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KARATE: POWER, SELF-CONTROL AND EVOLUTION

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Abstract: This article aims to present the processes of evolution that Karate has gone through, the power intertwined with it and the self-control of practitioners in their daily relationships of interdependence in the environments of the training space (dojo), on the competition court (koto) and in social relationships. The work is supported by a bibliographic review, in an approach with a qualitative emphasis, based on the conceptual theoretical foundation of Norbert Elias in dialogue with Michel Foucault, and with the field experience of a professional with graduations 5th Dan of Karate Shorin-Ryu Shinshukan, by the Confederation Brasileira de Karatê (CBK) and 3rd Dan of Kobu-Do (fighting with ancient weapons from Japan), by União Shorin-Ryu Karatê-Do Brasil (USRKB), or Shinshukan.

Keywords: Power, Karate, Civilizing Process, Figurations, Arbitration.

INTRODUCTION

In every figuration or where there are human relations, in the most diverse societies, power is a structural element of social relations and it is not an issue observed in the form of induction or deduction, it is a fact. From the simplest to the most complex figurations, power is implicit or explicit to the observer, such as sports and Olympic Karate, the object of this reflection.

In this activity, the web of interdependence is supported by practicing students, teachers, technicians, referees and leaders who live in a power relationship. From the moment that the applicant to learn the modality enrolls in an association, as Kohai (newbie), he is automatically subject to the rules, regulations and norms of the modality to which he passes, henceforth to belong, under the power of this chain of command, of this figuration, which will potentially result in its social transformation.

Given the above, the work brings a qualitative approach, supported by a bibliographic review and the experience of a professional with 5th Dan graduations in Shorin-Ryu Shinshukan Karate, by the Brazilian Karate Confederation (CBK) and 3rd Dan Kobu-Do (weapon fighting). old ones from Japan), by Shinshukan.

POWER IN THE LIGHT OF THE ELIASIAN THEORY

Power presents itself in different forms and levels in the most varied figurations, it is what we seek to discuss and understand in the figuration of sports karate, under the focus of the Eliasian theory.

The term power, available in some open sources, is a word that derives from the Latin *potere*, and refers to the ability to arbitrarily deliberate, act and command, and also, depending on the context, the ability to exercise authority, sovereignty, the Empire. Power constitutes a normal element of every human relationship of interdependence, that is, in a figuration.

Elias (1980) comments that the term power has an unpleasant aroma due to the fact that, throughout the development process of human societies, the balance of power has been extremely unequal. However, no matter how large or small the differences, the balance of power is always present wherever there is a functional interdependence between people. The author emphasizes that “power is not an amulet that one individual has and another does not; it is a structural feature of human relationships – of all human relationships”. (ELIAS, 1980, pp. 79/80).

Power also has a direct relationship with the ability to accomplish something, what one can or has the ability to accomplish, or to influence so that this intent is carried out. Since the dawn of humanity, relations between individuals and their groups, in most

cases, have occurred with the aim of obtaining power over others, to obtain economic or military exclusivity.

For Gebara (1994), “power is the result of relationships and, therefore, it is not a given and situated fact that can be isolated like anything else, but something relational, inherent to the interdependencies that are established in social practice”.

Michel Foucault (1979) considers that “power is essentially repressive, it represses nature, individuals, instincts, a class”. And he also highlights that:

[...]. Power is the concrete power that each individual holds and that he would give up, totally or partially, to constitute a political power, a political sovereignty. In this theoretical set to which I am referring, the constitution of political power is carried out according to the model of a legal operation that would be of the order of contractual exchange. Therefore, a manifest analogy, which runs through the whole theory, between power and goods, power and wealth [...]. Foucault (1979, p. 174).

In short, Elias points out that:

“We depend on others; others depend on us. To the extent that we are more dependent on others than they are on us, they have power over us, whether we have become dependent on them through their use of brute force or through our need to be loved, through our need for money, for healing, status, a career or simply stimulation. (ELIAS, 1970, p. 101)

KARATE – THE ART OF A SOCIALLY TRANSFORMED OLYMPIC SPORT WARRIOR

In your work: “*O processo civilizador*”, Elias (1993, p. 216/217), when carrying out a sociogenesis analysis of the royal court, emphasizes: “we find ourselves at the center of a particularly pronounced civilizing transformation, which is an indispensable precondition for all subsequent ups and

downs of the civilizing process.”.

In this same context Elias also draws attention to the power of the State in the social transformation of warriors, where we see how, step by step, the bellicose nobility is replaced by a tamed nobility, with softened emotions, a court nobility. The author emphasizes “Not only in the western civilizing process, but as far as we can understand, in all the great civilizing processes, one of the most decisive transitions is that of *warriors to courtiers*”.

In the course of the history of Karateka warriors, which begins around the 11th or 12th century and extends to the 17th and 18th centuries, it is observed that the warriors mastered this martial art with the aim of defending and annihilating their enemies.

In their relations with state power and interdependence, they undergo a radical change in their bellicose functions, in Okinawa/Japan, under the emperor’s power, at the end of the 18th century.

Now, in contemporary times, with sensitive political changes, in the dynamics of figurations and the consequent fall of the administration *Meiji Ishin*, power becomes centralized by the Emperor of Japan, with that, the shogunate system, which outsourced the administration of the country, ends. In this context, Pinto (2018) points out that,

in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, coinciding with the Meiji era (1868-1912), formal education and military service were inaugurated in Okinawa, now in peacetime and the island politically belonging to Japan. the martial art Karate, as an instrument of martial fights, of use in bellicose actions, instructed its warriors in secret training, now in this new reality, with open doors to the local society, it is going through a period of transition and readaptation to the new reality of good social and political coexistence in Okinawa - an advance in the civilizational process, which had not been planned (PINTO, 2018, pp.31/32).

It confirms that the martial art Karate, in this new civilizing context, was transformed by state power into sport and with the new figuration, it is now taught in public schools, clubs and academies/associations, as required by state power, through the organizations created specifically to manage this modality. And, therefore, new requirements were also created for the control of emotions during daily training or in official competitions.

In this context, directly or indirectly, the State assumes social control intermediated by sports organizations, imposing power through rules and norms for the control of violence in training and competitions, shaping, therefore, the behavior of Karate practitioners. In the case of Brazil, through the Consolidation of Karate Laws (CLK) and its arbitration rules, for the strict control of violence, which was previously allowed in combats.

Following a hierarchy, with central power, the maximum Karate organization becomes the World Karate Federation, or *World Karate Federation* (W.K.F.). In this new configuration, the organization by each country, as determined by the W.K.F. becomes through the Confederations, in the case of Brazil, the Brazilian Karate Confederation (C.B.K.), which dictates the rules of the game.

And this, in turn, requires that the state representations also do so, with the institutionalization of the Federations. However, it is necessary to understand that each Federation, in order to comply with the Law issued by the State, needs at least three Associations, legally registered.

All these organizations had to have a board elected by voting among sports karate practitioners. With these new requirements, many divergences occurred, and other resilient groups formed new figures, with demonstrations in defense of the interests of these groups of Karate practitioners.

In this same context, in the dynamics of

the interdependence network, in the daily relationships of Karatekas in relation to their superiors, an interaction is observed, if not one of submission, but also one of respect and refinement. In this power relationship, notably during training and competitions, both the neophyte (kohai) and the old (sempai) submit to the requirements, to the rules of the organization to which they now belong or which they already belonged to, under the condition of be penalized, according to the same rule/norm, if they do not comply.

Indeed, the fear of embarrassment or regret for having committed an act that goes beyond the limits of the rules/norms, due to the lack of control of emotions, also constitutes a mechanism of power, through self-discipline, generating self-control of the drives in Karatekas. And, so to speak, Elias (1992, p.103) in his work: ``A Busca da Excitação``, points out that “[...] it is usually a reason for shame or regret for those who allowed themselves to be dominated by excitement. To be considered normal, adults living in our societies are expected to control their arousal in time.”

It is noteworthy that, after years of training and intense learning to absorb the philosophical principles and norms of Karate, the Karateka is socially transformed and molds himself according to the new group to which he already belonged or now belongs to. Elias (1992) teaches us that rules or norms have devices so that the control of tensions does not fluctuate outside and above social processes. In this context, Pinto and Matos (2016) point out:

However, and this is not contradictory in the course of the civilizing process, the norms and philosophical principles of Karate converge towards the discipline of the individual. So that it is self-controlled and suppresses impulses of violence. The individual is prepared body and soul so that, according to his behavior, he is socially

accepted in Manaus society or in any other society. (PINTO; MATOS, 2016, p. 117).

It is, therefore, another effect of power, through compliance with rules and norms, whose objective is to generate self-discipline. Moreover, Elias (1992) supports us when he states that while they seem to resist pressures and restrictions in all known societies, their character and global balance existing between them changes throughout a process of civilization. And he points out:

in the course of such a process, restrictions on the behavior of individuals are generalized. They become more balanced, oscillate less between extremes and become internalized, constituting a more or less automatic personal armor of self-control. Elias (1992, p. 104).

To consolidate what we assert, Gebara (2008), in an article published in the book: *Representações Sociais e Imaginários no Mundo Esportivo*, (2008, p. 30), asserts that mobile social configurations, both internally and externally to a given group, they are always in flux, in an experiential process; the resulting transformations, some quick and ephemeral, others long-term, more lasting, define and redefine the balance of power between people and groups.

Gebara points out “these social configurations are this way, unexpected consequences of the innumerable possibilities of interactions experienced, with power always situated as a fundamental element in any configuration”.

In harmony with what the authors state, it is ratified that this interdependence relationship is very evident in the figuration of sports and Olympic Karate, where each of the participants involved there has a specific role. On the one hand, the teacher (sensei), at the top of command, of power, disseminating his theoretical, technical and philosophical knowledge; on the other, the student himself,

who strives to learn the techniques and obey the rules/norms. However, in this figurational context, power is initially heavily lopsided in favor of Sensei; but the disciple, with years of continuous practice, balances the balance. Some disciples manage to tip the balance of power in their favor.

SPORTS COMPETITION - THE POWER OF THE REFEREE AND THE COMPETITOR

In the context of an official sport and Olympic Karate fight, which is limited to a space of one square measuring 64 square meters (koto), obedience to the official rules established by the Confederation, Federation and the State, orchestrated by the central referee (shushin) assisted by four other side referees (fukushin) and one inspector (kansa), who exercise the disciplinary command, enforcing, or at least trying to enforce, the rules of the competition.

In the center of Koto, surrounded by agents that regulate good conduct, there are two competitors who have limited time to search for points, in obedience to these rules. Thus, the time learned in the years of training, following the thinking of Elias (1998), acts from the outside in and from the inside out, as a mechanism of social control and self-control that coerces the karateka's life and triggers discipline. In this configuration, on one side is the referee with the greatest power, ready to enforce the rules of competition and good manners among fighters, to punish the competitor who infringes them and, at the same time, to reward or score those who apply the best blows.

The competitors, in an effort and physiological limits, seek the score, in a continuous game with the attention linked to their opponent, to the fulfillment of the rule and to the chronometer time, administered by poll workers. But, this effort is intimately

connected with his coach, who in a specific figure prepared him for that moment delimited in three minutes of fight (which for the competitor seems like an eternity), to there, together in synergy, gather all the skills techniques, previously acquired, to beat the opponent, or to receive the defeat as one more learning.

These competitors remain in a position of respect and submission in relation to the referee; of respect towards his opponent, but not of submission, always trying to demonstrate, psychologically, power over the other, externalized by physical postures or gestures. But, this power is only effective from your first score on your opponent, especially if it is a maximum score, with a perfect blow (ippon). And this figure oscillates as the other opponent scores – in this case, it becomes a power game between them, based on technical skills or, also, on their emotional self-control. Sociologically, we see at least three important themes being exercised here: on the one hand, the disciplinary power, in obedience to the rules, and on the other, the flat, well-lit and limited space, which favors the gaze of the referees, which, anchored and Compared to what Foucault (1987) assures, it is a “spatial fitting of hierarchical surveillances [...], which is done to allow an interior, articulated and detailed control – to make visible those who are in it, towards to which all gazes converge”, in this case, the (koto) space, where sports fights take place. Furthermore, we see the social institution of time, closely controlled by timekeepers.

In this competition area, the central referee exercises his power supported by the rules, by the norms issued by the (CLK), regulated by the (C.B.K.) and established by the organization of each official Karate event. In the context of this figuration, during the competition the referee is supported and has the power to impose discipline on the offending athlete

and even expel him, depending on the type of infraction, as a serious disciplinary act. In this same context, the social institution of time is also present.

Clock time, as a mechanism of power exercised and controlled by timekeepers, registers every second of the sporting battle. The arrival time at the competition space, the start time of the fight, the stops, the time for withdrawal or not, the time close to the end of the regulation time and the final time. This time is, so to speak, a concern for everyone: competitors, technicians, referees and timekeepers, as already mentioned, especially in a situation of postponement of the fight to break the tie.

Therefore, one has to understand that time as a symbolic construct, according to Elias (1998), is yet another mechanism of social coercion. Furthermore, for the competitor, this time is short of that competitive moment. He starts in the time he has to prepare technically; within the deadline for registration in the competition, established by the institution promoting the event; in the time he must arrive at the championship venue, so as not to be late for the start of his fights.

The time we are referring to here is clock/chronometer time, socially established as an instrument to control human activities in their daily lives at home, at work, at school, at leisure and, in our case, in sports activities, in obedience to a power established by a calendar to be fulfilled, according to the previously determined time.

Another keener concern of the athlete is the time governed by the timer in which he runs his strikes, defenses and respective counterattacks, taking advantage of this technical ability to win a fight, with the effective application of a gesture, attitude and speed of the blow, which because it was delivered faster, in less time it hits your opponent first. Often so fast that it dazzles the eyes of an inattentive

or inexperienced referee.

In this context, similarly to what we discussed, Elias (1998, pp. 13/14) tells us that the expression time refers to this relationship of positions or segments belonging to two or more sequences of events, in continuous evolution. Elias, points out that the transformation of coercion exercised from the outside in by the social institution of time into a system of self-discipline that embraces the entire existence of the individual, explicitly illustrates the way in which the civilizing process contributes to forming the social *habitus*, which is part of integral to any personality structure.

Just like the clock and the boats, time is something that has evolved in relation to certain intentions and specific tasks of men. [...] The mechanism of the clock is organized so that it transmits messages and, with that, allows regulating the behavior of the group. Ratifying what was previously stated, in line with the theory, this regulation of group behavior highlighted by Norbert Elias is directly related to compliance with the established regulation time for sports karate competitions. And this, repeatedly taught in academies, constitutes one of the mechanisms to form the *habitus*, redirect and shape the behavior of groups of Karate practitioners (Karatekas), both technically and socially. Consequently, a model of social disciplinary power is constituted.

Thus, as Elias (1970) assures us, the power of another person must be feared: it can force us to perform a certain act, whether we want it or not; power seems immoral: we must all be able to make all our decisions for ourselves. However, with a look at the potential benefits that result from this interdependent relationship, the author points out that;

It is necessary to say that the potential beings we are at birth would never develop into the beings we are if we had never been subject to the obligations imposed by interdependence. We add that the current

forms of interdependence exercise a type of coercion that leads to the optimal realization of human potential. (ELIAS, 1970, pp. 101/202).

Consistent with the Eliasian theory, we emphasize that the relationship of interdependence and its constraints, applied in the daily interactions of Karate practices, both in training and in official competitions, shape and direct its followers to good social practices, current or potential, for coexistence in society.

Therefore, the evolution of Karate, from bellicose combat to a sporting practice, are marks of the civilizing process that focuses on this millenary martial art, and which has become a practice of self-control.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Social transformations in the martial art Karate result from constant changes in society, in a civilizing process, defended by Norbert Elias.

In the figuration of Karate, the power relationship is revealed, in the individual as a student, later as a monitor and in the sequence, if he remains in the continuous practice of the martial art, a teacher, and later a director and so on.

We show that the martial art Karate, formerly focused solely on bellicose activities, has become a sport and Olympic modality, providing it with great transformations.

Under state power, the modality came out of its closed ghettos, the *issin-soden*, in which its warriors only learned the art to defend themselves and to kill their enemies, but which gradually lost its function, until today, as a sport Olympic, figuration in which he and his warriors or descendants, became teachers (Sensei), who preach and teach wisdom, meekness, peace, tranquility, the fight against violence combined with technique, compliance with laws, regulations, norms,

through discipline, which generates self-control in the drives and results in accepted behavior for harmonious coexistence in society.

Thus, in the historical course, which culminated with the appeasement of Karate, it is observed the organization of institutions

such as the WKF, the COI, at international levels and, nationally, the CBK until reaching the base figure, with the state Federations, composed by the Associations. Finally, the process continues in the Karate figuration, in which power is constituted as a function of the athlete, society and not least the State.

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