground') that the use of boxing followed historical precedent as well. He argued that, from the anonymous Africans who acquired British-derived boxing skills in the course of plantation era 'human cockfights' through African-American pugilists Bill Richmond (the Terror of the London Prize Ring, 1763-1869), Jack Johnson (1878-1946), Archie Moore (1913-1998), and Mike Tyson, a distinctive Black boxing style had been intertwined with African-American VMAs [Green 2003]. Big K's stint as a professional boxer undoubtedly played an additional role in the selection of boxing.

As the efforts of Marks and Big K gained momentum and the 52s achieved a greater degree of legitimacy, others launched attempts to capitalize on and profit from the interest in the system. This became obvious in the latter by the absence of historical or cultural rhetoric beyond claims of ties to a ghetto and/or criminal (gang or prison) pedigree. In some cases, the actual term '52' in one form or another was attached to the products that emerged in the wake of Century's *Street Kingdom*, his *Details* article, and a series of similar pieces in both popular and academic venues. Apparently, efforts at capitalizing on the popularity of the 52s and JHR began as early as 2003 with Diallo Frazier's reputed autobiography of his years as an 'urban soldier', *Revelations of a Warrior*. In 2004, Frazier initiated production of a series of DVDs on 'Ghetto Blocks' through TRS (Threat Response Solutions) Productions. In 2014, after his stint as consultant and '52s coach' to Larenz Tate in the BET production of *Gun Hill* (2011), Frazier published *Tao of 52: Discovery of the Lost Science*, which reiterated much of the existing online and previously published print information on the 52s.

The launch of YouTube in 2005 and the subsequent posting of video clips, many of them featuring Marks and Big K, unleashed a torrent of instructional material. Per this article's opening remarks, more than one of the new crop of masters misinterpreted the derivation of the '52 Hand Blocks' and assumed that the number alluded to the number of defensive maneuvers contained in the art and not the NGE numerology nor the prank 52 card Pick-up [Green 2012]. This misapprehension compelled martial entrepreneurs to contrive a variety of techniques that, as far as can be determined, are not independently corroborated as

having circulated in any vernacular transmissions of the 52s.

Lyte Burley launched the most aggressive attempts at marketing his version of the 52s. At the time of writing, he had produced six instructional DVDs which he sells (along with t-shirts, hoodies, and other apparel) through his website, and has also posted dozens, if not hundreds, of online videos. New self-proclaimed experts continue to pop up, marketing contrived styles cobbled together from basic boxing techniques, wing chun kung fu, karate, modern versions of Bruce Lee's jeet kune do, print sources, and competitors' videos. I was contacted more than once after 2003 (when I began publishing academic pieces on JHR, the 52s, and related vernacular arts) by individuals purporting to be students, journalists, or fellow academics who were later revealed to be on fishing expeditions to hijack the practical expertise that I did not have.

During the years following their meeting, Marks and Big K were joined by urban fitness innovator Hassan ('Giant') Yasin, founder of Bartendaz Fitness, and by filmmaker Kamau Hunter. Marks, Big K, and Yasin came together to 're-frame' the 52s as a heritage art, a unique expression of African-American culture for cultivating health, fitness, and pride in cultural heritage. Hunter created visual records of the process.

The initial fwape organization founded by Marks, after a period of posting informational and instructional clips on YouTube and the fwape website, issued *Boxing for Combat* as a Blockstar Production in 2007. As the title implies, this instructional DVD offers an introduction to the basic boxing techniques that were beginning to form the core of the re-invented 52s curriculum. 2007 also saw the release of *Break the Glass: The Official 52 Hand Blocks Documentary*. Drawing extensively on Marks' previous field research with the OGs ('Original Gangsters' or, in tribute to the NGE, 'Original Gods') who used the 52s in the streets and prisons in the 1970s and 1980s, the two DVD set is an effort to confirm Marks' claims concerning the existence and most recent antecedents of the curriculum that he and Big K had begun to develop.

In essence, *Break the Glass* advanced the Constellation 52 agenda in the following ways. Significant members of the African-American martial community (including influential Afrikanist Tayari Casel of Kupigani Ngumi) attested to the existence of the 52s and asserted that the 52s had evolved from the boxing-based prison system Stato (Upstate New York Correctional Facility). Interviewees also claimed that the urban gangsters of the 1950s and 1960s abided by ethical warrior principles similar to Constellation 52's C.O.D.E: 'character, order, discipline, and equality' [http://52blocks.blogspot.com/2009_01_01_archive.html]. Establishing the latter was crucial to the 'rehabilitation' of the outlaw system as a tool for building a community movement.

Directed by Kamau Hunter, the formal association of Marks and Big K with Yasin was indicated by the DVD's being labeled a Blockstar/ Fwape/Bartendaz Production. *Framing 52* is an abbreviated print reiteration of points made in *Break the Glass* with written commentary by Marks and photographs by Hunter. The 2007 printing credits these two as authors. A subsequent printing [2008] adds Big K and Yasin as co-authors. 2008 was the point at which the consortium organized Constellation 52 Blocks Combat and Fitness.

Constellation 52 Combat and Fitness offered training seminars open to the public regardless of race and continued to produce books, documentaries, and instructional DVDs on boxing-based 52s. In the re-invented 52s, techniques are built using a toolkit consisting of boxing drills, dance moves, and boxing equipment. Physical attributes (strength, endurance, flexibility) are developed through the bodyweight-based exercises that are Yasin's riff on exercise protocols developed over the years utilizing the minimal equipment available in prison yards, cells, school playgrounds, and inner city parks.

Implementing the 52s aesthetic, Yasin added lateral movements and bicycling legs to the conventional vertical up and down of the pull-up, for example. These modifications bring additional muscle groups into play and intensify the basic movement. They also add style and performance to the most standard, old-school calisthenics, just as the 52s adds flash to the boxing paradigm. Like the re-framed 52s, these exercises are based on an outcaste model, prison training, and what have been called 'Thug Workouts'. And, like the re-framed 52s, the intent is to convert negative to positive. This is obvious in the inspirational lectures that Yasin serves up along with demanding workout routines. He even reinvented the word 'THUG' to become an acronym for 'talented humans under great stress' [Daniel Marks, personal communication, 2010]. This alliance represented the most ambitious effort to date to document and revitalize JHR, the 52s, dance, physical culture, and related practices in African-American cultural history.

Constellation 52 benefitted inadvertently from the rising popularity of MMA. Indeed, indicative of a unique back-and-forth transmission, the early UFCs had fueled an interest in JHR and the 52s as 'ultimate martial arts', while years later, as the UFC and MMA were becoming more mainstream, fledgling MMA fighter Rashad Evans sought out the 52s in search of an 'edge'. In 2005, Evans was introduced to the 52s by Marks and Thomas Lomax a few months before joining the cast of Season 2 of the Spike TV competitive reality series *The Ultimate Fighter* (which he would go on to win before eventually becoming a UFC champion in 2008). Evidence that Constellation 52 had gained traction (primarily via YouTube clips) not only as self-defense and African-American heritage but also as physical culture and combat sport training is signified by

the release of *Best Hands for MMA* in 2009. The DVD featured a video testimonial by Rashad Evans and the statement that '52 Blocks is the best dirty boxing and inside fighting for MMA' [2009, back cover].

A subsequent DVD titled *Changing of the Guard* represents a significant turning point for Constellation's interpretation of the 52s. The contents of the DVD, therefore, deserve detailed consideration. As Daniel Marks asserts in the promotion for the DVD, 'it ends a chapter and starts with Constellation' [*Promotion for Changing of the Guard* 5/22/10]. The work is intended to pay tribute to those ancestors and ancestral arts that have gone before, allowing the Constellation 52 'family' to move forward as a new entity that preserves the positive element of the past while distancing itself from the negative image that came with practicing an underground outlaw VMA.

Taking inventory of the African-descended VMAs in the Americas, from those well-known (capoeira) to the less familiar (*garrote, cocobale, maní*), *Changing of the Guard* opens with the assertion that there has been less information available on the Black VMAs of the U.S. than anywhere in the Western hemisphere. The film addresses this ignorance by fleshing out the history, in turn, of 200 years of boxing (from the plantation to the prize ring): Stato, Jailhouse, and the Fifty-two Hand Blocks. Like *Break the Glass,* it is rich in oral history. Going even further than its predecessor, however, *Changing of the Guard* includes legends of the streets and beyond, such as Happy ('Robot') Crump, a 1970s karate competitor and dance innovator, and King Saladin, a reputed student of the notorious 52s fighter Mother Dear.

While the relationship of the 52s to hip hop and break dancing has been discussed by the members of Constellation and elsewhere [Green 2012], consideration of the ties between JHR and the blues among other musical traditions of the 1950s and 1960s sets *Changing of the Guard* apart from the pack. Through the comments of their interlocutors the film-makers explore the code of honor that prevailed before gangs turned to guns. *Changing of the Guard* was made, we learn, to 'preserve and serve' this embodied cultural heritage art. While remaining acutely aware of the history of their art, with this film Constellation 52 announced their intent, as Marks declares, to 'move on'.

In 2012, Constellation 52 Combat and Fitness reorganized as Constellation 52 Global (G52G) in a partnership including Marks, Big K, and Yasin. While not neglecting the 52s' cultural background, the current agenda increasingly focuses on fitness and combat. Their global outreach has had its greatest success in Brazil and Finland, and the combat has had direct applications to boxing and MMA. By December 2013, Yasin was no longer associated with C52G and turned his energies to developing his own fitness and self-improvement programs such as the Bartendaz, Life Is Movement, and G.I.A.N.T. (Growing Is a Noble Thing). As of 2016, the forces behind C52G are Marks, Big K, and Mike Djangali.

REFERENCES

Abrahams, Roger D. 1983. *The Man-of-Words in the West Indies.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Bibb, Henry. 1969 [1850]. 'Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave', in *Puttin' on Ole Massa: The Slave Narratives of Henry Bibb, William Wells Brown, and Solomon Northup*, edited by Gilbert Osofsky. New York: Harper and Row.

Century, Douglas. 1999. *Street Kingdom: Five Years inside the Franklin Avenue Posse.* New York: Warner Books.

Century, Douglas. 2001. 'Ghetto Blasters: Born in Prison, Raised in the 'hood, the Deadly Art of 52 Blocks is Brooklyn's Baddest Secret', *Details* 19.9 [August], 77-79.

Darling, Ann and James Perryman. 1974. 'Karate Behind Bars: Menace or Means of Spiritual Survival', *Black Belt* [July], 16-21.

Dempsy. 1999. 'Jailhouse Rock Info'. Available at: http://stickgrappler. tripod.com/ug/jhr1.html.

Frazier, Diallo. 2003. *Revelations of a Warrior.* Pittsburgh, PA: Dorrance Publishing.

Frazier, Diallo. 2014. *The Tao of 52: The Discovery of the Lost Science.* Self-published: CreateSpace.

Gonzales, Ambrose E. 1922. *Tales of the Black Border: Gullah Stories of the Carolina Coast.* Columbia, SC: The State Company.

Green, Thomas A. 1981. 'Folklore and Ethnic Identity in Tigua Nativism', in *And Other Neighborly Names,* edited by Roger D. Abrahams and Richard Bauman. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 226-251.

Green, Thomas A. 2003. 'Freeing the Afrikan Mind', in *Martial Arts in the Modern World*, edited by Thomas A. Green and Joseph R. Svinth. Westport, CT: Praeger. 229-248.

Green, Thomas A. 2004. 'African Roots of the Martial Arts: An Interview with Kilindi Iyi', *InYo: The Journal of Alternative Perspectives on the Martial Arts.* Available at: http://ejmas.com/jalt/2004jalt/jcsart_green_1104.html.

Green, Thomas A. 2010. '52 Hand Blocks/Jailhouse Rock', in *Martial Arts of the World: An Encyclopedia of History and Innovation*, edited by Thomas A. Green and Joseph R. Svinth. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 25-31.

Green, Thomas A. 2012. 'Sick Hands and Sweet Moves: Aesthetic Dimensions of a Vernacular Martial Art', *Journal of American Folklore* 125, 286-303.
http://doi.org/bjpw

Green, Thomas A. 2013. 'White Men Don't Flow: Embodied Aesthetics of the Fifty-two Handblocks', in *Fighting Scholars: Habitus and Carnal Ethnography*, edited by Raúl Sánchez García and Dale C. Spencer. London: Anthem Press, 125-140.

Gwaltney, John L. 1981. *Drylongso: A Self-Portrait of Black America.* New York: Random House.

Hinton, William and D'Arcy Rahming. 1994. *Men of Steel Discipline: The Official Oral History of Black Pioneers in the Martial Arts*, edited by Jennifer H. Baarman. Chicago: Modern Bu-jutsu.

Kouri, Christopher. 1992. *'The Search for Knockin' and Kickin'*'. Unpublished thesis. African-American Studies Department: Yale University.

Kurchak, Sarah. 2016. 'Gary Busey: Actor, Reality Show Winner, Black Belt'. *Fightland Blog.* Available at: http://fightland.vice.com/blog/gary-busey-actor-reality-show-winner-black-belt.

Linton, Ralph. 1943. 'Nativistic Movements', *American Anthropologist* 45, 230-240.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/aa.1943.45.2.02a00070

Marks, Daniel. 2007. *Break the Glass: The Official 52 Hand Blocks Documentary.* Blockstar/Fwape/Bartendaz Production.

Marks, Daniel. 2007. *Framing 52 Constellations.* Blockstar/Fwape/ Bartendaz.

Marks, Daniel and Kamau Hunter. 2007. *Boxing for Combat.* Blockstar/ Fwape.

Marks, Daniel, Kamau Hunter, Kawaun Adon Akhenoten VII, and Hassan Yasin. 2008. *Framing 52 Constellations,* second edition. Blockstar/ Fwape/Bartendaz.

Marks, Daniel, Kawaun Adon Akhenoten VII, and Hassan Yasin. 2009. *Best Hands for MMA.* Constellation.

Marks, Daniel. 2010. *Changing of the Guard.* Constellation.

Muhammad, Calvin. 2014. 'Muslim Martial Arts Master Enshrined in Hall of Honor', *Final Call.* Available at: http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/National_News_2/article_101229.shtml

Newsome, Dennis. 2003. 'Jailhouse Rock'. Available at: http://www.malandros-touro.com/jailhouserock.html.

O'Neill, Terry. 1987. 'Terry O'Neill Interviews Mel Gibson', *Fighting Arts International*, 10-14.

Planet Capoeira. 2002. 'Interview with Contre-Mestre Preto-Velho'. Available at: http://www.capoeira.com/planetcapoeira/view.jsp?section=Feature&viewArticle=116.

Rath, Richard Cullen. 2000. 'Drums and Power: Ways of Creolizing Music in Coastal South Carolina and Georgia, 1730-1790', in *Creolization in the Americas*, edited by David Buissert and Steven G. Reinhardt. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 109-111.

Soet, John S. 2001. *Martial Arts around the World II.* Burbank, CA: Unique Publications.

Swedenburg, Ted. 1997. 'Islam in the Mix: Lessons of the Five-Percent'. Paper presented at the *Anthropological Colloquium*, University of Arkansas, February 19, 1997.

Taylor, Gerard. 2007. *Capoeira, the Jogo de Angola from Luanda to Cyberspace.* Berkeley, CA: Blue Snake Books.

Thompson, 1999 [1966]. 'An Aesthetic of the Cool: West African Dance', in *Signifyin', Sanctifyin', & Slam Dunking: A Reader in African-American Expressive Culture*, edited by Gena Dagel Caponi. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 72-86.

Wallace, Anthony F. C. 1956. 'Revitalization Movements', *American Anthropologist* 58, 264-281.
http://doi.org/b7scw2

Wiggins, David. 1977. 'Good Times on the Old Plantation: Popular Recreations of the Black Slave in the Antebellum South, 1810-1860', *Journal of Sport History* 4, 260-284.

Wilson, Lee. 2009. 'Jurus, Jazz Riffs, and the Constitution of a National Martial Art in Indonesia'. *Body and Society* 15, 93-119.
http://doi.org/bfdpq3

World Beat Center. 2002a. World Beat Center classes. Available at: http://www.world beatcenter.org/classes.shtml.

World Beat Center. 2002b. African Reconnection Program. Available at: http://members.tripod.com/ ~worldbeat/WorldBeat_Center_African.html.

CONTRIBUTOR

Allyson Quinney received her Masters in Journalism from the University of British Columbia and she begins her PhD at Florida State University in the fall of 2016.

THE @UFC AND THIRD WAVE FEMINISM? WHO WOULDA THOUGHT?

GENDER, FIGHTERS, AND FRAMING ON TWITTER
ALLYSON QUINNEY

KEYWORDS

CITATION

ABSTRACT

Most professional sports, such as hockey, tennis, and basketball, separate men's and women's sports leagues. In 2013, the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) disrupted this pattern by showcasing its first women's mixed martial arts (MMA) fight in a once male-only fight league. While the UFC's inclusion of female fighters is a step forward for gender equality, the change does not come without issues. This essay focuses on the framing of female UFC fighters on Twitter over a four year period. Through an intersectional feminist analysis, it examines how Twitter users frame female fighters' bodies in relation to gender, race, class, and sexuality. It argues that there is an imbalance in attention paid to female fighters in regards to gender, race, class, and sexuality, and this constructs contradictory messaging about feminism, female fighters' bodies, and the UFC on Twitter.

INTRODUCTION

This essay examines the English language social media coverage of the introduction of women into the premiere Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) organization, the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC). Signing Ronda Rousey was the first step in the UFC's inclusion of female fighters, which, I argue, is a step forward for female athleticism and equality. As Matt Hern has argued, sports offer 'a particular irreplaceable arena for radical social transformation' [Hern 2013: 24]. Further, Amanda Roth and Susan A. Basow add to Hern's claim by noting that, 'like education, work, religion, and family, the cultural institution of sports has the power to affect women's status in society, [although] not necessarily in a positive manner' [Roth and Basow 2004: 247]. For example, even though women make up nearly half of sports participation, society still favours male dominance in athletics, and women are often excluded from participating in some sports [Roth and Basow 2004: 247].

Until 2013, women were excluded from the UFC. Now, female fighters make up some of the most skilled fighters in the fight league. However, the inclusion of women in the UFC does not come without issues, such as over-sexualisation and exploitation of female bodies. My research builds on the sports research of Channon [2014], Roth [2004], Basow [2004], and Jennings [2014], all of whom focus on the role of women's sport, specifically combat sports, in promoting social change. I add to their analysis by locating my research on the Twitter coverage of two hashtags, #Feminism and #UFC. My findings suggest that there is an uneven attention paid to female fighters that constructs inherently contradictory messaging about feminism, female bodies, and the UFC on Twitter.

This essay is organized into four parts: Literature Review, Methodology, Discussion, and Conclusion. First, given the abundance of 'extreme' sports in today's sport culture, this essay provides a definition of MMA. Currently, there is a debate about whether or not MMA is something more than sheer violence. I unpack the violence debate by comparing the definitions of violence by national, international, and feminist institutions. Next, I highlight the long history of women in combat sports, and through L.A. Jennings' work, I show that women have been in combat sports all along, but have been ignored [Jennings 2014: 17]. After looking at the definitions of MMA and violence, and explaining the history of women in combat sports, I look at the intersectionalities between gender, sexuality, race, age, and class for female fighters through a feminist anti-racist lens. In a male dominated arena like sports, it is important to look at what could hinder women from participating and what obstacles they may jump over to continue. To accomplish this, I compare gender, sexuality, race,

age, and class for women in the UFC, and discuss the issues related to them. Further, I turn to Angela McRobbie's theory of the post-feminist masquerade to discuss the conflicts that accompany the introduction of women into the Octagon. I look at specifically gendered topics, such as beauty, space, and surveillance in regards to women in the UFC.

After this, I turn to my dataset of 303 tweets from Twitter to uncover how female fighters' bodies were represented on Twitter from January 2011 to March 2015. The timeframe was chosen based on the nature of the conversation that was taking place about female fighters in the UFC. In January 2011, UFC President Dana White said that women would never fight for the UFC. However, by February 2013, some of the most talented female fighters in the sport of MMA were officially signed by the UFC, and by 2015, Ronda Rousey, then the Bantamweight Women's Champion,[1] was (and still is) one of the most popular and profitable fighters in the UFC. While women in the UFC continue to be embraced by UFC fans, that does not mean that female fighters are not represented in problematic ways on and off social media. By tracking and analysing the conversation about female UFC fighters on Twitter, I hope to highlight what some UFC fans and critics think about women in the UFC, and how these people represent female fighters' bodies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Through conversations with colleagues and supervisors, as well as a search of online forums,[2] there appears to be some confusion about the difference between MMA and the UFC. The answer is relatively simple: The UFC is to MMA what the NBA is to basketball. Many consider *pankration*, a combat sport from ancient Greece that combined wrestling and boxing, to be the origin of MMA [Seungma et al. 2008: 110]. MMA, like pankration, combines striking and grappling, although MMA has evolved over the last two decades, formulating strict rules and regulations [Spencer 2014: 232]. Today, many competitors specialize in a particular form of martial arts, such as judo or boxing, and supplement their skills with at least one other fighting style (in general, strikers often supplement their primary striking training with secondary grappling training and vice-versa).

In the mid-20th century, the Japanese arts of jūjutsu and judo made their way to Brazil [Naraine 2012: 6]. The origin story of the modified form of Brazilian jiu-jitsu (BJJ) has been contested [Snowden 2010:

---

1   Bantamweight is the 135-pound weight class.

2   http://www.differencebetween.net/miscellaneous/difference-between-ufc-and-mma/

40] but most martial arts scholars believe that the increase in Japanese immigration to Brazil after World War II led to the birth of BJJ. Scholars believe that fourth degree Kodokan judo black belt Mitsuyo Maeda, an emissary of Jigoro Kano (the man who developed judo on the basis of several different schools of jujutsu) sent to spread judo around the world, deserves most of the credit for introducing the Japanese grappling arts to members of the famed Gracie family. Carlos Gracie received direct instruction from Maeda, and Carlos, along with his brothers, formulated what would come to be known as BJJ. Carlos' younger brother, Hélio, meanwhile, would further modify BJJ and craft what would come to be known as Gracie jiu-jitsu (GJJ). Although there are gaps in the historical timeline regarding the details of this origin story, most if not all stories about the birth of BJJ include connections between Maeda and the Gracie family.

BJJ was a major component in the creation of the sport that we now call MMA. Like Maeda before him, Rorion Gracie (one of Hélio's sons) moved from Brazil to the U.S. in the late 1970s as an emissary of his family's BJJ. Rorion spent ten years proving to Americans the effectiveness of his family's martial art. At one point, his teaching – and, more pointedly, his continuation of the family tradition of the 'Gracie Challenge' – garnered so much notoriety that he was interviewed in *Playboy* magazine [Snowden 2010: 151]. In an effort to bring the Gracie Challenge to the big stage, Rorion eventually teamed up with entrepreneurs Art Davie and Robert Meyrowitz to create what would become the UFC. Immediately following its Pay-Per-View (PPV) debut on November 12, 1993, the UFC was met with high-level political opposition; today, however, MMA has become one of the world's fastest growing sports and this is due in large part to the efforts of the UFC to both increase the visibility (and hence profitability) of the sport and to regulate the sport.

While this generalized BJJ-to-MMA trajectory is common knowledge in combat sports circles, what is often overlooked is the connection between the rise of BJJ and the rise of women in MMA. BJJ, especially as modified by the small and sickly Hélio, was developed for the purpose of allowing smaller and weaker practitioners to defend themselves against larger and stronger adversaries. At the beginning of the 20th century, English and American suffragettes used jūjutsu in like manner in their pursuit of equal rights [Jennings 2014: 114]. In 2011, the Gracie Barra BJJ team changed its slogan from 'Organized like a team, fighting like a Family' to 'BJJ for everyone'. The grappling art's contributions to equality have historically benefited women, and BJJ continues to contribute to equality through its teachings of self-defence as well as through providing a strong foundation for women to succeed in MMA.

Is MMA Violence?

The debate on whether or not MMA is violent has been around for as long as the sport itself. Judith Butler looks at violence and the body in her book *Undoing Gender* wherein she claims that human bodies are both dependent on and vulnerable to other people. For Butler, violence is 'a way in which the human vulnerability to other humans is exposed in its most terrifying way, a way in which we are given over, without control, to the will of another, the way in which life itself can be expunged by the wilful action of another' [Butler 2004: 22]. Matt Hern also defines violence in terms similar to Butler's, emphasising as well the lack of consent and control; he claims that boxing is not violence because 'violence is coercive by definition; it's done to someone against their will [whereas in boxing] you step into the ring voluntarily' [Hern 2013: 26]. According to Butler and Hern's definitions of violence, one could argue that MMA is not violence because fighting in the ring (or cage, as the case may be) is consensual and controlled.

The Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport defines violence as 'behaviour that causes harm, occurs outside of the rules of [a] sport, and is unrelated to the competitive objectives of [a] sport'.[3] According to this definition, MMA is not violence because athletes compete within the rules of the sport. Not everyone is as pro-MMA as the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sports, though. For example, the World Health Organization defines violence as 'the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation' [World Health Organization, Chapter 1, Violence - A Global Public Health Program]. Although there have not been any deaths within the UFC, common occurrences in MMA, such as injury and weight cutting,[4] are examples of both physical harm and deprivation. As per the World Health Organization, then, MMA is violence.

There have been multiple activists and politicians who have come out against MMA since the debut of the UFC in 1993. Infamously, in 1996, Senator John McCain restated his opposition, calling the sport 'human cockfighting'.[5] Similarly, the Canadian Medical Association urged the Canadian government to ban MMA in 2010.[6] After researching the sport in-depth, however, McCain changed his stance on MMA, and in

---

3   http://www.cces.ca/en/violence.

4   Weight cutting is the process whereby an athlete loses weight in a short amount of time to qualify for a weight class below his/her natural (or 'walk around') weight.

5   http://www.forbes.com/sites/robertszczerba/2014/04/03/mixed-martial-arts-and-the-evolution-of-john-mccain/

6   http://www.cbc.ca/sports/doctors-urge-mixed-martial-arts-ban-1.907376.

2007, the Senator admitted that the sport had unquestionably evolved.[7] While there are still many MMA naysayers throughout the world, sports literature shows evidence on both sides of the debate. Although many fighting scholars do not take the possibility of the lack of choice for fighters into account, a concept I will unpack further in the 'MMA, Women, and Class' section, the consent and control in sanctioned MMA fights is typically included in arguments for MMA.

The History of Women in Combat Sports

The UFC created its first female weight class in 2013, but according to Jennings, women have been training and competing in combat sports for thousands of years [Jennings 2014: 14]. In Jennings' *She's a Knock Out: A History of Women in Fighting Sports*, which explores women fighters over the past 300 years, she argues that women have long participated in these kinds of sports but have been ignored by the media [Jennings 2014: 17]. For example, in wrestling, one of the world's oldest sports, Jennings found that women were participating in the sport from the 18th century onwards, at times opting to work as wrestlers in travelling circuses.

Wrestling

Circuses became a space where women would wrestle because circuses exploit the grey area between performance and sport [Jennings 2014: 136]. Other scholars, such as Patrice A. Oppliger, have also identified women wrestlers in early 19th century carnival shows. Oppliger notes that women's wrestling matches were called 'freak shows' because 'women were seen as unpredictable and emotionally unstable' [Oppliger 2003: 125]. Women also competed in combat sports away from the watchful eye of the media to overcome forces that were rejecting them from fighting, which is why much of the evidence of women's early involvement in combat sports is anecdotal [Jennings 2014: 46]. Even though some historians question why women were excluded from wrestling, women's participation in wrestling continues to be a controversial topic. Despite their presence in the sport [Fields 2005: 103; Jennings 2014: 46], women were not permitted to wrestle in the Olympics until 2004.[8] After reducing the men's categories in freestyle wrestling in the Sydney Games in 2000, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) added four women's weight categories to the Athens Games in 2004.[9]

---

7   http://www.forbes.com/sites/robertszczerba/2014/04/03/mixed-martial-arts-and-the-evolution-of-john-mccain/.

8   While women were officially allowed to wrestle in 2004, their presence in wrestling has not been without problems. In 2004, 2008, and 2012, men were permitted to compete in both freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestling, but women were only permitted to compete in freestyle wrestling. This will also be the case in the 2016 Olympic Games.

9   http://www.olympic.org/wrestling-freestyle-equipment-and-history?tab=history

Boxing

Another combat sport with ancient roots is boxing, and there is some debate about when women started boxing. Sarah K. Fields, for example, claims that women started boxing in the mid-20th century [Fields 2005: 124], while Jennings argues that women have been active in the boxing world for hundreds of years. White women in the West, such as Elizabeth Wilkinson, Mary Welch, Ann Field, and Sara Barret were all active in boxing in the 18th century. Many were met with support from their communities, like the 'Championess of America and of Europe', Elizabeth Wilkinson Stokes, who was praised by English boxing fans. Unfortunately, the Victorian era, characterized by its strict gender ideals, dealt a devastating blow to women in the sport.

The 19th century marked a change in attitude towards women in society and, by extension, in sports. For a long time, women were arrested for boxing. The stigmatization of women in boxing from the arrests of female boxers caused the media to begin reporting on female fights in negative ways. To add to the stigmatization, doctors warned women about the dangers that boxing could have on their reproductive systems, and women were instructed to wear constrictive clothing [Jennings 2014: 58-61]. The societal norms brought in during the Victorian Era were meant to control women and confine them to particular ideals.

Women were bound by the social norms of the 19th century, but that did not stop all of them from fighting. During the Victorian Era, combat sports like boxing and wrestling were low-class activities. Boys and girls on farms would fight against each other. This brought about many infamous fighters, such as 'Bruising Peg' Malloy [Jennings 2014: 65]. Although such fighters were typically from the lower class, spectators from various classes enjoyed watching boxing matches. Some watched out of interest, some out of erotic pleasure, and others in disgust [Jennings 2014: 65]. Whatever their reasons for it, people were watching.

By the end of the 19th century, boxing schools began opening across the United States [Jennings 2014: 80]. During this time, self-defence became popular and women and girls began to train both for self-protection and for fun [Jennings 2014: 81]. By the end of the Victorian era, women were beginning to become physically involved with boxing. Although it was still illegal in most parts of the United States and Canada at the time, social attitudes towards the sport were continuing to change by the end of the 19th century. In the 20th and 21st centuries, women's boxing made great strides. Women's success stories in boxing discredited ideas about the supposed frailty of women and participation rates in boxing on recreational and professional levels increased

throughout the 20th century. USA Boxing allowed women to compete in amateur events in 1993 [Jennings 2014: 167], and in 2012, women were allowed to compete in the Olympics. After thousands of years of being alternatively ignored, shunned, and punished, women were finally accepted in boxing.

The History of Women in MMA

Gina Carano and Ronda Rousey may be two of the most well-known female MMA fighters, but they were far from the first. Women have been a part of the sport to varying degrees since its inception. Officially, the UFC did not allow women to fight in the Octagon until 2013, although the first all-women's MMA fight card was held in 1995 in Japan. The main event on that card was between the 160-pound Japanese fighter Sinobu Kandort and the 330-pound Russian fighter Svetlana Goundarenko [Jennings 2014: 171]. The first women's MMA fight in the United States took place in Utah in 1998 [Jennings 2014: 170-171]. Throughout the early 2000s, women fought for MMA promotions such as HOOKnSHOOT, Strikeforce, and Smackgirl. In 2012, Janet Martin and Shannon Knapp founded Invicta Fighting Championships All Pro Women's Mixed Martial Arts fight series. Within a year of the creation of Invicta FC, the UFC decided to bring women into the Octagon.

In February 2013, the UFC decided to bring women into the Octagon for the first time, and it was a main event to determine who would become the first UFC Women's Bantamweight Champion. At UFC 157, former Strikeforce champion Ronda Rousey took on challenger (and, to add to a night of firsts, the first ever openly gay fighter in the UFC) Liz Carmouche. Rousey defeated Carmouche with a spectacular armbar submission, and women's popularity in the UFC has only increased since that historic night. In the fall of 2014, the UFC's famous reality show, *The Ultimate Fighter*, featured for its eighteenth season both a male and female group of contestants to be coached by Ronda Rousey and Miesha Tate. Added to which, the female bracket was designed to inaugurate and crown the first champion for the women's Strawweight[10] division. Now with two women's weight classes and 60 women MMA fighters on the UFC roster (as of 2016), women's MMA is enjoying its greatest success to date.

Jennifer Lawler argues that the increasing number of women in sports media and film has a lot to do with the rise in the number of women participating in combat sports [Lawler 2002]. Lawler also notes the changing legislation in favour of women in sports and the growing possibility for sports careers for women as possible explanations for the rise of women in martial arts. The number of superstar, female

fighters who have been recently included in the UFC is likely one of the major reasons why women's participation in MMA in particular is also growing. Although the number of women in MMA may be increasing within and outside of the ring, it is also important to look at the intersectionalities of women's experiences in MMA.

Physical Feminism

Amanda Roth and Susan A. Basow discuss physical feminism in sports as a possible means of physical liberation. They note that 'often women are not weaker than men … yet the myth of women's weakness often goes unchallenged even by feminists' [Roth and Basow 2004: 246]. In addition, Roth and Basow highlight how women's increased participation in sports should result in a physical liberation for women in society but unfortunately has not. Further, Roth and Basow propose that the reason why physical liberation for women has not occurred is because feminists have not paid enough attention to it. In addition, many feminists, specifically cultural feminists, are against the physical liberation of women because of their focus on violence in sport [Roth and Basow 2004: 257]. Physical feminism is a loaded topic in sports research, but much of the research on embodiment in martial arts praises the concept as a useful tool for equality.

Martha McCaughey's views about whether or not physical feminism has been successful in women's empowerment are different from Roth and Basow. Unlike Roth and Basow, McCaughey praises physical feminism and women's empowerment through martial arts. She notes that, 'as more women become trained, physical differences between men and women will probably become less obvious … [and] the nature of those differences, if any, will become clearer' [McCaughey 1997: 84]. Sports theorists use physical feminism in analyses about all kinds of sports, but it is arguable that the concept is most useful in combat sports research. Physical feminism is a concept that theorizes women's use of their bodies to empower themselves in society [Noel 2009: 20].

Lawler discusses why women participate in combat sports. She says that women are participating in combat sports now because they are beginning to take physical risks. Lawler notes that women 'begin to imagine that [they] are strong, that [they] are tough, that [they] are not frail, and [they] do not need to be protected' [Lawler 2002: 19], and she says this is unique to combat sports. Further, Lawler views women's increasing participation in combat sports as a 'deliberate defiance' of gender stereotypes [Lawler 2002: 29]. Lawler unpacks physical feminism in combat sports further by bringing in concepts of possession and control. She notes that martial arts allow women to 'repossess their bodies', they give them something that 'cannot be taken away' [Lawler 2002: 43].

---

10   Strawweight is the 115-pound weight class.

MARTIAL
ARTS STUDIES

UFC Gendering MMA

Traditionally (especially when compared to other athletic activities) the martial arts are sports and practices in which men and women are equal. For example, a woman who is a black belt in taekwondo is a black belt, not a female black belt. The martial arts are also sometimes viewed as a physical form of feminism because 'martial arts can un-do societal views about women's safety by providing oppositional messages to the dominant norms' [Noel 2009: 35]. Many people think that women go into martial arts for self-defence. Noel adds to this concept by noting that 'women would benefit from engaging their bodies in addition to their minds to fight against a rape culture that reinforces women's weakness and vulnerability to male violence' [Noel 2009: 33]. In addition, Noel's research also shows that 'male martial artists contrast female martial artists with their generalizations about women because they see them more as equals due to the skills they demonstrate during training' [Noel 2009: 34].

Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman problematize the gendering of societal roles in their study of gender performance. They claim 'many roles are already gender marked, so that special qualifiers – such as '*female* doctor' or '*male* nurse'– must be added [to indicate] exceptions to the rule' [West and Zimmerman 1987: 129]. Similarly, the UFC specifies female-only and male-only weight categories. The role of female fighters in the UFC can be added to the list of gendered societal roles. In this way, the UFC goes against the traditional de-gendering processes of martial arts. As mentioned above, the UFC has female-only and male-only weight divisions. Gendered weight divisions in MMA construct a glass ceiling for women in the sport. Eleanor Wilson defines the glass ceiling as a corporate strategy that 'was originally introduced as an invisible, covert, and unspoken phenomenon that existed to keep executive level leadership positions in the hands of Caucasian males' [Wilson 2014: 84]. The glass ceiling is present throughout sports, and especially gender-segregated sports such as baseball, basketball, and hockey to name only a few.

Professional hockey is a gender-segregated arena. Nancy Theberge discusses the binaries between men's and women's hockey. She notes that 'the important issue in hockey is not whether or not women can play in the NHL but how the organization of the sport and the cultural beliefs that underlie its practice contribute to ideologies of gender' [Theberge 1998: 196]. Similarly, Eileen McDonagh and Laura Pappano argue that 'sports policies can be used to construct – and deconstruct – race and sex hierarchies' [McDonagh and Pappano 2007: 154]. Further, McDonagh and Pappano look at multiple cases of women's and girls' exclusions from football. All of these cases went to various levels of the courts system, and in all cases, the judges ruled that, once

a sport includes both men and women, both genders must be allowed to compete against each other [McDonagh and Pappano 2007: 134]. However, women and men are still separated in all professional contact sports and in most professional sports in general. When women are excluded from elite levels of sport, this constructs a cultural belief that they are naturally inferior athletes to men, which creates a glass ceiling for women in sports.

There is a clear glass ceiling in MMA, and specifically within the UFC. Workplace issues such as the gendered pay gap, lack of space for female fighters, lack of female sports journalists in MMA, and the lack of women in corporate sectors of the UFC all support this glass ceiling. While these issues are important, this section focuses on the policies which inhibit female fighters from becoming all around champions in the UFC. Take Ronda Rousey for example. Rousey is the former women's Bantamweight Champion, with an impressive current record of 12 wins and 1 loss. The former women's champion has a record that rivals fighters in the men's Bantamweight division in the UFC, but she was never the Bantamweight Champion. Under the UFC's current rules and regulations, Rousey can never be the champion; she can only be the women's champion. Through these gendered weight divisions, the UFC is letting women participate in the male dominated realm of MMA, but only under conditions that reinforce MMA as a man's world.

In addition to the UFCs gendering of MMA within its promotion, Allison Teeter discusses the gendered process of becoming an MMA fighter. Teeter argues that the ways in which men and women see each other as fighters are governed by dominant gender norms. She recalls her own epiphany as a fighter, noting that she 'refused to believe that gender was inhibiting my ability to become a fighter in any way. Realizing that gender very well could be the obstacle to my participation led me to question every aspect of my own experiences, which caused me to become very emotional' [Teeter 2014: 96]. Teeter's research begs the question: Why do MMA fighters and enthusiasts have a gendered experience of the sport when, as Noel notes, the discipline of martial arts is traditionally not gendered? I argue that the masculinization of the MMA brand combined with profit maximizing by promotions like the UFC has a lot to do with gender separation in MMA.

In creating female-only and male-only divisions, the UFC is also putting women's sexuality under the spotlight. Giovanna Follo looks at societal norms that govern the female athlete. Follo argues that the feminine body is seen 'as incapable of participating in sport; instead, the body is seen as an object or spectacle for adornments and presented in a manner that exhibits or highlights feminine traits of frailty and beauty' [Follo 2007: 15]. The idea that women are hetero-feminine objects of beauty is present in the fighters in the UFC.

The two highest-paid female UFC fighters, Ronda Rousey and Miesha Tate, are both embodiments of society's beauty norms. Both white women have long and flowing hair, tight bodies, and proportioned facial features. In addition, Tate has augmented breasts, which one would assume (her being the current women's Bantamweight Champion notwithstanding) would be a disadvantage for most women in a sport like MMA. Nonetheless, beauty norms govern what a successful female fighter should look like, which, as Follo observes, is just one more way to 'help maintain the subordination of women' [Follo 2007: 15].

These beauty norms are partly enforced through the UFC's only women's weight classes, the 115-pound Strawweight division and the 135-pound Bantamweight division. If a female fighter is more than 135 pounds, she cannot fight for the UFC. I argue that this regulates female fighters' bodies so they aren't too muscular, which plays into heterosexual male desire and subordinates women who do not conform. Looking at female bodybuilders, Precilla Y.L. Choi has observed that, insofar as Western society resists female muscularity and associates muscles exclusively with males, 'visible differences between women and men [are] maintained [and] this in turn maintains the patriarchal gender order' [Choi 2003: 73]. Thus, female bodybuilders challenge gender boundaries in much the same way as female MMA fighters. Consider, as an example in MMA, the case of Invicta FC champion Cristiane 'Cyborg' Justino. Arguably the best female fighter in MMA, Justino has yet to receive a Rousey-esque push from the UFC, and this is largely due to the fact that Justino fights in the Featherweight[11] division, which, as of 2016, is not a weight class featured in the UFC.

I argue that a major aspect of bringing women into MMA is their ability to fulfil the desires of the male gaze. The reality of women becoming subjects for male desire creates a new relationship between fighters and their fans. This new relationship looks to serve desires for sex and entertainment rather than athletics [Fields 2008: 118]. For example, in 2012, when she and then champion, Miesha Tate, fought for the Strikeforce fight league, Rousey bypassed all of the other eligible competitors and achieved a title fight against Tate. Rousey marketed herself by stating that she and Tate were both good-looking, so people would want to see the two fighters compete against each other. At the time, the 25-year-old Rousey was solidifying herself as a fierce competitor in MMA; in 2011, Rousey put together an undefeated record with four straight submission victories to go along with her bronze medal in judo from 2008. However, Tate, fans, and other fighters were angered by Rousey's push into the title picture given that she had not yet paid her dues [Jennings 2014: 195]. At the time, there were many female fighters who had more impressive fight records than

*Figure 1. Chart showing what each fighter wore for her online
fight card photos on UFC.ca*
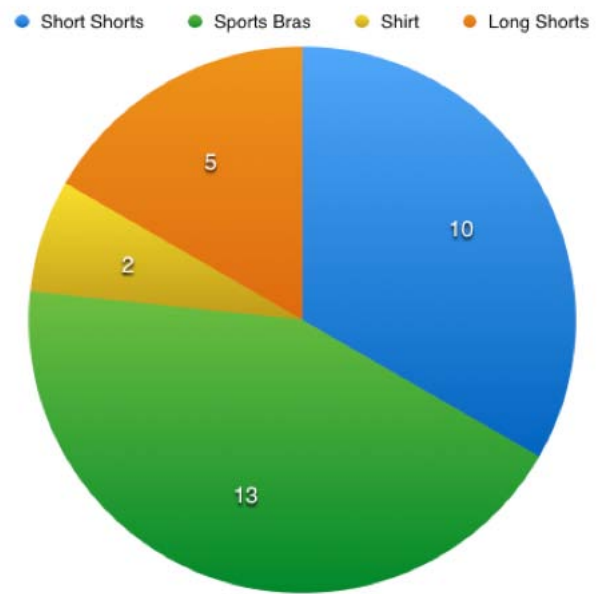
Female Fighters' Octagon Attire

---

11   Featherweight is the 145-pound weight class.

Rousey's, yet the soon-to-be Maxim Magazine and Sports Illustrated cover girl got the title fight against Tate. With reference to the way in which she campaigned for the title shot, I argue that the opportunity was, at least in part, a result of Rousey marketing herself in a way that was appealing to the disproportionately male audience.

In addition to strict weight limits, female UFC fighters have a particular uniform that they have to wear during competition. The rules require 'contestants' to wear 'mixed martial arts shorts [board shorts], biking shorts [vale tudo shorts], kick-boxing shorts, or other shorts' and shirts 'approved by the Commission'.[12] Board shorts, which are loose fitting and can extend to the knee, are clothing options for female fighters that allow for relative coverage and a move away from sexualized clothing. It is unclear how much the UFC tries to enforce these rules, as out of all 10 women's PPV fights in 2014, twice the number of women (12) wore short, tight shorts than wore long shorts. There are 15 different fight card photos on UFC.ca of women who fought in PPV fights in 2014.[13] These photos are accompanied by fighters' skill sets and statistics. Out of these 15 women, 13 are wearing sports bras, 2 are wearing shirts, and 5 are wearing long shorts.

Beauty is not the only way in which the UFC controls its female fighters. The concept of space is interesting when considering the current situation with gender in the UFC. Sandra Lee Bartky discusses the politics of space and notes that 'under the current "tyranny of slenderness" women are forbidden to become large or massive; they must take up as little space as possible' [Bartky 2006: 284]. The concept of women taking up less space than men is very present in the UFC. As discussed above, female fighters are required to take up little space in terms of body mass, which is ensured by the weight classes. If women do not make weight, they do not get to fight unless their opponent agrees to fight them anyway.

The politics of space come into play with the space women are allotted on fight cards. Women take up less space on fight cards if they are even give space to fight at all. When women do get the chance to fight, they are often scheduled in preliminary fights, which are not always televised. In the 2014-2015 basketball season, there were 82 games in the NBA, but only 34 games in the WNBA. Like female basketball players in the WNBA who are routinely given less space in

the professional basketball arena, women in the UFC are also given less space to showcase their athletic abilities on national and international stages. When fight cards include female fights, the ratio between male to female fights is extremely unequal. For example, out of 142 fights on PPV fight cards, 132 of those fights were men's fights. This means that only 7 percent of UFC PPV fights in 2014 were women's fights. The lack of space for female fights on UFC fight cards is evidence of the gross inequalities between male and female fighters in the UFC. Unless, of course, the women fighting are superstars, such as Rousey or Tate, who embody the UFC's marketing ideals of women who are desirable for a heterosexual, hegemonic male audience.

Women, Sexuality, Gender, and MMA

Much of the literature about women in MMA looks at women as one group. However, differences in gender, sexuality, race, and class mean that not all women experience or have experienced combat sports in the same ways. Women's sexuality has been a topic of discussion in sports for many years. For many lesbian women in sports, silence was the only way they could continue their passions [Griffin 1999: 3]. The reason why many gay women have stayed and continue to stay in the closet is because 'lesbians and bisexual women have been traditional scapegoats blamed for threatening public acceptance of women's sports' [Griffin 1999: 54]. Although there are no openly gay men in the UFC, there are three openly gay women who fight for the promotion: Liz Carmouche, Jessica Andrade, and Rachel Pennington. In July 2013, Carmouche and Andrade fought in the first fight featuring two openly gay fighters in the UFC. In addition, there are many openly gay women in MMA outside of the UFC.[14] The UFC's treatment towards gay women in the promotion has been surprisingly positive to date.

However, the acceptance of trans women within the UFC and sports as a whole has been different from that of gay women. In 1968, the Olympic committee introduced chromosomal femininity tests, which were proven to be inaccurate [Sykes 2007: 110]. Continuing the rejection of trans women from sport, in the late 1970's, sportswomen wanted to ensure that only naturally born women could compete in the Games [Sykes 2007: 111]. The debate on whether or not trans women should compete in women's sports continues today, and the debate is very active within MMA.

Fallon Fox is an example of the challenges within MMA around transgender fighters. In 2013, Fox came out as the first openly

---

12   The information about women's fight uniforms was compiled before the Reebok sponsorship deal the terms of which allow Reebok to provide standardized Octagon attire for all UFC athletes male and female.

13   Note that some female fighters fought more than one fight during 2014, and the same photos were used for their online fight card photos. In addition, some female fighters in the bantamweight division did not fight at all in 2014.

14   http://www.examiner.com/list/10-courageous-wmma-athletes-who-are-openly-gay.

transgender mixed martial artist.[15] Defining what transgender means is a complicated task because most trans people relate to trans identity in different ways. For the purpose of this work, I use Julia R. Johnson's definition of transgender. Johnson uses transgender as 'an umbrella term for persons who challenge gender normativity' [Johnson 2013: 137]. Fox's coming out was not her own choice, nor was it well received within the MMA world. Fox fights for various MMA fight leagues, such as Championship Fighting Alliance, Capital City Cage Wars, and Xtreme Fighting Organization. Although she does not fight for the UFC, UFC commentator Joe Rogan scrutinized Fox shortly after she came out, arguing, 'I say if you had a dick at one point in time, you also have all the bone structure that comes with having a dick. You have bigger hands, you have bigger shoulder joints. You're a fucking man'.[16]

Rogan is not the only person within the UFC who has been openly opposed to Fox. Similarly, Ronda Rousey stated that she did not think Fox should fight as a woman in the UFC. Fox is in the women's Featherweight division, not yet a weight class in the UFC. Rousey is the former Bantamweight champion, so the two would not fight unless Fox cut weight. Despite being in a different weight class, Rousey claimed in 2014 that she would not fight Fox because she went through puberty as a man and thus has advantages over female fighters.[17] Contrary to Rousey's views on trans people, according to the *Encyclopaedia of Gender in Media*, 'there is little to no empirical evidence supporting the assumption that transitioned athletes compete with an advantage over "physically born" females and males'.[18] Fox has received an abundance of negative attention after coming out as a trans woman. Although much of the harmful criticism about Fox has gone unpunished, one fighter has been held accountable for his hateful words towards Fox.

Like White, Rogan, and Rousey, UFC fighter Matt Mitrione discussed Fox's gender in negative ways. In 2013, Mitrione stated that Fox was a 'lying, sick, sociopathic, disgusting freak'.[19] The UFC held Mitrione accountable for his hateful opinions and suspended him. It is unclear why the UFC chose to suspend Mitrione for his discriminatory claims

---

15   http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/13/sports/for-transgender-fighter-fallon-fox-there-is-solace-in-the-cage.html?_r=0.

16   http://bleacherreport.com/articles/1573044-ufc-joe-rogan-to-transgender-mma-fighter-fallon-fox-youre-a-man.

17   http://www.advocate.com/sports/2014/09/22/ufc-womens-champ-refuses-fight-trans-athlete-fallon-fox.

18   http://knowledge.sagepub.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/view/genderinmedia/n153.xml#n153.

19   http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/09/matt-mitrione-fallon-fox-suspended_n_3045308.html

about Fox but chose not to punish Rogan or Rousey. The UFC's failure to hold all of Fox's naysayers accountable for their discriminatory statements against the fighter arguably implies an acceptance of that discrimination. Butler looks at trans politics in *Undoing Gender*, wherein she observes that 'violence against transgendered subjects is not recognized as violence' [Butler 2004: 30]. Further, she argues that violence against transgendered people 'is sometimes inflicted by the very states that should be offering such subjects protection from violence' [Butler 2004: 30]. The discriminatory remarks made by people in the UFC towards Fox are violent in nature. Although Fox does not fight for the UFC, since the promotion claims to be an ally of the LGBTQ communities, it should prove their alliance by supporting Fox. However, Dana White's comment in 2014 that he 'doesn't believe in' transgendered people shows that the promotion does not protect trans people, such as Fox, from violence.

It would be a mistake to discuss trans politics within the UFC without discussing cisgender privilege. A cisgender woman, or ciswoman, is a person who was born female and also identifies as such [Janson and Uyttewaal 2014: 86]. Laura J. Shepherd and Laura Sjoberg define cisgender privilege, or cisprivilege, as 'the privilege enjoyed by people who identify wholly with, feel comfortable in, are seen to belong to or "are" the gender/sex they are assigned at birth and/or raised to believe that they "are"' [Shepherd and Sjoberg 2012: 6]. Shepherd and Sjoberg go further in their definition by noting that individuals who diverge from cisgender identities are deprived of privileges, many of which are human rights, because of that divergence. The UFC's exclusion of transgendered fighters is an example of cisgender privilege.

Although the UFC does not include trans fighters, cisgender privilege is present in the corporation in many ways. Discussing cisgender privilege in the UFC is important because this challenges gender dominance, which, as Johnson points out, 'is created when we label non-normative identities as "different" and refuse to address privilege' [Johnson 2014: 137]. The UFC has definitely labelled Fallon Fox as different from both male and female fighters. As a result, Fox is rejected from the present-day UFC because the rules and regulations within the corporation separate men and women. The UFC's rejection of Fox is a conscious decision to privilege men and women who do not challenge gender dominance or normative gender practices.

The UFC only includes men and women who were born the same gender that they identify with, which is a process that normalizes cisgender. Cisgender normativity creates an assumption that if one does not identify with the gender in which they were born they are abnormal. This process is backed by an institutionalized transphobia that is entrenched in the daily lives of both cisgendered

and transgendered people [Enke 2012: 64]. However, unless one identifies as trans, or has a personal interest in trans politics, cisgender normativity is, as its name suggests, normalized, and thus goes unquestioned. The normalization of cisgender privileges those who conform, and in turn, it constructs disadvantages for those who do not fit within its definition. Cisgender normativity is present within the UFC because the corporation has affirmed rules, like the exclusion of trans athletes, which are grounded in institutionalized transphobia. These rules create overt privileges for cisgender athletes, while making it impossible to fight in the UFC and openly identify as trans.

The exclusion of trans women from the UFC goes against the 'undoing' qualities of martial arts. Alex Channon argues that the practice of martial arts promotes the 'undoing of gender' inasmuch as martial arts 'challenge sexist understandings of difference' [Channon 2014: 600]. Channon looks at co-ed martial arts classes and explains that they form a 'more inclusive and physical form of liberal culture' [Channon 2014: 587]. More specifically, martial arts can promote equality because it often shows women in authoritative positions and women that have high skills within classes, showing men and women the true capabilities of women. Unfortunately, as Channon finds, co-ed classes often deter women from trying martial arts because of fear or intimidation [Channon 2014: 597], but the positives in his study far outweigh the negatives in terms of equality. The undoing properties of martial arts suggest an important tool for equality in sport and society.

Similarly, Noel discusses martial arts as tools to undo gender difference. Noel interviews men and women in her piece and discovers that martial arts teach women to defend themselves, which 'may reduce their fear of crime and victimization' [Noel 2009: 20]. More interestingly, in interviewing male martial artists, Noel uncovers that watching women practice martial arts promotes equality because it shows men and women that women can be strong and capable of defending themselves [Noel 2009: 19]. Noel's research shows that martial arts are a way for women to physically and mentally empower themselves through their bodies.

Martial arts have the potential to contribute to equality by breaking down gender norms. However, the UFC's rejection of trans women contradicts the de-essentializing of gender that is possible in martial arts. Trans fighters like Fallon Fox rupture the strict binaries between males and females. Like martial arts, trans people break down gender norms by showing that gender is fluid and mutable. Pairing people who physically de-essentialize gender with an activity that de-essentializes gender would result in the deconstruction of some gender norms, which is an essential step towards equality. If an international platform like the UFC were to include trans fighters, the de-essentialization

of gender through martial arts would reach and educate millions of people. In turn, if it were to include trans fighters, the UFC could be an essential tool in the acceptance of trans people outside of sport as well as in it.

People within the UFC and other MMA promotions continue to refer to Fallon Fox as a man. In doing so, those against trans people in the sport are rejecting Fox's identity as a 'real woman'. Butler unpacks the rejection of trans people by claiming that 'to be called a copy, to be called unreal, is one way in which one can be oppressed' [Butler 2004: 30]. Fox is clearly being oppressed by some of her peers, as well as by industry leaders. The UFC's treatment of Fox shows that the promotion is not fully accepting of LGBTQ communities. Although women in certain weight categories are able to fight in the UFC, it is clear that not all women are accepted by the promotion, and this is why an analysis of all types of women in MMA is important.

Fox may have her critics, but that is not to say that she does not also have supporters. Fox has a lot of fans and support on and off line. On Twitter, Fox has over 3000 followers, and on Facebook, the fighter has over 10,000 likes. While just because a user follows or 'likes' another user does not mean they are supporters, many of the comments and posts on Fox's Facebook and Twitter accounts are supportive. For example, on June 11, 2015, a Facebook user posted on Fox's Facebook page the message, 'Thank you, what an inspiration you are to me ☺'. While there are also many negative and hateful comments on Fox's Facebook page, it is clear that Fox's supporters appreciate her fight inside and outside of the ring.

Women, Race, and MMA

The acceptance of lesbian fighters and the rejection of trans fighters in the UFC shows that sport can be a reflection of society as whole. The second-wave feminist slogan, 'the personal is political', is an important contribution to women's rights. Simply, 'the personal is political' concept illustrates that happenings that occur to individuals are reflections of society.[20] The concept is relevant when thinking about gender, sexuality, race, class, and sports. According to William John Morgan, sports are a reflection of society, and improving politics in sports will also improve societal morality [Morgan 2006: 2]. The connections between sport and society are crucial for the benefit of society, especially when considering sexualities, class, and race.

A look at the politics of race in the UFC sheds light on the politics of race in Western society. Nearly every culture has developed a form of

---

20   http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html

martial arts, yet there is only one woman in the UFC representing black female fighters, only one woman representing Middle Eastern female fighters, and three women representing Asian fighters. So why does the UFC exclude women of colour to such an extent? I argue that the answer has a lot to do with the politics of marketability.

Like sports, striptease is an arena where race, the male gaze, and performativity intersect. Becki Ross and Kim Greenwell discuss the politics of race in the striptease community in Vancouver B.C., from 1945 to 1975. Ross and Greenwell find that white women and women of colour were assigned to different locations in the city [Ross and Greenwell 2005: 137]. White stripteasers were more marketable because they could play into heterosexual male desire, and they did not make their male audience feel uncomfortable because they were white [Ross and Greenwell 2005: 141]. The marketability of white stripteasers put them in the coveted West End clubs, while women of colour were assigned East End clubs [Ross and Greenwell 2005: 142]. In the East End clubs, women of colour were subject to significantly less pay than white women in the West End clubs, poor working conditions, more police surveillance, and they faced difficulties in finding work [Ross and Greenwell 2005: 142-145]. In short, the location, working conditions, pay, and job market for white and non-white striptease dancers were all shaped by the desires of white men [Ross and Greenwell 2005: 152].

The racial realities for non-white striptease dancers in post-war Vancouver are comparable to that of non-white, female MMA fighters. When recalling the status of black striptease dances in post-war Vancouver, white striptease dancers assumed that there was simply a lack of black dancers in Vancouver. This assumptions, however, is false, and Ross and Greenwell note that 'the super-idealization of white, sexy female bodies … operated both to shape the appetites and desires of Vancouver audiences and to shrink opportunities for non-white dancers' [Ross and Greenwell 2005: 153]. The UFC recruits fighters from across the planet, so it is unlikely that there is only one black woman, three Asian women, one Middle Eastern woman, and zero indigenous women who are skilled enough to compete in the UFC. Rather, like in Ross and Greenwell's research, I suggest that the lack of non-white, female UFC fighters is due to the UFC's catering to white, heterosexual, male desires, as well as to the idealization of white female bodies.

Michel Foucault looks at the violence that comes with the lack of representation. *In The History of Sexuality*, Foucault famously remarks that 'there is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses' [Foucault 1978: 27]. The underrepresentation of women of colour in the UFC shows how the corporation devalues non-white women by rejecting them from the sport. In turn, the UFC is influencing public opinion on the value, or lack of value, ascribed to ethnic, female fighters.

Butler discusses the value of lives in *Undoing Gender,* arguing that 'the human is understood differentially depending on its race, the legibility of that race, its morphology, [and] the recognizability of that morphology' [Butler 2004: 2]. Women of colour in the UFC are in fact understood differently than white women. The different treatment of women from different ethnic backgrounds can be a positive strategy if it is used to highlight experiences of oppression. The UFC showcases the personal stories of fighters through promotional videos and through The Ultimate Fighter. However, the lack of women representing non-white cultures in the UFC makes it difficult to show cultural realities without tokenism. As a result, 'certain humans are recognized as less than human, and that form of qualified recognition does not lead to a viable life' [Butler 2004: 2]. Low ethnic representation of certain women in the Octagon shows society that these women are not as valued as white women in the UFC.

Rita Liberti looks at race and sport in women's basketball in black educational institutions in the United States in her article 'Fostering Community Consciousness: The Role of Women's Basketball at Black Colleges and Universities, 1900–1950'. Liberti draws upon oral histories and other materials to show that women's basketball 'informs broader notions concerning self-improvement, character education, and community consciousness' [Liberti 2004: 42]. Like Morgan, Liberti connects sports to society, noting that 'sport and physical activity were understood both as means toward individual improvement and as serving the collective good of all African Americans' [Liberti 2004: 43]. Liberti shows the clear connections between individuals, sports, and politics by arguing that in the 1930's and beyond, basketball is both a sport and a tool that could educate society [Liberti 2004: 54]. With respect to Liberti's argument, given the current popularity of MMA, the sport could also be used as a tool for educating its audience about race politics.

Although there are some sports that are deemed feminine, such as gymnastics, figure skating, and cheerleading, the majority of sports are dominated by men in both the global north and south. Due to male dominance in sport, women have historically been rejected from and ignored by sports communities. In her master's dissertation, Adrienne M. Ordorica discusses the impact of Latin American societal norms on women and girls' participation in sports. Ordorica argues that women in Latin America have been discouraged from participating in sports because of cultural views that women belong in the home [Ordorica 2005: 2]. Even Kyra Gracie, one of the first women in BJJ, was discouraged by her famous uncles from pursuing a career in the sport.

Despite cultural issues related to Latinas in sport, they have a strong presence in the UFC. Latin American women are much more prominent in the UFC than black, Asian, and Middle Eastern fighters. To date, there are seven female fighters who are from Latin America or identify as Latinas. Out of those seven Latina fighters, five are Brazilian. In comparison to the other ethnicities in the UFC, who only have one woman representing entire races, the female Latin American presence in the UFC looks impressive. However, given that Latin American men have been fighting for the promotion since its inception, that BJJ is a pivotal piece of the MMA puzzle, and that most of the female Latin American fighters are light-skinned, it should not come as a surprise that Latin American women are the second highest ethnicity in the UFC, after white women.

Women, Age, and MMA

Unlike in the case of ethnicities in the UFC, when it comes to age, there is slightly wider range in the ages of the UFC's female fighters. While the average age of female fighters in both the Strawweight and Bantamweight categories is 28 years old, some fighters are as young as 20, and others are as old 38. Figure 2 illustrates the ages of women in each of the UFC's women's weight classes.

The age of female UFC fighters is comparable to other popular women's sports such as soccer and basketball. The average age for female soccer players in the 2015 FIFA World Cup was 27.3 years old.[21] That average was calculated from an age range in which some players were as young as 18 years old and others were as old as 43 years old. In the WNBA, the average age of female basketball players in 2004 was 26.8, an average that was calculated from a dataset with a player as young as 20.4 years old, and one as old as 40 years old.[22] Despite the stress that MMA puts on the female fighters' bodies, the average age is similar to those of other women's sports.

Women, Class, and MMA

Like sexuality and race, class also has significant impact on the successes or failures of female fighters. Messner and Sabo look at combat sport and class. The authors ask, 'who are these [athletes] that risk life and limb for our entertainment?' [Messner and Sabo 1994: 77]. They go on to answer this question by noting that most boxers come from working-class backgrounds and many are from minority groups.
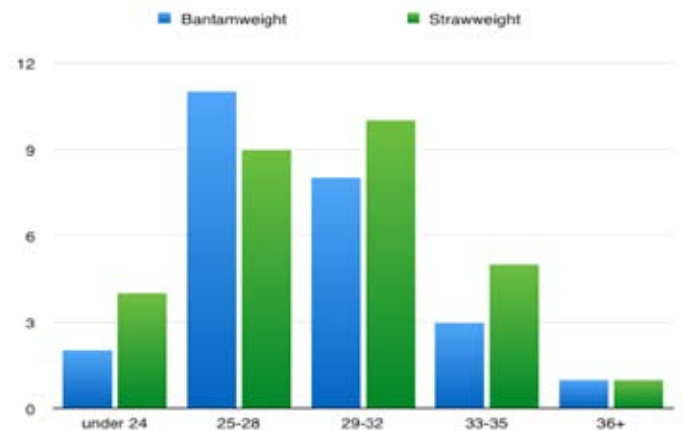

Figure 2. Age of Bantamweight vs. Strawweight

---

21   http://www.statista.com/statistics/303661/fifa-world-cup-2014-brazil-teams-by-average-player-age/

22   http://www.wnba.com/archive/wnba/statistics/survey_age_2004.html

Messner and Sabo attribute many boxers' dreams of 'making it' to the overrepresentation of working-class, minority groups within boxing [Messner and Sabo 1994: 78]. The majority of female fighters in the UFC are white women, and many had to overcome class struggles. A number of stories emerged during the all-female season of *The Ultimate Fighter*, with Angela Magana standing out as an example of class adversity. Magana disclosed stories about her difficult upbringing, including her family challenge with addiction (she is the daughter of heroin addicts). The 31-year-old shared stories of being born addicted to heroin, shooting heroin into her mother's arm, living on the streets, and eating out of trashcans [Bohn, October 28, 2014].

While many of the fighters in the UFC come from financially disadvantaged upbringings, the cost of fighting also reinforces class challenges in the UFC. Fighters pay thousands of dollars a month to train and maintain their skill levels; however, the UFC only pays for the fights with no training or travel allowance. According to Lowkickmma.com, one of the few public sites with UFC salary information, from 2013 to 2015, if Ronda Rousey's salary is omitted, the average woman's fight salary in the UFC was $25,487, but the average male's fight salary was $61,691. The major wage gaps between male and female fighters in the UFC continue further when unpaid work, fight costs, and sponsorships are considered.

Female fighters encounter class obstacles that are unique to women, such as the unpaid work of motherhood. For example, Bec Rawlings, a single mother of two sons, has had to raise her children and pay for childcare when she trains and travels away from her home in Australia. These expenses are on top of the typical fighter's expenses, such as fight camps and healthy meals, which can cost thousands of dollars per month. On top of these expenses, successful fighters train fulltime for fights. This terrain has shifted since the UFC signed a sponsorship agreement with Reebok 2015 that specifies set salaries based on number of fights. Additionally, while fighters are still allowed to have sponsors other than Reebok, they are not allowed to wear other sponsorship logos on their official Reebok fight uniforms. Most companies that sponsor fighters want airtime on television, which means fighters have fewer sponsorship opportunities now that the Reebok deal is in place. In addition, the new Reebok sponsorship has set salaries for fighters, which is dictated by how many fights each fighter has had in either the UFC, World Extreme Cagefighting,[23] or Strikeforce. If a fighter has had five or fewer fights, he or she is paid $2,500 per fight from Reebok. With six to ten fights, a fighter gets $5,000. Fight salaries increase in $5,000 increments as five fights are added to their fight records.

For example, if a fighter has fought in more than 21 fights, he or she is paid $20,000 per fight from Reebok. Alternatively, if the fight is a championship fight, the champion is paid $40,000 and the challenger is paid $30,000. These salaries only include the Reebok sponsorship salary, but fighters can still promote other sponsors on social media, and they have the chance to win bonuses from the UFC for impressive performances.

While I would argue that the Reebok sponsorship constitutes exploitation of bodies, the issue is exacerbated by gender. In order to get more money per fight, a fighter must have more than five fights. Since women were not allowed to fight in the UFC until 2013, the Reebok sponsorship creates a clear disadvantage for female fighters. That means, for fighters who have past fights in women's only leagues, such as Invicta FC or JEWELS,[24] their past fights do not count towards their salaries.

Post-Feminist Masquerade

Angela McRobbie's theory of the post-feminist masquerade is significant when considering the introduction of women into the UFC and relevant to my analysis. McRobbie explains that there has been an 'undoing of feminism' in today's western societies [McRobbie 2009: 10] which she terms post-feminism. This faux feminism has been created by nation states to make feminism appear less palatable for young women, which helps regulate feminist movements [McRobbie 2009: 5]. Further, to help young women accept the newly manufactured feminism, women are given what McRobbie calls a 'notional form of equality', which she claims takes the place of true feminisms [McRobbie 2009: 8].

In the UFC, this tension emerges in the form of female fighters being allowed to participate in a historically male dominated realm, with the organization only making a few changes to the fighting culture to make women's experiences in MMA more inclusive. Indeed, since bringing women into the UFC, the corporation has only exacerbated the heterosexual and cisnormative aspects of fight culture through the sexualization of female fighters. The efforts to sexualize female fighters in the UFC show that the UFC brings women into the fight league under the guise of women's rights, but in reality, female fighters are not on equal ground with male fighters.

---

24   JEWELS is an all-women's MMA promotion based in Japan.

---

23   An American MMA promotion that was active throughout the 2000s until it was purchased by the UFC's parent company, Zuffa, and absorbed into the UFC in 2011.

Fighting, Feminism, and Twitter

While learning self-defence and how to fight can take men and women a step closer to equality, the ways in which women are represented in the media often result in two steps backwards and away from equality. Scripted television and films represent women in stereotypical ways. Specifically, female characters are typically represented as objects for male desire, and serve only to fulfil that desire. As a result, scripted television shows and films continue to attract the attention of feminists who are critical of female character stereotypes [McIntosh and Cuklanz 2013: 264]. Similarly, unscripted television and online, social media representations of women are also spaces that elicit feminist critique for stereotypes [McIntosh and Cuklanz 2013: 281]. However, unlike on television, social media can provide an ability to resist through reframing.

Social media platforms such as Twitter are resources that are now being used as tools for resistance [Hermida 2014: 180]. Feminists, for example, are active on Twitter. One strategy that feminists use on social media is hashtagging. Hashtags are categorical markers that aid in the contextualization of social practices [Leavitt 2014: 137]. Users who are interested in a particular topic can find hashtags associated with the topic or simply type a search word into the search box. Doing so will provide users with a multitude of posts about the topic of interest. However, bringing social issues into the public sphere on social media often showcases polarized views of debates [Hermida 2014: 180]. Debates on social media can turn into 'Twitter wars', which are often heated and relatively permanent debates taking place on Twitter. The accessibility of social media helps people get their messages out easily, and attracts people who agree and disagree. Essentially, social media give everyone a platform to discuss topics on the contemporary socio-political agenda.

METHODOLOGY

The next part of my research looks at how female fighters are framed within the discourse of the UFC and feminism on Twitter. The conversation about feminism and the UFC on Twitter is important now because social media creates an ad hoc public that allows the media, UFC fans, UFC fighters, UFC employees, and UFC critics to come together in conversations about MMA in general and the UFC in particular. I compiled social media data about feminism and the UFC from Twitter with the social media analytics software ForSight.[25]

For my research, I studied 303 tweets that contained both hashtags #feminism and #UFC between January 2011 and March 2015. This time period is significant because in January 2011, UFC president Dana White said that he would never allow women to fight in the UFC. White's statement sparked a dialogue about women and the UFC both on and off social media platforms. Less than two years later, White changed his mind and decided to make Ronda Rousey the first woman signed to the UFC in November 2012. February 23, 2013 marked the first women's fight in the UFC, and an additional weight class was added in late 2014. I extended the sample period to March 2015 because Rousey defended her title against Cat Zingano in February 2015. I included the build-up to and the aftermath of this fight in my sample because Rousey's win was the fastest by submission in UFC history.

Framing Analysis

I used framing analysis to examine themes from the literature review, which included gender, race, sexuality, violence, female athletic ability, and physical feminism. My working definition of framing analysis was the examination of the relationship between competing discourses in a certain domain. In this case, the relationship is between the female fighter's body and Twitter users using the hashtags #feminism and #UFC on the Twitter domain. The following was my hypothesis: By searching for tweets from 2011 to 2015, Twitter users engaging in #feminism and #UFC will present female fighters as sexualized by focusing on the body rather than on athletic skill.

There are a number of limitations to this approach. First, pairing the two hashtags #feminism and #UFC. If a Twitter user does not use both #feminism and #UFC in the same post, their tweet is not included in this dataset. The tweets that do not include both hashtags are valuable in terms of the conversation about women in the UFC on Twitter, but

---

25   I compiled social media data about feminism and the UFC from Twitter with the social media analytics software, ForSight, a commercial social media analysis software based on algorithms with a database of over 600,000,000,000 posts from social media.

they simply do not fit into my research parameters. While this results in some tweets not being included in my dataset, hashtags are used to deliberately be part of a particular conversation [Bruns and Moe 2014: 18]. People using #feminism and #UFC want to be part of this discourse at this particular point in time, and this particular conversation is the one that concerns this research.

Second, Twitter is only one medium in the creation of online news and events. My research does not include data from other social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, or other means of publication, such as blogs. These platforms allow for different means of communication, like photos and longer posts, which make them useful platforms for analysis. In addition, online magazines, news websites, and documentaries are also important cultivators of information. While future research should dig deeper into other forms of media, my research looks at Twitter exclusively.

Framing analysis is applied to the quantitative data collected by ForSight. Framing theory is a concept that explains frames as 'normative schemes of interpretation that organize human perception'

[Hahner 2013: 153]. Dietram A. Scheufele takes the concept of framing further by claiming that the mass media influences society by constructing realities and opinions through their influence [Scheufele 2009: 110]. In other words, the ways in which particular forms of media frame stories have a major influence over how audiences form opinions of those stories.

While much of the research that employs framing theory is about the media and news production, researchers are beginning to look at framing theory and social media. Adding to the growing research on social media and framing analysis, Erika Pearson employs Goffman's ideology about performance for her research about online identities. She studied the connections between theories of performance and how social media users mediate their identities online. Pearson notes that social media platforms 'provide areas which are disembodied, mediated and controllable, and through which alternate performances can be displayed to others' [Pearson 2009]. Following researchers like Pearson, I seek to apply framing analysis to the 303 tweets compiled, which include #feminism and #UFC.
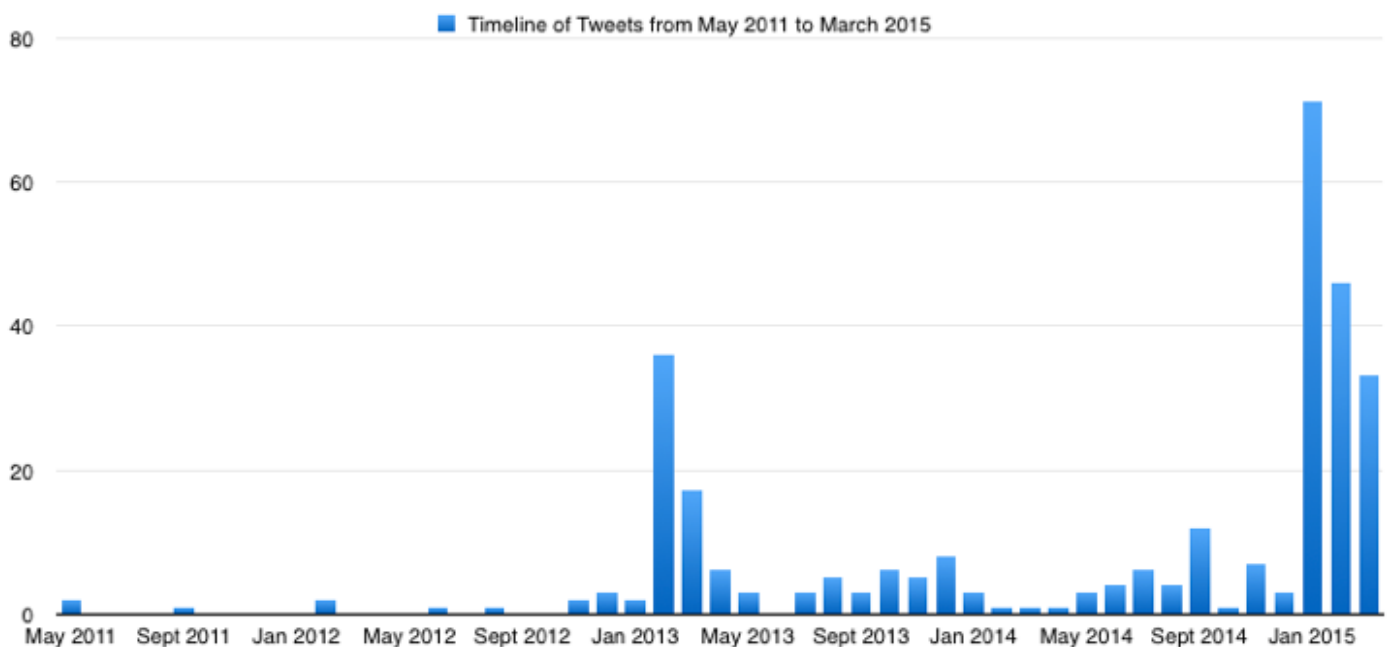

Figure 3. Timeline of tweets containing #feminism
and #UFC from 2011 to 2015

Women's MMA Timeline

The 301 tweets containing #feminism and #UFC were driven by various events over the past three years. As Figure 3 illustrates, there was limited discussion of #feminism and #UFC prior to early 2013 with later spikes coinciding with milestones in women's MMA.

Dana White announced in November 2012 that the first women's fight in the UFC would take place in February 2013. This milestone for women's MMA is paired with a low engagement with #feminism and #UFC on Twitter. The low engagement with the two hashtags at this time can be attributed to the UFC's framing of, or rather its failure to frame, feminism and UFC at the time. On February 23, 2013, the first women's fight in the UFC took place. Ronda Rousey defeated Liz Carmouche and became the first women's champion in the UFC.

The Rousey/Carmouche fight coincides with the first major spike in Twitter engagement with #feminism and #UFC. Between January 27, 2013 and March 22, 2013, 55 tweets containing both #feminism and #UFC were posted on Twitter. Of those 55 tweets, 3 discuss the female fighter's body in sexualized ways, 5 represent the fighter's body as violent, 0 discuss the female fighters as inferior to male fighters, 32 represent female fighters as tools for physical feminism or equality, and 15 did not discuss the female fighter's body at all. During the first women's fight in the UFC, the majority of tweets represented female fighters as beneficial for equality and physical feminism. For example, one Twitter user tweeted on February 23, 2013: '(US) - UFC 157: Ronda Rousey vs. Liz Carmouche Is a Step Forward for Feminism http://t.co/pjNonGQJFK #bleacher'. This tweet was retweeted eight times. After the initial excitement of the first women's fight in the UFC, the Twitter conversation about feminism and the UFC wore off.

Between August 4, 2013 and December 29, 2013, there is a slight increase in tweets containing #feminism and #UFC. During this time, 26 tweets were posted to Twitter about feminism and the UFC. Of these posts, 1 sexualizes the female fighter's body, 5 showcase it as violent, 4 represent it as beneficial for equality, 1 represents it as inferior to male athletes', and 16 do not discuss it at all. If the 16 neutral tweets are discounted, the majority of the tweets between August 4, 2013, and December 29, 2013 discuss the female fighter's body as violent. The increase coincides with the upsurge of female fights in the UFC throughout the four-month span. During this timeframe, the UFC included 10 women's fights on various fight cards. While some fight cards during this time did not include any female fights, others, like The Ultimate Fighter 18 finale on November 30, 2013, showcased as many as three women's fights.

There is a spike in the discourse in September 2014. The spike corresponds with the premier of the all-female season of *The Ultimate Fighter*. During September 2014, 12 tweets were posted to Twitter, of which 1 represents female fighters' bodies in a sexualized way, 7 discuss them as beneficial for equality, 1 showcases women as inferior to men, and the rest show female bodies in neutral ways.

In the case of the spike in tweets in September 2014, the ways that the UFC framed the female fighter's bodies through *The Ultimate Fighter* elicited criticisms from some Twitter users. The 7 tweets discuss female fighting as beneficial for equality are critiquing the UFC. For example, the tweet 'Pretty ballsy of the UFC to present TUF 20 as empowering feminism after the way they branded it. http://t.co/WHPFheI8lc' is critical of how the UFC branded the all-women's season as empowering while simultaneously showcasing women in sexualized ways.

The final spikes in the dataset occurred in January and February of 2015. The early 2015 spikes correspond with two pivotal events for women in the UFC. The first is a tweet that was posted by female UFC fighter Bec Rawlings. In January 2015, Rawlings tweeted a nude photo of herself which was paired with a statement about her disapproval of feminism. Rawlings' tweet sparked a conversation about feminism and the UFC that had attracted little attention before: the sexualized female fighter's body and feminism. The second influx of tweets occurred because of Ronda Rousey's defeat against Cat Zingano. The event made history as Rousey broke the record that had been held by Frank Shamrock for nearly two decades for the fastest submission win in UFC history, and her accomplishment served as a catalyst for the increase in Twitter conversations about feminism and the UFC.

Popular Words in Dataset

Figure 4 overleaf shows the words that were present in the initial search for tweets containing #feminism and #UFC on Twitter. The larger the word, the more times it appeared in the dataset. Terms such as 'pretty', 'pics', 'nude', and 'sex' show that women's sexuality continues to be a significant part of the discourse on women's MMA on Twitter.

The important role that individual words play in the construction of discourses can be positive. For example, terms, such as 'women', 'fighter', 'frontier', and 'victory' are also prominent terms in the word cloud. These words signify that Twitter users are engaging in a conversation about women in the UFC, which is a positive occurrence in and of itself. In addition, these words represent the female fighter as strong and legitimate athletes. Although words that represent female fighters in positive and negative ways are both present, the fact that the conversation is taking place is a step forward for women in the UFC.

Figure 4. Wordcloud of the most abundant words and hashtags

Figure 5. How the dataset frames female fighters' bodies on Twitter

Violent ● Sexualized ● Inferior to Men ● Pro-Feminism ● Neutral
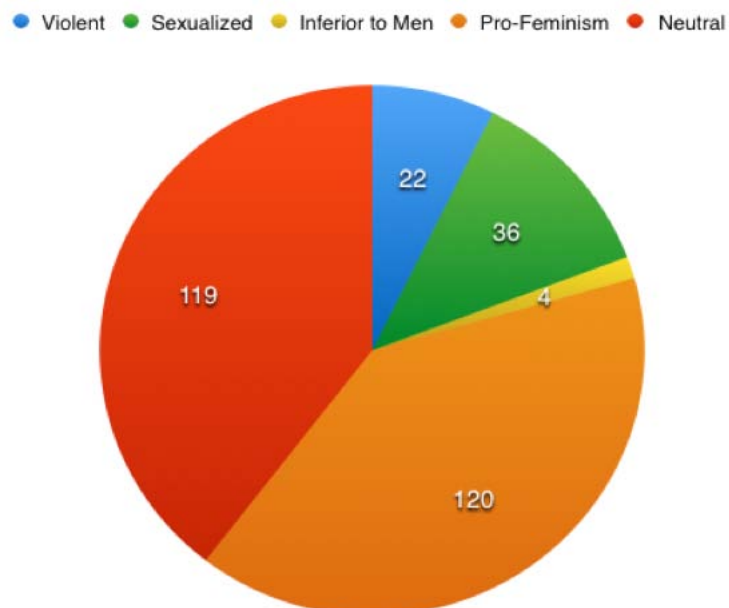
Retweets

Retweets, posts of particular tweets meant to widen the reach of that tweet, are significant in this dataset [Bruns and Burgess 2012: 3]. Whether or not a tweet is a retweet is determined either by 'RT', which signifies that the post is a retweet, or by duplicates of the same tweet by different users. Retweets are significant because they are intentional attempts to make other Twitter users view a particular tweet. That means, if a Twitter user retweets a tweet, that person feels that what it is saying is important. Retweeting is not always endorsing the tweet, though. Sometimes people retweet because they feel that the tweet is incorrect or ridiculous, and in turn, they want to highlight it. By amplifying a tweet's reach, a retweet increases the visibility of both the tweet and the user who posted the tweet [Bruns and Burgess 2012: 6]. There are 143 total retweets in this dataset. While some of those retweets represent female fighters' bodies as sexualized, violent, and inferior to men, the majority of them represent women in the UFC as beneficial for equality.

In this dataset, 47 percent of the tweets were retweets. This means that nearly half of the posts on Twitter about the topic were directly engaging with a previous tweet, thus contributing to the existing conversation. By contributing to the conversations about #feminism and #UFC, these Twitter users think that the topic is important in some way. For example, the most retweeted post was 'RT @TheCauldron The @ufc and Third Wave Feminism? Who woulda thought?! https://t.co/2YbPzn7AaG | http://t.co/TV1tYOYnQl', which was retweeted 36 times. In doing so, the users widened the reach of the tweet.

This particular tweet showcases feminism and the UFC as having a positive relationship, and the retweets meant it reached 36 times as many Twitter users. That means 36 times as many Twitter users had a chance to see the tweet and decide whether or not they agreed with it. In addition, 36 separate Twitter users engaged with the tweet, which means that they were either positively or negatively affected by it enough to share it with others. Since this tweet was the most retweeted post in this dataset, I argue that its reach amplified the conversation about how women in the UFC can contribute to equality.

DISCUSSION

In this section, I focus on how the female fighter's body is framed in my Twitter sample (see figure 5), specifically identifying how race, class, gender, and sexuality have an impact on those representations through an analysis of a hashtag #feminism and #UFC during the lead up and following the 2013 introduction of women into the UFC.

Female Fighters' Bodies as Violent

Out of 301 tweets, 22 tweets in the dataset represent female UFC fighters' bodies as violent. A tweet that stands out for me as someone who engages in MMA was tweeted by the user @mobilemartha: 'I saw these women fighting in UFC as I change TV channels. Why can't these women appreciate womanhood w/out fighting? #feminism'. The user specifically draws attention to women's UFC fights as violent rather than the sport of MMA as a whole. She shows disapproval of women fighting simply because of their gender. What is particularly significant about this tweet is that the user makes assumptions about the apparent universality of womanhood. Womanhood is not a static or singular experience, as the tweet suggests. My version of womanhood differs from other women's versions because it is developed out of my own personal experience of being a woman. For me, as a woman who is passionate about MMA and the UFC on many levels (i.e., academically and physically), MMA, as a sport, is in fact an aspect of womanhood that I appreciate to my core. This particular tweet represents women in the UFC as violent, and the perception of violence is created by the user's initial misunderstanding of both the sport and the dynamic and diverse reality of womanhood.

Another tweet that represents women in the UFC as violent was posted by a user ironically named @Misogyninja, who tweeted: '@RowdyBec You are fucking awesome. I love women fighters (they are vicious) in the UFC. And love your *Fuck Feminism* pics. #gamergate'. This tweet was initiated by a tweet that female UFC fighter Bec Rawlings posted about her disapproval of feminism paired with a nude photo of herself. The piece of the tweet that I find most significant is 'they are vicious'. By its definition, the word 'vicious', synonymous with 'evil', 'spiteful', 'malicious', and 'savage', has a negative connotation. While the user seems to be using 'vicious' to compliment female UFC fighters, I suggest that the compliment has a violent foundation and connotation that vilifies female fighters.

Sexualization of the Female UFC Fighter

Some of the tweets in this dataset sexualize the female UFC fighters. For example, one Twitter user posted: '@SeeBeeWhitman You want feminism? Tonight on UFC: first ever Women's Championship. I'm rooting for the attractive one. :]'. Instead of researching fight statistics and judging a fighter's abilities by their advantages, this Twitter user focuses only on the fighter's appearance. In doing so, the Twitter user disregards the fighter's hard work and athleticism because he or she argues that the attribute that matters the most for female fighters is their sexuality and physical appearance.

Framing the female fighter's body as objectified and sexualized is a form of symbolic violence that frames female fighter's bodies in harmful ways. McRobbie looks at makeover television shows as forms of symbolic violence. McRobbie notes that 'female individualization is, then, a social process bringing into being new social divisions through the denigration of low class or poor and disadvantaged women by means of symbolic violence' [McRobbie 2009: 101].

Like makeover television shows, symbolic violence is prominent on Twitter and the UFC's framing of female fighters. At first, the symbolic violence that accompanied #feminism and #UFC was the lack of conversation about the important topic, especially in a time when the UFC was excluding women from fighting. The UFC has influence over MMA as a sport, which means that it can frame particular topics to benefit the corporation. Thus, before 2013, the UFC normalized the exclusion of female fighters, which was then reflected by the lack of conversation about the topic in the media and on Twitter. When the UFC saw that female fighters were marketable, it then began to capitalize on feminism and women's rights.

The UFC's framing of female fighters also shapes possibilities for major influence over audience perception, and this is evident on Twitter. As Zhongdang Pan and Gerald M. Kosicki note, 'framing analysis as an approach to analyzing news discourse mainly deals with how public discourse about public policy issues is constructed and negotiated' [Pan and Kosicki 1993: 70]. Similarly, Twitter users have constructed and negotiated the ways in which female fighters are presented on Twitter, which are significant for the status of equality in larger contexts. Particular words, the choice of hashtags, and the reach of each tweet are all important aspects to how female fighters are framed on Twitter.

A Twitter conversation that was initiated by a female UFC fighter kicked off a number of tweets that sexualize female UFC fighters' bodies. Bec Rawlings, a single mother of two who fights for the UFC, tweeted a nude photo of herself holding a sign that said '#FuckFeminism

because I believe in human rights… for all!'. While Rawlings' initial post was an attempt to draw attention to her ideas on women's rights, as well as her misinformed views of feminism, the fighter actually initiated an important conversation that had never been discussed at such a level on Twitter. In addition, I suggest that Rawlings' tweet framed female fighter's bodies in an over-sexualized way. By posing nude, Rawlings presented herself as an object of sexual desire. Since Rawlings has one of the most colourful social media presences in the UFC, she can be considered representative of female fighters in the Twittersphere.

After Rawlings' tweet, 71 tweets and retweets were posted to Twitter engaging in #feminism and #UFC. Of these tweets, 26 frame the female body in sexualized ways, 3 discuss it as violent, and the rest do not include discussion of the female body. For example, 'ProMMANow - NSFW: UFC's Bec Rawlings posts nude pics, gives middle finger to feminism - [http://t.co/av6XEa9ytf] #TheMMAPulse' shows the female body in a sexualized way.

Female UFC Fighters as Inferior to Male UFC Fighters

Female athletes have been and continue to be framed by the media as inferior athletes to men. Martha McCaughey argues that 'one of the most destructive beliefs most people, including athletes, have is the belief that men are innately superior to women in physical abilities' [McCaughey 1997: 82]. Instead of highlighting their athletic abilities, media often focus on the sexuality, heterosexuality, and heterosexual appeal of female athletes [Heinecken 2015: 1]. Although Ronda Rousey is one of the highest paid fighters in the UFC, she is an anomaly. When it comes to other women in the UFC, the belittling of female athletes continues. The framing of female fighters as inferior to male athletes continues on Twitter. For example, @HydraCarbon209 claims, 'Women have no place in the UFC lmao go make me a samich #YesAllWomen #feminism #UFC'. The tweet harmfully claims that the value of women is through their abilities to serve men. While the women in the UFC are some of the most highly skilled MMA fighters in the world, the user finds their inclusion in the UFC laughable.

White Normativity

In this dataset, there are no tweets that directly discuss race. The absence of the discourse about race is an example of white normativity because it suggests that white fighters are the norm. In addition, the lack of race discourse in this dataset suggests that race is irrelevant. There is one tweet in this dataset, which was also retweeted once, that attempts to bring up race. One twitter user assertively notes, '@DCdebbie My tweeps talkin bout about feminism, white privilege, UFC. One guy keeps talkin bout his dick. Good fuckin night'. This

user is clearly attempting to bring up the important topic of white privilege in the UFC. However, another Twitter user, who wants to speak about trivial matters, disrupts the discourse. As a result, the topic is discontinued. The absence of race politics in this dataset implies that race does not matter.

The only names that are mentioned in this dataset are Ronda Rousey, Bec Rawlings, and Miesha Tate. All three of these women are white women. As I pointed out in the previous section about gender and race in the UFC, while the majority of female fighters in the UFC are white, there is a large number of Latina women in the fight league, as well as a smaller number of Asian and African American women. By only naming three white women, the tweets in this dataset suggest that non-white women are insignificant in the world of the UFC.

Cis-Normativity

None of the tweets in this dataset discuss trans fighters. The absence of a discourse about trans fighters shows the complete disregard of the trans community by the UFC and its fans. The rejection stems from the UFC's framing of trans people as Others through its exclusion of trans fighters such as Fallon Fox. The rejection of trans fighters in the dataset is more than exclusion though. By not allowing trans fighters such as Fallon Fox to fight in the UFC, the corporation is not framing transgender fighters as inferior athletes, but as simply not existing.

By not including conversations about important topics like cis-normativity, the UFC frames women's MMA to benefit the marketability of female fighters. This process of framing constructs symbolic violence that permeates both sports and society. Symbolic violence, a concept from Pierre Bourdieu, occurs when social capital is gained and then used to assert one's authority over others. The authority is then taken as the norm, and in turn, constructs hierarchies throughout society based on class [Cushion and Jones 1996: 144]. McRobbie takes Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence in class structures further by adding gender. These concepts together are directly reflected in the ways in which the dataset of tweets represent the female fighters' bodies.

The media chooses which topics it wants to make accessible to the public and uses its influence in society to make certain topics matter more than others [Scheufele 2009: 110]. Frames construct feelings and opinions of particular audiences [Davis and Abelman 1983: 394]. If this is true, what are the consequences when the media, or Twittersphere, fail to contribute to a conversation, such as that of feminism and the UFC? The result can be a symbolic version of violence that does its harm through systemic construction of harmful norms such as cis-normativity.

While the UFC has framed and normalized cis bodies, I cannot overlook that it is not just the UFC that is contributing to this conversation on Twitter. The dataset is made up of people who deliberately aimed to contribute to the discourse on feminism and the UFC on Twitter. That means that, in addition to the UFC, feminists in this dataset also failed to include transgender people in this discussion. Trans people have been excluded from feminist politics continually throughout history. From the exclusion of trans women's issues from Anglo-American feminist theory and their removal from history [Namaste 2009], to the vilification of trans people by some feminist theories [MacDonald 1998], many feminist ideologies have constructed a gap between feminism, trans politics, and trans people.

Heteronormativity

Female UFC fighters are represented in heteronormative ways on Twitter. Some users attempt to reframe femininity, womanhood, and feminism to fit their own desires. For example, in his tweet, @DylanRous claims that female fighters should not be in the UFC because they are women. He tweets, '@ufc this is a joke. Woman in the UFC is gross. I support Feminism but Christ a bunch of roid monkey chicks fighting in a cage? #notclassy'. The user makes an assumption that women need to be 'classy'. If women are fighting, they are classless, gross, and in turn, do not fit into the artificial mould of what this particular Twitter user thinks a woman should be. An interesting piece of this tweet is the user's apparent acceptance of feminism. He says that he supports feminism, but then he says women should not fight. These conflicting statements show that the user is attempting to reframe the female body and feminism into what fits into male desire.

Women's UFC as a Step Towards Equality

Women in the UFC show fans and critics that women can be skilled in fighting, an ideology that breaks down barriers between genders. The three most retweeted tweets in this dataset all discuss how the women's UFC is a step towards equality. For example, a user tweets, 'Have female UFC fighters won a small victory for #feminism? http://t.co/bLnUhdNZRr'. Although this tweet poses the relationship between the UFC and feminism as a question, this particular tweet was retweeted five times. This tweet is accompanied by three other tweets that discuss feminism and the UFC, and were retweeted many times. The trend in the promotion of the relationship between feminism and the UFC shows some acceptance of women in the UFC as legitimate athletes.

Despite the decrease in the MMA community's support of feminism in January 2015, February 2015 sparked some major changes. On February 28, 2015, Rousey defeated longtime rival Cat Zingano in a record-breaking 14 seconds, and her victory sparked a plethora of Twitter

conversations. Between February 13, 2015 and March 23, 2015, 78 tweets were posted containing #feminism and #UFC. Of those tweets, 4 discuss the female fighter's body in sexualized ways, 16 represent it as violent, 51 discuss female fighter's bodies as beneficial for equality or physical feminism, and 7 do not discuss the topic at all.

Unlike the conversation that was initiated by Rawlings, the majority of the conversation about feminism and Rousey framed the female fighter's body as valuable for equality. For example, 'The @ufc and Third Wave Feminism? Who would thought?! https://t.co/2YbPzn7AaG | http://t.co/TV1tYOYnQl', shows a clear acceptance of women's MMA as a tool for equality. In the case of Rousey, this framing resulted in a change in the discourse of how female fighter's bodies are framed on Twitter when compared to how they were framed after Rawlings' tweet. The two events occurred very close together, which highlighted a clear divide in the discourse at hand. However, what is certain is that the ways in which the media and the UFC frame women's bodies influences the discourse on Twitter. By including women, the UFC is constructing a frame that legitimizes female fighters as athletes. This frame continues to be more accepted throughout this particular MMA community on Twitter.

While this research shows that there is a gradual acceptance of women in the UFC, McRobbie is sceptical about women being under the spotlight. She notes that the bringing of women into the spotlight is an intentional means of surveillance [McRobbie 2009: 59] as well as a means to control women through the idea that they are free and equal [McRobbie 2009: 62]. As women become more visible in new spheres, such as MMA, they are given 'a shimmering presence' [McRobbie 2009: 65]. This type of presence both reassures normative ideals of hetero- and cist-femininity and ensures that women are involved in their own surveillance.

In addition, McRobbie explains that there are many conscious strategies put forth by nation states to control feminisms. Some of today's politics and politicians have undone feminism, and created an environment where women must fall in line [McRobbie 2009: 10]. Further, McRobbie claims that 'the new female subject is, despite her freedom, called upon to be silent, to withhold critique in order to count as a modern sophisticated girl' [McRobbie 2009: 23]. McRobbie's concept is present in the UFC through the compliance of most female fighters in the UFC, despite the many inequalities put onto them by the corporation.

Popular culture is a tool for McRobbie's concepts of a new faux feminism. Television shows such as Sex and the City and advertisements show women who are the embodiments of the undoing of feminism by nation states. The undoing of feminism through the media and popular culture instructs society that feminism is not necessary anymore. Further, these representations of faux feminism in the media 're-regulate young women by means of the language of personal choice' [McRobbie 2009: 26]. Faux feminism discounts the complicated politics of choice and misleads women into assuming they're on an equal playing field with men. I argue that faux feminism is present in the UFC's inclusion of female fighters.

CONCLUSION

My research examined the perspectives that critics and fans had on women in the UFC, and how these people represented female fighters on Twitter. My findings show that the female fighter's body was more often than not discussed as beneficial for equality. However, there is unevenness in the perspectives that these particular Twitter users had on female fighters. The imbalance is present through the sexualization and devaluation female fighters, and the lack of attention paid to intersectionality. Without awareness of the various drawbacks that interweave through gender, race, sexuality, class, and age, Twitter users engaging in the conversation about women in the UFC risk creating another faux feminism.

Through this research, I learned that female fighters in the UFC are framed in static and narrow ways on Twitter. Issues of race, heteronormativity, and cis-normativity are not mentioned in the dataset. The exclusion of these topics from this particular discourse on Twitter shows that the normalization of white, cis-gender, and straight fighters has not been challenged by this group of Twitter users, which suggests an acceptance of the domination of white, cis gender, and straight women in the UFC. While the failure to challenge white, cis gender, and straight domination in the UFC could be a limitation of the research sample, the results in this research call for further research about gender, sexuality, and race in women's MMA and in the UFC.

Paired with the international popularity and influence of the UFC, it seems as though women's MMA has the potential to be a new feminist frontier. However, the unevenness in representations of female fighters' bodies in the dataset suggests otherwise. While women are now included in the UFC, issues like patriarchy, white privilege, and cis privilege are still present. Twitter is a space where women's MMA can be discussed relatively freely by MMA fans, skeptics, and female fighters themselves. When grouped together, the three elements, MMA, the UFC, and Twitter, have the potential to improve equality in sports and society. While it is equipped with this potential, my results show that there is a distinct unevenness around female fighters' bodies.

The media has discussed gender issues in the UFC, but these issues have not been discussed to a large extent. In addition, media representations of gender issues in the UFC fail to examine particular issues, such as cis normativity, heteronormativity, and class. My research provides a new perspective on women in the UFC that the media has overlooked. Further, this essay adds to the academic literature because it brings the discussion on women in the UFC, a topic that has been largely neglected in academia, to light. This research is only the beginning of a variety of new discourses, both academic and otherwise, about women's MMA and women in the UFC. I hope that the discussion and results in this research will be considered by the UFC and other MMA fight leagues for the benefit of female fighters.

Suggestions for Future Research

My research is only the beginning of feminist research on women's MMA. Future research is needed to create a better understanding of women in the UFC and MMA as a whole. My research focused on how female fighters have been framed on Twitter through a discourse about feminism and the UFC. Future research should consider widening the scope of this conversation by exploring other hashtags associated with women's MMA. In addition, other researchers interested in this area should look at how female fighters are framed in different forms of media, such as on other social media platforms, as well as more traditional forms of media. Finally, I believe that research on women's MMA would benefit greatly from interviews with MMA fighters (male, female, and transgender), coaches, fans, and critics.

REFERENCES

2013. 'Matt Mitrione, UFC Fighter, Suspended After Transphobic Fallon Fox Rant', *Huffington Post*, available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/09/matt-mitrione-fallon-fox-suspended_n_3045308.html.

2015. 'Kyra Gracie', *BJJHeroes.com*, available at: http://www.bjjheroes.com/bjj-fighters/kyra-gracie.

Bartky, Sandra Lee. 2006. 'Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power', in *Theorizing Feminisms: A Reader,* edited by Sally Haslanger, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 277-292.

Basow, Susan A. and Amanda Roth. 2004. 'Femininity, Sports, and Feminism: Developing a Theory of Physical Liberation', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 28, 245-265.

Bennett, Lucy. 2014. '"If We Stick Together We Can Do Anything": Lady Gaga Fandom, Philanthropy, and Activism through Social Media', *Celebrity Studies* 5.1, 138-152.

Bishop, Greg. 2015. 'A Pioneer, Reluctantly', *Nytimes.com*, available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/13/sports/for-transgender-fighter-fallon-fox-there-is-solace-in-the-cage.html?_r=0.

Bruns, Axel and Moe Hallvard. 2014. 'Structural Layers of Communication on Twitter', *Twitter and Society* 89, 15-27.

Bruns, Axel and Jean Burgess. 2012. 'Researching News Discussion on Twitter: New Methodologies', *Journalism Studies* 13.5, 1-13.

Burk, Martha. 2003. 'WNBA – One Cent on the Dollar'. *People's Weekly World* 17.39.

Butler, Judith. 2004. *Undoing Gender*. London: Routledge.

Callison, Candis and Alfred Hermida. 2015. 'Dissent and Resonance: #idlenomore as an Emergent Middle Ground', *Journal of Communication*.

Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sports. 'Violence', available at: http://cces.ca/violence.

Channon, Alex. 2014. 'Towards the "Undoing" of Gender in Mixed-Sex Martial Arts and Combat Sports', *Societies* 2, 588-605.

Channon, Alex and George Jennings. 2014. 'Exploring Embodiment through Martial Arts and Combat Sports: A Review of Empirical Research', *Sport in Society* 17.6, 773-789.

Choi, Precilla Y.L. 2003. 'Muscle Matters: Maintaining Visible Difference between Women and Men', *Sexualities, Evolution, and Gender* 5.3, 71-81.

Cushion, Christopher and Robyn L. Jones. 2006. 'Power, Discourse, and Symbolic Violence in Professional Youth Soccer: The Case of Albion Football Club', *Sociology of Sport Journal* 23, 142-161.

Davis, Dennis K. and Robert Abelman. 1983. 'Families and Television: An Application of Frame Analysis Theory', *Journal of Family Issues* 4.2, 385-404.

Enke, Anne. 2012. 'The Education of Little Cis: Cisgender and the Discipline of Opposing Bodies', in *Transfeminist Perspectives in and Beyond Transgender and Gender Studies*, edited by Anne Enke, Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 60-77.

Fields, Sarah K. 2008. *Female Gladiators: Gender, Law, and Contact Sport in America*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Follo, Giovanna. 2007. 'Entering a Male Domain: Women in Rugby and Martial Arts'. PhD diss., Wayne State University.

Fortune, Laura, Mark Mierzwinski, and Philippa Velija. 2012. '"It made me feel powerful": Women's Gendered Embodiment and Physical Empowerment in the Martial Arts', *Leisure Studies* 32.5, 524-541.

Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The History of Sexuality.* New York: Vintage Book.

Griffin, Pat. 1999. 'Lesbians and Bisexual Women in Sport', *Journal of Physical Education*, Recreation, and Dance 70.4, 53-62.

Hahner, Leslie A. 2013. 'The Riot Kiss: Framing Memes as Visual Argument', *Argumentation and Advocacy* 49, 151-166.

Heinecken, Dawn. 2015. 'So Tight in the Thighs, So Loose in the Waist', *Feminist Media Studies* 15, 1-18.

Hermida, Alfred. 2014. *Tell Everyone: Why We Share & Why it Matters.* Canada: Doubleday Canada.

Hern, Matt. 2013. *One Game at a Time: Why Sports Matter.* Baltimore: AK Press.

Holden, Eric. 2013. '10 Courageous WMMA Athletes Who Are Openly Gay', *AXS Entertainment*, available at: http://www.examiner.com/

list/10-courageous-wmma-athletes-who-are-openly-gay.

Iole, Kevin. 2011. 'White Says Gay UFC Fighters Should Come Out', *Yahoo Sports*, available at: http://sports.yahoo.com/news/white-says-gay-ufc-fighters-211700517--mma.html.

Janson, Melissa and Julia Uyttewaal. 2014. 'XV. Privilege and Transgender In/exclusivity in a Female Sexuality Group', *Feminism & Psychology* 25.1, 84-89.

Jennings, L.A. 2014. *She's a Knock Out: A History of Women in Fighting Sports.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Johnson, Julia R. 2013. 'Cisgender Privilege, Intersectionality, and the Criminalization of CeCe McDonald: Why Intercultural Communication Needs Transgender Studies', *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 6.2, 135-133.

Kagan, Vadim, Edward Rossini, and Demetrios Sapounas. 2013. *Sentiment Analysis for PTSD Signals.* New York: Springer.

Kellaway, Mitch. 2014. 'UFC Women's Champ Refuses to Fight Transgender Athlete Fallon Fox', *Advocate.com*, available at: http://www.advocate.com/sports/2014/09/22/ufc-womens-champ-refuses-fight-trans-athlete-fallon-fox.

Lawler, Jennifer. 2002. *Punch! Why Women Participate in Violent Sports.* Indiana: Wish Publishing.

Leavitt, Alex. 2014. 'From #FollowFriday to YOLO: Exploring the Cultural Salience of Twitter Memes', *Twitter and Society* 89, 137-154.

Liberti, Rita. 2004. 'Fostering Community Consciousness: The Role of Women's Basketball at Black Colleges and Universities, 1900-1950', in *Race and Sport: The Struggle for Equality on and off the Field,* edited by Charles K. Ross. Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press.

Kernaghan, Rory. 2015. 'Nevada Union Accuses UFC of Sexual Discrimination', *Lowkickmma.com*, available at: http://www.lowkickmma.com/UFC/nevada-union-accuses-ufc-of-sexual-discrimination/

Macdonald, Eleanor. 1998. 'Critical Identities: Rethinking Feminism Through Transgender Politics', *Atlantis* 23.1, 3-11.

Maireder, Axel and Julian Ausserhofer. 2014. 'Political Discourses on

Twitter: Networking Topics, Objects, and People', *Twitter and Society* 89, 306-318.

Marcelo Alonso. 2009. 'Rising from the Slums'. *Sherdog*, available at: http://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/1/Rising-from-the-Slums-17423

Martinez-Camara, Eugenio, M. Teresa Martin-Valdivia, L. Alfonso Urena-Lopez, and Arthuro Montejo-Raez. 2014. 'Sentiment Analysis in Twitter', *Natural Language Engineering* 20, 1-28.

McCaughey, Martha. 1997. *Real Knockouts: The Physical Feminism of Women's Self-Defence.* New York: New York City Press.

McDonagh, Eileen and Laura Pappano. 2007. *Playing with the Boys: Why Separate Is Not Equal in Sports.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McIntosh, Heather and Lisa Cuklanz. 2013. 'Feminist Media Research', in *Feminism Research Practice: A Primer*, edited by Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, London: SAGE, 264-295.

McRobbie, Angela. 2009. *The Aftermath of Feminism.* London: SAGE.

Messner, Michael A. 1988. 'Sports and Male Domination: The Female Athlete as Contested Ideology Terrain', *Sociology of Sport Journal* 5, 197-211.

Messner, Michael A. and Donald Sabo. 1994. *Sex, Violence, and Power in Sports: Rethinking Masculinity.* Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press.

Mishra, Suman. 2013. 'Nationality and Gender in Sports Photography: A Case Study on Portrayals of Figure Skaters at Torino Winter Olympics', *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise, and Health* 6.3, 382-400.

Morgan, William John. 2006. *Why Sports Morally Matter.* London: Routledge.

Namaste, Viviane. 2009. 'The "Transgender Question" and the Epistemic Violence of Anglo-American Feminism Theory', *Hypatia* 24.4, 11-32.

Naraine, Michael Lance. 2012. 'Developing an Understanding of the Role of Gender in the Consumption of Mixed Martial Arts'. PhD diss., University of Winsor.

Noble, McKinley. 2013. 'UFC's Joe Rogan to Transgender MMA Fighter Fallon Fox: "You're a F***ing Man."' *Bleacherreport.com*, available

at: http://bleacherreport.com/articles/1573044-ufc-joe-rogan-to-transgender-mma-fighter-fallon-fox-youre-a-man.

Noel, HarmoniJoie. 2009. 'Undoing Gendered Power Relations through Martial Arts?' *International Journal of Social Inquiry* 2.2, 17-37.

Oppliger, Patrice A. 2003. *Wrestling and Hypermasculinity.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Ordorica, Adrienne M. 2005. 'The Social Impact of Competitive Sports Participation for Latina Adolescents'. Master's Thesis, California State University Dominguez Hills.

Pan, Zhongdang and Gerald M. Kosicki. 1993. 'Framing Analysis: An Approach to News Discourse', *Political Communication* 10, 55-75.

Pearson, Erika. 2009. 'All the World Wide Web's a Stage: The Performance of Identity in Online Social Networks', *First Monday* 14.3.

Ramazanoglu, Caroline and Janet Holland. 2002. *Feminist Methodology: Challenges and Choices.* London: SAGE.

Ross, Becki and Kim Greenwell. 2005. 'Spectacular Striptease: Performing the Sexual and Racial Other in Vancouver, B.C., 1945-1975', *Journal of Women's History* 17.1, 137-164.

Scheufele, Dietram A. 2009. 'Framing as a Theory of Media Ethics', *Journal of Communication*, 103-122.

Shepherd, Laura and Laura Sjoberg. 2012. 'Trans-bodies in/of War(s): Cisprivilege and Contemporary Security Strategy', *Feminist Review* 101, 5-23.

Seungmo Kim, T. et al. 2008. 'An Analysis of Spectator Motives in an Individual Combat Sport: A Study of Mixed Martial Arts Fans', *Sport Marketing Quarterly* 17, 109-119.

Snowden, Jonathan. 2010. 'Brazilian Jiu Jitsu', in *The MMA Encyclopedia.* Toronto: ECW Press.

Sullivan, Claire F. 2012. 'Sports Media: Transgender', in *Encyclopedia of Gender in Media*, edited by Mary E. Kosut, London: SAGE, 269-271.

Sxczerba, Robert J. 2014. 'Mixed Martial Arts and the Evolution of John McCain'. *Forbes.com*, available at: http://www.forbes.com/sites/robertszczerba/2014/04/03/mixed-martial-arts-and-the-evolution-of-john-mccain/.

Sykes, Heather. 2007. 'Anxious Identification in The Sopranos and Sport: Psychoanalytic and Queer Theories of Embodiment', *Sport, Education, and Society* 12.2, 127-139.

Teeter, Allison M. 2014. 'Caution, This is Sparta!: A Gendered Examination of Mixed Martial Arts and the Spartanization Process', PhD Diss. Kansas State University.

Theberge, Nancy. 1998. '"Same Sport, Different Gender": A Consideration of Binary Gender Local and the Sport Continuum in the Case of Ice Hockey', *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 22, 183-198.

West, Candace and Don H. Zimmerman. 1987. 'Undoing Gender', *Gender and Society* 1.2, 125-151.

White, Dana. 2013. '"I don't believe in it" – Dana White on Fallon Fox'. YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dm8jWOkPEAo.

Whiteside, Erin. 2010. 'Under the Glass Ceiling: Power Identity and Sexuality in Sports Information', PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University.

Wilson, Eleanor. 2014. 'Diversity, Culture, and the Glass Ceiling', *Journal of Cultural Diversity* 21.3, 83-89.

World Health Organization. 2012. 'Violence – A Global Public Health Problem'. *World Report on Violence and Health*, available at: http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/en/chap1.pdf.

CONTRIBUTOR

George Jennings is a qualitative sociologist interested in traditionalist physical cultures. His previous work has examined the traditionalist Chinese martial arts such as Wing Chun and Taijiquan, and he is currently investigating the dynamic relationships between martial arts, health and society. He is a researcher and editor at the Universidad YMCA, Mexico, and an associate researcher at the Health Advancement Research Team, University of Lincoln, UK.

ANCIENT WISDOM MODERN WARRIORS
THE (RE)INVENTION OF A MESOAMERICAN TRADITION IN XILAM
GEORGE JENNINGS

ABSTRACT

Xilam is a modern Mexican martial art that is inspired by pre-Hispanic warrior cultures of ancient Mesoamerica, namely the Aztecs (Mexica), Maya and Zapotec cultures. It provides a noteworthy case study of a Latin American fighting system that has been recently invented, but aspires to rescue, rediscover and relive the warrior philosophies that existed before the Spanish Conquest and subsequent movements beginning in 1521. Using the thought-provoking work of anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *México Profundo*, I aim to analyse the Xilam Martial Arts Association through the way that they represent themselves in their three main media outlets: the official webpage, the Facebook group and the YouTube channel. Overall, the data suggests that certain elements of Mesoamerican civilisation may be transmitted to young Mexicans through a mind-body discipline, which in turn acts as a form of physical (re)education. Overall, xilam is both an invented tradition (in a technical sense) and a re-invented tradition (in a cultural sense) that provides lessons on the timeless issues of transformation, transmission and transcendence.

XILAM IN THE INCLUSIVE FIELD OF MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES

The *México Profundo* is formed from a great diversity of peoples, communities and social sectors that constitute the majority of the population of the country. What unites and distinguishes the Mexican society are carrier groups that have the way to look at the world and organize life, and which originate in Mesoamerican civilisation, forged here through an expanded and complex historic process. The current expressions of that civilisation are very diverse: From the cultures that some Indian towns have known how to conserve with a high grade of internal cohesion, to the great quantity of isolated characteristics that distribute different ways in the distinct urban sector. The Mesoamerican civilisation is a neglected civilisation whose presence is essential to know.

[Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, prologue, *México Profundo*].

Xilam is the reformation – from contemporary Mexico – of an important part of the experience of ancestral life. It does not just imply a martial art, but a complete life philosophy; it is a project of personal development where the individual is discovered and discovers ways 'to remove the skin'. It is also a historic project representative of awakening, maintaining and transcending the ancestral memory of a nation.

> **Xilam is a work that seeks the memory of that which we have been and the affirmation of what we will be.**
> **Today we are witness to the renaissance of a Mexican martial art.**
> [www.xilam.org]

To date, social scientific research on martial arts has moved from earlier considerations of Asian martial arts in the West [Goodger 1982; James and Jones 1982] to contemporary issues in sweeping martial arts movements such as mixed martial arts (MMA) [Green 2011; Spencer 2013], 'reality' schools of combat [Bar-On Cohen 2010], and also topical issues such as masculinity and homosexuality [Channon and Matthews 2015; Matthews 2015]. As Channon and Jennings [2014] contend, there remains a need for a balanced study of different martial arts and combat sports (MACS) from around the world. As fresh research on MACS in Latin America has indicated [Assunção 2004; Downey 2005; Ryan 2011a, 2011b], there is a wealth of warrior traditions in countries such as Brazil and Venezuela. Each country brings its own richness in culture and philosophy through African, indigenous and European influences, and Mexico is no exception.

In this article, I present the little-known case of Xilam (pronounced shi-lam), a Mexican martial art system developed in the 1980s and registered in 1992 founded on the principles of eclectic pre-Hispanic philosophy. Xilam is taught and practised in and around Mexico City and it is a registered association that aims to spread the art across Mexico and also nationwide. Although Mexico is a modern, industrialised and capitalist nation, it has its basis in the pre-Hispanic (also known as pre-Columbian) Mesoamerican civilisation including the cultures of the Olmecs, Toltecs, Maya and Aztecs. Although existing over thousands of years in different areas of Mexico and Central America, there are some key commonalities that unite them: The calendar system, the scientific-astrological philosophy and the deities, sacred animals and stepped pyramids. Furthermore, all of these peoples were also warrior societies. Despite the fact that the martial arts were not transmitted from student to teacher through direct body lineages [see Brown and Jennings 2010], elements of their philosophy interest many Mexicans today. Many of these elements are taught in an academic sense to Mexican children, but there are small groups of people that have tried to recover, rediscover and share this core philosophy with people in a dynamic and physical way. Xilam is such a case study.

From the outset, it is important to declare that there is no way that xilam can be described as truly pre-Hispanic. It was developed in 1989 and registered in 1991, long after the Spanish conquest of 1521 ended the millennial civilisation of the pre-Hispanic people. Furthermore, it was founded by a contemporary figure, Marisela Ugalde, who hails from a mixture of Mexican, Spanish, French and Jewish heritage. Although she, like the majority of Mexicans, possesses native blood, she is from the swarming metropolis of Mexico City and currently resides in the metropolitan zone, far removed from the poverty and agricultural life associated with Mexico's original people. Thus, Ugalde is not indigenous, neither in a genetic nor in a social sense.

What, then, makes xilam interesting as a case study for this special issue of *Martial Arts Studies* on the invention of martial arts? For one thing, in a field focused on MMA and capoeira, it is a rare exemplar of a recently invented Latin American martial art. Another noteworthy aspect of xilam is the fact that it was invented by a woman facing many social, political and economic obstacles and subcultural dismissal over the course of almost three decades [a life history is provided in Jennings 2015a]. A third important issue is the insertion of ancient Mesoamerican philosophies into a modern system which binds the concepts, forms and rituals.

This contribution extends the work of some of my previous projects looking at traditionalist martial arts cultures. The perception of

wing chun as a secular religion [Jennings, Brown and Sparkes 2010], alternative narratives of ageing and learning in Chinese martial arts [Jennings 2012] and utopian views on ecology in a taijiquan organization [Brown, Jennings and Sparkes 2014] are all examples of different ways to view the world: Not what society or martial arts necessarily are, but ways they can be – now and in the future.

This study forms part of a broader movement of martial arts studies that endeavors to break barriers between academic disciplines and fields of interest [see Bowman 2015a, 2015b]. As a qualitative sociologist of physical culture originally trained in exercise and sport sciences, I venture into the new territory of post-colonial studies, cultural anthropology and social history through the study of xilam via the insights of the anthropologist, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla.

My first publication on xilam put the life of the art's founder, Marisela Ugalde, under the academic spotlight [Jennings 2015a], and to date, no further published academic research exists on this little-known martial art. Marisela began martial arts in the 1960s, and experienced sexual abuse, discrimination and personal suffering during the first few decades of her life. However, she chose not to adopt a feminist approach to the martial arts, and instead created a new martial art for Mexicans and Mexican Americans to develop the human being, reintroduce these people to their pre-Hispanic roots and provide a programme of nation building for future generations of her compatriots, as well as people from all over the world. Marisela pointed out that her daughter, Mayra, is her lineage holder, and it will be interesting to see how xilam continues to be practiced, taught and portrayed as technology and society change in the years to come.

As a second publication in an ongoing study of xilam, the objective of this article is to assess how the art is promoted to the public as a re-invented, rediscovered and reimagined martial tradition. It achieves this by focusing on multimedia and textual data obtained over the course of three years' study of the art, and the findings are illuminated by the theory of a deep Mexico (*México Profundo*) put forth by the anthropologist and essayist Bonfil Batalla. Together, these elements serve to illustrate how the invention of xilam provides an alternative way to look at Mexicans and even Mexico itself: a country with profound customs, beliefs and cultural treasures.

MÉXICO PROFUNDO
SEARCHING FOR A DEEPER, HIDDEN MEXICO

The country now known as Mexico is a complex, developing nation with over 120 million people in a large territory that is approximately the size of Western Europe and that spans desert, woodland, and jungle. Despite its modern exterior as evidenced by sprawling cities, such as Mexico City and Guadalajara, it is home to over 60 indigenous languages and hundreds of indigenous groups, including descendants of the ancient, and often thought extinct, Maya. In fact, several ancient civilisations occupied its territory well before the Spanish invasion and conquest of the Mexica (Aztec) empire of 1521: flourishing from its humble origins seven thousand years ago, when settlement first began [see Smith and Mason 2000]. These include the Olmec, Toltec, Maya and Zapotec peoples in what is now central and southern Mexico and also Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua in what is known as Mesoamerica. The northern regions of Mexico have quite a different culture, with a heavy influence from their neighbours, the United States.

It is this foundation of Mesoamerican life that forms the basis of the work *México Profundo* [Bonfil Batalla 1994, 1996] by the Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla. For Batalla, there are two facets of Mexico: The real (profound) and the imaginary (superficial). The real Mexico is derived from the rural and native traditions of the various ethnic groups and tribes: The diet, the geographical names and local knowledge, the family culture and upbringing. The imaginary Mexico is postulated as a modern, democratic, industrialised nation that forms part of the Western world: Western (Occidental) civilisation, much like the United States, Canada, Western Europe and Australia. This imaginary Mexico is the public face issued by the various governments of this Latin American nation, which hides the deeper traditions of medicine and healing, philosophy, spirituality, esotericism, physical culture and ecology that has continued over thousands of years, and in a clandestine fashion under Spanish rule and attempts at modernity.

The various Mesoamerican cultures, city-states, peoples and tribes combine to form one of the few original civilisations on Earth (like those of Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia), and is quite different from Western civilisation. For Bonfil, the Western civilisation and the Mesoamerican civilisation coexist, and can (in an ideal or utopian sense) continue to work together for a better future for the Mexican nation. The 'civilisations' he writes of are ideal models for societies to develop – two contrasting worldviews – which have been in conflict over hundreds of years. This is particularly important, as their views of how to live, what to eat, how to organize society, how to dance, and how to

treat one another hold the key to the country's future. This is despite the diversity within both ideal projects, which are composed of different peoples and communities, like Britain and the United States or the tribes and peasants of the centre and south of Mexico. Many important processes, such as colonization, urbanization and 'de-indianization' have weakened the presence of indigenous identity, but not indigenous culture rooted in mestizo society. 'They' are posited as different to 'us' (the modern Mexicans). According to Bonfil Batalla, the living and breathing 'Indians' are marginalized in contemporary Mexico. Despite the different 'cultures' that have different names and speak strikingly different languages, they share the same values and worldview: the very same Mesoamerican civilisation.

The key argument in this seminal text is that Mesoamerican society, seen from an infrastructural and technological vantage point, is portrayed as dead – abandoned pyramids and ruined cities akin to the lost city in *The Jungle Book* [Kipling, 1985 (1894/1895)], and vanished citizens in a mysterious diaspora or racial mixing with Europeans and other settlers. In its place, the Western model is implanted as a foreign project that began with the conquest, and continued well after the declaration of Mexican Independence (1821) and the Mexican Revolution (1910). This project has never been under the control of everyday Mexicans, who continue to live their everyday lives.

Bonfil Batalla's work argues that Mexico should emphasize its unique characteristics and traditions – the colour, flavour, and sounds that form the backbone of Mexican society – rather than trying to emulate foreign models. He suggests that arts and crafts and other artisanal enterprises are the heart of Mexican society. Despite these thought-provoking insights, he overlooks the physical culture of the ancient and contemporary Mesoamerican people – the so-called 'native games' [Hallinan and Judd 2013]. These native games, such as dance, wrestling and ball games – including the famous Mesoamerican rubber ball game – are now a subject of increasing academic and public interest [Whittington 2001]. The Mexican Federation for Autochthonous and Traditional Games and Sports [http://goo.gl/4SgJnd] protects the traditions of various regions and tries to promote the traditions to other areas of the country. However, the complex fighting systems of the warrior classes of the Mexica (Aztecs) and Maya were eliminated with the conquest, colonization and inquisition in Mexico. To date, no complete martial art exists that can be compared with those of the pre-Hispanic times. Nevertheless, there are small groups of patriots and martial arts researchers who are trying to rediscover, salvage and rebuild these martial arts systems and philosophies. One such effort is xilam, modern Mexico's first martial art inspired by pre-Hispanic martial arts that communicates with the public through various open-access media.

MULTIMEDIATED METHODOLOGY

> From the outset, a concha [shell] is blown strongly, which is followed by a screech of an eagle and a woman's voice. Then, modern music sets it, which blends into the background with the continued sequence of the other sound.
>
> What does this mean? The merging of the ancient with the modern? Under a photograph of an instructor holding two shells, the home page says 'listen to the call and recognize your ancestral heritage'.
>
> Sounds and voices: Not just what they say, but how they say it.
>
> [Reflexive journal notes]

This article forms part of an open, ethnographic case study of xilam as part of a wider consideration of martial arts and combat sports in Mexico. Like many ethnographies, this study adopts a multimodal approach including full participant observation, observation life history, interviews and media and textual analysis – each of these interwoven in different stages. It is the latter two methods of media and textual analysis that form the basis of this particular paper, as they are the most relevant to the construction and public demonstration of xilam as a restored, re-invented and rediscovered pre-Hispanic martial arts tradition in a modern, accessible form.

There is yet to be published a formal text (academic or instructional) on xilam, yet the public information on this art is now available in a wide variety of online and written sources. The association's official website [www.xilam.org], Facebook group and YouTube channel were the main sources of data, along with flyers, posters and hand-outs that I gathered during my ethnographic fieldwork since 2011. Alongside the association's own material, I also examined formal interviews, documentary videos and online discussions on this art with journalists and martial arts specialists – some of these going back to the early 1990s. I listened to the videos, interviews and music at home between long periods of visual analysis. This helped me consider the hows of talk: How people speak, emphasize certain themes and convince their audience by making an 'authentic portrayal' of a given physical culture. In sum, the raw data was in reality multimedia: Text, images, music, videos, music and sounds working in unison to re-invent a martial tradition.

In addition to these conventional academic methods, I rehearsed the basic xilam forms, postures and rituals between periods of sedentary analysis. This provided an opportunity to physically assess

the philosophies, narratives and discourse – to psychosomatically evaluate how the invention of xilam offered a non-academic way of rediscovering and reassessing pre-Hispanic history.

The theory inspired by Bonfil Batalla's *México Profundo* was not a conventional academic theory that I had learned at university, or had been introduced to by my academic peers. Instead, the core xilam practitioners such as Marisela and my old instructor, Xolotl (pseudonym), spoke openly about this seminal text during the 'circle of warriors' after one class, which is a time for reflection and discussion.

As Paulus, Lester and Dempster [2014: 142] point out, 'multimedia data is often overlooked as an opportunity to deepen our understanding of social life'. Following the digital and multimodal approach for this particular article inspired by the increasing importance of digital tools for qualitative research, I not only read the *México Profundo* text, but also took photographs of key extracts and read them whenever I had the chance in order to reflect upon the themes outside of my academic environment. Moreover, at home, I listened to audio versions of the book on YouTube while performing domestic duties, which allowed me to gain a further grasp of these anthropological ideas in native and second tongue.

I took the same approach with the xilam association's data: I both read and listened to the multimedia data and used the interview and field notes data to reconsider the public information. There were no discrepancies between the public and personal data that I gathered, and in the discussion that follows, I focus chiefly on the public data issued through the official website, Facebook group and YouTube channel – the three media through which the Xilam Martial Art Association communicates to the general public and the Mexican martial arts community. Overall, this approach is used, as Paulus et al. [2014: 142] explain, 'to explore how meaning is produced within and across space and place'. Considering this, my choice of using xilam's official material was supported by an analysis of articles by Marisela Ugalde and other important characters in the xilam story, alongside video interviews conducted and writings produced by other professionals, such as the journalist Arturo de la Peña [2014].

With this array of data, I thus adopted a holistic form of analysis that examined the main themes (content analysis), the core stories being told (narrative analysis), how specific forms of language were being utilized (discourse analysis), and the ways in which practitioners were engaging with specific audiences, such as interviewers (conversational analysis). Overall, this holistic strategy enabled me to assess the extent in which the xilam association presented itself to the public for martial arts and general audiences as a modern martial art based on ancient traditions. I therefore employed both the whats (content, themes and ideas) and

hows (methods, language and rhetoric) outlined by Smith and Sparkes [2014].

The analysis developed over several stages. First, I looked at each source of raw data as singular units and assessed their content. Later, I looked for core narratives and discourse, an approach that links to my consideration of central philosophies underpinning them [Jennings 2015]. Third, I looked at the ways in which the messages were being shared through images, sounds, metaphors and other forms of rhetoric. Finally, as the information is interconnected through hyperlinks and references, I examined the different sites through video links on YouTube and related sites. This final stage provided me with an insight into how different forms of information on xilam could be accessed by a member of the general public or prospective student.

I have chosen to represent the data as a form of a reflexive realist tale incorporating my own voice [Sparkes 2002] while considering calls for an ethnography of the senses in physical culture [Sparkes 2009], the voices and musings of the official xilam movement in their three main media outlets: The official website, the Facebook group and the YouTube channel. With new patriotic and nostalgic movements like xilam, there are, quite naturally, many negative comments and critiques that deserve academic attention in future efforts to study this little-known art. However, adopting an interpretivist approach [Markula and Silk 2011], I have strived to interpret the realities and collective identity/knowledge of the group, with no political interests in intervening with, challenging or changing this social group and movement. In order to construct the discussion that follows, I represent the findings through sights, sounds and physical feelings. All the data shown here is originally in Spanish, and therefore all the extracts are my translations.

DISCUSSION

From the holistic approach to analysis, I discovered two clear themes: First, a comical critique of contemporary Mexico, which was at times accompanied by talk of Mexico's unique characteristics such as creativity and ingenuity. This is in turn connected to the more serious (and even academic and poetic) tone of writings and documentary videos on Mesoamerican culture – particularly the general philosophy and warrior philosophies that they shared. A second theme was the presentation of xilam as a way to recover seemingly lost traditions for modern Mexican citizens. This was to be achieved via physical (re)education to form strong, healthy, and proud citizens to help their country as it struggled with its own identity in relation to its own past and to other nations and cultures – perhaps the term 'civilisations' would be apt.

In terms of this national identity, I had considered using the Nobel Prize winner Octavio Paz's famed essay, *El Laberinto de la Solitud* or *The Labyrinth of Solitude* [1994] but later felt *México Profundo* provided the strongest theoretical basis for my analysis. The xilam media do not relate to the text in a direct way, but their dismissal of Western models of capitalism, finance and government are juxtaposed with images, talk and writings on the wisdom and brilliance of the ancient Mesoamerican/pre-Hispanic societies and how their philosophy still lives on in a physical art form. I begin my interpretation through the consideration of the sometimes scholarly and other times tongue-in-cheek viewpoints of the Mexico of today.

A Critique of Contemporary Mexico and a Glimpse of Mesoamerican Philosophy

Ancient Mesoamerica, as I have briefly explained, was home to one of Earth's original (and isolated) civilisations, which was based on settlement in city states, the cultivation of maize and the establishment of trade networks of necessary resources. This later led to the flourishing of art, poetry, writing and other aspects of culture [Smith and Mason 2000].

In contrast, the globalised Mexico of today is a member of the G20, home of the world's largest Spanish-speaking population and is Latin America's second biggest economy. However, as Bonfil Batalla has commented, many Mexicans do not feel part of the Westernization project. Indeed, many use social media platforms to express their outrage in response to fiscal reforms made by politicians far removed from the daily reality of the bustling streets and scorching fields. On the xilam Facebook group, some advocates share jokes about the banking industry. For example, a cartoon cat with a book and spectacles is depicted with the following text: 'I am going to measure your opinions in a bank and see if it generates me any interest one day'. Fierce criticism is also issued to the Bank of Mexico and jokes are made of its famously overweight chief director, Agustín Carstens, who 'hasn't tightened his belt'. Other funny videos show builders' labourers jumping off the first floor of a building to land safely on a heap of sand between repetitive work operations, and a man using a Coca Cola bottle – the epitome of Americanisation, bad health and capitalism – as a musical instrument.

On a more serious note, the xilam community attempts to instill pride in the underlying indigenous society that forms the bedrock of modern Mexico. They criticize the strong interest from many Mexicans in foreign cultures (particularly Western and East Asian) in terms of fashion, beauty ideals, sports and general life philosophy. On the group's website, they write of the suppression of native culture:

> Throughout the passage of time in Mexico, there has been the belief in the concepts and disciplines of development from foreign cultures. During the period of conquest, the native culture was pushed underground, yet this was retained in the collective subconscious and multiple traditions, being in this way transmitted to this day by shamans and teachers who survived silently while the course of time and history brought the country to its modernity.
> [www.xilam.org]

This marginalized native culture, like all cultures, is said to have resisted over time. The key terms 'rescue' and 'renaissance' are common in the lexicon of xilam, as they claim below in relation to the above statement:

> In contemporary times, and responding to a basic need – a people unaware of their culture and inserted within imposed beliefs that cannot flourish – there has reemerged an interest in a search for the culture that was guarded during this invasion. There are many stories of this renaissance, which propose an awakening of the people from their internal force after more than 500 years of submission.
> [www.xilam.org]

Furthermore, the association provides examples of scientific discoveries and discussions of the achievements of the pre-Hispanic cultures, in particular the elements that unite them: An apparently esoteric (from a somewhat Orientalist posture), supposedly barbaric (from a Western viewpoint) and perhaps highly scientific philosophy based on the 'exact' sciences of astronomy and mathematics (as we understand science today in the West). For example, there are documentary videos offering a great paradigm shift: Claiming that the Greco-Roman calendar is inaccurate, like that of the Chinese, and the only accurate one is the Maya, which perceives time as a spiral.

Unsurprisingly, there is little mention of the 'darker' aspects of ancient Mesoamerica in their different stages of development, specifically the many sacrifices and domination through violence that is evidenced in tombs and other sources. Instead, the association opts for a more utopian perspective, like some taijiquan organisations do today in terms of ecological relationships with the Earth, animals and the elements [Brown, Jennings and Sparkes 2014]. The personal pronouns used by the xilam group are intimate: The pre-Hispanic people are perceived as being 'us', and there are many references to 'our ancestors' and 'our grandparents'. This is a key issue, according to Bonfil Batalla, as Mexicans often talk of the ancient Mesomericans as 'they', with the 'we' being the Mestizo (racially and culturally mixed), cosmopolitan and Westernised people. The xilam community reverse this discourse,

and refer to 'they' as the corrupt politicians and capitalists that favour foreign investment over internal development, and still consider Mexico to be Tenochtitlan, the ancient Aztec capital, as expressed on Mexican Independence Day, 15th September:

> **Mexico!!**
>
> **A warrior with name and surname, that is predestined to fly like an eagle, that knew to wait for the time and soon take the place in history that was prepared for it, no matter how much abuse it suffered, how many have defamed it, how many have wanted to violate it without honour, its richness, its territory and the most valuable, the heart of its children that so many times have turned their backs, rejected and depreciated its treasure, its culture, its greatness.**
>
> **Mexico Tenochtitlan lives and will live forever while the world still exists!**
>
> [https://www.facebook.com/silam8/]

Overall, the Facebook group provides the best example of the three media sources in terms of a general look at Mesoamerica, modern Mexico and what it means to be a warrior. In terms of the last issue, here are some general quotes of wisdom issued to the members and general public:

> **When the question is to value or not to value, to walk alone or to be accompanied, the most important thing is to give yourself consideration of the magnitude of the required commitment, crossing a path on which herds will follow your footsteps.**
>
> **It is not necessary to be followed to be valued. The lion walks alone, while the sheep walks in a herd.**
>
> [https://www.facebook.com/silam8/]

This respect for the solitary, alternative way of living is advocated in xilam's classes and courses, as I observed in a year's participant observation. In the next section of the discussion, the specific elements of Mesoamerican civilisation, pre-Hispanic cultures and warrior philosophy are analysed in conjunction.

The Warrior Philosophy of Xilam and México Profundo

With the gradual destruction of Mesoamerican society as the official paradigm for life in Mexico, the philosophies of life and death, health, the body and warriors have slowly diminished. The ideal of a warrior – in this case, the eagle and jaguar warriors – is reinterpreted for modern-day warriors who, as Marisela Ugalde explained to me [Jennings 2015a], is a person whose thoughts, feelings and actions are in unison, who fights every day to pursue their non-selfish and often altruistic goals for their family, nation and the Earth. This non-literal, perhaps metaphorical notion of a warrior is the guiding point for xilam, and it may be a factor that connects it to other traditionalist movements in the martial arts worldwide. Furthermore, xilam is posited as part of a broader set of physical cultural practices, games and rituals that could be described as a Mesoamerican 'body culture' [Eichberg 2000], including dance, the ball game, interactive and reactive games and wrestling.

As may be expected, the bulk of the media on xilam concerns introducing the art itself and the core warrior philosophy that binds its inspiration from the seemingly disparate Maya, Mexica and Zapotecan cultures, although there is mention of other aspects of the body culture, such as the so-called Mayan Yoga and pre-Hispanic dance [for a video, see https://goo.gl/JHB81J]. As I have shown in the previous section, this philosophy is posited as being both scientific and pragmatic: Scientific through its connections to astronomy and mathematics and pragmatic for its ability to be applied and readily understood by people living thousands of years after its foundation. Researchers in martial arts studies have begun to look at the connections between martial arts and elements of religion [Brown, Jennings and Molle 2009] following earlier work looking into the links between martial arts philosophy and phenomenology. Xilam provides an insight into how a Latin American martial art has rediscovered and re-invented an ancient warrior culture, one which the organization uses as a basis for the art. In the official website, they clearly lay out the overall aims of this martial arts system:

> **A project for the integral development of Mexicans through the retaking of their national identity by means of physical, intellectual and social activities.**
>
> **Xilam seeks personal development [through] willpower, emotion, intelligence and conscience. It merges sport, discipline and the identity with Mexican pre-Hispanic origins.**
>
> [www.xilam.org]

Xilam is the name of an ancient Maya city in Yucatan, Mexico that means 'to remove the skin'. However, like the idea of a warrior, this is non-literal and metaphoric. In an interview recorded on the YouTube channel, Marisela Ugalde claimed:

> For us, xilam is to remove the ego, to remove our old beliefs, our resources, without self-interest. Xilam is to remove this skin and give oneself to others, to do things for other people. This is for the rescue of a discipline and for Mexico to have its roots again – its philosophical basis strong among the youth.
>
> To create a martial art, it is not enough to have the physical movements, but a philosophical rescue … xilam is a total rescue … A youngster without goals and a course is a youngster lost in our society, lost in humanity. Xilam tries to give a goal to every young Mexican: To find their culture.

[https://goo.gl/V24lNB]

Like many warrior philosophies, xilam is concerned with continuous hard work towards a specified goal until the time of death – death is not feared, and is seen as being as natural as birth. Again, the metaphorical rhetoric blends with discourse concerning the connection between the underlying nation of Mexico and the individual Mexican who must know his/her origins in order to understand themselves:

> Xilam was initiated to wake the warrior that is strong and powerful, but has been forgotten … he has his origin as his weapon and his story as his shield.
>
> Xilam is a difficult art to learn. Before understanding what it is, you must learn what it is to be a warrior. The warrior is an example of excellence, of wisdom, of knowing oneself, of honesty, of truth, of strength and life itself.

[https://goo.gl/I6Zi5x]

On the basic description on the association's Facebook page, it is claimed that the group's objective is 'to recover our roots and strengthen our nation that is Mexico'. These roots are the pre-Hispanic ones seen in photographs, images and documentary videos shared on this social networking site. The notion of recovering Mexico's pre-Hispanic roots is the focal point of México Profundo, in which the use of Mesoamerican philosophy and practices should be the driving point for the national project: The past and hidden present used to guide the country to a future that works for the majority of Mexicans far removed from the capitalist, Western democracy that Mexico appears to be.

Below is a brief description of the art on the Facebook group, which is intended for a public audience:

> A technique of body-to-body fighting, endurance, precision and use of weapons, which are incorporated to structure the system, as well as to give xilam the pre-Hispanic worldview to translate in terms of a fighting art, a vision, a set of life ethics that permit the practitioner a glimpse of their transcendence as a human being.
>
> It is the re-composition from contemporary Mexico of an important part of the experience of ancestral life that not only implies a martial art but a life philosophy and personal development project where the individual discovers themselves and their similarities [with others] to 'remove the skin'.

[https://goo.gl/FGH7ud]

As I have demonstrated, this 'removing of the skin' is not a technical destruction of a human body's exterior but a metaphor for the gradual discovery of human nature that is internal to all people, regardless of 'race', ethnicity, gender, biological sex, age, sexual orientation or physical ability. It is the understanding of willpower and determination, self-control and precision and love for humanity, the nation and the world that are possible for all citizens. Xilam is thus an educational platform for Mexicans (and Mexican Americans) to rediscover and understand their pre-Hispanic roots in a carnal, living and feeling way.

Interestingly, and perhaps ironically, by using modern technology like Facebook and YouTube to disseminate indigenous wisdom and warrior philosophies, the xilam association is engaging with both Mesoamerican and Western civilisations. Native or indigenous Mexico, so commonly associated with poverty and lack of technological and economic progression, can be bonded with progressive business models and technological platforms to reach a wider audience in person and online. In an ideal or utopian sense, the half a millennium of conflict might now be resolved. This is important when considering different philosophies under one unifying paradigm, i.e., a civilisation. The xilam association is proud to share the fact that the martial arts are not only part of the cultural heritage of Asian civilisation. Marisela explains the warrior philosophy – perhaps something that connects all traditional martial arts, which may connect to other philosophies, such as ecological ones: 'To have the sufficient willpower to control your emotions, to have clear thinking, and to have the consciousness that all of us live on this planet'.

Nevertheless, the focus on indigenous culture and national identity may to some degree limit the internationalization of xilam that has been seen in other Latin American martial arts like Capoeira and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, which have proliferated across the globe thanks to diasporic immigration and the efforts of various entrepreneurs through varying degrees of business and formal organizations [De Rocha, Esteves, Cotta de Mello and Ferreira da Silva 2015]. Xilam remains a local, relatively unknown martial art due to the central control of its founder. To be spread across the globe requires a change in the organization from a family organization or body lineage [Brown and Jennings 2011] to a modern, 'Westernized' martial arts association – which could damage or disrupt its traditional ethos. Whether it follows the path of many Japanese martial arts like Judo [Villamon, Brown, Espartero and Gutierrez 2004] or maintains a traditionalist, esoteric approach, only time will tell. Its future, like that of Mexico itself, is in the hands of the Mexicans of today: To deliver a new project for a profound Mexico or continue along the path of Westernization. This leads me to consider this case study in the following conclusion.

CONCLUSION
XILAM, MÉXICO PROFUNDO AND THE INVENTION OF MARTIAL ARTS

In this contribution to the invention of martial arts, I have made no visible reference to Hobsbawm and Ranger's classic edited collection The Invention of Tradition [1983]. This has been well utilized by other researchers in our area [to name a few, Inoue 1998; Nakajima and Thompson 2012], but it is pertinent to briefly consider the case of xilam here, as peers in martial arts studies may find an empirical or thematic comparison useful. Xilam is most certainly an invented tradition, but the prefix 're-' would be more suitable: It is an attempt to re-invent a 'lost' martial arts culture that was suppressed and nearly lost due to years of conquest, colonization and later changes through the Holy Inquisition in Nueva España (New Spain) and movements towards (post)modernity by the Mexican Republic. It is an approach to re-educate the general Mexican population in a dynamic and lively way about their origins, which contrasts to the formal academic approach of conventional education. It is also a way to re-invent Mexico's image, as part of a broader approach to the México Profundo.

This theoretical framework inspired by México Profundo provides a new way to look at cultures and civilisation and could be fruitfully paired with post-colonial studies, cultural and social anthropology, media studies and a broad range of subject-specific 'studies' that, as

Paul Bowman [2015b] has pointed out, are fundamental cognate disciplines for martial arts studies. By using theories developed in other countries, chiefly former colonies and indigenous societies, we can see the world through different lenses beyond theories from Western Europe (particularly France, with its plethora of outstanding theorists such as Barthes, Bourdieu, Derrida and Foucault) and the Anglosphere. Alternative notions of physical or body cultures from often-overlooked regions of the world [Eichberg 2000] may be seen from the native rather than Western academic perspective, adding to the richness of analysis.

In line with the recent abundance of new studies on Latin American martial arts, the aim of this article was the provide an insight into how one Mexican martial art promotes pre-Hispanic philosophy to the general public using contemporary media like Facebook and YouTube. It was restricted to these three formal and official media for the Xilam Martial Arts Association, which derives from a broader ethnographic study of this physical culture. As part of a special edition of Martial Arts Studies on the invention of martial arts, xilam is used as an exemplar of how a recently created martial art may be used to rediscover ancient traditions, re-educate contemporary people about their ancestors and to re-invent a 'lost' body culture for the benefit of future generations.

This part of a wider study of xilam adds to the corpus of knowledge in martial arts studies by using an example of a martial art from Mexico, a country that is often overlooked by scholars in the fields of the anthropology, philosophy and sociology of sport in terms of the contemporary nation. It contributes to the broader studies of Latin American fighting systems, and also provides an introduction to the idea of México Profundo to a new audience, who may find some of the core concepts useful for studies of other indigenous or folk cultures and forms of combat from different parts of the world. This article also provides an example of how a multimedia approach can be useful by considering the different senses (here, sight and sound), as seen in earlier calls in the specific methodological tradition of ethnography [Sparkes 2009].

Despite these small additions to the body of knowledge, this article invites more questions than it addresses. So far in this investigation, I have shared the life history of one of the few living female founders of a martial art, and have also suggested ways in which technology and collaboration can be used to disseminate such stories [Jennings 2015b]. In the specific focus of xilam, how do the practitioners engage with the public information? How does the data serve for a general discussion of authenticity, tradition, ancestry and the re-invention of martial arts? Further research into xilam also needs to look at the critiques and attacks on xilam, how the practitioners and their supporters respond to

this and how the art is taught in regular classes and seminars as well as showcased in demonstrations and martial arts exhibitions. The animal aspects of the warrior philosophy and the pedagogical and didactical methods are also worthwhile themes for future writings and talks.

Further work on xilam and similar traditionalist martial arts could use three terms deriving from the suffix trans-: Transformation (in terms of practitioners as a direct and by-product of self- and shared cultivation), transmission (of the art from generation to generation) and transcendence (for both the practitioner and art). The third term, transcendence, has been raised as a potential aim of the martial arts in a recent article by Sixt Wetzler [2015], who offers a look at the construction of meaning in martial arts. This social construction of meaning [also the focus in Green 2015] and transcendence are core issues for the xilam practitioners, as can be seen in the closing extracts below, offered as a final reflection:

> You are the recognised and exercised being from the effort and the psychophysical coordination, which permits you to integrate as one being, which is one's own individual, where you discover who you are, what you represent, which has the elusive heritage and origin, genetics, history, education, culture, etc. To be able to identify one who can transform or better themselves this day, giving a sense of life that permits one to make a decision and make it transcendental.

> Xilam is based on a history that dates back thousands of years, having its origin in pre-Hispanic peoples transcending until our times with their discipline, philosophy, spiritual and ceremonial mysticism, these characteristics that combine with the unique influences of the modern era in a Mexican martial arts system.

> [www.xilam.org]

REFERENCES

Alter, Joseph S. 1992. *The Wrestler's Body: Identity and Ideology in North India.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Assuncao, Matthias R. 2004. *Capoeira: A History of an Afro-Brazilian Martial Art.* London: Routledge.

Bar-On Cohen, Einat. 2010. 'Globalisation of the War on Violence: Israeli Close Combat, Krav Maga, and Sudden Alterations of Intensity'. *Social Anthropology* 18.3, 267-288.
http://doi.org/c3xgc6

Bonfil Batalla, Guillermo. 1994. *México Profundo: Una Civilización Negada.* Mexico City: Debosillo.

Bonfil Batalla, Guillermo. 1996. *Mexico Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization*, translated by Phillip A. Dennis. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bowman, Paul. 2015a. *Martial Arts Studies: Disrupting Disciplinary Boundaries.* London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Bowman, Paul. 2015b. 'Asking the Question: Is Martial Arts Studies an Academic Field?' *Martial Arts Studies* 1, 3-19.
http://doi.org/bjqj

Brown, David, and George Jennings. 2011. 'Body Lineage: Conceptualising the Transmission of Traditional Asian Martial Arts in the West'. *STAPS: Revue Internationale des Sciences du Sport et de l'Education Physique* 32, 61-72.
http://doi.org/bjqk

Brown, David, George Jennings, and Andrea Molle. 2009. 'Exploring Relationships between Asian Martial Arts and Religion'. *Stadion: International Journal of the History of Sport* 45, 47-66.

Brown, David, George Jennings, and Andrew Sparkes. 2014. 'Taijiquan the "Taiji World" Way: Towards a Cosmopolitan View of Ecology'. *Societies* 4.3, 380-398.
http://doi.org/bjqm

Channon, Alex and George Jennings. 2014. 'Exploring Embodiment through Martial Arts and Combat Sports: A Review of Empirical Research'. *Sport in Society* 17.6, 773-789.
http://doi.org/bjqn

Channon, Alex and Christopher Matthews. 2015. '"It is what it is": Masculinity, Homosexuality, and Inclusive Discourse in Mixed Martial Arts'. *Journal of Homosexuality* 62.7, 936-956
http://doi.org/bjqp

De la Peña, Arturo. 2014. 'Xilam: Mexico's First Martial Art'. Available at: http://www.arturodlp.com/xilam-the-first-mexican-martial-art/.

De Rocha, Angela, Felipe Esteves, Renato Cotta de Mello, and Jorge da Ferreira Silva. 2015. 'Diasporic and Translational Internationalization: The Case of Brazilian Martial Arts'. *BAR* 12.4, 403-420.
http://doi.org/bjqq

Downey, Greg. 2005. *Learning Capoeira: Lessons in Cunning from an Afro-Brazilian Martial Art.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Eichberg, Henning. 1998. *Body Cultures: Essays on Sport, Space, and Identity.* London: Routledge.

Federación de Juegos y Deportes Autóctonos y Tradicionales http://www.jcarlosmacias.com/autoctonoytradicional/.

Goodger, John. 1982. 'Judo Players as a Gnostic Sect'. *Religion* 12.4, 333-344.
http://doi.org/bws6r9

Green, Kyle. 2011. 'It Hurts so it is Real: Sensing the Seduction of Mixed Martial Arts'. *Social & Cultural Geography* 12.4, 377-396.
http://doi.org/d9p4bk

Green, Kyle. 2015. 'Tales from the Mat: Narrating Men and Meaning Making in the Mixed Martial Arts Gym'. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 27.
http://doi.org/bjqr

Hallinan, Chris and Barry Judd eds. 2013. *Native Games: Indigenous Peoples and Sports in a Post-Colonial Word.* Bingley: Emerald Publishing.

Hobsbawm, Eric and Terrance Ranger eds. 1983. *The Invention of Tradition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Inoue, Shun. 1998. 'The Invention of the Martial Arts: Kano Jiguro and Kodokan Judo', in *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan,* edited by Steven Vlastos, Berkeley: University of California Press, 163-173.

James, Alan and Richard Jones. 1982. 'The Social World of Karate-do'. *Leisure Studies* 1.3, 337-354.
http://doi.org/b9phb5

Jennings, George. 2012. 'Learning, Mastery, and Ageing: Alternative Narratives among British Practitioners of Traditionalist Chinese Martial Arts'. *Asia Pacific Journal of Sport and Social Science* 1.2-3, 128-142.
http://doi.org/bjqs

Jennings, George. 2015a. 'Mexican Female Warrior: The Life History of Marisela Ugalde, the Founder of Xilam'. In *Global Perspectives on Women in Combat Sports: Women Warriors around the World*, edited by Alex Channon and Christopher Matthews, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 119-134.

Jennings, George. 2015b. 'Sharing Women's Stories of Martial Arts: The Life History of Marisela Uglade, the Founder of Xilam'. Martial Arts Studies: An International, Interdisciplinary Conference, Cardiff University, UK. Presented 12th June 2015.

Jennings, George, David Brown, and Andrew Sparkes. 2011. '"It can be a religion if you want": Wing Chun Kung Fu as a Secular Religion'. *Ethnography* 11.4, 533-557.
http://doi.org/bdz4mt

Kipling, Rudyard. 1985 [1894/1895]. *The Jungle Book*. New York: Bantam Classics.

Matthews, Christopher. 2015. 'The Tyranny of the Male Preserve'. *Gender & Society* vol. 30 no. 2, 312-333
http://doi.org/bjqt

Markula, Pirkko and Michael Silk. 2011. *Qualitative Research for Physical Culture*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Nakajima, Tetsuya and Lee Thompson. 2012. 'Judo and the Process of Nation-Building in Japan: Kano Jigoro and the Formation of Kodokan Judo'. *Asia Pacific Journal of Sport and Social Science* 1.2-3, 97-110.
http://doi.org/bjqv

Paulus, Trena M., Jessica N. Lester, and Paul G. Dempster. 2014. *Digital Tools for Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.

Paz, Octavio. 1994. *The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings*. New York: The Grove Press.

Ryan, Michael J. 2011a. 'I Did Not Return a Master, but Well-Cudgeled was I: The Role of "Body Techniques" in the Transmission of Venezuelan Stick and Machete Fighting'. *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 16.1, 1-23.
http://doi.org/d62fr8

Ryan, Michael J. 2011b. 'The Development and Transmission of Stick Fighting in Venezuela: Garrote de Lara, a Civilian Combative Art of the Pueblo'. *The Latin Americanist* 55.3: 67-92.
http://doi.org/d48xt5

Smith, Brett and Andrew Sparkes. 2014. *Qualitative Methods in Sport, Exercise and Health: From Process to Product*. London: Sage.

Smith, Michael E. and Marylin A. Mason eds. 2000. *The Ancient Civilizations of Mesoamerica: A Reader*. London: Wiley-Blackwell.

Sparkes, Andrew C. 2002. *Telling Tales in Qualitative Research: A Qualitative Journey*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Sparkes, Andrew C. 2009. 'Ethnography and the Senses: Challenges and Possibilities'. *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise* 1.1, 21-35.
http://doi.org/bcxr96

Spencer, Dale C. 2013. *Ultimate Fighting and Embodiment: Violence, Gender, and Mixed Martial Arts*. London: Routledge.

Spencer, Dale C. 2014. 'From Many Masters to Many Students: YouTube, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, and Communities of Practice', *JOMEC Journal 5*. Available at: http://goo.gl/DzV53V.

Tan, Kevin S. Y. 2004. 'Constructing a Martial Tradition: Rethinking a Popular History of Karate-do', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 28.2, 169-192.
http://doi.org/b4vct9

Villamon, Miguel, David Brown, Julián Espartero, and Carlos Gutiérrez. 2004. 'The Reflexive Modernization of Judo from 1948 to the 2000 Sydney Olympics'. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 39.2, 139-152.
http://doi.org/cncr6s

Wetzler, Sixt. 2015. 'Martial Arts Studies as Kulturwissenschaft: A Possible Theoretical Framework'. *Martial Arts Studies* 1, 20-33
doi: 10.18573/j.2016.10016

Whittington, E. Michael ed. 2001. The Sport of Life and Death: The Mesoamerican Ball Game. London: Thames & Hudson.

Xilam Official Facebook Page: https://es-es.facebook.com/silam8/info/?tab=page_info.

Xilam official website: www.xilam.org.

Xilam official YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZhfJaA1_VYfm9Kyagpeyew.

Zarrilli, Phillip B. 1998. *When the Body Becomes All Eyes: Paradigms, Discourses and Practices of Power in Kalaripayattu, a South Indian Martial Art*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

CONTRIBUTOR

Paul H. Mason completed his PhD in cultural anthropology at Macquarie University (2012) under the supervision of Professors Greg Downey and John Sutton. He has conducted ethnographic fieldwork with arts communities in Indonesia and Brazil, religious minorities in India and Brazil, and tuberculosis patients in Australia and Vietnam. With support from Macquarie International, the National Department of Education in Indonesia, and the Australia Netherlands Research Collaboration, he has also conducted archival research in Australia, Brazil, Holland, and Indonesia. His research on martial arts has been published in Global Ethnographic, Cultures-Kairós, *and* Inside Indonesia, *and he recently coedited* The Fighting Art of Pencak Silat and its Music *with Dr Uwe Paetzold (Robert Schumann University of Music, Düsseldorf), published as part of Brill's Southeast Asian Library Series.*

FIGHT-DANCING AND THE FESTIVAL
TABUIK IN PARIAMAN, INDONESIA AND IEMANJÁ IN SALVADOR DA BAHIA, BRAZIL
PAUL H. MASON

ABSTRACT

Festivals bring people together in affirmations of community. This article looks at two festivals in coastal locations in Indonesia and Brazil with a close inspection of performances of fight-dancing included within both festivals. The improvisatory or choreographed organization of the fight-dancing performances echoes the manner in which the festivals themselves are assembled. As these festivals grow in popularity, the process of inventing tradition is heterogeneously co-constituted by those parties who actively invest in the symbolic capital of the events. Verbal and non-verbal forms of expression reinforce each other in the construction of a multivalent sense of regional traditions. The corporeal engagement of organisers and participants blurs the boundary between embodied remembering and narrative accounts. Based on archival research and ethnographic fieldwork, this article explores the interweaving of fight-dancing with the history, growth, and post-colonial expression of regional festivals.

INTRODUCTION

Religious festivals are important sites of cultural activity. In this article, I discuss performances of fight-dancing featured during religious festivals in Indonesia and Brazil. Tabuik[1] is the name of an annual festival in Pariaman, West Sumatra. Iemanjá is the name of an annual festival in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil. During both festivals, people carry objects in procession out to sea. These seaside festivals exhibit almost entirely discrete histories, precipitate from completely different religions, and have evolved in geographically separate societies. Nonetheless, they feature ritual tasks with overlapping similarity, topographically similar sites, and incorporate performance arts for public entertainment. Amidst the similarities that run through these coastal festivals, I draw attention to dissimilar performances of fight-dancing. In the context of both festivals, fight-dancing performances have been mobilised along with other performance genres to instantiate a construal of the past serving variable interests in the present.

The festivals of Tabuik and Iemanjá both arose from minority groups within forcefully expatriated communities. The festival of Hosay in Trinidad studied by Korom [2003] has similar origins. Korom suggests that community events such as the festival of Hosay flourish through 'cultural creolisation', a process where minority religious communities adopt local customs to allow their rituals to thrive creatively [Korom 2003: 5]. Korom points out that it is in the public arenas of these rituals that cultural encounters take place and gradual transformations of the observances occur [Korom 2003: 59]. The rituals become contested phenomena that are negotiated and co-constituted by the parties involved. I attempt to capture a sense of this hybridity in Indonesia and Brazil by describing the activities that accompany and surround the main events.

Presentations of fight-dancing are incorporated into the public entertainment of the festivals of Tabuik and Iemanjá. The West Sumatran form of fight-dancing is called *silek minang* and the Brazilian form of fight-dancing is called *capoeira*. Choreographed performances of silek minang appear during the official proceedings of the Tabuik festival, while the improvised art of capoeira is usually found somewhere alongside the festival of Iemanjá. The way fight-dancing is embedded within each festival provides a framework to conceptualise the similarities and differences between silek minang and capoeira. The

analogous social settings of the performances provide some common ground to grapple with various internal and contextual processes of Indonesian and Brazilian fight-dancing. Emphasising the idiosyncrasies and issues of the two communities, I explore the history, religious themes, and contemporary manifestations of Tabuik and Iemanjá, and describe the respective performances of fight-dancing.[2]

PART 1
FROM PERSIA TO PARIAMAN

People from the hinterland region of West Sumatra say that the coastal region is rich with legends, mystical beliefs, and Sufi traditions. These traditions are indigenous creations blended with adaptations of performances from neighbouring regions and abroad. The festival of Tabuik in the coastal city of Padang Pariaman is a popular example of such a blend. Tabuik is a fascinating religious festival incorporating local and foreign elements that reflect the diverse influences from the region's history.

Tabuik commemorates the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the grandchild of the Prophet Muhammad who died in the battle of Karbala in 680 AD. Around the world, Hussein's ordeal has sometimes been remembered by tragic and distorted acts of martyrdom [Israeli 2002] as well as through theatrical re-enactments and processions. The public rituals of the commemoration of Hussein are known for their eccentric breast-beating, weeping, wailing, self-flagellation, or self-mortification with razors, flails, and knives [Chelkowski 1979: 2-3; Pinault 1992: 135, 180]. In Indonesia, however, Hussein's struggle is recalled through diverse performances and ritual traditions, including the dance and body percussion of the Acehnese.

In Padang Pariaman, the re-enactment of the suffering of Hussein at Karbala has become an annual cultural event celebrated on his anniversary, the tenth day of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar. This event promotes social cohesion and regional identity as

---

1   The festival of Tabuik is named after the tabuik cenotaphs that are the focal point of proceedings. 'Tabuik' with a capital 'T' is used for the name of the festival and 'tabuik' with a lower-case 't' is used for the name of the cenotaphs. Please note as well that this word is Indonesian. Nouns in Indonesian can be singular or plural depending on the context of the sentence.

2   My introduction to these festivals occurred through my fieldwork pursuits in fight-dancing. I first observed and participated in Tabuik in Pariaman, West Sumatra, in January 2008. The following year, I found myself immersed in the activities of a capoeira group in Rio Vermelho, Bahia, during the Festival of Iemanjá. My ability to participate within each festival and my point of observation varied. During Tabuik, my participation was confined to the observation and documentation of performances and proceedings. Like the other visitors, I was able to follow the procession to the beach, but the events had already been pre-planned and roles already assigned. During the festival of Iemanjá, I was invited to become an active participant and assist the activities of a fight-dancing group in the preparation, coordination, and celebration of the day's events.

well as tourism and trade. Although the inhabitants of Pariaman and the surrounding areas are mostly Sunni Muslims, they have embraced a convivial interpretation of this Shiite tradition.

From Persia to the furthest satellites of the Islamic world, the Ashura observances have spread and 'assumed many forms, reflecting the diverse cultures and ethnic groups among which they developed' [Nakash 1994: 142]. In Iran, annual mourning processions were well-established by the tenth century AD and have been performed with great pageantry and emotion ever since [Chelkowski 1979: 2-3]. In India, celebrations of Ashura were stimulated by a minority sect of Shiite Muslims and today involve Sunnis and Hindus [Campbell 1988; Cole 1988: 115-117]. Hindus will often visit Shiite shrines and offer homage to Hussein during the month of Muharram [Pinault 1993: 160]. From India, Ashura has spread further and become a popular pan-Indian festival in places where Indians went as indentured workers and where Shiites were a minority [Wood 1968: 151]. In Trinidad, the festivities became part of the carnival period festivities and assumed the name Hosay supposedly as a derivation of the name Hussein [Korom 2003]. Tabuik in West Sumatra has formed in a distant outpost of the Shiite world [Kartomi 1986: 144] where a predominantly Sunni community continues a unique expression of the Muharram observances.

Present day Muharram ceremonies date back to at least the tenth century Shiites in Iran [Kartomi 1986: 144]. The earliest roots can be traced even further back to pre-Islamic Persian legends. Muharram ceremonies found ready ground in the ritual plays of Sasanian and Parthian tragedies of ancient Persia [Yarshater 1979: 89] and the origin and development of the indigenous ritual drama of Hussein can be drawn from Mesopotamian, Anatolian, and Egyptian myths [Yarshater 1979: 94]. Pre-Islamic Persian legends with themes of redemptive sacrifice that venerate deceased heroes find continuation in Hussein's story [Chelkowski 1979: 2-3]. Supporters believe that Hussein's suffering and obedience to the will of God gave him the exclusive privilege of making intercession for believers to enter Paradise [Thaiss 1994: 40]. The mourning processions were developed in Persia after 1500 CE and then, through Persian contact with India, became a recent unique Indo-Muslim culture that cannot claim great age [Kartomi 1986: 144].

Muharram commemorations found throughout the Islamic world all display their local distinctiveness. In Pariaman, for example, cenotaphs are brought out to sea; in other locations, they are immersed in rivers or tanks of sacred water [Korom 2003: 189, 269]. The submersion of the cenotaphs in water appears to follow the Hindu custom of immersing a deity after a religious festival [de Tassy 1995: 33; Pinault

1992: 61-62, 153-165]. The tabuik cenotaphs themselves resemble the *madya* tower-shrines made for funeral rites in Bali [Lueras 1994: 197-203]. Although observances of Muharram are practiced by Muslims in remembrance of martyrdom, they may also have connections to fertility rituals [Horowitz 1964: 80] and Hindu observances of Krishna and Ganesha [Forster 1924: 314]. Muharram ceremonies, sometimes called Tabot [e.g. Permana 1997], could even be related to celebrations of the Ark of the Covenant or a form of processional worship from the Old Testament (the Torah) celebrating the Tablets of Law onto which the Ten Commandments were inscribed. Commemorations of the Ten Commandments involving Tabot are still carried out in places such as Ethiopia. According to Edward Ullendorff [1968: 82, 122], the word Tabot is derived from the Jewish-Palestinian Aramaic word *Tebota*, which in turn is derived from the Hebrew *Tebah* meaning box or ark. In any particular location, Muharram ceremonies have been susceptible to the confluence of multifarious contributions and interpretations.

Early Shiite influences in Indonesia possibly opened the space for a later inculcation of the Muharram tradition into the communities of Bengkulu and Pariaman. During the fourteenth century, the Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyyah, a major Shiite literary work, was translated into Malay [Brakel 1975: 60-61, 75, cited by Kartomi 1986: 141-142, 144]. Classical Malay literature indicates that early Indonesian Islam had a very strong Shiite character [Wieringa 2000]. Today in Indonesia, the Shiitic text, Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyyah, has been thoroughly neutralized so that no Sunni could possibly object to the stories within it [Wieringa 1996].

The Sporadic Growth of Tabuik in Pariaman

English and Dutch colonial powers acted as catalysts in the transplantation of Ashura rites from India to Indonesia. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the British took Indian soldiers and farmers to West Sumatra and Trinidad. Of these indentured workers, only a small minority were Shiite Muslims [Wood 1968: 151], but the Muharram ceremonies came to involve Sunnis and Hindus [Campbell 1988] and over time the processional festivities sporadically prospered.

In West Sumatra, Muharram ceremonies were first brought to Bengkulu by Sepoy Indians from Madras and Bengal [Estudantin 2009: 180]. Of the Sepoy regiments deployed by the British, it is estimated that up to 20 percent of the soldiers were Muslim, a majority were Hindu, and a minority were Sikh, Christians and Jews [Mead 1858: 28-32]. Many Indians married with the native citizens, and their children

are known as Sipai. In Bengkulu, the celebration, known as *Tabut* in this region, is carried on by Sipai descendents [Widiastuti 2003]. Though Shiites comprised only a minority of the sepoy troops under the command of British colonial powers, the Muharram ceremonies proved to be popular among the expatriate and Sumatran communities.

From Bengkulu, the Muharram ceremonies were subsequently brought to Pariaman, supposedly by a Muslim leader named Kadar Ali [Kartomi 1986: 142]. In Pariaman, the guardians of the Tabuik ritual were a select group of descendents. Recently, however, this role and its responsibilities have been diffused throughout two subdistricts of Pariaman city, the Pasar and Subarang communities. The festival has changed from a small religious ritual to a city-wide celebration. Newspapers and TV reports suggest that the festivities have enjoyed greater growth in Pariaman and become more famous in this region.

Figure 1: The Muharram festivities in West Sumatra in 1939. The ornamented edifice in the centre of the photograph is a cenotaph (model tomb) called a tabuik. This tabuik was constructed especially for a procession on the tenth day of Muharram. KITLV archives, Leiden [KLV001049773]

When the Western Coastal area of Sumatra was handed over to the Dutch after the Treaty of London was signed in 1824, some Sepoy troops remained in Pariaman. They carried on the Shiite tradition. By 1831 the Tabuik festivities were well-established and have continued, though somewhat sporadically, ever since [Bachyul 2006]. Some Indonesian scholars have suggested that, following the British colonial government, the Dutch provided funds for the ceremonies in order to create unrest, trigger quarrels between Islamic groups, and weaken the resistance of the West Sumatrans [Ernatip et al. 2001: 14-5, cited by Estudantin 2009: 180], although evidence for these claims is minimal. Nonetheless, such interpretations are possible because carriers of tabuik edifices were pitted against each other and would often physically fight. The Dutch may have believed this ceremony would divide the local Minangkabau communities. Whatever the truth may be, the tradition in Pariaman and Bengkulu has been popular enough to outlast colonial rule and has sporadically managed to attract diverse sponsors. For a brief period, the festival's commercial value attracted sponsorship from local businesses, mainly Chinese traders. Nowadays, the event enjoys sponsorship from the local government and the Department of Tourism, both of which have supported the inclusion of traditional Minangkabau performances.

Across Southeast Asia, observances of Muharram also had economic and other obscure ties to Chinese business [Kartomi 1986: 158] and the Triads [Wynne 1941]. In the colonies of the British Empire, the British colonial government viewed public Shiite Muharram observances primarily as a security risk harbouring a great potential for violence [Pinault 1992: 63] and other illicit activities [Wynne 1941]. With this perception, the British saw the need to suppress Muharram observances. While the British may have inadvertently transported the Muharram rites to Pariaman and Bengkulu, it is only because the English subsequently left that the festival prospered. Had the British retained control over the region, they would most likely have attempted to extinguish the Muharram festivities, for they believed the ceremonies were connected to Islamic and Chinese secret societies.

Originally, the Tabuik rituals were the responsibility of a small community of Sepoy descendents. The event was a costly venture involving the construction of large edifices that required generous benefactors. For some time during the 20th century, the event had been sponsored by local businesses, mostly owned by Chinese traders interested in promoting business [Kartomi 1986: 158]. President Suharto's purge of suspected communists in 1965-1966 saw a rapid decline of Chinese traders. While the number of benefactors in Pariaman dwindled, the festival nonetheless continued to gain popularity and government officials and national corporations began to assume a larger role in the events. Today the event enjoys

sponsorship from the local government and the Department of Tourism. The influence of nationalism and regional pride has meant that the traditional festivities now include performances from the wider genre of Minangkabau arts; government administration, meanwhile, has sedated objectionable public aspects of the procession, sanitised incongruous religious aspects, and introduced entertainment performances from an assortment of local arts.

Procession, Submersion, and Destruction

Two of Padang Pariaman's communities, the Pasar and the Subarang, actively participate in the Tabuik procession. Through their efforts, the Tabuik tradition has become famous throughout West Sumatra. Nowadays, the government steps in to carry out much of the organization of the event.

As well as being the name of the festival, 'tabuik' is also the name given to the cenotaphs that are the focal point of the public processions in the Ashura rites. According to legend, a borak collected the scattered parts of the bodies of Hussein and his brother Hasan after the battle of Karbala and carried them to the sky. Legend also relates that the borak ordered devotees to build a tabuik every year to commemorate Hussein's death. These tabuik are the dominant material features

Figure 2: Muharram ceremonies in West Sumatra, 1948. Pictured in the centre of the photograph is a tabuik cenotaph constructed especially for the ceremonies.
KITLV archives, Leiden [KLV001009626]

Figure 3a. Mounting the umbrella-shaped handcrafted flowers
[Photo courtesy of Kaja Dutka]

Figure 3b Constructing the cenotaph
[Photo courtesy of Kaja Dutka, 2008]

Figure 3c . The finished Tabuik in the centre of town
[Photo: Paul H. Mason]

during the event. Each tabuik is an upright, standing coffin built from bamboo, rattan, cloth, paper, and decorated with eight umbrella-sized adornments covered with handcrafted flowers. This cenotaph is placed above a statue of a borak, a powerful steed with broad wings and the head of a smiling girl. A tabuik edifice has three levels and can exceed 15 metres in height and 500 kilograms in weight [Muhammad 2008]. The base level features long wooden poles that enable a group of men to carry it.

Preparation of the two tabuik cenotaphs begins on the first day of Muharram. Construction begins with the collection of earth from Subarang and Pasar land. This earth is wrapped in white cloth representing Hasan and Hussein and later put into each tabuik. Special rites accompany the making of the tabuik. These rituals represent different parts of Hussein's story and symbolise his courage in fighting the enemy as well as the courage of his son, Abi Kasim, who avenged his death. The rituals are accompanied by community events, kite races, traditional plays, various prayers, martial arts performances, Sufi dances, and speeches by political and social leaders. While the rituals generally involve select groups, the accompanying entertainment builds excitement among the broader community in anticipation of the procession of the two tabuik. The rituals and performances are all enacted before the final procession and eventual dismantling of the structures in the ocean waves at *Magrib* (sunset prayers).

On the tenth day of Muharram, the day of Ashura, the procession is officially opened with traditional performances including the Gelombang welcome-dance, the Indang seated dance, and a martial arts performance that presents the story of Hasan and Hussein in theatrical form. The procession of the two tabuik follows. Each tabuik is lifted by approximately twenty men. The tabuik are rocked, danced around, and shaken to perform a mock-battle symbolising the battle of Karbala. Onlookers shout '*Angkat Hussein*' ('Lift up Hussein') or '*Oyak! Oyak!*' ('Shake! Shake!') [Rahsilawati 2007]. The colourful umbrella-shaped decorations that ornament the tabuik evoke a prestigious air while the bobbing and shaking adds to the visual spectacle. After being shaken and turned in circles, the tabuik are carried out of the city centre. The tabuik proceed from the city centre to the beach accompanied by loud barrel-drums, hand-held kettle-drums, and synthesiser music called *organ tunggal*.

At the end of the journey, which occurs just before the evening prayer, both tabuik are thrown into the sea. What is not destroyed by the waves is pulled apart by the bearers and onlookers, for the destruction of the two tabuik symbolises both the end of the battle and the ascent of Hasan and Hussein to heaven. Some people wade into the water in search of souvenirs of the destroyed cenotaphs. However, most people return to daily life with no deeper participation in the events than that which has been crafted for them by the event organizers and government officials.

The Day of Ashura in Pariaman

On the day of Ashura, the procession of the tabuik only commences once government officials have arrived – even if that means that the procession is delayed, the mock battle shortened, and the tabuik have to be rushed to the beach to beat sunset.[3] Once the official guests arrive, a *silek gelombang* welcoming dance is performed to open the ceremonies. Silek gelombang is a greeting dance based upon the practice of silek minang. Composed of deep postures and strong poses, the dance demonstrates strength and readiness, recalls ancestors who arrived on the waves of the sea, and signifies welcoming, invitation, and hospitality [Risnawati 1993: 12].

From early afternoon on the day of Ashura in January 2008, silek gelombang dancers waited in the middle of the main road of Pariaman for the governor and various government officials including the Head of Tourism. One group of dancers was dressed in red traditional Minang attire. The other group was dressed in black. Traditional Minang attire consists of wide-set pants, a long-sleeved shirt with slight decoration around the cuffs and neck, and a *destar* triangular headpiece or a decorative cloth wrapped around the head.

Prior to the arrival of the dignitaries, crowds built to enormous numbers. The silek gelombang dancers stood ready to welcome the dignitaries with their performance. Masses of people waited amidst the market stalls, side attractions, and blaring synthesizer music. Police ushered the crowds to the side of the road and cleared a path leading from the silek gelombang dancers to a central stage for official guests and dignitaries. The two groups of dancers looked like teams preparing for a tug-of-war, seemingly eyeing their opponents from a distance. Iranian Shiites might have interpreted the colours of the performers as significant with the red costumes representing *shembra* or *shemr*. Firemen sprayed the crowd with water from their truck as people eagerly awaited the commencement of the opening silek gelombang dance. The high-pressure water kept the crowd back from the road and cooled the bitumen road for the dancers who were barefoot. Organ tunggal blared from over-amplified speakers. Everyone awaited the arrival of the dignitaries who were running on *Jam Karet* (time that is flexible like rubber).

As soon as the first crowd members caught sight of the dignitaries, the organ tunggal music stopped and a single-head *tasa* drum signalled six double-sided *gendang tambuah* barrel drums to commence. The

---

3   In December 2008, the festival was attended by the Iranian ambassador. Official speeches by dignitaries, sponsors, and politicians went overtime and the mock battle had to be shortened so that the tabuik could be dragged to the beach before sunset.

tasa drum reportedly originates from India and is said to possess a magical power imparted by a mantra that once incited members of each tabuik to fight each other. Today it signals the start of a symbolic fight performed by the silek gelombang dancers. At the sound of the *tasa*, the silek gelombang dancers assumed their postures and commenced their cycles of movement. The dancers made a series of sideways approaches towards each other and gradually made their way closer to centre stage where an offering was placed between them. They cautiously approached each other with silek minang postures that, much to the excitement of the crowd, demonstrated power, strength, and readiness; the crowd pulled in close, and the dance sent spectators into a frenzy. Organisers and police had difficulty holding people back. Both groups of dancers continued to warily approach each other until they met at the offering plate placed in front of the stage where dignitaries were seated. Upon arriving at the plate, the lead performers shook hands with each other. Music erupted from all over the city and everyone jumped and danced around in jubilation. The tension of the silek gelombang dance was high and the offering plate was a site of consensus, a peaceful meeting point where different parties had been welcomed through movement.

The silek gelombang dance preceded a series of performances and speeches that acted as the forerunner to the much-awaited Tabuik procession. The performances were all carried out in front of the stage of dignitaries with the crowd surrounding the performance space in front of the stage. During the performances, a choreographed presentation of silek minang was featured. Silek minang groups often have a prepared choreographed product that they can hire out for performances. This performance product had been adapted for the occasion.

In a silek minang performance, generally two adult male performers (possibly a father with his son or nephew) begin an elaborate sequence of stylized bows in various directions to dignitaries, members of the audience, and then to each other. The performers then demonstrate a series of open-hand and knife techniques that have the mark of social heritage, cultural patrimony, and regional identity. To the trained eye, silek minang performances are visibly well-rehearsed and pre-set. In much the same way that Yogyakarta-style court dance is regarded as a cultural heirloom of Central Java [Hughes-Freeland 2008], silek minang is a cultural heirloom of the Minangkabau of West Sumatra.

In the performance of silek minang during Tabuik, ceremonial sequences of movement were performed by two performers dressed in black Minang attire. Their bows were accompanied by the sound of a woodwind flute played over loudspeakers. After a sequence of opening movements and two sideways bows, the gendang tambuah drums began to play and a repetitious melody was sounded on a sarunai reed

woodwind flute. Female dancers, who had performed the seated Indang dance earlier in the proceedings, moved to surround the fighters. The dancers were dressed in red or blue and clapped their hands and moved to the rhythm of the music. In the background, a small replica tabuik was shaken up and down by three men dressed in yellow traditional Minang attire. The fighters maintained their distance and performed eloquent threatening postures. When the choreographed fight started, the dancers circled the fighters as well as the men rocking the replica tabuik. Gradually, an older fighter moved to replace the younger of the two fighters. The fighter who remained took a knife and thrust to the side of the older fighter. The older fighter eventually overcame his opponent and took his knife away at which point the younger fighter returned to complete the battle. At the end of the battle, the dancers and the fighters encircled the men shaking the replica tabuik and danced around jubilantly.

The combat choreography involved three performers and evoked an emotive response from the audience. The interchange between two of the performers alluded to the battle efforts of Hussein and his son. During the performance, stabs with a knife that landed safely to the side of an adversary were still met with gasps and shouts of exhilaration; grappling techniques that were visibly pre-negotiated still caused people to hold their breath; and defensive moves that were initiated before the attack to which they were supposed to respond still managed to sustain the audience's rapt attention. Perhaps it was the protracted tension of the accompanying music that bore a contextual relationship (but not a rhythmic, metric, or melodic relationship) to the movements that deeply engaged the audience.

After the regional performances finished and the opening speeches concluded, the large tabuik were lifted by approximately twenty men each, turned in circles, and the umbrellas shook as the constructions were rocked in a mock performance to symbolically represent the battle of Karbala. Both tabuik were taken from the city to the beach located almost half a kilometre away. The electric and telephone wires overhead presented an interesting obstacle for the tabuik carriers. Comically, each tabuik was tilted and dragged to avoid these dangers.

The procession of the tabuik was accompanied by a cacophony of music groups located at various places along the road to the beach. Loud barrel drums sounded above the noise of the crowd, hand-held kettle drums were just barely audible, and organ tunggal performers sung barely comprehensible lyrics. The soundscape differed from the Shiite processions elsewhere that include religious chants, wailing, and other forms of ritual drama. When the procession arrived at the beach at sunset, both tabuik were thrown into the sea. This symbolised both the end of the battle and the ascent of Hasan and Hussein to heaven.

Figure 4. A tabuik being thrown into the ocean with onlookers crowding the beach. [Photo: Kaja Dutka, 2008]

Performances, Sponsorships, and Reworkings of Tradition

Tabuik was once a complex ritual process coordinated by a small community of Indians living in Pariaman. It followed the heritage of distinct lineages. Originally, the procession of the tabuik to the beach was probably accompanied by special Shiite chants, recitations, and other pageantry. As recently as the 1980s, the violent re-enactment of battle was performed between groups of men throwing stones at each other.[4] As the Sepoy lineage became more diffuse, the funds and manpower for the tabuik constructions declined. The accompanying Shiite traditions were also increasingly overlooked or at least maintained outside of public view.

The material and costly aspect of Tabuik explains why external support, control, and organization have been adopted so easily. Constructing

---

4   Personal communication with Professor Margaret Kartomi [2008].

a tabuik requires a significant amount of manpower and costs a lot of money – an amount certainly beyond the savings of most villagers. The need for sponsorship creates a space for government bodies and national corporations to offer financial support. This opportunity has been seized upon in order to self-promote, facilitate tourism, and enhance trade relations with other parts of the Islamic world. For religious groups tied to these sponsoring organizations, it was also an opportunity to etiolate the Shiite aspects of the ritual and bring them into accordance with Sunni practices in Indonesia. The procession has become government funded, controlled, and organized, and the government-implemented changes have had profound effects on the rituals.

Kartomi points out that since 1974 the Muharram observances in Pariaman have been diverted towards attracting tourists and this has meant a loss of 'the essential elements of passion, which is a distinguishing feature of Shiism' [Kartomi 1986: 159]. The Tabuik ceremonies are now accompanied by a plethora of ancillary cultural vignettes that manifest associations in the minds of Indonesians, which are deeply emotive but historically superficial. The idea of acquiring spiritual merit through participation in the construction, parading, and worship of the tabuik has been diverted by a culturally and politically empowered complex of contemporaneous community activity of another nature. The sacred aspects of the commemoration are unknown to many, but the celebratory aspects are complemented by the incorporation of other local customs into the order of events. This collective of supplementary performances creates a fuller expression of identity, culture, and tradition through an integrative, figurative, and reiterative framework. Tabuik now has fewer explicit connections with its specific Shiite origins. The celebration has been transformed into an ethnic festival expressing the community identity of the people of Pariaman, distinguishing the people of West Sumatra, and occupying a special place within the Republic of Indonesia.

Despite recent additions to Tabuik, the main processional event remains irreplaceably as the core attraction. The people who carry the Tabuik have t-shirts with the names of their government and business sponsors clearly emblazoned. The fact that the Tabuik tradition grew from a minority group in Pariaman has meant that it was easy for economically more powerful entities to exert their control over the event through monetary sponsorship. The Tabuik festivities are thus subordinate to sponsorship and include choreographed performance products found useful to the sponsoring bodies.

The choreographed art of silek minang is a relatively recent introduction into the now predominantly government-organised ceremonies. The ceremonies, which were once opened with religious rites, now begin with speeches by dignitaries and performances of regional culture. Like other local customs along the Southwest coast of Sumatra [Galizia 1989; Feener 1999], the local representatives of the Indonesian state have in the past few decades taken over the organization of the ritual and the religious celebration has been melded into a cultural manifestation [Feener 1999: 87].

Nationalist flavours have been sprinkled into the events with an increasing impulse of the state to pay tribute to regional identity in their affirmations of power. As such, the various rituals leading up to the procession of the tabuik are accompanied by entertainment events organized by the local government that celebrate regional arts and culture. Not all regional arts are included. Only those that are recognized as being representative of regional identity and deemed to fit with national ideology are incorporated. For example, a choreographed silek minang martial arts performance is featured while the improvised Sufi martial arts performance of Ulu Ambek is not. Ulu Ambek is specific to Pariaman and is usually performed at prestigious local events or village inauguration ceremonies. Silek minang, however, has stronger ties to the nationally recognised standard of pencak silat. In fact, the performance of silek minang during Tabuik was labelled pencak silat in the calendar of events. While locals would recognise the distinctive movements of silek minang, the national label encourages them to see their indigenous martial art as part of a larger body of martial arts systematised by the government.

The nation building policy to promote *puncak daerah* (local peaks of cultural excellence) favours some performance genres over others. Versions of the indang and gelombang dances featured on the day of Ashura are taught at the undergraduate level in Indonesian Arts Institutes. Through this association, the indang and gelombang dances, unlike ulu ambek, are recognised by a national pedagogy and are integrated into national events. The integration of silek minang, indang, and gelombang into the festival of Tabuik is, as Felicia Hughes-Freeland describes it, an example of how 'dance becomes both implicated in, and is also constitutive of, the embodied and imagined community of the nation state' [Hughes-Freeland 2008: 17].

Festival participants suggest numerous interpretations of the event. For some, Tabuik is a re-enactment of the conflict between the brothers Isaac and Ishmael in the Islamic version of the story of Abraham; for others, the two cenotaphs symbolise tensions between the different subdistricts of Pariaman city. In this latter interpretation, discord between the richer and poorer parts of the city is represented. The social tensions between the two subdistricts are symbolically expressed in the mock battles, and then thrown out to sea. Some locals say this brings peace and cohesion to the Pasar and Subarang communities.

An overarching theme that encapsulates the whole event, however, is government recognition, sponsorship and control. The references to a unified Indonesia through local arts performances are unambiguous and speeches by dignitaries strongly influence the public construal of Tabuik. By honouring and recognising regional arts and festivities, the government has set up a monetary reward system that acts as positive reinforcement for the development and propagation of nation building.

Regional Heritage and National Culture from a Worldwide Tradition

Muharram ceremonies are found in two principal locations across the western coast of Sumatra, Pariaman, and Bengkulu. Across West Sumatra, replica tabuik can be seen paraded at other festivities, from Siliwangi and Lake Singkara to Bukittinggi and Lake Maninjau, and people always associate the replica tabuik with a 'tradition from Pariaman'. In these separate locations during different festivals, there may be only one tabuik not two. In Pariaman, the two tabuik are still the main material focus of Muharram festivities and have come to represent more than the sacredness of a procession. The edifices are an affirmation of solidarity, place, and community. The procession provides an adequate frame for the expression of community by incorporating other local traditions, creating a space for spectatorship, and grounding the celebration within the topographic coastal location of Pariaman.

All over the world, Muharram ceremonies are observed in locations as disperse as India, Trinidad, and Norway. Sometimes the ceremonies attract interest from tourists. Sometimes they gain bad press by being associated with boisterous parades, self-flagellation, and occasional violence. In the city of Pariaman, Muharram ceremonies are peaceful and lively celebrations that unite communities. Snouck Hurgronje was one of the first to note that 'the processions remind one more of a fair or carnival than of a funeral pageant' [Hurgronje 1906: 203].

Regardless of its exact origins, the tradition has undergone numerous transformations within the diverse cultures and ethnic groups in which it has been nurtured. The history is so diverse, and the contemporary local element is so strong, that people happily embrace many differing interpretations. Not all the visitors to the Tabuik ceremonies are aware of the legend of Hussein or the ritual's connections to Shiite and pre-Islamic conventions. Many people will more readily recognise the national and regional cultural references that government sponsorship has brought to the event. Visitors enjoy an experience conveying Minangkabau distinction as well as shared Indonesian tradition, validating the celebrations as regional heritage and national culture.

Iemanjá, the Goddess of the sea, is a symbol of fertility worshipped among communities all along the coastline of Brazil. Ceremonies in her honour are observed all year round but particularly near the New Year. Along the south central coast, Iemanjá is a prominent figure in the syncretic religion of Umbanda. In the Northeast, she is the nature Goddess, Orixá, a divinized African ancestor worshipped by the followers of Candomblé religion. Iemanjá can be depicted as a seductive mermaid, a buxom African woman, and even the Mother Mary.

Under many different names and taking many different forms, the Goddess Iemanjá receives pilgrims from all across Brazil [Carneiro 1986: 67]. Along Urca beach in Rio de Janeiro, ceremonies dedicated to Iemanjá are observed at the end of the year or at the turn of the New Year [Nadel 2005]. On Ipanema and Copacabana beach (also in Rio de Janeiro), celebrations honouring Iemanjá coincide with New Year's Eve [Smith 1992]. In Salvador da Bahia, in the northeast of Brazil, Iemanjá is honored and celebrated on February 2, and on other dates at Lagoa do Abaeté, Dique, and Itapagipe [Ferreira 1958: 265].

Iemanjá is venerated as the Queen of the Sea who protects her children at all costs, a powerful female figure and a goddess of fertility. She is the archetypal symbol of motherhood and the patron saint of fishermen. Her followers bring her ritual offerings to win her favour. Her huge following, both inside and outside of the religion of Candomblé, may be in part because of the Brazilian obsession with the beach and the sea [Voeks 1997: 56]. Ramos and Machado [2009: 45], two Brazilian psychologists, believe that the rapid expansion of the worship of Iemanjá observed along the coast of northeast Brazil is a demonstration of the force that the great mother archetype exerts over the psyche of the people of Bahia. For Ramos and Machado, this ritual is reminiscent of the ancient Greek worship of the Goddess Aphrodite, where offerings of flowers, perfumes, and prayers were taken out to sea in small boats. Although only around 2-3 percent of the Brazilian population report being involved with Candomblé [Selka 2005: 74], the hope of the renewal of life has become a pagan ritual practiced by countless Brazilians regardless of religion and from many different socio-cultural levels [Ramos and Machado 2009: 45].

The improvised art of capoeira is inevitably found somewhere during the festivals of Iemanjá. The appearance of capoeira during Iemanjá is often impulsive, precipitating at the side-fair, not at the ceremony itself [Edison 1940 in Landes 2002: 138]. Impromptu community performances are common and can be found amongst the crowds who

Figure 5. Gifts being brought to the beach of Rio Vermelho, Bahia, Brazil, 2nd February 2009.
[Photo: Paul H. Mason]

gather to present gifts to Iemanjá. Capoeira performances consistently
feature the iconic rhythms of the *berimbau*, a monochord musical bow
with a gourd resonator affixed to one end. The sound of the berimbau
can carry across the throng and attract onlookers to vibrant and eclectic
physical demonstrations.

The festival of Iemanjá itself is celebrated by locals and mediated by
a heavy presence of police. There is no central organising authority,
but business, religious, and arts communities devise their own ways of
joining in the hype, celebrating the occasion, and making themselves
known. The structured chaos of the organization of music and
movement within capoeira is perhaps a reflection of the structured
chaos of the Festival of Iemanjá.

The Social, Religious and Historical Context of Candomblé in Bahia

The religion of Candomblé is composed of a complex of competing houses dedicated to divinised African 'ancestors' known as the Orixás [Downey 2004: 347]. The Orixás are nature gods 'associated with distinct provinces of the natural world – water, air, forest, and earth – and it is from these primary sources that they gather and impart their … vital energy' [Voeks 1997: 56]. Water is typically associated with female Orixás. Fresh waters are linked to an Orixá called Oshum, soil-penetrating rain that makes mud is linked to Nanã, and the waters of the sea are linked to Iemanjá [Wafer 1991: 123].

Candomblé at its roots exhibits intra-African syncretism that continues in the Americas [Daniel 2005]. The term Candomblé comes from the Bantu language group carried to Brazil by West Africans who constituted the first large-scale source of enslaved labour in Bahia that began in the early seventeenth century [Harding 2000: 45]. The Dahomeans and Yoruba composed the majority of the last wave of African immigrants from the late eighteenth century to the final slave shipment in 1851 AD [Voeks 1997: 52]. Intra-African syncretism began in Benin and Nigeria even before the South Atlantic Slave trade and continued in Brazil where European and African syncretism also occurred and continues to occur [Daniel 2005].

During the nineteenth century, capoeira and Candomblé underwent similar modes of oppression. Between 1910 and 1940, there was a mobilization and commercialization of festive aspects of Afro-Brazilian urban popular culture that undermined the formal and informal discriminatory practices of the first Republic of Brazil. 'By making Afro-Brazilian practices more visible [and] less clandestine, it abated some of their connotations of polluting menace' [Borges quoted by Shaw 1999: 10]. Afro-Brazilian practices that were once considered a potential threat to authority were converted into something 'clean', 'safe', and 'domesticated' [Fry quoted by Shaw 1999: 11]. By being put on public display, Candomblé and capoeira became 'chic' and respectable. They lost the power they once had by being absorbed by popular culture.

Between Candomblé houses, there is a 'thin coherence' of relative cultural stability [Johnson 2002b: 35]. No overarching structure unifies all Candomblé houses [Downey 2004: 347] but intra-African syncretism accounts for some of the threads of commonality in the codes and symbols that they all contain [Daniel 2005: 140]. Many stories of Iemanjá represent her 'as a matron with enormous breasts, the symbol of fecund and nourishing maternity' [Verger 1993: 256]. In the worship of Iemanjá, her followers and admirers offer presents that include flowers (fresh or artificial), perfumes, coins, small mirrors, combs, cosmetic tools [Ferreira 1958: 265], dishes of carefully prepared foods, soap wrapped in cellophane, letters of supplication, dolls, pieces of fabric, necklaces, bracelets, and other presents that would 'please a beautiful and alluring woman' [Verger 1993: 256].

Every year on February 2 in Rio Vermelho, presents are gathered together in baskets in the Casa do Peso under the supervision of the ordained mothers and fathers (*Mae- e Pai-de-santo*). They conduct the events with ritual song accompaniment, oversee the filling of the baskets, the embarkation, and the launching of gifts out to sea. If the gifts submerge, it signifies that Iemanjá, the Queen of the Sea, has accepted the gift and gives her protection to her devotees. If the waves wash the gift back to the shore, it is a sign of bad tidings. The individual gifts to Iemanjá by Bahians contrast with the construction of two large Tabuik edifices financed by Indonesian government bodies and national organizations. It would be difficult for an external sponsor to exert economic power over prolific gift-giving. Sponsors can more easily fund the construction of two large objects than finance festivities where a multitude of locals furnish their own individual gifts.

Figure 6. 2nd February 1990, Boats laden with gifts for Iemanjá head out from the beach of Rio Vermelho. Photo Courtesy of the Fundaçao Gregorio Mattos, Salvador da Bahia.

Figure 7: 2nd February 1977, Worshippers bringing baskets of flowers to the fishermen who will present the offerings to Iemanjá. Photo Courtesy of the Fundaçao Gregorio Mattos, Salvador da Bahia

In 1950, the Festival of the Mother of the Water (*Festa da Mae d'Agua*) in the suburb of Rio Vermelho was described in a local newspaper as one of the most beautiful festivals of Bahia.[5] It was publicised that from the very earliest morning hours of the second of February, the initiated and the devoted would arrive to pass offerings to the colony of fishermen who would take these gifts out to sea. Countless other people were expected to come 'simply out of curiosity'. Capoeira and *roda da samba* were described as having their space at this festival. This space, however, was auxiliary. The festival continues to this day and capoeira games continue to be played alongside the festival of Iemanjá as a side-attraction that culminates at various locations with the capoeira practitioners who congregate in the crowds.

When Ruth Landes did research into Candomblé in the 1940s, she was told by her principal informant, Edison Carneiro, that '*Os Capoeiras não se importam com o Candomblé*' ('capoeiristas do not care about Candomblé') [Landes 2002: 147]. Indeed, during a Festival of Iemanjá, Landes had to walk some distance into the fair, far from the ritual events, to see capoeira. When she saw the crowds forming for a capoeira game, she noted that there was not a woman or ordained Candomblé priest among them [Landes 2002: 149]. Landes came to the understanding that Candomblé practitioners did not hold a high opinion of the violent and drunken games of the capoeira of this period, and that the trouble-seeking men of capoeira did not find diversion in Candomblé.

The connections and distinctions between capoeira and Candomblé are not always clear. They share a similar history of oppression, an overlapping repertoire of instruments, and an ambience of Africanism. 'Capoeiristas were drawn from among the same milieu as the Candomblé worshippers and the influences of one on the other are often marked' [Taylor 2005: 333]. Despite Landes' observation that Candomblé and capoeira are discrete, capoeira has numerous Candomblé-inspired songs, and today, many capoeira practitioners respect Candomblé and its rituals. In fact, many capoeira practitioners turn to Candomblé for protection rituals that 'close the body' during capoeira play [see Downey 2005: 146-147], wear beaded necklaces that have been blessed (*patua*), and claim to be devotees to one Orixá or another. Quite possibly by banding together, capoeira practitioners and Candomblé devotees have found a fuller expression of their culture, a more robust identity, and a greater sense of place in Brazilian society.

The once-secret religion of Candomblé is now widely disseminated in public [Johnson 2002a: 315] and has become institutionalized in popular Brazilian society [Voeks 1997: 56]. Carneiro [1986: 67]

observed that the cult of Iemanjá came to practice more in public spaces than inside houses of Candomblé. Perhaps this publicity pleases Iemanjá who is said to be given to vanity. For Brazilians, the festivals in Iemanjá's honour have become spaces where some of the secrets of Candomblé are taken to the streets, put on public display, and made accessible [Johnson 2002b: 131]. The secrets revealed have their allure and suggest the presence of other secrets. It builds the reputation of a Candomblé house. 'The circulation of meanings … in mass media and popular culture has led to the participation of new practicing bodies; it has brought a new ethnic constituency' [Johnson 2002a: 303]. Progressively the local Festival of Iemanjá has transcended religious ritual to become cultural tradition and is 'at times implicated in Brazil's national representations' [Johnson 2002a: 315]. The publicity of the events filters into the lives of Bahians and it has also allowed various aspects of the rituals to become contested. The capoeira practitioners, who once played their games at the sidelines of the fair, now deliver their own gifts on the beach of Rio Vermelho, insert their own expressions of tradition into the celebrations, and announce their own opinions about the practice of events.

Capoeira and the Festa de Iemanjá, 2009

Assemblies of samba schools, marching bands, local DJs, hundreds of street-sellers, performance art groups, and Candomblé followers all squeezed themselves into the streets near the beach of Rio Vermelho. The festivities did not exhibit an obvious centralized organizing body. There was no stage for politicians to capitalize on a captive audience. Groups were finding their own spaces to be a part of the activities. Artists, merchants, and religious devotees were the driving forces of the celebrations and celebratory ambiance.

Capoeira practitioners were found in abundance within the crowd. Throughout the day, at various locations near the beach of Rio Vermelho, they created a space for their art. Capoeira does not require a lot of administrative preparation for performances. Once a network of practitioners has decided upon a location and a time, the only thing remaining is to bring the instruments and hope that rain does not affect plans.

Grupo Nzinga is a capoeira group located near the beach of Rio Vermelho in the Alto da Sereia (Mermaid's peak). Since 2005, Grupo Nzinga members have participated in the Festival of Iemanjá. They perform capoeira, samba dancing, and have their own procession of offerings. Each year they carry a basket of gifts from their academy to the beach of Rio Vermelho. During the performances and procession,

---

5   Diario de Noticias, 29 January 1950.

they sing songs dedicated to Iemanjá and celebrate her as a symbol of feminism. Here is a sample excerpt from one such song:

> *Verse:*
>
> **Não deixe meu barco afundar,**
> **Não deixe, rainha do mar**
> (Don't let my boat sink
> Don't let it happen, Queen of the Sea)
>
> *Chorus:*
>
> **Minha Sereia Rainha do mar,**
> **Não deixe meu barco virar,**
> (My mermaid, Queen of the Sea,
> Don't let my boat capsize)

The teachers of Grupo Nzinga have an affiliation with their own Candomblé temple located well into the outskirts of Salvador.[6] For several years, they have held African dancing lessons for children and adults on Tuesday and Thursday nights. During these classes, students learn the music and dances of the Orixás. For children aged sixteen and under, capoeira classes at Grupo Nzinga are free. Like many capoeira schools, the teachers take etiquette, education, and community action very seriously. Due to the academy's shanty-town location, the teachers of Grupo Nzinga have found themselves variously involved in land-rights issues, preventing domestic violence, and advocating feminism and gender equality. Being located at the Mermaid's Peak, they often sing songs to Iemanjá during the weekly classes. These songs are an expression of location, affiliation, and cultural education.

Preparations for the 2009 festival of Iemanjá within Grupo Nzinga had commenced only a week before the day of celebrations. The proximity of their academy to the beach meant that they did not need to look for a space on the streets to hold their performance. From this advantage, their community-based and community-centred group put on one of the most planned of all capoeira performances that day. The way they celebrated the festival of Iemanjá had evolved from their experiences over previous years.

After a weekly capoeira event held in their academy on Friday 30 January 2009, the group leaders announced their plans for the festival of Iemanjá and discussed what needed to be done. They had two days to meet and prepare their academy for the proposed capoeira performance,

samba de roda, lunch, and short pilgrimage to Rio Vermelho beach. They could not be sure how many people would turn up, but they had plans to distribute information flyers to advertise their performance, make t-shirts, and decorate the academy. They agreed to meet on Saturday afternoon to commence cleaning and decorating the academy, preparing the instruments, and painting shirts for their campaign. Then, on Sunday, they continued decorating, preparing instruments, and painting shirts. Everyone was invited to bring some food that they subsequently enjoyed and shared. The group made a modest profit by selling their shirts, as well as cans of beer, soda, and guarana soft drink. By the end of the day, the room was nicely decorated. Small blue and white flags in commemoration of Iemanjá lined the ceiling and a basket had been decorated ready to receive biodegradable gifts for the Queen of the sea.

Environmentalist concerns drove Grupo Nzinga to develop a slogan: '*Iemanjá protege a quem protege o mar: escolha bem seu presente*' ('Iemanjá protects those who protect the sea: Choose your present well'). This slogan was part of an incentive campaign to promote biodegradable gifts to Iemanjá instead of items that pollute the sea. The anti-pollution campaign met with some disagreement among various traditionalist communities that celebrate Iemanjá. Opponents claimed that it would be wrong to stray from tradition, that it was not possible to replace the gifts that Iemanjá enjoys, and that the ceremonies should remain as they have always been observed [Oliveira 2009a].

Some argued that Candomblé exists to protect nature and that people could offer fried fish, fruits of the season, remove plastic from gifts and replace non-biodegradable objects with paper replicas. For those people, what was important for Iemanjá was 'the symbol and not the object' [Oliveira 2009a]. The pedagogical coordinator for Grupo Nzinga, Lígia Vilas Boas, explained that 'the academy's objective was to raise awareness of marine pollution but they could not predict the impact that their campaign would have on more than 100 years of tradition' [Oliveira 2009b]. As a potent site of Afro-Bahian heritage, Grupo Nzinga seized upon the opportunity to use the veneration of Iemanjá as a way to educate people about the respect for nature.

By ten o'clock in the morning on the day of the festival, many people had arrived at the academy of Grupo Nzinga. Capoeira practitioners from other academies and many children from the surrounding shanty-town had come to join in the fun. Only a limited number of flyers had been distributed, but news had evidently passed around by word-of-mouth that Grupo Nzinga was celebrating the day. With such a crowd, one of the leaders, Mestre Poloca, was personally attending to the tuning of the berimbaus, a job normally reserved for one of his senior students.

---

6   There are many capoeira groups in Bahia. Grupo Nzinga is just one group among several with whom I performed ethnographic fieldwork.

MARTIAL
ARTS STUDIES

The academy was filled with people and bursting with the noise of conversation, but slowly the sound of the single-string berimbau being struck by a thin stick drew the capoeira practitioners to one end of the room. The practitioners formed a circle, some of them seated on a bench with instruments and others seated on the floor forming the circular performance space of capoeira called the *roda*. Mestre Paulinha, one of the leaders of Nzinga, began to lead the orchestra with a steady rhythm on the berimbau gunga, the largest of the berimbaus. Another two berimbaus followed suit. The rhythmic drone from the orchestra of three berimbaus carried across the room and the visitors grew quieter in anticipation of the performance.

Many of the capoeira practitioners of Grupo Nzinga were hesitant to sit near the orchestra. The closer to the orchestra they sat, the faster they would have to enter the roda. As a researcher, I also did not want to sit too close to the orchestra. I had never been to a capoeira roda at the Festa de Iemanjá before. I wanted to observe before I participated. Other people more adeptly found excuses to position themselves at a comfortable distance from the front of the queue. As a consequence, I was in the second pair called to play and my opponent was a student of the respected Mestre João Pequeno. I would have thought that long-standing members of Nzinga would have been the first to play, but instead, it was João Pequeno's formidable student and me, a foreigner with only five weeks experience in Brazil.

João Pequeno's student had a comforting smile and a respectful attitude. After Mestre Paulinha sung the opening *ladainha*, a chorus began in response to her lead, which meant we could commence a game. João Pequeno's student and I shook hands and commenced our game slowly. We began with very low crouching moves that were positioned within a cautious distance of each other's kinesphere. But slowly we began to trust the other's dance and we became bolder and more daring, taking care not to irreparably raise the tension of our interaction.

The game we played remains fondly in my memory as it was both friendly and playful yet gently testing at the same time. Perhaps it was because João Pequeno's student was a guest and I was a relative newcomer to Nzinga that we both showed our restraint and indulged only in light-hearted mischievousness in the roda of this academy. It was also likely that my partner was a skilled practitioner who knew how hard to push an opponent who was visibly less experienced and skilled. Winning in capoeira does not always mean triumph over an opponent. It can often mean the success of exploiting opportunity and chance. Possibly the most crowd-pleasing part of the game I played during the Festa de Iemanjá was when my partner unexpectedly changed pace and performed a stylised movement called a *chamada*. He raised his hands gesturing that he wanted me to come close and make

contact. I cart-wheeled without taking my eyes off him and slowly made my way towards his open hands. I stood up and placed the palm of my right hand on his and my left hand on his elbow so that I could stop a potential strike. We walked back and forth checking each other's balance and looking for a moment's weakness where we could make a surprise attack. And then, my partner stopped, crouched, and invited me to resume play. He had opened the space and was waiting for me to make the first move. Sometimes, practitioners in my position will joke and pretend that they are preparing for an elaborate gymnastic flip but then revert to a very simple but guarded dance movement. I performed the exaggerated movements that typify people pretending to prepare for an elaborate flip. My movements suggested that I was only pretending. Then, to everyone's surprise, including my opponent's, I actually performed a front handspring and returned to the game. My showmanship had become a challenge that he was impelled to meet. Soon after, he called me for another chamada. Once again, we danced back and forth, and again he crouched and offered floor-space for me to perform my acrobatics. However, I noticed that he was not crouching as deeply as he had before. He was obviously preparing for something. So, again, I performed the exaggerated movements that looked as though I was preparing for a front flip. I motioned forwards, took a large step, and then back-flipped back into the game. My opponent was adequately deceived; he balked and the crowd laughed. However, it was a reserved laugh, a laugh that suggested that today my acrobatics were funny but tomorrow I had better be careful because now they all knew my trick.

When Mestre Poloca decided that our performance was over, a berimbau was lowered and repetitive quavers were sounded. João Pequeno's student and I moved over to the berimbaus, shook hands, and left the roda. Everyone's attention was directed to the next two capoeiristas who moved to the foot of the berimbaus and waited for the appropriate cue to start playing. They warily shook hands and improvised their own hesitant yet precise moves as they danced into the centre of the circle, testing each other for balance, concentration, and agility. The moves were spontaneous and consciously impulsive with each practitioner trying to lure his opponent into trust through dance and then surprise with a skilled attack. They listened to the beat of the berimbaus and the messages of the songs, but the space created by the guiding rhythms was theirs to sculpt with their respective abilities, interactions, and instinctive creativity.

After each pair of capoeiristas had exhausted their game, new practitioners from either side of the roda would enter the circle, crouch at the berimbaus, and commence a new game. Each game was unpredictable and enjoyable because of its capriciousness, skilfulness, and occasional humour. Although the moves were improvised, certain arrangements had been set in place that allowed these unrehearsed

movement dialogues to evolve. The musical rhythms had been rehearsed and songs had been memorized, but the tempo, occasion, and choice of each new song was left to the musician leading the orchestra. The roda had been given a time and place, but the capoeiristas who entered did so at their own impulse and desire.

After the roda, a small party of capoeira students carried a basket of offerings and made the pilgrimage from the training room to the beach of Rio Vermelho. They were accompanied by a small berimbau orchestra playing Candomblé-related *ijéxa* rhythms and singing songs to Iemanjá. They tried to stay together as a group but were frequently separated by the crowds of people, the haphazard street stalls, and the ever-present control of police blockades. Those that reached the beach delivered the basket to the flotilla of fishermen and sang more songs before returning to the academy for more drinks, dancing, and merriment.

Figure 8 Mestre Poloca plays berimbau and leads a capoeira game during the Festa de Iemanjá. [Photo Paul H. Mason, 2009]

Reflections on Capoeira and Candomblé

Issues of publicity and secrecy throughout the practice of Candomblé find parallels in the recent developments of capoeira. In Candomblé, 'tourists' eyes and prying scholars have made secrecy increasingly untenable' [Downey 2004: 348]. The revelation of secrets to the public is accommodated in Candomblé in order to bring economic sustainability. Revealing secrets appears to be a permutation of long-standing tendencies in Candomblé. Over time, secrets about

membership, structure, location, mythology, and even practice have been divulged. The secret is 'no longer in information about the practice of the religion, but rather, in the knowledge behind and below the obvious manifestations' [Johnson 2002b: 181]. Although disclosure of secrets may enlarge the power of Candomblé authorities, it has given rise, as Greg Downey observes, to a new type of devotee who is bound to no house: 'These practitioners piece together their own idiosyncratic sets of devotions and theologies from diverse sources and consume their favourite rituals by circulating among houses' [Downey 2004: 349].

Just like the patronage of Candomblé, Capoeira teachers must also fund their practice by finding a reliable student base. However, with an abundance of books and audiovisual materials on capoeira as well as the growth of an international economic-bound traineeship, Brazilians observe the same kind of master-less students in capoeira. They wander from group to group, training and playing in the academies of Bahia and the gymnasiums of the world. However, without a strong Mestre-student relationship, practitioners are often un-initiated in the subtleties of musical messages, sometimes unsolicited by the favour of the berimbau, and forever caught between different schools of movement aesthetics. Here, Bahians have established a monopoly on capoeira and Candomblé. Initiates of Candomblé and practitioners of capoeira retain and circulate information periodically as if to suggest that it is the content that is of value. The true meaning of form is disguised by the sale of content. The pedagogical transfer of information distracts the tourist from understanding that by the simple act of moving in harmony with the other then they too become the secret. Without an understanding of the complicity of distributed embodiment, the capoeira tourist remains a customer and the teacher retains clientele.

The musical processes and movement organization of capoeira are also reflections of the activities of the festival of Iemanjá. The festival activities are generated by large numbers of separate but interconnected Candomblé groups each of which participates at their own pace and leisure but inevitably respond to specific spiritual leaders within their group. In a capoeira performance, specific elements have to be organized under the guidance of respected teachers. The capoeira circle is a structured space for improvised activity. Similarly, the festival of Iemanjá is both structured and improvised. Certain arrangements are made by the fishermen of the Rio Vermelho beach and the Candomblé practitioners of the temples while the rest is an improvised ensemble of tourists, opportunistic businesses, and inspired artists.

CONCLUSION

Tabuik and Iemanjá are prime examples of 'the invention of tradition' [Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983] assuming the status of a religious ritual and cultural event. Merle Ricklefs [1974] – whose work on the relationship between authenticity and tradition predates the concept of the invention of tradition – showed that a tradition is not a 'thing', but rather, a politically contingent and strategically constructed process [see also Hughes-Freeland 2008: 14]. In Pariaman, Tabuik reinforces developing types of authority. In Brazil, Iemanjá reaffirms historical modes of resistance. These festivals exhibit a range of socio-historical, religious, and organizational particularities. The differences between the lament of Hussein and the reverence of Iemanjá are pronounced. The differences between silek minang and capoeira are similarly discernible. The choreographed movements of silek minang performed during the government-organized events of Tabuik, however, differ strikingly from the improvised rhythms of capoeira extemporized during the festival of Iemanjá.

During the regional festivals of Tabuik and Iemanjá, the choreographed or improvised structure of fight-dancing performances somehow mirrors the social organization of each event. Political and corporate sponsors formally coordinate the official proceedings of Tabuik. Performances of the choreographed art of silek minang are strategically integrated into Tabuik to fit the agenda of political sponsors. Performances of fight-dancing in West Sumatra are choreographed. Similarly, the Tabuik festivities are choreographed. In contrast, the festival of Iemanjá in Brazil is largely an improvised event and capoeira is improvised too. Local groups in Bahia voluntarily assemble the festival and capoeira performances are initiated in an improvisatory manner. The internal dynamics of capoeira and silek minang are a reflection of the organization of the coastal rituals in which they are respectively embedded.

Capoeira and Iemanjá in Brazil are largely improvised and the hierarchies of organization are more obscure than in silek minang and Tabuik from Indonesia where the hierarchies are explicit and the public components mostly choreographed. Nonetheless, Tabuik does exhibit some improvised elements and a few aspects of Iemanjá do require set structures. On the whole, ordered events have attracted preset stage performances and community events have attracted community ventures. The choreographed structure of silek minang and the improvised nature of capoeira capture the processes through which traditions have been assembled, invented, and propagated within Pariaman and Bahian communities.

In an observation of trends in performance theory, Lowell Lewis has noted that 'practices and events don't merely reflect but also influence

or enact social changes through a performative process' [Lowell 2001: 410]. More than just being a reflection of the improvised or choreographed nature of the ceremonies, the physical presence of fight-dancing during Tabuik and Iemanjá significantly sculpts the impression of events. Watching crafted bodily movement can evoke imaginations of that movement's historic origins [Anderson 1998]. Giving crafted bodily movement a public space during a commemorative event allows the imagined origins of a bodily practice to become infused with the imagined origins of the festival. When commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices overlap, the collective memory of a community becomes constituted by theatrical re-enactments, narrative accounts, and corporeal acts of embodied remembering.

West Sumatran and Afro-Brazilian fight-dancing have their own narratives of origin, evoke a sensation of the past for the performers, and elicit an abstruse notion of tradition for the witnesses. Viewing presentational performances is not necessarily a passive process. During the choreographed silek gelombang opening to Tabuik, for example, some local audience members were spurred to execute the postures of silek themselves in an emotive response to the performance. This physical response evidenced 'a common repertoire of somatic states' [Blacking 1977: 10] that have been 'sedimented in the body' [Connerton 1989: 36, 72, 102] through familiarity and possible physical experience with the movements being viewed. Such responses offer a concrete example of the shared somatic states that form the basis of 'bodily empathy' [Blacking 1977: 10]. Acts of somatic viewing among locals verifies a corporeal engagement with the presentational activity that taps into personal narratives, experience, and training.

Performances of bodily practices invigorate the imagined history of the current moment. More than just a direct visceral connection, embodied practices, as Hughes-Freeland notes, 'are brought into cultural memory and then into history by the ways they are interpreted and rendered meaningful in what people say about them' [Hughes-Freeland 2008: 42]. The presence of fight-dancing at the festivals of Tabuik and Iemanjá enforces a particular vision of contemporary traditions and influences subjective imaginations of the past. In this way, the festivals, by their association with adjunct embodied traditions, became imbued with complementary narratives of origin. In Pariaman, the choreographed performance of silek minang was a presentational activity sponsored by the state and viewed by the public. In Brazil, the participatory performance of capoeira was assembled by members of the public to create an 'experiential space' for the 'various narratives of capoeira, imagined origins, and epic histories' [Downey 2005: 115]. Acts of embodied remembering and narrative accounts reinforce one another. Silek minang consolidates Tabuik as part of regional heritage and capoeira strengthens the connection of Iemanjá to an African past.

The festivals of Tabuik and Iemanjá have become important parts of regional cultural pride, localised social cohesion, and opportunities for the growth of tourism. The public and private spaces of these festivals as well as the space for the inclusion of auxiliary entertainment have become redefined over time. Ashura rites that were once at the forefront of the Muharram observances in Pariaman are now elided for the expression of regional culture endorsed by the government. The festival of Iemanjá, now a public event, explicitly places ritual elements of Candomblé on show for the public. To a large extent, the changes to the organization of these events have been constrained by the material features of the festivals. The large cenotaphs of Tabuik lend themselves to administrative control. The prolific gift-giving to Iemanjá promotes initiatives from individuals and local communities. Political control of Tabuik has done the same to expressions of Shiite culture in Pariaman that political leniency towards the festival of Iemanjá has done to Candomblé in Bahia. In both cases, the power of a religious minority over their own traditions has been reduced and exposed to external forces.

The revellers of Iemanjá and Tabuik are willing observers who in cooperative gestures follow the activities of the rituals they observe. Simultaneously, they are interfering participants. The ways in which they interact with the ritual creates new understandings of the events, not only because of their individual gaze but also because of their individual participation. The propagation of idiosyncratic interpretations reshapes, distorts, and redefines events. Cultural theorists may ask how growing popularity and increasing media attention will revitalize and renegotiate ideas about tradition, religious heritage, and tourism in years to come. With a multitude of vested interests from political groups, commercial businesses, and arts and religious communities, the festivals are open to change and restructuring. A longitudinal study would allow cultural theorists to track these changes. Further research may also uncover to what extent the emotional force of these events is carried by the natural symbols inherent in the topographical location, the physical action of taking objects out to sea, and the sense of community built by social manifestation.

In Pariaman, many people did not know that Tabuik was a re-enactment of the martyrdom of Hussein. The lack of informed participants during Tabuik leads to the same question that Johnson [2002b] asks about the festival of Iemanjá: can the interpretation of a ritual as a re-enactment of myth proceed when many participants do not know the myth or recognize its connection to the ritual? As privileged observers, Jackson [1989: 126] reminds researchers: 'It is probably the separateness of the observer from the ritual acts which makes him think that the acts refer to or require justification in a domain beyond their actual compass'.

Even without understanding the symbolism, Tabuik and Iemanjá are exciting and enjoyable events. During Tabuik, the participation of most attendees is probably sufficiently explained by the simple pleasure of watching the umbrellas on each tabuik fall as they are pulled by gravity and lifted again as the bearers shake the structure. Another drawcard for attendance is the hype of the procession to the beach and watching the destruction of the tabuik in the waves. During Iemanjá, the crowds on the beach of Rio Vermelho, the flotilla of fishermen taking offerings out to sea, and the excitement of impromptu arts performances attract people from neighbouring Bahian communities. However, do explanations reliant purely on entertainment value abrogate a responsibility to a diegetic understanding that grounds human activity in history and symbols? One thing is sure: Public rituals expose themselves to a variety of interpretations and multifarious influences. Interpretations are shaped the most by those who invest the greatest amount of time and skill in the symbolic capital of the events. The organisers, the performers, the gift givers, and the cenotaph makers are thus the main players in the invention of tradition. The process of inventing tradition is co-constituted by an assortment of overlapping intersubjectively experienced construals assembled in time and space by socially-embedded, environmentally-situated, and embodied actors.

REFERENCES

Anderson, Aaron. 1998. 'Kinesthesia in Martial Arts Films: Action in Motion', *Jump Cut* 42, 1-11.

Bachyul Jb, Syofiardi. 2006. 'Tabuik Festival: From a Religious Event to Tourism', *The Jakarta Post*. March 1.

Campbell, Susan. 1988. 'Carnival, Calypso, and Class Struggle in Nineteenth Century Trinidad', *History Workshop* 26, 1-27.
http://doi.org/d3p69n

Carneiro, Edison. 1986. *Candomblés da Bahia.* Civilização Brasileira: Rio de Janeiro.

Chelkowski, Peter J. ed. 1979. *Ta'ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran.* New York: New York University Press.

Cole, Juan. 1988. *Roots of North Indian Shiism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Avadh,* 1722-1859. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press

Connerton, Paul. 1989. *How Societies Remember.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Daniel, Yvonne. 2005. D*ancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bahian Candomblé.* Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Downey, Greg. 2002. 'Listening to Capoeira: Phenomenology, Embodiment, and the Materiality of Music', *Ethnomusicology* 46.3, 487-509.
http://doi.org/cwcx48

Downey, Greg. 2004 'Book Review – *Secrets, Gossip, and Gods: The Transformation of Brazilian Candomblé* by Paul Christoper Johnson', *History of Religions* 43.4, 347-350.
http://doi.org/b8drdc

Estudantin, Nusi Lisabilla. 2009. 'Performing Arts in Sumatra', in *Sumatra: Crossroads of Cultures*, edited by Francine Brinkgeve & Retno Sulistianingsih, KITLV Press, 171-183.

Feener, R. Michael. 1999. 'Tabut: Muharram Observances in the History of Bengkulu', *Studia Islamika: Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies* 6.2, 87-130.

Ferreira, Jurandyr Pires. 1958. *Enciclopédia dos Municípos Brasileiros,* I.B.G.E.

Forster, E.M. 1924. *A Passage to India,* San Diego, CA: Harcourt.

Galizia, M. 1989. 'State and Ethnic Identity: Among the Rejang in Southwest Sumatra', *Prisma: The Indonesian Indicator* 46, 57-69.

Harding, Rachel E. 2000. *A Refuge in Thunder: Candomblé and Alternative Spaces of Blackness.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Horowitz, E. 1964. 'The Communal Ritual and the Dying God in E. M. Forster's A Passage to India', *Criticism* 6, 70-88.

Hughes-Freeland, Felicia. 2008. *Embodied Communities: Dance Traditions and Change in Java.* New York: Berghahn Books.

Israeli, Raphael. 2002. 'A Manual of Islamic Fundamentalist Terrorism', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 14.4, 23-40.
http://doi.org/db9x2p

Jackson, Michael. 1989. *Paths Toward a Clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic inquiry.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Johnson, Paul Christopher. 2002a. 'Migrating Bodies, Circulating Signs: Brazilian Candomblé, the Garifuna of the Caribbean, and the Category of Indigenous Religions', *History of Religions: An International Journal for Comparative Historical Studies* 41.4, 301-327.

Johnson, Paul Christopher. 2002b. *Secrets, Gossip, and Gods: The Transformation of Brazilian Candomblé.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kartomi, Margaret. 1986. 'Tabut - a Shia Ritual Transplanted from India to Sumatra', in *Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Indonesia: Essays in Honour of Professor J.D. Legge*, edited by David P. Chandler and M.C. Ricklefs, Australia: Monash University, Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, 141-162.

Korom, Frank J. 2003. *Hosay Trinidad: Muharram Performances in an Indo-Carribean Diaspora.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Landes, Ruth. 2002. *A Cidade das Mulheres.* UFRJ Editora.

Lueras, Leonard. 1994. *Fire: A Balinese Journey of the Soul.* Singapore: Yayasan Sekar Manggis.

Mead, Henry. 1858. *The Sepoy Revolt: Its Causes and its Consequences.* London: Routledge.

Muhammad. 2008. 'Pariaman Tambah Pesta Tabuik', *Kompas,* 31 January.

Nadel, Laurie. 2005. 'Iemanjá is Waiting for Your White Roses on the Shores of Brazil'. *Brazzil*, 22 December.

Nakash, Yitzhak. 1994. *The Shiis of Iraq*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Oliveira, Meire. 2009a. 'Opiniões Diferentes sobre Questão Ambiental', *Atarde*, 31 January.

Oliveira, Meire. 2009b 'Campanha quer Estimular Mudanças no Costume das Oferendas a Iemanjá', *Atarde*, 31 January.

Permana, R.C.E. 1997. *Upacara Tradisional Tabot: Dampaknya Terhadap Kebudayaan dan Parawisatawa Budaya Daerah*. Laporan Penelitian: Universitas Indonesia.

Pinault, David. 1992. *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Pinault, David. 1993 *The Shiites*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rahsilawati, Kuntarini. 2007. 'Oyak…! Oyak…!': Hoyak Tabuik Pariaman', *Garuda Inflight Magazine*, April, 58-65.

Ramos, Denise Gimenez and Pericles Pinheiro Machado, Jr. 2009. 'Individuação e Subjetivação', *Memória da Psicanálise* 2, 42-49.

Ricklefs, Merle. 1974. *Jogjakarta under Sultan Mangkubumi 1749-1792: A History of the Division of Java*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Risnawati, S. 1993. *Tari Gelombang di Desa Kapalo Koto Aie Angek Padang Panjang*. Laporan Penelitian, STSI.

Selka, Stephen. 2005. 'Ethnoreligious Identity Politics in Bahia, Brazil', *Latin American Perspectives* 32.14, 72-94.
http://doi.org/bjq3kw

Shaw, Lisa. 1999. *The Social History of the Brazilian Samba*. Surrey: Ashgate.

Smith, Donald. 1992. 'Brazil Welcomes in New Year With a 15th-Century Africa-Based Rite', *Los Angeles Times*, Dec 27.

Snouck Hurgronje, Christiaan. 1906. *The Acehnese*. E.J. Brill: Leyden.

Taylor, Gerard. 2005. *Capoeira: the Jogo de Angola from Luanda to Cyberspace, Volume 1*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

De Tassy, Garcin. 1995. *Muslim Festivals in India and Other Essays*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Thais, Gustav. 1994. 'Contested Meanings and the Politics of Authenticity: The Hosay in Trinidad', in *Islam, Globalization and Postmodernity*, edited by Akbar S. Ahmed and Hastings Donnan, London: Routledge, 38-62.

Ullendoff, Edward. 1968. *Ethiopia and the Bible: Sweich Lectures of the British Academy 1967*. Oxford: University Press for the British Academy.

Verger, Pierre Fatumbi. 1993. 'The Orishás of Bahia', in *Os Deuses Africanos no Candomblé da Bahia*, edited by Jorge Amado, Pierre Verger, and Waldeloir Rego. Bahiana Industrial Grafica, 235-261.

Voeks, Robert A. 1997. *Sacred Leaves of Candomblé: African Magic, Medicine, and Religion in Brazil*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Wafer, James William. 1991. *The Taste of Blood: Spirit Possession in Brazilian Candomblé*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Widiastuti, Wahyu. 2003. *Analisis Jaringan Komunikasi Dalam Mempertahankan Kepercayaan Terhadap Mitos Seputar Tabot Pada Kerukunan Keluarga Tabot Kota Bengkulu*, Laporan Penelitian: Universitas Bengkulu.

Wieringa, Edwin. 2000. 'Taming the Text: The Incorporation of the Shiitic Hero Muhammad Hanafiyyah in a Sundanese Version of the Prophetic Tale', in *Society and Culture of Southeast Asia: Continuities and Changes*, edited by Lokesh Chandra, New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 355-364.

Wieringa, Edwin. 1996. 'Does Traditional Islamic Malay Literature Contain Shiitic Elements?: Ali & Fatimah in Malay Hikayat Literature', *Studia Islamika: Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies* 3.4, 93-111.

Wood, Donald. 1968. *Trinidad in Transition: The Years after Slavery*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wynne, Mervyn Llewelyn. 1941. *Triad and Tabut: A Survey of the Origin and Diffusion of Chinese and Mohamedan Secret Societies in the Malay Peninsula A.D. 1800-1935*. Singapore: Goote Printer.

Yarshater, Ehsan. 1979. 'Ta'ziyeh and Pre-Islamic Mourning Rites in Iran', in *Ta'ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran*, edited by Peter Chelkowski, New York: New York University Press, 88-94.

CONTRIBUTOR

Augustin Lefebvre has a Ph.D. from Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3 University. Drawing on video recordings filmed in an aikido dojo in Tokyo, the work described aikido interactions by adapting analytical tools from Conversation Analysis, Ethnomethodology and Gesture Studies. It showed that aikido can be conceived as a communication system in which practitioners coordinate whole body movements. This communication system shares some properties with the speech-exchange system described by Conversation Analysis such as the possibility for practitioners to anticipate the next step of a contribution to the activity. My work focused on the interactions between skilled members and between skilled practitioners and beginners. In my post-doctoral research I collected other corpora in classroom and theatrical rehearsal, always focusing on the role of the body's behavior in the organization of social interaction.

THE PACIFIC PHILOSOPHY OF AIKIDO
AN INTERACTIONAL APPROACH
AUGUSTIN LEFEBVRE

KEYWORDS

Aikido, social interaction, body movement, semiotic structure, sequence.

ABSTRACT

This paper engages with the question of the invention of martial arts by examining the case of the Japanese martial art *aikido*. Relying on existing schools of traditional martial arts, Morihei Ueshiba [1883-1969] created aikido with the goal of transforming techniques aiming at killing the opponent into techniques which could benefit both partners. Instead of becoming stronger than the opponent, the goal of aikido practice is to improve the individual's behaviour during their physical interaction with their partner. The question I examine in this paper is how practitioners manifest such philosophy during their practice and through their embodied conduct. I focus specifically on how practitioners simulate a situation of conflict through semiotic structures [Goodwin 2000] through which they construct a world of movement in which anticipating the attacker's movement becomes possible. Because practitioners are organized with such a framework, they can, through movements of the whole body, pacifically produce and resolve the situation of conflict. This study contributes to understanding how a practical philosophy is implemented within the practitioners' bodies and is manifested during social interaction.

Aikido is presented by its founder, Morihei Ueshiba [1883-1969], as a *way of harmony* and an art of peace [Ueshiba 2008]; it is a method to produce an 'appropriate response to a particular situation' [Stevens 2010: 126]. How do practitioners organize these 'appropriate' responses during their everyday practice? The aim of this paper is to answer this question by examining how aikido practice is concretely organized as a particular kind of *social interaction*.

The focus on social interaction here is motivated by the ethnomethodological idea that 'the objective reality of *social facts*' is an 'on-going accomplishment of the concerted activities of daily life' [Garfinkel 1967: vii, my emphasis]. According to this view, face-to-face interaction is the *constitutive substrate* of any social phenomena:

> **Everything that matters socially – meanings, class, roles, emotions, guilt, aggression, and so forth and so on – is socially constructed. Theories about how such things are learned and experienced, and about how to study them, which are not built to the specifications that interaction requires are wrong.** [Moerman 1988: 1]

This radical statement needs some explanation. Durkheim [1937: 4] defines a social fact as a way of acting, thinking, and feeling that exists outside of and constrains any given individual consciousness (sociology for Durkheim is thus the science of social facts). Ethnomethodology, meanwhile, builds off of Durkheim's empirical study of social facts by proposing that they be studied in the context of social interactions (i.e., in their specific and contingent times and places). The ethnomethodological approach does not deny that normative rules exist; however, ethnomethodology does seek to examine how normative rules are organized, mobilized, and negotiated during social interactions. From this perspective, the goal of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis [Sacks et al. 1974] is to build 'a bridge from microphenomena such as discourse or social interaction to macronotions such as occupational careers, social indicators, dominant cultural values, and patterns of inequality in a population' [Cicourel quoted in Moerman 1988: 1].

The statements that aikido is a way of harmony, an art of peace, a method to produce appropriate responses to new situations – these contribute to the *macronotion* of aikido. However, this does not explain how aikido practitioners develop appropriate responses nor does it explain how they coordinate whole body movements without talking in each particular situation. In this paper, employing an empirical approach, I will endeavour to explain these elements of aikido practice by analysing the practical logic of practitioners engaged in aikido interactions.

The practical problem faced by aikido practitioners while interacting is to understand what the other is doing and to respond appropriately. We enter then into a problem which is common to any participant in any social interaction, viz. how to come to a shared agreement or a common understanding with one another [Garfinkel 1967: 30; Schegloff 1992: 1299]. Interestingly, while studies on intersubjectivity always rely on data containing speech [Garfinkel 1967; Schegloff 1992; Barnes 2014], aikido interactions allow us to observe the interactional management of intersubjectivity through whole body movements. Indeed, as a non-competitive martial art, the practice of aikido requires a common understanding be shared between participants.[1] In this sense, understanding Ueshiba's invention of a martial arts practice of peace and harmony requires an examination of *naturally occurring interactions* [Heritage and Atkinson 1984] of aikido practice.

---

1   In this paper, the coordination of participants refers exclusively to bodily coordination. For a consideration of the coordination of aikido movements with weapons, see Lefebvre [2016].

ONE
THE PHILOSOPHY OF AIKIDO FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF ITS INVENTOR

The founder of the Japanese martial art aikido, Morihei Ueshiba, is known to have been a great connoisseur and practitioner of Shinto and Buddhism as well as a variety of different martial arts [Ueshiba 2008; Stevens 1997]. Buddhism and the military elite have been connected throughout most of Japanese history [Cleary 1991] and the link between martial art practice and spirituality was not new when Ueshiba invented the word and the practice of aikido. The originality of Ueshiba's contribution is rather to conceive martial arts practice as a method to improve social relationships (i.e., an art of peace). Relying on lectures given by Ueshiba [2010], Stevens proposes the following definition of aikido:

> Aikido includes the techniques … actually practiced in aikido training halls. In a wider sense, however, aikido is a way of harmony, an art of peace that includes how we relate to the people around us, to society as whole, and how we deal with nature. In this case, aikido means 'appropriate response to a particular situation'.
> [Stevens 2010: 126]

One consequence of conceiving martial arts practice as a way of harmony is that, in the community of aikido practitioners, even nowadays, no competition is organized. Self-improvement is often mentioned by practitioners to explain why they do not organize and participate in competition. While competitors prepare for a competition day and therefore establish a pyramidal hierarchy from the strongest to the weakest, aikido practitioners emphasize the importance of organizing collaboratively the improvement of each individual. This point is stressed by Ueshiba in one of his lectures:

> True *budō* is not a fighting technique based on a rash use of force against another in order to determine who is stronger or who can win in a contest; rather, it is a path centered on daily training with other kindred souls, mutually working together to polish their individual characters.
> [Ueshiba 2010: 15]

However, if competition is not a relevant way of *working together*, non-competitive practice emerges as central. In one lecture, Ueshiba points out the centrality of *practice*: 'I can explain and explain aikido, but in order to understand what I am saying, a person needs to practice, to experience aikido. Practice first, and then listen to explanations' [Ueshiba 2010: 96].

Aikido cannot be reduced to an abstract discourse or philosophy about practice. Rather, we can assume that the organization of aikido practice will have specificities that are linked to the philosophy that practitioners embody, or manifest through their behaviour.

In the following sections, I address the question of how aikido practitioners manifest mutually the ability to produce appropriate responses to particular situations while interacting through nonverbal embodied conduct. How can they understand and perceive the embodied conduct their partner is performing even if they are practicing together for the first time? Through which forms of social organization do they secure a systematic coordination between their whole body movements while interacting?

Answering these questions requires us first to conceptualise how social knowledge is implemented in the body of practitioners. This paper relies on and contributes to the paradigm of research concerned by *action and embodiment within situated human interaction* [Goodwin 2000]. This approach focuses on the role of the body in the *organization of human interaction*, it 'investigates how multiple participants take each other's bodies into account as they build relevant action in concert with each other' [Goodwin 2003: 2]. This field of study follows a naturalistic perspective inspired by ethnomethodology [Garfinkel 1967] in which the analysed actions are contextualized in their social and interactional setting. As Goodwin remarks, 'human bodies, and the actions they are visibly performing, are situated within consequential settings. The positioning, actions, and orientation of the body in the environment are crucial to how participants understand what is happening and build action together' [Goodwin 2003].

The Body in Social Interaction:
Transactional Segment and Interactional Space

Current research about the role of the human body in the organization of social interaction has been greatly influenced by Goffman who distinguishes between unfocused and focused interactions [Goffman 1963]. While unfocused interaction has to do with 'the management of sheer and mere copresence' [Goffman 1963: 24], focused interaction concerns a cluster of individuals who share a mutual focus of attention and collaboratively accomplish an activity; it comprises 'all those instances of two or more participants in a situation joining each other openly in maintaining a single focus of cognitive and visual attention – what is sensed as a single mutual activity entailing preferential communication rights' [Goffman 1963: 89]. During the accomplishment of this mutual activity, each individual's body is a central resource for exchanging consequential information such as gaze directions, postures of the whole body, facial expressions, and gestures.

The empirical study of the function of the body in the organization of focused interactions has been pursued by Kendon [1990: 2004] who emphasizes *spatial management and the construction of space by the human body*. In order to describe this spatial management in any activity, Kendon proposes the notion of a *transactional segment* defined as 'a space extending in front of a person which is the space he is currently using in whatever his current activity may be … created and maintained by the individual's behavior' [Kendon 1990: 210]. When two or more individuals accomplish a mutual activity, they join their transactional segments, creating what Kendon calls an *F-formation* defined as 'the space between the interactants over which they agree to maintain joint jurisdiction and control' [Kendon 1990: 211]. The notions of *participation framework* by Goffman [1981] and Goodwin and Goodwin [2004] or of *interactional space* by Mondada [2009, 2013] all refer to a similar phenomenon, viz. the cooperative accomplishment of an activity organized within a space by/between participants via bodily interaction.

To understand how aikido practitioners manifest or accomplish their art of harmony through their bodies, studies focusing on the role of the body in the organization of social interactions provide crucial methodological tools. With reference to the notion of a transactional segment, the nature of the transactional segments organized by the body and the *frame* that it produces during aikido interactions must be specified. Kendon defines the limitations of the location and orientation of the transactional segment by 'how the individual places his body, how he orients it and spreads his limbs'; the position of the body thus serves as 'a frame, limiting the space to which the individual has immediate access and within which he carries out his current line of activity' [Kendon 1990: 211].

The specificity of aikido practitioners' transactional segments, then, is that they are *mobile*. The mobile transactional segments frame an activity which consists in organizing a space related to the moving transactional segment of the other partner. When interacting, aikido practitioners, as practitioners of any martial art, coordinate movements of the whole body creating an interactional space. But from this conceptualization, more questions emerge. What are the properties of this interactional space? How it is built and how does it become a resource for organizing aikido practice? Which are the spatial and temporal specificities of the interactional space they produce between their bodies?

Any such study needs to consider the resources that practitioners rely on to organize their embodied activity. In describing action and embodiment in human interaction, Goodwin underlines the role of semiotic structures as resources that participants to a setting rely on to organize their contributions to the shared activity. In analysing children playing hopscotch, Goodwin shows the importance of the painted grid as a semiotic structure:

> [It] provides crucial frameworks for the building of action that could not exist without it such as successful jumps, outs, fouls, etc. The actions that make up the game are impossible in a hypothetical 'natural environment' unstructured by human practice … Simultaneously, the game is just as impossible without embodiment of the semiotic structure provided by the grid in a medium that can be actually jumped on.
> [Goodwin 2000: 1505]

The semiotic structures that aikido practitioners rely on to build transactional segments and interactional space are implemented in their bodies as 'techniques du corps' [Mauss 1934]. Indeed, aikido practitioners rely on a repertoire of techniques – i.e., ways of moving the body and manipulating another body – the learning of which not only allows them to build transactional segments but also distinguishes skilled practitioners from beginners or outsiders. More importantly, these techniques are intrinsically cooperative, they imply the coordination of whole body movements between at least two practitioners.

TWO
THE AIKIDO MOVEMENT EVENT AND
ITS SEMIOTIC STRUCTURES

As a consequence of organizing a non-competitive system of training, aikido practitioners rely on known-in-common semiotic structures that afford them resources to coordinate whole body movements. The event they build while relying on those semiotic structures is known in the Japanese martial art tradition as a kata. From an anthropological perspective, a kata can be defined as a movement event similar to Hymes' explication of a 'speech event' [Hymes 1972: 56]. A kata can then be defined as an *activity directly governed by rules or norms for the use of whole body movements.* As practitioners themselves often mention, the role of a kata is to simulate a martial situation. A simulation, as a mock-up, keeps some essential features of the original, 'real' version, while eliminating other elements [Garfinkel and Sacks 1970: 363]. A kata is then a sequence of movements which re-produce some aspects of 'real' situations. Note that the literal translation of 'kata' is *mould* or *model*. The specificity of any kata is the specialization of each partner with respect to a particular task – generally attacking and counter-attacking – which is accomplished by relying on semiotic structures.

Participation Categories:
The Attacker [uke] and the Counter-attacker [nage]

Crucial to understanding how practitioners rely on semiotic structures to build a *movement event* is their orientation towards a standardized pair of *membership categories* [Sacks 1992: 40] on the basis of which aikido practitioners 'confront a world that is eminently coherent and intelligible' [Clayman and Maynard 1995: 4]. They create a social world in which the counter-attacker can project and therefore anticipate the unfolding movement of the attacker.

Some Aikido Semiotic Structures

Aikido semiotic structures provide practitioners with frameworks in which to make decisions regarding how, when, and where to move their limbs when facing their partner at any given moment in their interaction. An important semiotic structure available in aikido *membership knowledge* [ten Have 2002] is related to the position of the whole body when in a standing position. Historically, this structure comes from the practice with weapons: the *bushis* used to stand in profile relative to their opponent in order to reduce the surface of their body. In various Japanese martial arts, including aikido, this way of standing is referred to with the Japanese word *Han-mi*. *Han* (半) means the half and *Mi* (身) means the body. *Han-mi* (半身) then means to expose the opponent to only half the surface of the body. To stand in

Han-mi involves positioning one foot before the other (this is the case also, again indicating the importance of weapons here, in fencing).

This structure creates two possibilities when practitioners stand face-to-face. The first possibility, which is called *Ai-han-mi* (相半身 same half body), corresponds to a situation in which both partners have extended the same foot in front of them (left-left or right-right). The second possibility is called *Gyaku-han-mi* (opposite *Han-mi*), a situation in which both partners have extended the opposite foot in front of them (left-right).

This semiotic structure offers a basis to another semiotic structure which concerns the actions of the arm/hand segments. In this paper I will only consider the movement of grasping one wrist with one hand, which is known as *katate-dori* (*katate* 片手 for one hand, *dori* 取り for seizure). The combination of those two semiotic structures is then *Ai-hanmi-katate-dori*, where one practitioner (the attacker) grasps the *right* wrist of the other practitioner (the counter-attacker) with his *right* hand (or vice-versa). *Gyaku-hanmi-katate-dori*, meanwhile, would constitute a different semiotic structure where the attacker grasps the *right* wrist of the counter-attacker with his *left* hand (or vice-versa).

Entering the Body [Irimi] and
Receiving the Unbalancing [Ukemi]

Once the bodies are in contact, aikido practitioners rely on other kinds of complementary semiotic structures that are specifically designed to be mobilized at the moment of contact. Here again, each structure is designed to be accomplished specifically by one partner.

The first structure is initiated by the counter-attacker in order to unbalance and throw the attacker. *Irimi* (入り身) means to *enter the body* with an offensive movement. Rather than moving backwards and *away* from the attacker's movement, the martial principle of *irimi* consists of the counter-attacker moving forwards and *into* the attacker's movement in order to take a position at the attacker's back while making bodily contact with their hands or arms.

Ukemi [受け身], on the other hand, means to receive the counter-attack movement while protecting oneself. To take the *ukemi* implies an acceptance of being unbalanced by the other partner but implies at the same time a reception of the other's movement by protecting oneself. It is then a voluntary movement: when a practitioner falls, they fall not because they were 'defeated' but because they are responding to an embodied communication with the counter-attacker. Moreover, the specific form of the attacker's embodied response is contingent on the semiotic structure selected based on how they interpret the movement of the counter-attacker.

The aikido *movement event*, the kata, is then organized around the collaborative structures which allow practitioners to shape their whole body actions and articulate them in time and space. In the next section, relying on video analysis, I show how two practitioners concretely organize some katas relying on those semiotic structures. The structure *Ai-hanmi Katate-dori* provides resources to practitioners to organize the kata leading up to the point of contact (extracts 1-6). When they make contact, the structure Irimi Ukemi provides resources to organize their bodily contact until the separation of their bodies (extracts 7-8).

THREE
DATA AND METHODS

In this paper, I examine the aikido interaction following an empirical perspective inspired by ethnomethodology [Garfinkel 1967; Clayman and Maynard 1995]. I describe the aikido movements as they are performed from the practitioners' point of view in *naturally occurring interaction* [Heritage and Atkinson 1984], relying on *video recordings* [Sacks 1984: 26] analyzed through sets of screenshots.[2]

All the extracts examined in this paper are taken from a video corpus recorded in Japan in 2007. The extracts detail techniques performed by aikido master Tada Hiroshi (born 1929), a direct student of Morihei Ueshiba. In these extracts, Hiroshi is shown with a partner interacted in the same semiotic structure, the structure introduced previously as *Aihan-mi Katate-dori Irimi Nage.* While Hiroshi repeats the same semiotic structure eleven times in fifty seconds, both he and his partner actually introduce small variations each time which I will highlight in my analysis. Interestingly, these extracts show how a single semiotic structure provides a resource to *organize variation.* If we remember that the definition of aikido implies producing an *appropriate response to each particular situation,* we can understand why it is important to be able to create variation. If each situation is different, then the response appropriate to each situation will be different in each interaction.

Observation of Naturally-Occurring Aikido Interactions

Aikido semiotic structures imply the presence of two practitioners and the movement of one toward the other. They imply further an elaboration *in situ*: one practitioner needs to choose *when to initiate* the structure while the other needs to identify when to *complete* it. Those structures reflexively offer a framework to interpret the position of the partner's body before and during contact between the bodies. For aikido practitioners, the semiotic framework *Aihan-mi Katate-dori Irimi Nage* provides a resource to organize the movement of one toward the other until the contact between their bodies.

The numbers above the screen shots refer to the timing at which the image has been shot. Below the screen shots of every extract, the letter A indicates the Attacker (*Uke*) and the letter C indicates the Counter-attacker (*nage*) while the lines following each letter indicates their observable movements.

---

2   For more in-depth considerations of the theoretical and methodological implications of video analysis, see Mondada [2006] and Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff [2010].

Extract 1 *(below)*

The attacker, A, is on the right. The counter-attacker, C, is on the left.

In 3.15, both practitioners are walking one towards the other, while their arms are relaxed at their sides. While being in movement one toward the other, their practical problem is to identify the appropriate moment to initiate the production of the shared semiotic structure. The semiotic structure provides a task to accomplish for the attacker: to seize the counter-attacker's wrist. However, the semiotic structure leaves open to the counter-attacker the choice of which wrist he will present first to the attacker to complete the action [to *seize with the hand of the same side*] and when he will do that.

From 3.15, the counter-attacker *shapes his transactional segment* by

3.15

3.45

C: moves left foot one step forward and raises right hand
A: moves left foot forward one large step and raises his right hand

3.7

3.9

C: keeps right hand raised while moving right foot one step forward
A: moves left foot forward one large step and raises his right hand

raising his right hand in front of him in the direction of the attacker. We can observe the complete extension of the counter-attacker's arm in 3.7. By this movement, the counter-attacker initiates the semiotic structure and transforms the interactional space between both practitioners. As the counter-attacker's hand passes above his hip level (3.45-3.7), the arm's movement becomes recognizable for the attacker as a *solicitation*: a first action of the counter-attacker's whole body that calls for the attacker to *accelerate the rhythm of his walking* by taking a big step with his left foot and to raise his right hand toward the hand that has presented by the counter-attacker (3.7-3.9).

The attacker's *interpretation* of the counter-attacker's solicitation, his way of responding to it by a large step, is possible only with reference to the semiotic structure to which both practitioners have oriented themselves; that is to say, the counter-attacker's hand movement *becomes meaningful* when understood as part of a specific semiotic structure, viz. *seize with the same side's hand.* The attacker shapes his transactional segment by responding to the first part of the semiotic structure initiated by the counter-attacker.

Importantly, we can observe that the semiotic structure is being reconstructed *dynamically*. In other words, it becomes a resource to structure each partner's transactional segment and to organize an interactional space in which both practitioners are moving one towards the other.

In the next extract, where the spatial positioning is quite different compared with their positioning at the beginning of the first extract, we can observe that both partners rely on the same semiotic structure to organize a dynamic interactional space.

Extract 2 *(opposite)*

The sign '> 20.6' symbolizes the fact that the described movement continues until the screen shot which corresponds to 20.6 seconds.

The attacker, A, is on the left. The counter-attacker, C, is on the right.

In 20.22, though the attacker has just finished rolling, he is already gazing at the counter-attacker which indicates his *recipiency* [Heath 1986: 45]. The counter-attacker interprets the attacker's posture as an opening to extend his left arm in solicitation; that is, as initiating the first movement of a new semiotic structure. The counter-attacker's solicitation makes it appropriate for the attacker to get back to his feet and seize the wrist that has been presented to him by the counter-attacker (from 20.48).

Although the initial spatial position of both partners is quite different between extracts 1 and 2, the same sequence of initiation of movement to reconstruct in situ the semiotic structure becomes a resource for organizing the movement of one towards the other. Importantly, we observe that it is the counter-attacker, by presenting a hand to seize, who initiates the first movement to reconstruct the semiotic structure. As soon as he identifies which hand he should seize, the attacker initiates the movement towards the counter-attacker, raising his hand on the same side. From this moment on, both practitioners move *simultaneously*, one towards the other, but the counter-attacker moves as the *initiator*, choosing on which side the attacker should come. The attacker moves second, as the *responder*, aiming at a target designated by the counter-attacker. This organization in sequence has consequences that we observe in the next section.

Initiating the Counter-attack

In the following extracts, while both practitioners are physically moving simultaneously one towards the other, we can observe that the counter-attacker is able to project what will be the next position of the attacker, and to use that possibility of projection for appropriately positioning his own body in preparation for accomplishing the semiotic structure *entering the body* in the attacker's movement.

In extract 3, the counter-attacker stepping forward with his left foot (3.9-4.2) constitutes a projection because it begins at the moment when the future position of the attacker – the complementary position to which the counter-attacker is stepping (3.9-4.2) – has not yet been reached by the attacker.

20.38   *20.48*

A: orients gaze toward C and keeps gazing toward him
C: moves forward with his left foot and extends his left arm > 20.6
A: stands up > 20.73

20.6   *20.73*

C: keep his left arm extended
A: moves forward with his left foot and raises his left hand
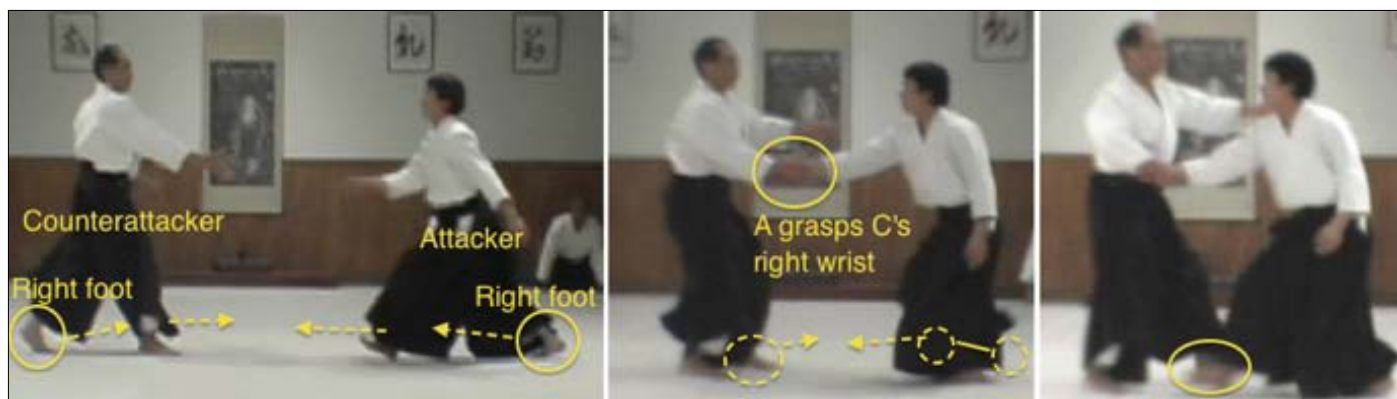
Extract 3 *(below)*

The attacker, A, is on the right. The counter-attacker, C, is on the left.

3.9   *4.1*   *4.2*

*C: keeps his right arm extended > 4.1 and steps with his left foot to the outside in order to
position himself at the approaching attacker's back > 4.2.
A: steps forward with his right foot > 4.1 and uses his right hand to grasp C's right wrist*

Extract 4 *(below)*

The attacker, A, is on the left. The counter-attacker, C, is on the right.

20.73   *20.82*   *20.98*

*C: keeps his left hand extended > 20.98
A: moves forward with his left foot and raises his left hand to grasp C's left wrist > 20.98
C: puts his right foot on A's left side before the attacker puts his left foot on the mat > 20.98*

In extract 3, by accomplishing his step forward with left foot (3.9-4.2), the counter-attacker repositions his body from the front of the attacker to his back. The position the counter-attacker reaches in 4.2 is relevant because it is on the outside of the attacker's right foot, that is, to the attacker's back. But more interestingly here, the position the counter-attacker reaches in 4.2 is relevant according to the position the attacker reaches in 4.2, while the counter-attacker's step begins in 3.9, at a moment at which the attacker is not in the same position as he is in 4.2. This means that the counter-attacker can project in 3.9 the position the attacker will reach in 4.2. The same phenomenon is observable in extract 4.

In 20.73, the counter-attacker begins a step that will become relevant only according to the position the attacker will reach in 20.98. How is the counter-attacker able to anticipate the position the attacker will reach? What are the features of the interaction between both practitioners at that moment?

In extracts 3 and 4, the counter-attacker, by keeping his solicitation arm continually extended, produces a situation that makes it appropriate for the attacker to come and grasp his wrist. The counter-attacker's left hand works then as a landmark so that the attacker can identify the point of arrival for his grasping movement and complete the structure of soliciting/grasping. Extracts 3 and 4 allow us to understand that the condition that allows the attacker to accomplish the second movement of the pair (the movement of grasping) is the maintenance of the counter-attacker's solicitation until the contact of bodies.

Simultaneously, the attacker's movement of coming and grasping produces a situation that makes relevant another movement for the counter-attacker: the outside step that allows him to take the attacker's back. For the attacker, the expected point of arrival of his grasping movement is at the level of the hands of the counter-attacker. Reaching that point requires the attacker to move his legs. And for the counter-attacker, the movement of the attacker's legs is a crucial landmark for choosing the direction for his own next step. The organization of the opening of aikido interaction relies then on the crucial fact that the counter-attacker produces a fixed point of arrival for the attacker's movement of coming and grasping. The counter-attacker *responds* to the attacker's movement of coming and grasping with his legs. In other words, the counter-attacker's solicitation produces a situation that makes it appropriate for the attacker to come and grasp, while the attacker's movement of coming and grasping makes it appropriate for the counter-attacker to move to the attacker's back.

In this interactional organization, in anticipating the point of arrival of the attacker's movement, the counter-attacker relies on the fact that the attacker will not stop moving toward the solicitation hand. The next section shows that an expectancy available in the attacker's category is: *pursuing the movement toward the counter-attacker's solicitation hand even when his solicitation hand* is moving (extract 5) or when the counter-attacker produces unexpected perturbations (extract 6).

In extract 5 overleaf, the counter-attacker changes at the final moment the position of his soliciting hand. In such situations, in producing his movement of coming and grasping, the attacker manifests the expectancy 'accomplishing movements without stopping'.

Extract 5 *(below)*

The attacker, A, is on the right. The counter-attacker, C, is on the left.

24.15　　　　　　　　　*24.33*　　　　　　　　*24.4*　　　　　　　*24.5*

C: raises his right hand
A: raises his right hand toward the counter-attacker
C: makes a quick up and down cutting gesture

In 24.15, the counter-attacker accomplishes a solicitation in the direction of the attacker. The attacker answers as soon as possible with a movement of coming and grasping in the direction of the counter-attacker (from 24.15). But this time, as the attacker's hand is approaching, the counter-attacker does not maintain the solicitation hand in a fixed position: he raises his right hand and symbolizes a cut of the attacker's right arm. Nevertheless, the change in the counter-attacker's hand position is not interpreted by the attacker as problematic: he pursues his movement of coming and grasping in the same direction. The twist of the attacker's hand (24.4-24.5) shows furthermore that he is trying to grasp the counter-attacker's solicitation hand.

Extract 6 opposite shows another kind of possible perturbation the counter-attacker can produce in accomplishing the first movement of the same semiotic structure. Generally, the counter-attacker alternates the solicitation hand in a regular rhythm: once on the left, once on the right, and so on. In extract 6, however, the counter-attacker solicits with his right hand even though he had just previously solicited with his right hand.

From 16.9, the attacker, by raising his left hand, manifests that he is mobilizing the expectancy *alternating the solicitation hand* for choosing the hand he will use for *coming and grasping*. According to that expectation, the attacker expects at this moment that the counter-attacker will raise his left hand. The attacker is here anticipating the next solicitation of the counter-attacker, as is shown in 17: the attacker's left hand reaches the same level as the counter-attacker's right hand at the same time. At this moment, the possibility for the attacker to react with great speed to the counter-attacker's solicitation depends on his relying on the *solicitation hand alternation expectancy* rather than on the observation of what the counter-attacker is doing.

From the moment observable at 17, maintenance of mutual intelligibility is threatened: the attacker makes accountable the expectancy of the *hands alternation* while the counter-attacker makes accountable the fact that he is entitled to choose freely which hand of solicitation he will present to the attacker. The result is that the attacker cannot appropriately complete the counter-attacker's first movement. How do practitioners manage to maintain the mutual intelligibility of their activity?

With the screen captures 17.34-17.47 we can observe that the attacker relaxes his left hand and raises his right hand. He shifts then from the hand which manifests the hand alternation expectancy to the expectancy according to which, as a responder completing the semiotic structure initiated by the counter-attacker's solicitation, he is supposed to adapt his movement to that of the counter-attacker. By changing the hand he will use for answering the counter-attacker's solicitation, the attacker maintains the interactional order at this moment: the counter-attacker can choose the hand of solicitation even if his choice does not match with the expectancy of right/left alternation.

Extract 6 *(below)*

The attacker, A, is on the right. The counter-attacker, C, is on the left.

16.7   *16.9*   *17*

C: raises his right hand and keeps it raised
A: raises his left hand

17.34   *17.47*

A: relaxes his left hand while he raises his right hand

In next section, I examine how practitioners organize their interaction during the contact between their bodies when the semiotic structure seizing the counter-attacker's hand with same side's hand has been completed.

Organizing Contact between Bodies

The semiotic structure *entering the body* consists for the counter-attacker to position his whole body at the attacker's back while maintaining the attacker's head against his seized arm. On his side, the attacker receives the counter-attacker's movement by bending his whole body and pivoting it in order to roll on the mat.

Extract 7 *(below)*

The attacker, A, is on the right. The counter-attacker, C, is on the left.

4.2   *4.3*   *4.44*

4.7   *4.9*   *5.1*   *5.3*

A: keeps on seizing; 4.44: stops seizing, puts his right foot on the floor, and
keeps his left foot directly behind his right foot.
C: puts his left foot on the mat > 4.2; steps forward with his right foot behind
the attacker's back > 5.3; moves his right arm towards the attacker's face until
making contact > 5.3
A: bends his body back > 5.1; his right foot extends out and he reaches back
with his right hand to execute a fall > 5.3.

As soon as the attacker seizes the counter-attacker's wrist (from 4.2), he stops moving his feet: he puts his right foot on the mat and keeps his left foot behind, maintaining a position of half body. By locking his whole body's posture, the attacker completes the previous semiotic structure: he is seizing the counter-attacker's wrist with his right hand and with his right foot forward.

On his side, from this moment on, the counter-attacker initiates the semiotic structure *entering the body*. The counter-attacker moves his right foot in the attacker's back and coordinates the forward movement of his right foot with a semi-circle movement of the right arm, making contact with the attacker's face in 4.7. This movement of the counter-attacker's whole body lasts until 5.3. To interpret the counter-attacker's *entering the body* movement, the attacker relies on the semiotic structure *receiving with the body*. The attacker does not try to go backwards but accepts his loss of balance. Indeed, the attacker *follows* the counter-attacker's whole body movement by bending his body back (from 4.7) and letting his right foot slip as the counter-attacker steps in to his back and makes contact with his arm (from 5.1).

Extract 8 shows that, between the moment of the seizing and the moment in which the counter-attacker enters his body, another semiotic structure can be inserted. The possibility of inserting another structure between two structures shows, first, that a certain degree of improvisation is possible by combining relevant elements at relevant moments, and second, that the whole body movements are organized according to a syntax i.e., a combination of units following an order). The shared movement – while bodies make contact – can therefore be lengthened by the counter-attacker for all practical purposes.

Extract 8 *(below and overleaf)*

The attacker, A, is on the left. The counter-attacker, C, is on the right.

20.95　　　　　　　　　*21.09*　　　　　　　　　*21.22*

A: keeps on seizing > 22.14
21.09 A: moves his right foot forward > 21.38
C: raises his seized hand and coordinates its trajectory with the trajectory of his left foot > 22
21.09 C: begins to pivot his left foot backwards while supporting his weight on his right foot > 21.75

21.28   21.38   21.75   22

21.38 A: puts his right foot on the mat and moves his left foot in front of his partner
21.75 C: puts his left foot on the mat

22.14   22.37   22.6   22.96

A: stops moving forwards
22.37 A: moves his left foot backwards
C: changes his whole body direction: his left arm goes right and his body's
weight is on his right foot

We can observe that, in 20.95, the counter-attacker, instead of stepping directly in the attacker's back as in extract 6, pivots and moves his left foot back. He coordinates this complex foot movement with the movement of his seized arm. This is another semiotic structure called *tenkan* (pivot). We can observe that the attacker responds to the counter-attacker's pivot with two steps instead of keeping the half-body semiotic structure as in the previous extract. Here, he organizes his contribution to the kata by following the counter-attacker's movement via his grip on the counter-attacker's wrist and by stepping forward in the direction indicated by the counter-attacker. From 22.14, the mutual configuration of both partners' bodies is comparable to the moment observable in 20.95 prior to the pivot. However, the result of the pivot is that the counter-attacker is positioned much more in the attacker's back than he was previously. From 22.37, the attacker initiates the semiotic structure *receiving with the body*. He steps back with his left foot and, from 22.96, orients his left hand toward the mat following the counter-attacker's left arm movement.

In these last few extracts, we saw how practitioners coordinate their whole body movements through a *tactile mode*. The counter-attacker's semiotic structure shapes his transactional segment in order to give direction to the attacker. Reciprocally, the attacker's semiotic structure shapes his transactional segment in order to follow the counter-attacker's movement. Through semiotic structures, they build a world of bodily contact through which they are able to communicate.

CONCLUSION

Morihei Ueshiba invented aikido by refashioning elements from preexisting martial arts used to prepare practitioners to be effective in 'real' combat situations and utilizing them in an effort to transform conflict into harmony. In this paper, I attempted to 'build a bridge' between the macronotion of aikido and the microphenomena through which aikido practitioners construct the conditions of possibility for anticipation and collaboration in the achievement of harmony.

As we saw in the extracts, the individual transactional segments are always shaped by practitioners in response to their fellow practitioners. The interactional space in which the counter-attacker is able to project and therefore to anticipate the attacker's next action is built on the basis of semiotic structures that connect transactional segments and thus connect practitioners. The semiotic structures, meanwhile, are reconstructed cooperatively through a simple sequence in which the counter-attacker initiates a first action to which the attacker responds.

Interestingly, this sequential principle of cooperation, in which one practitioner responds to the initial action of the other, allows both practitioners to *coordinate simultaneously unfolding body movements*. In other words, the simultaneity of their contributions to the interaction is possible because through semiotic structures they can interpret visually and tactilely what the other is doing as an *initiator* or as a *responder*. The participation categories of attacker and counter-attacker are therefore embedded in a social (semiotic structures) and interactional (sequence of initiations of actions) system of conflict simulation which affords practitioners the conditions of possibility of pacific harmony between two opponents.

If we think about other martial arts which rely on the kata-type of training – kumite in karate, kata in judo, but also specific training in fencing or boxing, for instance – we will find the same kind of interactional organization: semiotic structures which provide practitioners ways of using their bodies in front of a partner and in sequences of attacks/counter-attacks linked to participation categories. Every particular martial art practice and culture can be described by this interactional framework. Thus, if we consider that the practice of aikido (and the practices of all other martial arts as well) is a *social fact*, and if we want to understand how practitioners find common ground on which to tactilely communicate, then martial art studies will do well to explore further the insights afforded by observing naturally-occurring interactions.

REFERENCES

Barnes, Scott. 2014. 'Managing Intersubjectivity in Aphasia', *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 47:2, 130-150.
doi: 10.1080/08351813.2014.900216.

Clayman, Steven E. and Douglas W. Maynard. 1995. 'Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis', in *Situated Order Studies in the Social Organization of Talk and Embodied Activities*, edited by Paul Ten Have and George Psathas. Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1-30.

Cleary, Thomas. 1991. *The Japanese Art of War: Understanding the Culture of Strategy.* Boulder, CO: Shambhala Classics.

Durkheim, Émile. 1937. *Les règles de la méthode sociologique.* Paris: Quatridge/PUF.

Garfinkel, Harold. 1984 [1967]. *Studies in Ethnomethodology.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings.* New York: Free Press.

Goffman, Erving. 1981. *Forms of Talk.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Goodwin, Charles. 2000. 'Action and Embodiment within Situated Human Interaction'. *Journal of Pragmatics* 32, 1489-1522.
http://doi.org/bzhnhz

Goodwin, Charles. 2003. 'The Semiotic Body in its Environment', in *Discourses of Body*, edited by Justine Coupland and Richard Gwyn. New York: Palgrave, 1-35.

Goodwin, Charles and Marjorie Harness Goodwin. 2004. 'Participation', in *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, edited by Alessandro Duranti. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 222-244.

Heath, Christian. 1986. *Body Movement and Speech in Medical Interaction.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme].

Heath, Christian, Jon Hindmarsh, and Paul Luff. 2010. *Video in Qualitative Research Analysing Social Interaction in Everyday Life.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Heritage, John and J. Maxwell Atkinson. 1984. 'Introduction', in *Structures of Social Action Studies in Conversation Analysis*, edited by John Heritage and J. Maxwell Atkinson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1-15 [Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme].

Hymes, Dell. 1972. 'Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Life', in *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*, edited by John J. Gumperz and Dell Hymes. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 35-71.

Kendon, Adam. 1990. *Conducting Interaction Patterns of Behavior in Focused Encounters.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kendon Adam. 2004. *Gesture: Visible Action as Utterance.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lefebvre, Augustin. 2016. 'The Coordination of Moves in Aikido Interaction', *Gesture* 15.2, 123-155.

Mauss, Marcel. 1934. 'Les techniques du corps'. *Journal de Psychologie* XXXII.

Moerman, Michael. 1988. *Talking Culture: Ethnography and Conversation Analysis.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Mondada, Lorenza. 2006. 'Video Recording as the Reflexive Preservation and Configuration of Phenomenal Features for Analysis', in *Video Analysis: Methodology and Methods*, edited by Hubert Knoblauch, Bernt Schnettler, Juergen Raab, and Hans-Georg Soeffner. Oxford: Peter Lang.

Mondada, Lorenza. 2009. 'Emergent Focused Interactions in Public Places: A Systematic Analysis of the Multimodal Achievement of a Common Interactional Space'. *Journal of Pragmatics* 41, 1977-1997.
http://doi.org/cckhm9

Mondada, Lorenza. 2011. 'Interactional Space and the Study of Embodied Talk-in-Interaction', in S*pace in Language and Linguistics: Geographical, Interactional, and Cognitive Perspectives,* edited by Peter Auer, Martin Hilpert, Anja Stukenbrock, and Benedikt Szmrecsanyi. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Sacks, Harvey. 1984. 'Notes on Methodology', in S*tructures of Social Action Studies in Conversation Analysis*, 21-27.
http://doi.org/bjqw

Sacks, Harvey. 1992. *Lectures on Conversation.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Schegloff, Emanuel A. 1968. 'Sequencing in Conversational Openings'. *American Anthropologist* 70, 1075-1095
http://doi.org/c6sbsm

Schegloff Emanuel A. 1992. 'Repair after Next Turn: The Last Structurally Provided Defense of Intersubjectivity in Conversation'. *American Journal of Sociology*, 97(5), 1295-1345
http://doi.org/cpb324

Stevens, John. 2010. 'Glossary of Key Terms', in *The Heart of Aikido: The Philosophy of Takemusu Aiki by Morihei Ueshiba*, edited by Hideo Takahashi, translated by John Stevens. Tokyo: Kodansha International.

Ten Have, Paul. 2002. 'The Notion of Member is the Heart of the Matter: On the Role of Membership Knowledge in Ethnomethodological Inquiry'. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 3.3, available at: http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0203217.

Ueshiba, Kisshomaru. 2008. *A Life in Aikido: The Biography of Founder Morihei Ueshiba,* translated by Kei Izawa and Mary Fuller. Tokyo: Kodansha International.
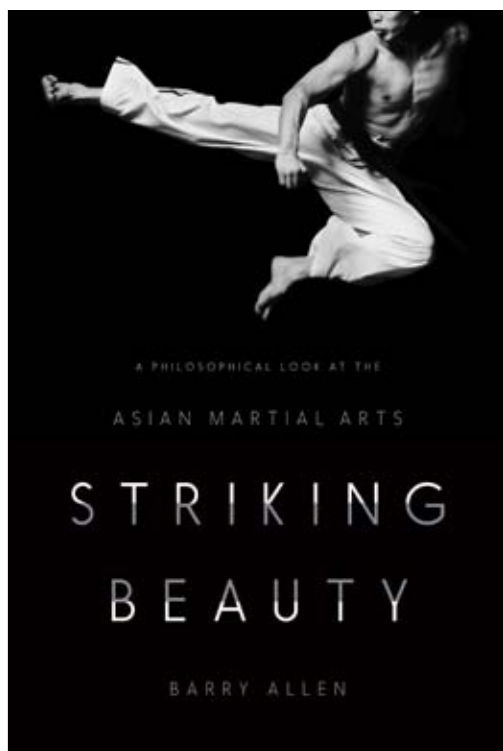
Ueshiba, Morihei. 2010. *The Heart of Aikido: The Philosophy of Takemusu Aiki.* Kodansha International.

BOOK REVIEW

Striking Beauty: A Philosophical Look
at the Asian Martial Arts
Barry Allen

REVIEWER

Hiu M. Chan is a PhD candidate at the School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, Cardiff University.

In his new book, *Striking Beauty: A Philosophical Look at the Asian Martial Arts* [2015], martial artist and author Barry Allen seeks to address the following question: 'Where is the beauty in something so vested in violence?' In order to understand the 'paradoxical relationship with beauty and violence' evidenced by the martial arts, we must, he proposes, 'know something about the Asian martial arts themselves' [ix]. The question that Allen has chosen to address, and the position from which he tries in his book to address it, already signals the book's significance for martial arts studies scholars. Outside of the academy, Allen's work is equally significant, for this paradoxical relationship with beauty and violence is also revealed in our everyday encounters with martial arts. Whether as practitioners, scholars, or practitioner-scholars, we all conceive of the 'essence' of martial arts differently. Some think that the emphasis lies in the word 'martial', i.e., in the practical, combative, *violent* aspects of the martial arts. Others think that the emphasis lies in the word 'arts', i.e., in the potential for deep, philosophical, *nonviolent* enlightenment.

This seems to be a never ending debate. Allen's book, then, can perhaps offer us some useful perspectives on how to approach this issue in our scholarship and our practice. This does not, however, exhaust Allen's project, for his ambition is much greater than this. Instead of focusing on one particular school of martial arts, or even one particular country, he is keen to analyse the entire phenomenon of what he calls 'the Asian martial arts' as a whole, an 'originally Chinese, then East Asian, and now global' tradition of 'usually unarmed personal combat' [ix]. In this sense, the term 'martial arts' is being used as an umbrella term for diverse cultural phenomena. Such an approach can, indeed, provide us with different perspectives on the 'bigger picture', but it also inevitably lacks the kind of focused attention that helps us understand particular cultural traditions and their unique philosophies.

In Chapter 1, Allen explores 'the Asian martial arts' by positioning the phenomenon in the context of Chinese philosophical traditions such as Daoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and the military 'art of war'. Allen attempts to trace the usage of the term *wushu* back to its original usage in the Chinese language. He claims that wushu dates back to the sixth century, while wuyi dates back to to the seventeenth century. Allen insists that wushu is the more accurate term for describing what we call 'martial arts' nowadays, as in his view, contemporary practices tend to disengage from their Chinese philosophical heritages.

In my view, this argument is slightly problematic. Even though many types of Asian martial arts are influenced by Chinese philosophical traditions, I do not think the term wushu should be the default term for all martial arts. For instance, as an aikidoka, it would be strange to think about aikido as a type of wushu. Not only is this a dubious proposition, the argument is not developed enough to encourage substantial debate. Allen's survey of wushu relies exclusively on secondary sources, and in

**MARTIAL
ARTS STUDIES**

Striking Beauty
Barry Allen
Columbia University Press

Reviewed by
Hiu M. Chan

particular, on Peter A. Lorge's *Chinese Martial Arts: From Antiquity to the Twenty-First Century* [2011]. If it is truly Allen's contention that we should theorize the martial arts according to the concept of wushu, then more research into early, primary sources and manuscripts is necessary. How was the term wushu adapted and revised when it travelled to different places within Asia? Did this influence the names given to later martial arts styles? If so, how? The argument is not completely without merit, but in the state presented here, it is not sufficient.

Further, Allen briefly introduces the history of Indian Buddhist monk Bodhidharma and his travels in China. He claims that Bodhidharma introduced both Chán (Zen) and physical training to the local monks, making him, on Allen's account, 'the founder of Chán (Zen) Buddhism and thus also the father of the Chinese martial arts' [3]. Allen considers the link between Bodhidharma and the Asian martial arts to be underrepresented in historical accounts, and for his part, he credits Bodhidharma with combining spiritual meditation and physical training into a specific form of practice. From here, Allen proceeds to link martial arts to Sunzi's *The Art of War*, in which Allen is fascinated by its similarity to the Daoist tenet of 'fighting without fighting'. In particular, Allen discusses at length the notion of 'effortless effectiveness' [33] and its salience with respect to *The Art of War* on the one hand and martial arts practice on the other. Again, Allen brings up an interesting point but does not mount a convincing argument. Although there are vague connections, *The Art of War* is in fact very specific in its strategic discussions, and to focus only on the vague similarities to aspects of martial arts practice ends up devaluing *The Art of War*, obscuring the context in which it was written and the purpose it was designed to serve.

In Chapter 2, Allen moves from the relevance to Asian martial arts of traditions in 'Eastern' philosophy to traditions of 'Western' philosophy. As he prefaces the chapter: 'I [will] explain why a chapter on Western philosophy cannot have much to say to these arts, not for accidental reasons of language and geography, but because this philosophy tends to be struck mute before anything as corporeal as the martial arts' [61]. In Allen's view, Western philosophy is 'a movement of nature rationalism, conceiving nature as a rational order, a cosmos with a principle that is both intelligible and intelligent' [61]. Allen thus sets up 'Western Philosophy' (if only it could be one unified *thing*) as the 'Evil Other' in his philosophical history of martial arts. This is not the first time this binary has been deployed. Allen's purpose in deploying it is to foreground the mind/body conflict, which he identifies as a hallmark of Plato's metaphysics and which he traces from Plato throughout the 'whole' of 'Western Philosophy'. In doing so, the initial question of the paradoxical relationship between beauty and violence in martial arts seems to get lost (unless Allen wishes to map beauty/violence onto mind/body, although if this is his intent, it remains unclear).

By Chapter 3, as if sensing he had lost the initial thread, Allen tries to return to the question 'Where is the beauty in something so vested in violence?' by considering martial arts in relation to athletic competition and artistic performance:

> **Martial arts practice is like sport but not sport and dancelike but not dance. It constantly refers to violence but refuses it a place in the training. The training is athletic, as it is in sport and professional dance, yet the competence that the martial arts teach stands apart from those of sport or dance by means of its external, instrumental value as a weapon. It is precisely this external, instrumental effectiveness, the weapons potential of martial arts, that accounts for the striking beauty of its movements. [112]**

Allen investigates the notions of athletics, sport, sport aesthetics, martial art aesthetics, and dance in order to strike a balance between beauty and violence:

> **Movement tends to become aesthetically interesting as it becomes fluid, flowing, efficient, visibly**

MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES

Striking Beauty
Barry Allen
Columbia University Press

Reviewed by
Hiu M. Chan

> energetic, and seemingly effortless, the design qualities of Asian martial arts techniques. Training becomes a theatre of skilled movement for the agent and an audience of teachers and fellow students. [158]

In Chapter 4, building off of the previous chapter's consideration of physical competence in sport and performance, Allen turns to the issue of what a body can do. He does this by constructing the martial body as a weapon: 'The techniques that the Asian martial arts teach are weapons. There is no other way to put it, which means that training in these arts is training in the use of weapons' [159]. I disagree with Allen's conceptualisation of the martial body as a weapon. A weapon does not have a conscious purpose, it does not have agency. A weapon does not *do* anything, it is *used, by someone, to do something.* Who – or what – 'uses' the martial body? Either the practitioner is self-aware or not. The logic to conceptualise the martial body as a weapon seems to be an effort on Allen's part to justify the violent element of martial arts. This is a problem, however, and it is related to the usage of 'the Asian martial arts' as an umbrella term, for different martial arts conceptualise violence differently.

Instead of investigating how one specific martial art conceptualises violence, Allen turns his discussion into a more general survey of different aspects of violence such as 'dread violence', 'representations of violence', 'violence and power', 'war and violence', 'terrible beauty', 'ethics and arts of violence', and so forth. All the while, there is an ever-widening gap between these discussions and Allen's initial question. How do these discussions contribute to a potential answer? One can be very violent but not necessarily a martial artist; similarly, a martial artist does not need to be violent in order to be a skilled martial artist. What Allen is trying to approach or grasp between violence and beauty, it seems to me, is a notion of *adaptability*. The beautiful aesthetic is enabled by the body's adaptability through mental and physical conditioning; likewise, adaptability is prized in combat situations including self-defence and sport. Some martial arts might be more violent than others, but violence, Allen seems to realise over the course of his book, has never been the essence of the martial arts; rather, the skills a martial artist acquires, skills in both intellectual and physical activities, are what need to become our focus.

In his epilogue, Allen returns to the fascinating paradox that inspired him to write this book, that 'something so warlike in conception should be beautiful to watch and joyful to perform' [206]. The way we can reconcile this paradox, Allen believes, is for us to realise, with him, that 'martial arts are not vested in violence. They are vested in life and address the ethical problem of a response to violence' [206]. Allen's epilogue is my favourite part of the book. 'Martial arts' means different things to different people, and Allen's book may not settle once and for all the debate on the 'essence' of the martial arts, but his book is significant for the passion with which he braves his philosophical journey. His joyful position, reached at the end of his journey, may serve as the final word in my review:

> [Martial arts practice] resonates with everything it touches, changing how you think and act, perceive and feel. The beginning of power, knowing what your body can do, is the imagination of power, daring the experiment, and, only in that way, becoming more consistently who you are. [212]

REFERENCES

Allen, Barry. 2015. *Striking Beauty: A Philosophical Look at the Asian Martial Arts*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Lorge, Peter A. 2011. *Chinese Martial Arts: From Antiquity to the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
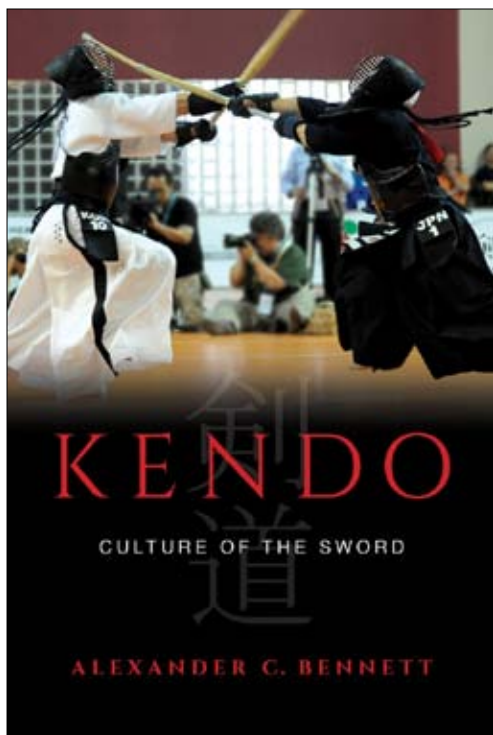
BOOK REVIEW

Kendo: Culture of the Sword
Alexander C. Bennett

University of California Press, 2015
328 pages $32.95 /£24.95

REVIEWER

Dr. Andrea Molle holds a PhD in Sociology from the University of Milan. Between 2006 and 2008 he conducted extensive ethnographic fieldwork on Japanese Martial Arts in Nagoya, Osaka, and Tokyo. He is the founder and lead scientist of BUDO-lab [http://www.budolab. org], an interdisciplinary research group at Chapman University that focus on the study of combative behavior and martial arts practice.

The easily accessible writing and rich information contained in *Kendo: Culture of the Sword* [2015] makes it an essential work for both enthusiasts and scholars in the field of martial arts studies. As someone who has lived in Japan and is active in the field of quantitative and computational study of Japanese Budō, I can readily attest to the expertise of author Alexander C. Bennett. Bennett, trained as both a historian and as an anthropologist, is a brilliant and prolific scholar who has dedicated his professional life to the study of Budō in general and kendo in particular.[1]

An enthusiast-practitioner as well as an academic scholar, Bennett has actively contributed to the overseas diffusion and development of these disciplines. His long-time residence in Japan coupled with his linguistic competence makes Bennett uniquely suited to this project. Not only is he able to make use of and explore sources that simply do not register for most scholars, he is also able to make strides in an area of martial arts studies that has been reluctant to open itself to inquiry. I cannot think of anyone more qualified than Bennett to write the book on the social and political history of kendo.

Bennett's many years in the field are discernible in every aspect of his writing. Despite the fact that the book was written for a general audience, as suggested by the detailed technical explanation of kendo [xvii–xxxv] and the introduction to the various other forms of Budō [1–25], it will no doubt prove useful for scholars interested in exploring new topics in the field of martial arts studies. In this volume, Bennett acts as a guide to the main religious, philosophical, historical, and political events that shaped the development of modern kendo across the centuries. He presents a wide range of information including names, events, places, and technical evolution, and he does so with an enjoyable prose style that is light and vivid without losing the rigor and precision that is expected of a scholarly monograph.

The only limitation that I see in this manuscript is a persistent tension between Bennett-the-kendo-enthusiast and Bennett-the-kendo-scholar. By and large, Bennett manages to execute a sophisticated balancing act on this front; nevertheless, I often got the sense that he was forcing criticisms as if to avoid charges of bias regarding his lifelong passion. Additionally, in the introduction, it was as if he felt compelled to justify his work to both the academic and the Budō communities. Still, this is a very common tendency in works currently being produced in martial arts studies.

---

1   Alex Bennett holds a PhD in Human Studies and Science from Kyoto University [2001] and a PhD in Japanese Studies from the University of Canterbury [2012]. He is currently an Associate Professor at Kansai University in the Department of International Affairs and specializes in religious studies, Japanese history, and Budō culture.

Kendo: Culture of the Sword
Alexander C. Bennett
University of California Press

Reviewed by
Andrea Molle

The goal of the book is clearly presented in its introduction: To deconstruct and demystify kendo in order to discover the historical processes that led to its creation. To Bennett, kendo is an invented tradition that emerged, as did all of the other forms of Budō, in a particular historical milieu. It has been shaped by a number of competing political agendas and social objectives. Each chapter is designed to present the reader with an analysis of kendo through the most important philosophical paradigms, theoretical debates, and historical issues involved in its construction. Through this discussion, we see that kendo is both the object of the analysis and the perfect metaphor to approach the complexities of modern Japanese society.

The first chapter of the book is devoted to presenting the foundations of the 'Art of the Sword' during the medieval period. While not holding back any essential historical information, the core of the chapter is an intriguing concept that Bennett refers to as the 'aestheticization of violence' [36]. This is a very important concept. It gives the reader a viewpoint from which to understand how Japanese martial arts evolved from a pure set of combative skills to become a complex social artifact and, in some cases, even a sport. The Japanese understanding of mind-body interaction, meditation, enlightenment, and social relationships introduced in this first chapter put the following four centuries into perspective. From the second chapter on, Bennett explores the five phases of 1) Intellectualization, 2) Spiritualization, 3) Pacification, 4) Commercialization, and 5) Sportification.

After reading each section, it is clear that the invention of kendo was not separate from the creation of a larger (inter)national myth: the 'way of the sword'. The sword (and, by extension, practices associated with swordsmanship) is mythically framed as a unique Japanese archetype. Interestingly, this is far from a historical truth. The sword, both as an instrument of war and as a sacred symbol, had always been much more meaningful in the European imagination than in the Japanese imagination. However, as Bennett notes, it did serve the ethos and the interests of the emerging ruling elite during the Meiji Era.

Moving on, Chapters 3, 4, and 5 discuss the cultural implications of kendo through the lenses of pre- and post-World War II Japanese nationalism. In Chapters 3 and 4, Bennett investigates the time period during which Japan tried to establish its political and cultural hegemony throughout East Asia. It was this effort that led to the construction of kendo as the heir to the ancient (re: invented) wisdom of the samurai class which helped to instill a useful sense of pride and sacrifice in the Japanese people. Consequently, the 'samurai spirit' aided the government in instituting pervasive social control.

Later, in Chapter 5, Bennett covers Japan's efforts to find its place in the postwar world. During this period, a more modern kendo concealed the underlying tension resultant from the contradictory demands of globalization (i.e. conformity vs distinctiveness and tolerance vs discrimination). This discussion of modern kendo and the sportification of Budō leads to Chapter 6 and, finally, the Epilogue, wherein Bennett discusses issues related to the internationalization of the Japanese martial arts. If kendo arose from (or at the same time as) Japanese nationalism, then is there really a way to make it a globalized practice?

Bennett seems to suggest that the answer may be no. As the Japanese people believe themselves to be the only ones capable of fully appreciating the implications of the philosophical, social, ethical, and psychological dimensions of kendo, every effort to globalize kendo is invalidated by the presumption that 'non-Japanese people will never understand'. Interestingly enough, Bennett notes that this presumption seems to have been internalized by the many non-Japanese who consider all Japanese practitioners to be inherently 'authentic' and superiorly skilled. This is a very provocative conclusion to a question that not all scholars are willing to address, and the candidness with which Bennett addresses it is all the more encouraging, especially insofar as further studies of this phenomenon (perhaps from more sociological vantage points) and its effects on the social construction of kendo would yield very interesting insights.

MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES

Kendo: Culture of the Sword
Alexander C. Bennett
University of California Press

Reviewed by
Andrea Molle

Unfortunately, Bennett does not seem to be willing to offer more evidence than his own personal anecdotes gained while working as a translator for some of the main Budō associations. I am well-aware that Bennett's work is situated in the fields of history and anthropology. Nevertheless, as a quantitative social scientist, I cannot avoid noting that, despite the high quality of the historical reconstruction, several of the cases presented as evidence of the modern implications of kendo (and Budō more generally) are taken from the author's personal experiences and interviews. This hardly constitutes what we might call a scientifically valid 'sample set'.

In conclusion, this book is a must-read for researchers in the field of martial arts studies. Bennett's efforts allow non-specialists the opportunity to form their own opinions on the interconnections between kendo and the evolution of Japanese society. The book is reasonably simple, yet it provides a 'blueprint' for the design of all sorts of future research projects on the Japanese martial arts. For students, the structure of the book is clear and it provides vivid explanations of the more important and challenging concepts. Overall, the book offers ample material to stimulate further inquiries in response to the many unanswered questions currently animating martial arts studies.

BOOK REVIEW

Martial Arts and the Body Politic in Indonesia
Lee Wilson

REVIEWER

D. S. Farrer is associate professor of anthropology at the University of Guam. He edited War Magic: Religion, Sorcery, and Performance *[2016], co-edited* Martial Arts as Embodied Knowledge: Asian Traditions in a Transnational World *[2011], and authored* Shadows of the Prophet: Martial Arts and Sufi Mysticism *[2009].*

DOI

Good anthropological research involves going into the field, making observations, and utilizing data to make an argument. Where possible, scholars read and reply to previously published work so as not reinvent the wheel, avoid making the same mistakes, and respond to established findings. It is in these terms that I approached *Lee Wilson's Martial Arts and the Body Politic in Indonesia* [2015].

Unfortunately, Wilson exhibits zero knowledge of the vibrant and emergent field of martial arts studies and his book adds little to any of this field's emerging debates. Moreover, the style displays a kind of clunky artifice throughout, which makes it feel as if the book were the product of a postgraduate student lost in a maze of endless obscure academic references. Perhaps the book might have been more impressive had it delivered significant original results. Unfortunately, originality is difficult to locate in this chaotic assemblage. Several of the chapters have been published elsewhere, in part or in full, and the author has simply mashed them together in this book, with little consideration for developments in the field or relevant literature.

The book is mostly based upon (recorded?) interviews, punctuated by multisided participant observation gathered during 17 months in 2002-2003 (with occasional subsequent visits until 2013) [21]. A local research assistant and friend knowledgeable in the ways of *silat* accompanied Wilson for an unspecified amount of time. I suspect the account would have been more interesting had the assistant (key informant?) been allocated more ink.

Wilson's stated aim is 'to explain why Pencak Silat, as both fighting art and system of spiritual cultivation, has figured so conspicuously in Indonesian society and political culture' [3] – a task he attempts across six chapters. The first chapter, however, entitled 'From Out of the Shadows', is a lost opportunity. For instance, Wilson has either not read or not bothered to respond to *Shadows of the Prophet* [Farrer 2009]. 'The Management of Tradition' details the organizational structure of Ikatan Pencak Silat Indonesia (the Pencak Silat Association of Indonesia, or IPSI). But there is no account of the fighters in competition *silat* or *olahraga*. Indeed, overall, *Martial Arts and the Body Politic in Indonesia* would perhaps have been better entitled *The Oral History of IPSI: 1948-2003*.

In these pages, Indonesia is mostly conceived as a political entity divided between center and periphery, Jakarta and Cimande village, Java and Sunda, rather than considered in discrete geographical or culturally-bounded areas. A cradle of *silat*, Sumatra, in this account may as well not exist. The 'body politic', 'community', or 'common body' is utilized principally as a rather clumsy metaphor redolent of certain 1980s genres of academic writing. Conspicuous by its absence, there is no discussion of more recent work in phenomenology or embodiment. Equally

MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES

Martial Arts and the Body Politic in Indonesia
Lee Wilson
Brill

Reviewed by
D.S. Farrer

problematic is the fact that, whenever the author actually gets around to describing 'martial arts', we merely encounter a rather thin cameo description of Javanese and Sundanese varieties of *penca* and *silat*, including Setia Hati, Cikaret, Betawi, Syabandar, with a few details reserved for the supposedly 'peasant' or village style of Cimande.

However, the final chapter, entitled 'Sovereign Bodies and the Practicalities of Power' (although another borrowed concept), does provide some interesting material on organized violence in the overthrow of the Suharto regime in 1998. Unfortunately, by this stage, Wilson has abandoned any serious discussion of martial arts. Rather, he claims that the 'gist' of his argument is that, 'in subjectivities cultivated in IPSI and modern Pencak Silat schools, interpersonal relations and diffuse agency are circumscribed by a bounded individualism in which the state assumes prominence as the guarantor of spiritual well-being' [170]. As such, the title *Martial Arts and the Body Politic in Indonesia* amounts to a triple misnomer for a rather inadequate journey not through the subject announced in the title but rather through certain Western sociological and anthropological conceptions of power.

REFERENCES

Farrer, D.S. 2009. *Shadows of the Prophet: Martial Arts and Sufi Mysticism*. Netherlands: Springer.

Wilson, Lee. 2015. *Martial Arts and the Body Politic in Indonesia.*
Leiden and Boston: Brill, VKI 299, Power and Place in Southeast Asia 7.

CONFERENCE REPORT

MIXING FENCING GROUND AND ACADEMIC FLOOR

A review of three recent conferences with a focus on Historical European Martial Arts studies

Sword: Form and Thought
German Blade Museum, Solingen
19-21 November 2015

The Art That Suits You
Schlossberg Museum, Cheminitz
18-20 February 2016

Shields of the Late Middle Ages
Bavarian National Museum, Munich
4-5 March 2016

REVIEWER

Daniel Jaquet is a postdoctoral fellow at the Max Planck Institute for History of Science, Berlin. He specialises in Historical European Martial Arts studies as both historian and practitioner. He has co-edited Late Medieval and Early Modern Fight Books: Transmission and Tradition of Martial Arts in Europe (14th-17th c.) *and is the co-editor of the peer-reviewed journal* Acta Periodica Duellatorum.

DOI

For the past half decade, increasing attention has been directed towards Historical European Martial Arts (HEMA) studies as an emerging field of cross-disciplinary research. Particular focus has been given to written sources of the late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period referred to as 'Fight Books'.[1] A few dedicated conferences and workshops have emerged, alongside specific panels in larger conferences on arms and armour or medieval studies.[2] This conference report will briefly review three such events held recently in Germany where HEMA were presented both through academic papers and practical demonstrations by 'fighting scholars' (a term coined by Raúl Sánchez García and Dale C. Spencer [2013]), thereby providing a multi-dimensional (scientific and pragmatic) range of perspectives.

One such conference was held on the margins of an exhibition called 'Sword: Form and Thought' at the German Blade Museum in Solingen. This showcased new ideas and approaches on how to study and present swords as dynamic objects to a larger audience. This was held as an international conference, involving scholars, museum curators, researchers from various fields, and experts not only of martial arts but also blacksmithing.[3] This three-day symposium included a day dedicated to the practical exchange of martial knowledge. It was actually a follow-up to an earlier conference, held in Freiburg in 2012,[4] which did not however include an exhibition.

The 22 papers covered a large timeframe (from prehistory to the early modern era, with a heavy focus on medieval swords) as well as a large geographical frame (from Asia to Europe). The work presented could be divided into four thematic subjects: classification and typology, fighting and swordsmanship, metallurgy and production, and symbolism and reception. Many thought-provoking contributions pointed out the need to revise established theories and methods that have in the past been used to study and classify swords. New findings and case studies were presented and led to interesting and deep discussions between experts and scholars.

The papers dealing with fighting and swordsmanship stemmed from experimental archaeology and use-wear analysis [Raphael Hermann's paper 'Bronze Age Combat Experiment: The Swords'], German studies and linguistics [Matthias Johannes Bauer's paper 'Egenolff's Fight Book: Form and Thought, Then and Now'], history and anthropology [Eric Burkart's paper 'How to Handle a Long Sword and How to Use a Fight Book'], and history and material science [my paper 'Analysis of Mechanical Properties and Construction of Three Fencing Swords']. The aforementioned papers attempted to demonstrate details of this field of research from a different point of view, trying to methodologically reshape the boundaries and identity of martial arts studies connected to either fight books or material culture. The proceedings of this conference

---

1   For some introductory remarks on the development of the field, and issues faced by both researchers and practitioners, see Jaquet and Sorenson [2015].

2   See Jaquet [2013].

3   See Grotkamp-Schepers, Immel, Jojhnsson, and Wetzler [2015] as well as Deutscher, Kaiser, and Wetzler [2015].

4   See Deutscher, Kaiser, and Wetzler [2014].

will appear in a collection entitled *Armour and Weapons* by Boydell and Brewer. Additionally, several events were held during the exhibition which revolved around the demonstration and introduction of European martial arts.

In the context of a wider project of an exhibition on fight books in the Schlossberg Museum, a conference solely dedicated to HEMA studies was organised by Thore Wilkens [Chemnitz, February 18-20, 2016]. This two-day conference was entitled 'Kunst dye dich zyret: Fechten als Mittel persönlicher und institutionneller Repräsentation' ('The Art that Suits You: Fencing as a Means of Personal and Institutional Representation') and it also included half a day of martial exchanges in the gym. During this event eight out of the nine speakers were experienced martial artists. Thore Wilkens opened the conference by presenting on the subject of the goals, methods and limits of 'fight book studies' ['Die Idee kommt aus der Bewegung. Potenzial und Methodik der praktisch perspektivierten Fechtbuchforschung': 'The Idea Come from Movement: Potential and Methodology of Fight Books Studies with a Practical Perspective']. He concluded the event with a case study showing the relevance of the practical orientation of research compared to more classical – indeed, arguably biased – methodologies used in the context of art history studies ['Der Schlüssel zur Kunst. Ergebnisse einer praktisch perspektivierten Analyse der kommentierten ringer kunst': 'The Key Unlocking the Art: Results of an Analysis with Practical Perspective of a Commented Art of Wrestling'].

Uwe Fiedler outlined the importance of this approach for urban history ['Fechtmeister, Schlachtschwertierer, Raufbolde. Relevanzen der Fechtbuchforschung für stadtgeschichtliche Fragestellungen': 'Fencing Master, Executioner, Ruffians: Relevance of Fight Book Studies for Urban History Questions']. Paul Becker reviewed previous research and presented new findings related to two well-known authors of the fifteenth century ['Ausgeschöpft? Zwischen Qualität und Quantität von Quellen zu mittelalterlichen Fechtmeistern. Paulus Kal und Hans Thalhofer. Ein Vergleich': 'Depleted? Between Quality and Quantity of Sources Related to Medieval Fencing Masters: Paulus Kal and Hans Thalhofer, A Comparison']. Dierk Hagedorn presented specific techniques from the armoured fencing repertory and reviewed some of the misconceptions about this type of fighting ['Spezialeinsatz mit Mordschlag und Straße der Glieder. Der Kampf im Harnisch in den "Gladiatoria"-Handschriften': 'Specific Engagement with the Mortal Strike and the Road of the Gauntlet: The Fighting in Armour in the "Gladiatoria" Manuscritpts'].

Jan Schäfer presented the authorial strategies for personal and institutional representation of the 18th century fencing masters ['Das Fechtbuch als Repräsentationsraum an Fürstenhöfen und Universitäten der Frühen Neuzeit am Beispiel der Werke von Jéann Daniel L'Ange und Jean Jamain de Beaupré': 'The Fight Books as a Means of Representation in the Princely Courts and Early Modern Universities with the Works of Jean Daniel L'Ange and Jean Jamain de Beaupré as Examples']. Moshtagh Khorasani introduced the specificities of wrestling in Iranian History with parallels from contemporaneous practices and perspective with the historical treatises ['Die soziale Stellung des Ringkampfes und Ringer in der iranischen Geschichte. Eine Vergeichsanalyse der persischen Manuskripte über den historischen Ringkampf': 'The Social Status of Wrestlers in Iranian History: A Comparative Analysis of the Persian Manuscripts about Historical Wrestling'].

Matthias Johannes Bauer presented a socio-linguistic and technical analysis of the different printed versions of one 16th century work ['Das Egenolffsche Fechtbuch: Ladenhüter oder Verkaufsschlager?': 'The Fight Book of Egenolff, Unsold Good or Best-Seller?']. Rainer Welle offered a theoretical analysis and confronted a pragmatic point of view of the representation of movement in illustrated fight books ['Vom Standbild zur filmischen Illusion. Das frühneuhochdeutsche Fechtschrifttum und sein Beitrag zur Visualisierung und Objektivierung internalisierter Bewegungsbilder': 'From Still Picture to Cinematic Illusion: The Early Middle High German Fighting Material and its Contribution to Visualisation and Objectification of the Mental Image of Movement']. Lastly, I proposed a typology as a research tool to classify and analyse Fight Books ['Die Verschriftlichung von Kampfpraxen. Zur Entwicklung einer Typologie von Fechtbüchern, zur näheren Bestimmung der kulturellen

und institutionellen Kontexte': 'The Fighting Praxes Put in Writing: Towards the Establishment of a Typology of Fight Books to Identify Cultural and Institutional Contexts']. Overall, this conference should significantly help to redefine the German research scene in terms of rethinking its limits and potential.

Finally, a two-day international conference entitled 'Schilde des Spätmittelalter' ('Shields of the Late Middle Ages') was held at the Bavarian National Museum (Munich, March 4-5, 2016). This attracted curators and arms/ armour scholars as well as HEMA practitioners. It focused mainly on questions related to typology, case studies and representation of various medieval shields, with several contributions dealing with conservation studies, replication and archaeological experiments.

Two contributions were specifically focused on HEMA studies, and a thirty minute annotated demonstration took place. Cornelius Berthold and Ingo Petri ['Passiv oder aktiv? Die Verwendung von Schildern im Kampf': 'Passive or Active? The Handling of Shields in Combat'], two scholars and experienced practitioners, proposed a review of our understanding of the martial principles and contexts of interpretation and experimentation based on both material culture and technical literature (i.e., fight books). Herbert Schmidt ['Der Buckler im Spätmittelalter': 'The Buckler in the Late Middle Ages'], a martial artist and independent researcher, presented his typology of bucklers.[5] With his HEMA group (Ars Gladii) he also gave a demonstration, surveying the most important material from the Fight Books related to fighting with sword and buckler.

As mentioned above, these three recent events are all developments on earlier pioneering conferences in Germany; moreover, they also echo similar initiatives that have begun to emerge in different areas over the last decade in places such as England, Scotland, Austria, France and Switzerland. The frequency and increasing quality of the German events strongly suggest that HEMA studies are actually gaining recognition and momentum on an academic level. The critical mass of researchers – whether they be academics, martial experts or both – and the increasing number of scientific and amateur publications in the field certainly presage interesting developments on the horizon.

Amongst the important issues this field will have to face in the future is the definition of practice as research.[6] As showcased by several of the papers reviewed above, the inclusion of demonstrations with scholarly paper serves not only as decorum or public outreach entertainment, but mostly as a support to scientific argumentation – may it be for research on bodily knowledge circulation or on material culture. However, such performances are still perceived merely as 'revival', 're-enactment' or 'entertainment'. More proof of concepts and case studies should appear in publication to help minimise confusion about the scholarly value of experiencing and experimenting within historical martial arts.[7] As with other fields of martial arts studies, innovative ways of bridging the gap between researcher and practitioner must be found, as well as new approaches on the matter of how to actually publish research on embodied knowledge.

Historical European Martial Arts studies, based on a large corpus of written documentation from the late middle Ages onwards, has mainly been based on classical disciplinary approaches such as history, philology and art history. The latest developments, however, seem to demonstrate that new approaches to these big questions are increasingly cross- and multi-disciplinary (or indeed even what Bowman calls 'anti-disciplinary' [2015]). Through such developments, the field or fields of HEMA are currently being re-invented.

---

5   For more, see Schmidt [2015].

6   On this issue, see Bowman [2015] and Spatz [2015].

7   See Jaquet [2016].

REFERENCES

Bowman, Paul. 2015. *Martial Arts Studies: Disrupting Disciplinary Boundaries.* London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Deutscher, Lisa, Mirjam Kaiser, and Sixt Wetzler eds. 2014. Das Schwert – Symbol und Waffe. Beiträge zur geisteswissenschaftlichen Nachwuchstagung vom 19.-20. Oktober 2012 in *Freiburg/Breisgau. Freiburger Archäologische Studien* 7. Rahden: Martie Leidorf Verl.

Deutscher, Lisa, Mirjam Kaiser, and Sixt Wetzler. 2015. 'The Sword – Form and Thought Conference Proceedings', available at: https://www.academia.edu/19645241/_The_Sword_-_Form_and_Thought_Conference_2015_Report.

Sánchez García, Raúl and Dale C. Spencer [eds]. 2013. *Fighting Scholars: Habitus and Ethnographies of Martial Arts and Combat Sports.* London: Anthem Press.

Grotkamp-Schepers, Barbara, Isabell Immel, Peter Johnsson, and Sixt Wetzler eds. 2015. *The Sword: Form and Thought.* Solingen: Deutsches Klingenmuseum.

Jaquet, Daniel. 2013. 'Les Savoirs Gestuels Investigués : L'expérimentation Des Arts Entre Histoire Des Techniques, Archéologie et Histoire Culturelle'. E-*Phaïstos: Revue D'histoire Des Techniques* 2.1, 119–22.

Jaquet, Daniel. 2016. 'Experimenting Historical European Martial Arts – A Scientific Method?' In *Late Medieval and Early Modern Fight Books: Transmission and Tradition of Martial Arts in Europe (14th-17th Centuries)*, edited by Daniel Jaquet, Karin Verelst, and Timothy Dawson, Leiden: Brill, 216 245.
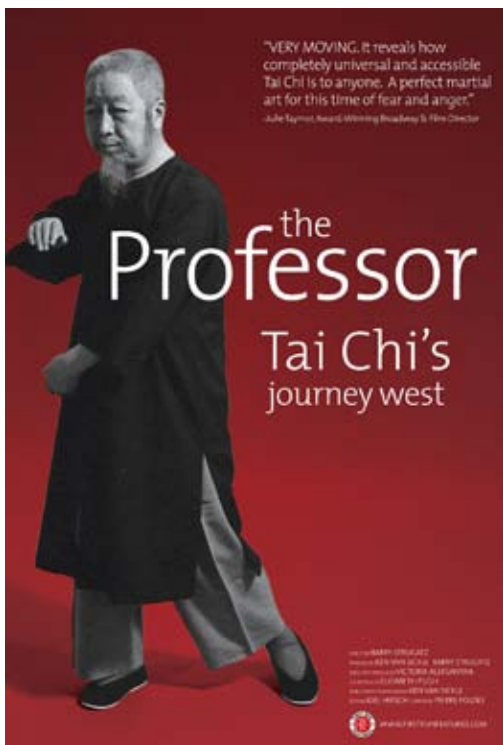
Jaquet, Daniel and Claus Frederik Sorenson. 2015. 'Historical European Martial Art – A Crossroad between Academic Research, Martial Heritage Re-creation, and Martial Sport Practices'. *Acta Periodica Duellatorum* 3, 5 35.
http://doi.org/bjqz

Schmidt, Herbert. 2015. *The Book of the Buckler.* Berlin: Wyvern Media.

Spatz, Ben. 2015. *What a Body Can Do: Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research.* London and New York: Routledge.

DOCUMENTARY REVIEW

The Professor: Tai Chi's Jouney West
Barry Strugatz (Director, Co-producer)
USA 2016

REVIEWER

Douglas Wile is Professor Emeritus of Brooklyn College-CUNY, former instructor of medical Chinese and history of Chinese medicine at Pacific College of Oriental Medicine NYC, and current assistant professor of Chinese language and Asian Studies at Alverno College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

The title of Barry Strugatz's *The Professor: Tai Chi's Journey West* is a word play on the classic Chinese novel *Journey to the West*. Lacking an authorial argument or omniscient 'voice of God' narrator, the story is told through a select cast of intimates: family and first-generation American students of taijiquan master Zheng Manqing. This gives the film a distinctly phenomenological, or emic, tone. The structure is not strictly chronological, and the levels of social analysis – systemic, institutional, and individual – are represented by American culture of the 1960s, the taiji school community, and the lives of the students. Topical sections, entitled 'Form', 'Push-hands', 'Sword', etc., develop a multi-dimensional view of the art, the master, and the students. The expository mode of the documentary is enhanced with poetic touches, sweeping the viewer into a stream of vintage photographs and film footage that create a montage of the exhilarating encounter with an Asian master that changed the lives of the film's student/informants.

Chinese disciples such as William C. C. Chen and Benjamin Lo, who remain highly influential in Zheng style taijiquan's dissemination in the West, are not included, nor are his Taiwan students such as Liu Xiheng and Xu Yizhong, who have attracted Western students to Taiwan. The film leaves the impression that Zheng was the first to introduce taijiquan in New York, and the date usually given is 1964, but it should be noted that Sophia Delza taught Wu style taijiquan a decade earlier at Carnegie Hall and Choy Hok Pang, also a student of Yang Chengfu, was the first to teach taijiquan openly in the US in 1939.

The Professor exists in a kind of time warp. Exactly the same film could have been made forty years ago. There is no acknowledgement of today's vastly more diverse martial arts marketplace, the challenge to traditional arts by mixed martial arts, the proliferation of popular and scholarly books on the Zheng legacy, the emergence of martial arts studies as an academic discipline, the existence of fifty accredited schools of traditional Chinese medicine, or the reams of biomedical studies on the therapeutic benefits. Zheng's name is no longer blacklisted on the Mainland and his hometown Wenzhou now claims him as a famous native son. With Deng's policy of 'reform and openness' in the 1980s, and the arrival of the internet in the 1990s, the number of biographies and articles on Zheng published on the Mainland has exploded, adding a wealth of new anecdotal material but leaving us wondering why even such basics as the date of his birth, the length of his study with Yang Chengfu, his modifications of the form, his arrival in the US, and the circumstances of his death are so wildly divergent in various sources.

The filmmakers make no attempt to reconcile these contradictions or provide a definitive account. Having said this, there are some interesting revelations in the film: his refusal to live in Chinatown in favor of the more upscale Riverside Drive, his rejection of a Japanese student and conditional acceptance of a Japanese-American student, and the landlord lockout of his Canal Street studio. The film also raises a host

of provocative questions. For example, why do world and Olympic records constantly improve, while Zheng insists he did not equal his teacher Yang Chengfu, and Zheng's students say they cannot match him? Is this false modesty, do 'secrets' die with their keepers, or is this movement art somehow more akin to painting, poetry, and calligraphy, whose ancient masters are held to be unrivaled?

Viewers of the film may also wonder about Zheng's unique style of dress – neither Western, Mao, nor Manchu – or why they rarely hear his own voice. Certainly his long beard and robes contributed to an air of authenticity in the eyes of his Western students, but this was actually the standard style of self-presentation for senior Chinese artists of his generation such as Qi Baishi and Zhang Daqian.

The issue of language is a bit more complicated and involves the awkward symmetry between Zheng's refusal to speak, and presumably learn, English, and his students' neglect, with one notable exception, to learn Chinese. Catholics learn Latin, Jews learn Hebrew, and Muslims learn Arabic, all to be closer to their Source. Zheng's students were equally devoted to their Source, so one cannot help but wonder at the persistent monolingualism. For his part, Zheng's refusal to speak English may have been a strategic act of resistance against the legacy of Thomas Macaulay's 1835 policy to promote English in the colonies to enable them to better serve the British Empire.

In this way, Zheng reasserts China's role as 'teaching civilization', to use Tu Weiming's term, against the forces of Westernization and registers his resistance to the subaltern role that requires language as a badge of acceptability. In reality, he even refused to write in the Chinese vernacular, considering it a Communist plot, and persisted in writing in the classical style long after most of his contemporaries adopted the vernacular. He likewise rejects Christianity and communism, or any dialogue with modern scholarship, modern art, or modern medicine. His native Wenzhou dialect, considered a 'living fossil', was used for code talking in military communications during the War of Resistance against Japan, and thus his use of Mandarin is already a forced concession to modernity. Teaching through body language (what Mauss called 'technique du corps' and Bourdieu called 'habitus') Zheng succeeds in sinicizing his students and assimilating them in a kind of inverted hybridity.

It is not surprising that the style of indirect narration tells us more about the subjective lives of the informants than the subject, but is there no way to access Zheng's interiority? Zheng, after all, was a political refugee, leaving all but immediate family behind and suffering the ultimate Confucian catastrophe of 'loss of the nation' (*wangguo*). How did he feel about America, for example? America was China's exploiter during the opium trade and her oppressor during the Opium Wars, Boxer Rebellion, Open Door Policy, and Exclusionary Act of 1882, but also China's savior in World War II and the Nationalists' protector in 1949. His feelings must have been ambivalent to say the least. Film is the visual medium par excellence, and there is evocative footage of taiji, painting, calligraphy, and even medicine, but his fifth art, poetry, perhaps the best source for his emotional life, is completely missing, as is his voluminous scholarship on the Chinese classics. Is it impossible to bring poetry and philosophy to the screen, or is it another case of language barrier?

One of the film's narrators (and co-producer) Ken Van Sickle says, 'I'm not sure why he came to live here … As far as I'm concerned, he came here to teach me'. This captures the magic of the moment but truncates the story arc and leaves the master as a Martian who arrived from outer space without a past. Did he come originally as cultural ambassador to the overseas Chinese community and stumbled into teaching non-Chinese, or was that part of the original plan? The 1960s-1970s was a period of intense ideological competition between Communists and Nationalists in the New York Chinatown community, and Zheng would have been one of the greatest assets for the Nationalists. Or, were his motivations purely personal?

Seeing the wholesale destruction of traditional culture on the Mainland, and the best and brightest in Taiwan running to the STEM subjects, he might have concluded that the survival of the traditional arts depended on

the 'periphery', to use Tu Wei-ming's term. Is there a symbiosis of the alienated on both sides of the master-disciple relationship here? In unguarded moments, many Asian masters of traditional arts lament that their foreign students seem more serious than their own countrymen, an echo of the Biblical 'prophet not honored in his own land', and ironically, the respect of non-Chinese can become currency to bid up the value on the home front. Perhaps he was an early example of what Tu called 'cultural China', a Chinese identity not dependent on geographic or political definitions. In any event, refusal to serve a new dynasty is the principled Confucian response to what is perceived as illegitimate rule, in this case, the Communists.

As brought to life in the film, Zheng was one of the most remarkable polymaths of the 20th century, perhaps only equaled on the American scene by 18th century Benjamin Franklin, who among other talents was posthumously inducted into the Swimming Hall of Fame. Franklin distinguished himself as scientist, inventor, statesman, and diplomat during the turbulent Revolutionary War period, and Zheng was esteemed as a master of painting, poetry, calligraphy, medicine, and martial arts during China's two revolutions, semi-colonialism, warlordism, a civil war, foreign invasion, and annual natural disasters, all of which cost the lives of tens of millions.

His ten years in America coincided with the Cultural Revolution in China, a violent campaign to destroy everything he held dear. His close association with the Nationalist Government undoubtedly made him a marked man. Although his education was exclusively in the disciplic succession style, he became a public intellectual, holding countless posts for governmental and non-governmental bodies. From 1937 to 1949, he lived the life of a refugee, in constant dislocation; from 1949 to 1964, he joined two million refugees and the Nationalist government in Taiwan, living in exile under one party rule, martial law, and as a virtual colony of the US. By eliding his background, the film underestimates the intellectual capacity of its audience and misses an opportunity to contextualize his achievements. After all, even genius is situated.

Absent from the film are any references to modern Chinese history, or such relevant postcolonial studies concepts as Fanon's 'hybridity', Spivak's 'strategic essenticism', Chow's 'coercive mimeticism', or Tu's 'cultural nationalism'. Even the most elementary categories of critical theory – race, ethnicity, gender, identity, and embodiment – are never uttered. Is the film simply suffering from what Chow calls 'orientalist melancholia', seeking to preserve an imagined, pre-contact Chinese authenticity? It is very instructive for devotees of Chinese culture to experience the ridicule of Chinese engineers and microbiologists, who think you are wasting your time reading the *Daodejing* in the original or practicing taijiquan and qigong. Less diplomatic interlocutors will tell you it is the luxury of hegemony, adding that what protects China's sovereignty is not the ability to bounce push-hands partners off the wall but nuclear weapons and ICBMs, and that what actually improves the quality of life for Chinese is flush toilets and air conditioning.

No work of art is made without an intended audience. Is this merely a self-congratulatory exercise in nostalgia on the part of aging boomers? How will it play to Generations X, Y, and Z? Taiji long ago lost the youth market to karate and taekwondo, the Olympics to judo and taekwondo, and fitness and glamour to yoga. Is this film a propaganda piece for prospective students, or an educational resource for established students? *The Professor* is not an action movie, it is not an instructional video, and it is not a history lesson on modern China. The release of this film is a significant event in the evolution of the Zheng Manqing taijiquan lineage, but its resonance in the wider taijiquan community, Asian martial arts at large, and martial arts studies is a question that can only be answered at the box office.

In one of his writings, Zheng says that if you hit a big bell with a small stone, you get a small sound, and if you hit a big bell with a big stone, you get a big sound. Few would argue that Zheng was not a big bell, but there is bound to be fruitful debate over whether this film is the long-awaited big sound. It is certainly a labor of love, though, and one that celebrates a moment in time when innocence met authenticity and an unlikely community emerged uniting East-and-West and old-and-new.

MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES