

GLOBALIZATION AND SHARED PRACTICES: ON BRAZILIAN JIU-JITSU AND PAIN COMMUNITIES¹

ALEXANDRU ȘTEFAN DINCOVICI²

Pain has usually been the realm of medical anthropology, a discipline that has focused mostly on specific categories of pain, resulting either from illness or from injury and involving a great amount of suffering. This widely researched pain has almost become the norm in anthropology research, its main characteristics being its world destructive effects and impossibility to be communicated and thus understood. In this article I discuss a different, almost opposite type of pain: controlled, positive, communicable and, most of all, devoid of suffering. This is how pain looks in the modern combat sport of Brazilian jiu-jitsu, a bodily practice that, by its dissemination through instructional videos and forums on the internet, can create a worldwide community of practitioners that share the same experiences of pain. Drawing on an extensive ethnographic study, the article looks at how the sport has entered the Romanian scene and brought technical knowledge that created corresponding pain related knowledge, as well as at the role of pain in the learning process and its importance for the practitioners.

Key words: anthropology of the body, pain, combat sports.

When one hears about another person's physical pain, the events happening within the interior of that person's body may seem to have the remote character of some deep subterranean fact, belonging to an invisible geography that, however portentous, has no reality because it has not yet manifested itself on the visible surface of the earth. (Scarry 1985: 3)

INTRODUCTION: UNSPEAKABLE AND SPEAKABLE PAINS

Trying to communicate pain can be a difficult endeavor. It transcends the barriers of language and is such a personal experience that it is usually impossible

¹ Many thanks to Zachary Androus for his many useful comments and recommendations on earlier versions of the article.

² Beneficiary of the project "Doctoral scholarships for the development of the knowledge-based society", co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007–2013.