

## CONTRIBUTOR

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# NATIONALISM, IMMIGRATION AND IDENTITY THE GRACIES AND THE MAKING OF BRAZILIAN JIU-JITSU JOSÉ CAIRUS

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## ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the transformation of a modernized Japanese school of martial arts, *jujutsu* (柔術), also known as *jiu-jitsu*, *jujutsu* and/or *Kodokan judo*, into a Brazilian combat sport. In the 1930s, the Gracies, supported by a nationalist regime, launched a comprehensive process of jiu-jitsu reinvention that evolved into a local combat sport at the same time as the inauguration of the Estado Novo dictatorship in 1937. This study argues that the Brazilian jiu-jitsu is the direct outcome of clashes pitting the Gracies and Japanese immigrants that occurred against a background of radical nationalism, violence and ideological polarization. The creation of a local jiu-jitsu encompassed a wide range of changes in techniques, philosophy and rituals borne from the clash between tradition and modernity.

## INTRODUCTION

Around World War I, a branch of a Scottish-*cum*-Rio de Janeiro family with genteel pretensions, joined a troupe of Japanese martial artists and adopted *jujutsu* (hereafter, *jiu-jitsu*) as part of their circus act. The surname of this family was Gracie. After having moderate success in the Amazon, they faced economic hardship in the 1920s upon their return to Rio de Janeiro. In the face of this, the Gracies sought to use their jiu-jitsu skills to meet the challenges posed by their failing social status during the transition from the 'Old Republic' to the Getúlio Vargas regime. Their trajectory might be taken to confirm the identification between the new regime and the emergent middle class, as suggested by Michael Conniff [1981]. However, the Gracies were not part of the emergent middle classes. Rather they can be said to fit better into Brian Owensby's characterization of Brazilian society of the 1930s: this proposed a category of *déclassé* aristocrats, 'descendants of traditional families struggling to adjust to the challenges and uncertainties of an increasingly competitive and diversified social order that had eroded the social hierarchy of mid-nineteenth century slave society' [Owensby 1999: 45–46]. Nonetheless, the Gracies' trajectory certainly shows that, in modern Brazil, white or light-skinned individuals from the ranks of once elite groups still enjoyed privileges within the new regime.

This context played a crucial role in the creation of what is today widely known as Brazilian jiu-jitsu (BJJ), an internationally successful, rapidly globalizing martial art and combat sport, which was pioneered and promoted by the Gracie family throughout the twentieth century. In the twenty first century, the Gracies are still closely – almost indelibly – associated with BJJ. Yet remarkably little scholarly research has been carried out into the socio-cultural and political context of its historical formation. This article seeks to redress this balance.

In the early 1930s the Gracies used their martial arts skills to replenish their cultural capital and regain social status. They did this by introducing the practice of jiu-jitsu into the newly created paramilitary gendarmerie, known as *Polícia Especial* (Special Police). The provisory government, headed by Getúlio Vargas, had created the Special Police (*Polícia Especial*) in 1932 as a branch of Rio's police department as part of comprehensive reform which restructured the state security apparatus [Vargas 1938: 34–35]. The *raison d'être* of this Fascist-inspired unit was ousting Getúlio Vargas' representative in São Paulo. The *casus belli* was the new regime's failure to comply with the demands of São Paulo's oligarchies for constitutional rule [Burns 1993: 351–352]. Also in 1932, a coalition of landowners and industrialists politically sidelined by the coup d'état in 1930, deposed Varga's *interventor* (appointed state governor) and declared war on the authoritarian regime. After nearly three months of military engagements, federal armed forces defeated São Paulo' troops, which were made up of state militias and volunteers. In order to avoid any repetition of such an event, the new regime

organized storm trooper squads, fully devoted to Getúlio Vargas, whose primary mission was to protect the regime [Bonelli 2003: 14]. Physical prowess and martial arts skills were the most important requirements and considerations when it came to drafting new recruits, and the unit worked in combination with the political police (*Departamento de Ordem Política e Social* –D.O.P.S.). Throughout their existence, both forces were deadly efficient and infamously identified with the more repressive facet of Vargas' authoritarian regime.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of their insertion into Getúlio Vargas' security apparatus, the Gracies enjoyed protection under the new regime. In this article, I analyze how they launched a process of reinventing Japanese jiu-jitsu within a context of growing nationalism and the active construction of national identity, most notably during the implementation of the *Estado Novo* dictatorship after 1937.

Strongly supported by the regime, the Gracies ran their jiu-jitsu operations in Rio de Janeiro only a few blocks from the presidential palace. By contrast, rival martial artists settled in the epicenter of Japanese immigration, 400 kilometers away, in São Paulo. The rivalry between the Gracies and the Japanese martial artists reflected the existence of two competing projects for modern Brazil. The Gracies came to represent the nationalist alliance between Rio's old elite and the new power holders hailing from oligarchies established in peripheral Brazil – an alliance that was not without xenophobic overtones. Conversely, the Japanese martial artists symbolized São Paulo's agro-industrial elite option for immigration and multiculturalism.

The dynamic of the rivalry between the Gracies and the Japanese fighters reveals the ambiguities within in the discourses just mentioned. The Navy was the branch of the military that had pioneered the practice of jiu-jitsu, and it sponsored some of the best Japanese martial artists in Brazil during the 1930s. At the same time, the Navy traditionally recruited officers of genteel background. In this context, their antagonism toward the Gracies reveals an inter-elite dispute within the bureaucratic apparatus created by the new regime [Beattie 2004: 91]. Accordingly, in this article, I analyze the genesis of Brazilian jiu-jitsu using two conceptual frameworks. For, the creation of a Brazilian national identity took place, on the one hand, in a context of growing foreign immigration and, on the other, in terms of a nationalist influence [Lesser 1999]. During the 1930s, the Gracies found themselves in a quasi-Hobbesian state of war against all challengers. When fighting *Brazilian* wrestlers, the Gracies were simply seeking to enhance their status and prestige within the new political establishment. But when fighting the *Japanese*, they were in a more complicated way becoming figures of national identity and simultaneously representatives a distinct local fighting style.

1 In 1924, the Brazilian government created the 'D.O.P.S.' (Departamento de Ordem Política e Social) Department of Political and Social Order.

The Gracies created a local jiu-jitsu culture by self-consciously refusing to abide by the technical, philosophical and cultural aspects of the Japanese matrix. As a result, they laid the foundations of the future hybrid that would come to be known as Brazilian jiu-jitsu. The transformation of Japanese jiu-jitsu encompassed a wide range of changes concerning techniques, philosophy, and rituals. To approach these, I employ Arjun Appadurai's approach to understanding the acculturation of British cricket in India. Appadurai argued that through a binary transformation involving 'hard' and 'soft' forms, British cricket underwent a process of indigenization in colonial India. Appadurai writes:

Hard cultural forms are those that come with a set of links between value, meaning, and embodied practice that are difficult to break and hard to transform. Soft cultural forms, by contrast, permit relatively easy separation of embodied performance from meaning and value, and relatively successful transformation at each level [Appadurai 1996: 90]

To grasp what is meant by the 'hard' forms of embodied practice, a brief explanation of technical aspects is necessary. Japanese immigration had direct influence on jiu-jitsu style as reinvented by the Gracies. Since the initial bouts in 1930 between Carlos Gracie and Geo Omori in São Paulo, what became clear was the Japanese martial artists' technical superiority in standing techniques (*Nage-Waza*).<sup>2</sup> Yet their very specialization in standing techniques led the Japanese fighters to gradually neglect ground combat (*Ne-Waza*). The Gracies then filled the technical gap by focusing their jiu-jitsu practice almost exclusively on ground combat. Ultimately, while keeping the techniques in their original form, they worked out a ground combat style based on a defensive strategy. Simultaneously, the Gracies sought to transform jiu-jitsu's 'soft' forms by rapidly abolishing Japanese bowing (*rei-ho*), ignoring Kodokan judo's belt rankings and Japanese rules governing the fights.<sup>3</sup>

2 'Jiu-Jitsu: Um Verdadeiro Luctador Brasileiro Enfrentara O Famoso Geo Omori.' **Folha da Manhã**, São Paulo, 1930, 8; 'Domingo Haverá o Grande Encontro Entre Grace e Omori.' **Folha da Manhã**, São Paulo, January 3 1930, 9; 'Jiu-Jitsu: Ainda O Encontro De Domingo: Teremos Uma Revanche?' **Folha da Manhã**, São Paulo, January 7 1930, 10; 'Omori Foi Completamente Dominado Pelo Luctador Brasileiro.' **Folha da Manhã**, São Paulo, January 20 1930, 3.

3 Replacing the Japanese bowing by the Westernized 'handshake' seems to be an attempt to introduce horizontal ethics or egalitarian ideas that came along with modernization [Matta 1991: 148-9]. The Gracies also created a new ranking system in which the highest level was the blue belt.

## ROUND 1: A 'FIGHT OF HONOR', GEORGE GRACIE VERSUS YANO TAKEO<sup>4</sup>

In 1934, the newspaper *Jornal dos Sports* announced Yano Takeo's arrival in Rio de Janeiro:

A new phenomenon in our rings: The sympathetic and humble Japanese Takeo Yano came to our office accompanied by Commander Luis Souto, director of the Navy Sports League. This young Japanese man settled in Brazil three years ago and has a record of 200 fights since the beginning of his martial arts career in Japan.<sup>5</sup> In Brazil, he fought a police sergeant weighing 185 pounds (Yano weighs 154 pounds). In the state of Pará (Amazon) he taught jiu-jitsu to the police forces and to the Navy officers as Count Koma's assistant. Currently, living in Rio de Janeiro, he is teaching classes to 20 Navy cadets. Yano will challenge George Gracie soon.<sup>6</sup>



Figure 1: Yano Takeo. Source: *Jornal dos Sports*, 1934

4 Japanese surnames come first.

5 Takeo Yano was an agricultural technician settled in Amazon by the mid-1930s (Amazonas state) to work in the project to produce jute at Parintins and Itacoatiara.

6 'Um Novo Crack Para Os Nossos Rings', *Jornal dos Sports*, October 7 1934, 5.

After Mayeda Mitsuyo, Yano arguably held the best martial arts pedigree in Brazil. The article above hinted at the existence of animosity between the Gracies and jiu-jitsu practitioners in the Navy. The Navy Sports League, founded during World War I, promoted sports and nationalism, and in the 1930s recruited Japanese instructors to teach jiu-jitsu and swimming.<sup>7</sup> Navy officer Luis Souto, also a former Mayeda Mitsuyo student, was not at all sympathetic to the Gracies.<sup>8</sup> Once again, although the local lineages of martial artists originated in the Amazon, they competed fiercely for Mayeda's legacy. This time, however, the Gracies were facing their Japanese rivals with backing from the Brazilian Navy, which pioneered the practice of Japanese jiu-jitsu in the early twentieth century.

Yano eventually challenged the Gracies to 'a fight for honor'.<sup>9</sup> After *demarches* in which tempers flared, Yano and George Gracie fought a 100-minute bout. This was dominated by Yano, who threw the Brazilian twenty-six times. Despite his ample technical dominance, the match ended in a tie according to the agreed rules. Afterwards, Yano dismissed rumors of deliberately holding back during the fight. Instead, he declared that his failure to win was due to George's defensive strategy and because the local rules were different than those enforced by Kodokan school in Japan.<sup>10</sup>

## ROUND 2: JIU-JITSU, FOOTBALL AND DICTATORSHIP RIO DE JANEIRO, 1937

Under Getúlio Vargas' leadership, the regime ruling Brazil since the *coup d'état* in 1930 became a full-fledged dictatorship in 1937. This was known as the Estado Novo – the New State. It was a period of the radicalization of Brazilian nationalism in a quintessentially xenophobic form, expressed in terms of an alleged foreign threat. Throughout the 1930s, Japanese immigration was often at the center of a national debate dividing the Brazilian elite. Anti-Japanese groups sought to justify their xenophobia claiming that the 'yellow peril' were unassimilable and a

threat to the idea of a homogenous national identity.<sup>11</sup> Against this background, a rivalry developed between the Gracies in Rio de Janeiro and the Ono brothers in São Paulo.

In 1937, George Gracie claimed that his younger brother, Hélio, had previously fought a 2-2 draw with Ono Yasuichi. Now George would have his shot against Ono Naochi.<sup>12</sup> The referees for the bout held in Rio were two Special Police officers, one of whom was the police commandant, Lieutenant Euzébio de Queiroz.<sup>13</sup> Ono Naochi threw George Gracie harshly several times, tossed him out of the ring and then choked him into submission. This devastating loss before their patrons certainly damaged the Gracies' reputation and demanded a quick and adequate response.<sup>14</sup>

Immediately thereafter, the promoters rapidly scheduled a rematch to take place at the Brazil Stadium in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>15</sup> Before a packed arena, George finished off Ono Naochi in the sixth round with a decisive arm bar that constituted revenged and restored the Gracies' honor. The next day's newspapers headlined: 'Football is no longer the only sport attracting large audiences'.<sup>16</sup> The analogy with football was deliberate, since Mário Filho, intellectual and owner of the *Jornal dos Sports*, enthusiastically promoted a national identity associated with a Brazilian style of football. Heightening the nationalist fervor, the Brazilian-owned movie studio *Cinédia* screen the presentation of 'the first jiu-jitsu match ever filmed in Brazil'.<sup>17</sup>

7 The Navy Sports League was founded on November 25 1916.

8 'Ono é um lutador extraordinário.' *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, November 27 1935, 3. Commander Luis Filipe de Filgueira Souto was among the 333 sailors killed in the sinking of the battleship 'Bahia' on July 4 1945. The warship was sunk by accident during an artillery exercise off Brazil's northeastern coast.

9 'Yano Desafia Helio Gracie Para Uma Luta De Honra', *Jornal dos Sports*, December 20 1934, 3.

10 'George Gracie e Yano empatam após 100 Minutos de ação'. *Ring*, Rio de Janeiro, October 5 1935, 3.

11 R.C.P. Um perigo para a nacionalidade: a imigração japonesa. Rio de Janeiro, *Mensário do Jornal do Commercio*, n. 1, janeiro 1938, 119–123.

12 'Ono vai experimentar o amargor da derrota'. *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, September 8 1937, 4.

13 *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, September 27 1937, n. p.

14 *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, September 27 1937, n. p.

15 The 'Estádio Brasil' (Brazil Stadium) was a 3,600 square feet-multifunction arena built in 1935 near Rio's downtown at the 'Feira Internacional de Amostras' fairgrounds (Sample International Fair).

16 George Gracie venceu no sexto round com um armlock: 'já não se pode dizer que o football é o único esporte que atrai o grande público'. *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, October 3 1937, 6.

17 Ibid.

## THE GRACIES VERSUS THE JAPANESE MARTIAL ARTISTS: FIGHTING FOR JIU-JITSU'S SUPREMACY

As James C. Scott affirmed, the new regime sought 'to remake society in its own image' [Scott 1998: 97]. In undertaking this task, the government created agencies to organize, regulate and control sports in general and combat sports in particular. Rio de Janeiro's Municipal Boxing Commission, for example, was organized in 1933 and was responsible for a variety of martial arts. Upon the arrival of the new regime, elements within both the military and the police became obsessed with ideas stemming from neo-Lamarckian eugenics that placed strong emphasis on improvement of living conditions through the practice of sports [Stepan 1991: 92]. Thus, police or military officers usually led the state agencies that governed combat sports.

At the same time as measures that established state control over combat sports, there was growing Japanese immigration between 1925 and 1935 that brought scores of martial artists to São Paulo. The account of an immigrant named Yanagimori Masaru is particularly noteworthy. In 1936, he was a fifteen-year old martial artist who embarked on a ship bound for Brazil. The 'Buenos Aires Maru' regularly transported Japanese immigrants and was equipped with a twenty-eight mat *dojo* that held a judo tournament during the forty day trip.<sup>18</sup> According to Yanagimori Masaru, ten percent of the passengers were martial arts practitioners, with one-fourth of these being black belts. Such figures indicate a significant number of martial artists arriving to Brazil, as immigrants traveling on the 'Buenos Aires Maru' represented ten percent of the all Japanese arrivals in 1936 [Arai 2003].

Confrontations between the Gracies in Rio de Janeiro and the Japanese black belts were probably inevitable even though the latter predominantly settled in São Paulo. In the early 1930s, Hélio and George Gracie fought their first bouts against new Japanese immigrants. Both Gracies achieved draws in their respective fights, both against Namiki and the old Gracie acquaintance, Geo Omori. Towards the mid 1930s, Japanese immigrants with outstanding martial arts skills landed in Rio de Janeiro, some of them supported by the Gracies' antagonists in the military.

Evidence of the growing tension between the Gracies and the Boxing Commission can be seen in the fact that they had their licenses to participate in public bouts suspended twice in 1934. On the first occasion, prior to the fight between Hélio and a Japanese named Myako, Carlos Gracie flatly rejected the appointed referee, who was instead replaced by the Gracies' patron, Special Police chief Lieutenant Euzébio de Queiroz. Next, Carlos made an unusual request – for the use

18 The Osaka Shohen Kaisha Line (O.S.K.) owned the 'Buenos Aires Maru' whose itinerary had as port of calls Rio de Janeiro and Santos (São Paulo). Larsson B. Maritime Timetable Images. Available at: <http://www.timetableimages.com/maritime/images/osk.htm>. Accessed August 12, 2011.

of sleeveless jiu-jitsu uniforms. This was apparently in an effort to make the application of arm bars by the Japanese more difficult. Lastly, after Hélio's victory over Myako, the Boxing Commission suspended Carlos from participating in combat sports due to his unruly behavior during the bouts and persistent complaints.<sup>19</sup> The other Gracie, George, also had his share of controversy with the commission. In 1934, he once entered the ring but inexplicably refused to fight the Brazilian wrestler Orlando Américo da Silva (nicknamed *Dudu*). Before an astonished audience and members of the Boxing Commission, the police escorted George away and placed him in custody.<sup>20</sup>

The Boxing Commission sought to set limits, draft regulations, and create weight divisions and rules, all in order to decrease the level of violence in no-holds-barred bouts. Such measures infuriated the Gracies, whose martial-art marketing sought largely to create the image of 'David and Goliath' performances. The creation of weight divisions mitigated the effects of their psychological game. Moreover, the adoption of international wrestling rules deprived them of many of the chances inherent to fights with barely any rules. For instance, the referees of the Boxing Commission were instructed to apply international wrestling rules in which points were gained by pinning fighters on their backs. This regulation posed a major setback for the Gracies since they were often likely to be pinned down for a while when fighting against larger and heavier wrestlers.<sup>21</sup>

The jiu-jitsu routine that Carlos Gracie learned from Mayeda Mitsuyo lacked philosophical aspects, hierarchy and respect for the rules otherwise found elsewhere in the Japanese tradition. This helped the Gracies replace Kodokan judo's 'soft' forms of orthodox and to produce a local version of the sport. A similar situation occurred in the creation of creole style of football (*fútbol criollo*) in Argentina where the British sought to transmit to local footballers their sporting ethics [Archetti 1991: 49]. However, the Argentineans reinvented football under their own cultural terms. In fact, Argentinean, Uruguayan and Brazilian football players over time developed their own interpretation of what the British defined as 'fair play'. Brazilians responded by resorting to a cultural codification known in Portuguese as *catimba*. This colloquial Afro-Portuguese word *catimba* corresponds to the Spanish term *picardia criolla*, which means 'craftiness' or 'trickery'. Each refers to dissimulation or astute trickery used to keep an adversary off balance through behavior unexpectedly contrary to the norms.

19 'Brilhante victoria de Hélio Gracie sobre Myaki'. *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, June 24 1934, 6

20 George, after signing a contract and agreeing to the rules, refused to fight under any rule. 'George Gracie fugiu ao combate com Dudu'. *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, November 4 1934, 6.

21 'Carlos Gracie suspenso por 6 mēzes'. *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, July 25 1934, front; 6.

The Gracies' adamant refusal to abide by Kodokan rules and to resist the ones enforced by the Boxing Commission is key to understanding how they survived the early confrontations with Japanese martial artists while creating a local jiu-jitsu style. It is noteworthy that modern rules enforced both in Japan and in Brazil had nationalistic and even militaristic undertones. Kodokan judo rules, for example, resurrected old warrior codes of Japanese *Bushido* by incorporating the idea of 'sudden death', which proclaimed as victorious the one able to apply a clean ('perfect') throw. In Brazil, the military, which was in charge of combat sports, sought to standardize loosely organized rules in order to regulate violence and transform unruly performances into modern sport.

If the Gracies accepted Japanese rules, they would stand no chance of victory against skilled Japanese throwers. Similarly, adopting the new rules that determined victory by points established by the military that controlled the Boxing Commission would turn draws into defeats. This is clear when one analyzes the fights in which the Japanese martial artists threw and dominated the Gracies. One should bear in mind that inconclusive draws allowed the Gracies to keep their aura of invincibility intact, which was a valuable asset in times of nationalism.



Figure 2: 'Ono is an outstanding fighter: Captain Luis Souto, Count Koma's student'. Source: *Jornal dos Sports*, 1935.

After the Gracies' fight with Takeo Yano, as described in the beginning of this article, other Japanese immigrants based in São Paulo came to Rio determined to purge the local jiu-jitsu's heresy. Yassuiti, another member of the Ono family supported by the Navy challenged Hélio Gracie.<sup>22</sup>

In a bitter exchange of words prior to the fight, Carlos Gracie acknowledged the hostile Navy officer's past apprenticeship under Mayeda Mitsuyo in the Amazon. Yet training under the same jiu-jitsu master made them rivals rather than friends. Furthermore, in this exchange Commander Souto emphasized that Ono was even better than Yano, and that Hélio Gracie thus stood no chance.<sup>23</sup> In response, instead of offering his habitual bellicose remarks, Carlos was somewhat tactful. While acknowledging 'Commander Souto's profound jiu-jitsu knowledge', Carlos affirmed that 'Hélio had no fear and will win'.<sup>24</sup> Ono himself decided to provoke the Gracies and declared that Hélio would not survive the first round and challenged all the Gracies to fight him in one night.<sup>25</sup> The bout ended in a draw, not very differently from George's previous match with Yano. According to the *Jornal dos Sports*, Hélio's strong defensive strategy held off Ono's aggressive actions. Carlos, acknowledging the danger posed by Ono, sought to disturb the latter and intimidate the referee. For this, the Boxing Commission, once again, suspended him from coaching for six months.<sup>26</sup>

The first round of fights between the Gracies and skilled Japanese martial artists such as Yano and Ono came to a stalemate although the Gracies managed to survive their first real test against mainstream jiu-jitsu. The political background behind the matches was particularly

- 22 Yassuiti Ono and Naoti Ono arrived in São Paulo in the late 1920s. Takao, F. Q. O judo no Brasil: os primeiros rivais da família Gracie. Rio de Janeiro, *Revista Tatame*. n. 180, 54, February 2011.
- 23 Commander Luis Souto was part of the Navy officer's cohort trained by Mayeda Mitsuyo, the 'Count Koma', and Takeo Yano in Belém, Pará. *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, November 27 1935, n.p.
- 24 'Hélio não se atemorizá'. *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, November 28 1935, 3.
- 25 'Hélio não passará do 1o round: Ono desafia os 4 Irmãos Gracie'. *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, December 3 1935, 5.
- 26 'Nao se definiu o combate Hélio x Ono: defensiva do brasileiro invalidou a agressividade do japonês'. *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, December 6 1935, front page; 4.

significant. A political crisis marked by violent clashes broke out on November 23, 1935, in some northeastern states and Rio de Janeiro.<sup>27</sup> A Communist revolt rocked the fragile constitutional arrangement, and Getúlio Vargas used this as an excuse to impose a dictatorship in 1937 [Hilton 1991: 73]. Repressing communism was the *baptême du feu* for the Special Police in which the Gracies were instructors. Through this recently created gendarmerie the state unleashed repression in full swing [Scaramuzzi 1981: 15–22].

Figure 3: 'Ono wants to fight in Rio: an extraordinary jiu-jitsu master'. Source: *Jornal dos Sports*, 1935.<sup>28</sup>



27 The revolt broke out in Natal, capital of Rio Grande do Norte state on November 23 1935 and in Rio de Janeiro on November 27 1935.

28 'Ono quer combater no Rio: um excelente mestre de jiu-jitsu'. *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, November 27 1935, 3.

Against this background, Hélio and Ono Naochi finally had a showdown.<sup>29</sup> Ono slammed Gracie to the ground twenty-seven times and, even more surprisingly, the latter avoided ground combat, narrowly escaping defeat. By declaring a draw, the referee ignored the new jiu-jitsu rules that had recently been adopted by the Brazilian Boxing Federation. The new rules aimed to introduce a scoring system of points similar to those used in boxing matches. Under these regulations, Ono was the winner, but the invisible hand of the establishment saved the Gracies. At the end, the event organizers, perhaps trying to minimize public embarrassment, awarded Ono a gold medal for his contribution to martial arts practice.<sup>30</sup>

The Ono brothers in São Paulo, however, were not satisfied with their previous bouts against the Gracies. Yasuichi challenged George Gracie and one newspaper headline declared: 'Jiu-jitsu Supremacy in Brazil will be decided today! Who will win? The Japanese Ono or the Brazilian Gracie?' After a very close match, the referee disqualified Ono for punching George unlawfully.<sup>31</sup> The tension around these matches seemed to take its toll on the Japanese fighter. Finally, Yasuichi's younger brother, Naochi, came forward and challenged George. After a tough six-round fight, George defeated Naochi by points upon the application of the long-awaited new rules enforced by the referee from the Special Police.<sup>32</sup>

By the end of 1937, at the launch of the Estado Novo, Yano declared: 'only a Japanese martial artist can hold the title of best jiu-jitsu fighter

29 Massagoichi had to submit to a 'qualifying test' to have his bout against Hélio approved by the Boxing Commission. The Commission applied this procedure in case of doubt about the fighter's credentials. Yano, invited to evaluate Helio's next opponent, found Massagoichi's skills insufficient. 'Hélio Gracie enfrenta Massaigochi'. *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, August 15 1935, 3.

30 The Brazilian Boxing Confederation (Confederação Brasileira de Pugilismo) founded on August 3 1935 merged federations of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Minas Gerais. This state institution, thereafter, ruled over jiu-jitsu, Boxing, Capoeira, Wrestling, judo among others. Jiu-jitsu's rules changed on August 20 1935. 'The rules of jiu-jitsu's matches were modified and hereafter will be decided by points, surrender and knockout in order to avoid mistakes made by referees'. Confederação Brasileira de Pugilismo. *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, August 20 1935, 3.

31 'George Gracie vencedor por desclassificação'. *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, October 17 October 17, front page.

32 'Gracie dará nova oportunidade a Naoiti Ono'. *Diário Carioca*, Rio de Janeiro, November 12 1937, 8.

in Brazil'.<sup>33</sup> This was a bold statement, issued under a full-fledged dictatorship with xenophobic overtones. Yet Yano had the support from the Brazilian Navy, something that may have encouraged him to display his 'Japaneseness' in such tense times.

The turning point in the creation of a Brazilian jiu-jitsu were the fights pitting the Gracies against Japanese immigrants. After years struggling in the business of combat sports, at the beginning of the Estado Novo the Gracies managed to attract sizable audiences, capture media attention and obtain state support only comparable with football spectacles. In any event, the rivalry between the Gracies and the Japanese raged on when the Estado Novo was tightening its grip on every aspect of Brazilian life.<sup>34</sup>

Within this wave of nationalism, George and Yano fought two important bouts, in Rio and Belo Horizonte respectively. In the first, George won by finishing Yano with a foot lock, evincing the Gracies growing specialization in ground combat. Prior to the second bout, however, the contenders made a peculiar bet in which Yano promised to throw George twenty times during the fight. If he failed, he would pay George a certain amount of cash for each failed throw.<sup>35</sup> Yano accomplished his goal by throwing George exactly twenty times and won the bout on points.<sup>36</sup> By this stage, the differences between the styles were very clear. The Gracies relied on a defensive ground strategy based on a scissors-like position (*do-o sae*) to compensate for the Japanese superiority in throwing techniques. As such, the Gracies had developed their jiu-jitsu beyond the model of 'soft forms' – i.e., purely cultural adaptations – proposed by Arjun Appadurai.

Ultimately, the emphasis on ground combat was primarily a survival strategy and not the expression of a deliberate aim to create a 'Brazilian' jiu-jitsu style. Even so, the Gracies' agency was an important factor in the invention of 'Brazilian' jiu-jitsu. The Gracies devised it as a defensive style, but they made it offensive through the application of chokes and joint-locks from the bottom position.

33 'Yano esta certo de que derrotará George Gracie: japonês declara que só um japonês poderá deter a supremacia do jiu-jitsu'. *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, August 31 1938, 4.

34 Getúlio Vargas' coup d'état on September 10 1937 made the regime a full-fledge dictatorship.

35 'Yano e George mais uma vez frente a frente: uma aposta original para o grande choque de sábado'. *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, September 22 1938, 2.

36 'Yano venceu George Gracie por pontos em Belo Horizonte derrubando 20 vèzes'. *O Globo Sportivo*, Rio de Janeiro, October 4 1938, 6.



Figure 4: *Osae-komi waza* (pin down technique). Kodokan judo rules give the victory to those able to pin down their opponent for thirty seconds. By contrast, the Gracies adopted the rule in which victory only could be achieved by submission (surrender or tapping out). Source: *Judo Information*, 2011.<sup>37</sup>



Figure 5: *Nage-Waza* (throwing techniques). According to Kodokan rules, a 'perfect' (clear) throw ends the fight according to the concept of 'sudden death' (knock-out). Source: *Judo Information*, 2011.<sup>38</sup>



Figure 6: The 'guard' (*do-osaie*) position hallmarked the Brazilian jiu-jitsu by emphasizing ground combat.<sup>39</sup>

37 Ohlenkamp, N. Pinning Techniques. Available at: <http://judoinfo.com/techdrw.htm>. Accessed June 22, 2011.

38 Judo Techniques. Available at: [https://www.tutorialspoint.com/judo/judo\\_techniques.htm](https://www.tutorialspoint.com/judo/judo_techniques.htm). Accessed March 01, 2020.

39 Accessed June 23, 2011. Available at: <http://academiablackbelt.com/apostila/passagens-de-guarda/>



## PUBLIC PERFORMANCE, POLITICS AND THE GRACIES' PATRIARCHY

Participation in public performances against the Japanese was essential to the development of the Gracies' 'Brazilian' jiu-jitsu. These activities, combined with others undertaken in their *dojo*, helped to consolidate their prestige and created a strong ethos that linked them with local society. Public gatherings displaying beautiful bodies, encouraging the practice of sports and promoting nationalism marked this period. Connections between sports, eugenics, nationalism, and militarism were the norm [Stepan 1991: 162–170]. Yet the transplanting of jiu-jitsu to particular elitist urban spaces and within a larger cultural concept was a specifically Gracie innovation. In 1936, they promoted jiu-jitsu tournaments and staged public demonstrations with the participation of 'the best individuals of our society'.<sup>40</sup>

The presentations held on Copacabana Beach were a cultural innovation at a time when urban expansion sprawled along Rio's southern beaches. The construction of the Copacabana Palace Hotel in 1923 had constituted a watershed for this previously peripheral neighborhood. It introduced fashionable forms of seaside recreation imported from contemporary Europe [Conniff 1981: 28–29]. The *Jornal dos Sports* enthusiastically reported in 1936: 'Jiu-jitsu on Copacabana Beach: Splendor and Physical Prowess'.<sup>41</sup> Beach culture was a new aspect of upper-class lifestyle sponsored by the *Jornal dos Sports* and the beginning of an instrumental relationship linking bodies in swimsuits to ones wrapped in jiu-jitsu *gis*.<sup>42</sup>



Figure 7: Copacabana 1930s. Source: Flickr, 2007.<sup>43</sup>



Figure 8: 'Jiu-jitsu and Wrestling Tournament Kick-Off' Copacabana Beach, Rio. Source: *Jornal dos Sports*, 1937.<sup>44</sup>

40 'Torneio de jiu-jitsu reúne os melhores indivíduos de nossa sociedade.' *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, June 15 1936, 3.

41 'Jiu-jitsu em Copacabana: esplendor e pujança física.' *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, June 21 1937, front page.

42 Roberto Marinho and Mário Filho bought the *Jornal dos Sports*. The former also owned the newspaper *O Globo* which became Brazil's most powerful media empire in the second half of the twentieth century.

43 Costa, A. Copacabana Beach. Available at: [http://www.flickr.com/photos/andre\\_so\\_rio/1016368923/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/andre_so_rio/1016368923/). Accessed August 30 2011.

44 'Jiu-jitsu em Copacabana: esplendor e pujança física.' *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, June 21 1937, front page.



Figure 9: 'Sporting Evening at Gracie Academy with the Best Individuals of Our Society' Source: *Jornal dos Sports*, 1936.<sup>45</sup>

Along with scores of Brazilians, the Gracies found themselves caught in the middle of a fierce ideological competition in the 1930s.<sup>46</sup> Modernist movements gained momentum in São Paulo during the 1920s and soon split into divergent ideological currents [Bethell 1996: 21–22]. The *Ação Integralista Brasileira* (A.I.B.) became during the 1930s the first mass-based political party organized in Brazil. Moreover, in the 1930s, international political polarization spilled over into the political arena in Brazil as communists and *integralistas* battled for hearts, minds, and power.<sup>47</sup> The Integralist Party rapidly expanded in number and influence, winning over people from a wide array of social backgrounds and with different interpretations of nationalism. Furthermore, the slogan 'God, Fatherland, and Family', the aesthetics of their green shirts, the performance of lavish parades and their idiosyncratic salute: 'Anauê!'

45 'Torneio de jiu-jitsu reúne os melhores indivíduos de nossa sociedade'. *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, June 15 1936, 3.

46 The movement led by Plínio Salgado branched off the modernist movement moving from aesthetics to political nationalism. Besides nationalism, Plínio Salgado brought to his movement traditional Catholicism, refreshed by the ongoing religious revivalism in Rio de Janeiro. He later founded Brazil's 'Integralist Party'.

47 In 1922, communists founded the Partido Comunista Brasileiro P.C.B. (Brazilian Communist Party) and in 1932, integralistas founded the *Ação Integralista Brasileira*, A.I.B. (Brazilian Integralist Action).

would be highly appealing to those seeking social insertion in the new order [Costa and Labriola 1999: 174].

After helping to crush the 'Communist Insurrection' in 1935, and upon the inauguration of the *Estado Novo* two years later, the integralists saw no hurdles between them and political power. Yet when it came time to divide the political spoils, Getúlio Vargas had his own plans, which did not include the integralists. The latter, frustrated and determined to settle a score with an ungrateful partner, stormed the presidential residence in 1938. The ill-planned and poorly implemented raid concluded as a grotesque episode [Levine 1998: 54]. The fate of the *Estado Novo* hung in the balance during the five-hour skirmish in which Vargas, his family, a handful of marines and Special Police troopers held off the rebels until lethargic support arrived from security forces [Peixoto 1960: 93].

Once the *putsch* attempt failed, the regime unleashed its security apparatus to punish the unruly integralists. Repression by political police (D.O.P.S) included raids and the seizing of documents from political committees throughout the country. In the party office in the then-bucolic Rio de Janeiro neighborhood of Ipanema, the dossier that was found indicated that the party was a social patchwork. The long list of supporters included descendants of aristocratic families, the *nouveau riche*, intellectuals, civil servants, blue-collar workers, enlisted men, and housewives, displaying a remarkable political solidarity.<sup>48</sup> On the party membership list, the name 'Hélio Gracie' showed up.

Of the three Gracie brothers who became instrumental in creating the Brazilian jiu-jitsu, Carlos, George and Hélio, the latter was the only one who displayed open support for Integralism. In assessing Hélio's affiliation to radical ideologies one is tempted to affirm that he was simply swept up in a strong political trend, but in some ways his support for this Brazilian version of fascism was predictable. In addition, the party placed a premium on youth, virility and aggressive manliness [Deutsch 1999: 282–283]. Hélio's bellicose persona and past transgressions made his affiliation with the 'green shirts' unsurprising.

It is unknown whether Hélio suffered any reprisals in the repressive response to the coup attempt. It is likely that he was able to remain untouched, along with the majority of party members. In general, the backlash against the integralists was mild, especially when compared to the repression suffered by the communists in 1935 [Levine 1995: 54]. The repressive machine, however, carefully maintained the records of Hélio's affair with the 'green shirts'.

48 Arquivo Público do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. DOPS/RJ - Dossiê das Relações de Votantes nos Diversos Nucleos. 31 de maio 1937, Fundo: Divisão de Polícia Política e Social.



Figure 10: Fascism 'made in Brazil'. Integralismo became a patchwork of nationalistic tendencies (left). Integralistas parading in Rio, 1937, fascist aesthetic (right). Source: Frente Integralista Brasileira.<sup>49</sup>

The local jiu-jitsu invented by the Gracies continued to mold its soft forms on their image, against a backdrop of rapid social changes. A few months after the failed coup, a young woman walked into the Gracie dojo and asked for jiu-jitsu lessons to learn how to deal with her husband's outbursts of violence. She explained that her husband was usually an 'adorable man', but prone to become physically abusive whenever he lost his temper. Since this rogue behavior was culturally tolerated as part of the routine violence faced by many women, the beleaguered housewife decided to resort to jiu-jitsu to combat machismo with the help of the Gracies [Hautzinger 2007: 34–35]. Carlos Gracie, assuming the role of female protector, not only taught her some jiu-jitsu techniques, but also professorially instructed her: 'Do you want to solve your conjugal troubles? Put an arm bar on your husband'. This was the Gracies' formula for responding to domestic violence.<sup>50</sup> Photos portrayed the young housewife being empowered by learning jiu-jitsu.

49 Frente Integralista Brasileira. Available at: <http://integralismo.org.br/novo/imagens/phpDpksL2.jpg>. Accessed June 5, 2010.

50 'Queres solucionar as tuas questões conjugais? Aplique um armlock! O jiu-jitsu iguala os sexos'. *O Globo Sportivo*, Rio de Janeiro, November 1 1938, 5.

Women's rights made significant advances in the early stages of Getúlio Vargas' rule. The regime initially promoted women's suffrage and appointed female officials to high-profile positions, as well as introducing other improvements for middle- and upper-class women. Despite these achievements, the inauguration of the Estado Novo dictatorship in 1937 halted these advances and reinforced male domination [Hahner 1990: 177–179]. In this episode, Carlos gradually revealed his persona as a 'cordial' patriarch [Rocha 2004: 299]. 'Brazilian cordiality' is a phrase coined by historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda. It evokes the fact that since the colonial period foreigners have often portrayed Brazilians as overtly sincere, hospitable and generous. Buarque de Holanda defined 'Brazilian cordiality' as a pattern developed in rural and patriarchal settings. Yet it does not engender social solidarity beyond the individual's immediate circle. This behavior allowed Carlos Gracie to mitigate aspects of traditional behavior without giving up his patriarchal position.

In his trajectory to become the Gracies' patriarch, in 1938 Carlos introduced his first-born son and successor through a newspaper article entitled 'I want to be a champion too!' Pictures depicted the five-year-old Eduardo Gracie, representing the second generation of this martial arts clan in the making, wearing a jiu-jitsu *gi* and performing moves with Carlos. Later, Carlos (claiming to be under spirit possession) changed the child's name to 'Carlson' (Gracie 2008: 115). The child

was the offspring of Carlos' relationship with Carmen, a dark-skinned woman of humble origins. This was a transgression of the unwritten codes that would deem a woman like Carmen to be an 'unfit' partner for Carlos, considering his family background.

However, Carlos claimed to follow an esoteric practice that regarded sexual discharge as 'waste' if not for bearing offspring [Urban 2006: 7]. He allegedly partnered women solely for the sake of procreation. Whether his reasons were the result of his esoteric beliefs or of patriarchal values, in order to enforce his procreation ideas, he tended to engage with poor females from lower social strata in sexual liaisons. In Brazil, the imbrication of race, class and gender explain why Carlos invariably resorted to dark-skinned female partners to carry out his reproductive strategies [Levine and Meihi 1995: 141]. Thereafter, Carlos would attribute his physical prowess, longevity and numerous progeny to his dietary habits combined with sexual restraint.

Figure 11: 'I want to be a champion too!' Eduardo, later renamed as 'Carlson', was a Carlos Gracie's first-born child in his clan of Brazilian jiu-jitsu's fighters. Source: O Globo Sportivo, 1938.<sup>51</sup>



51 Também quero ser campeão! *O Globo Sportivo*, Rio de Janeiro, November 26 1938, 7.

Completing the pillars underpinning Brazilian jiu-jitsu, Carlos Gracie became increasingly involved with esoteric practices and adopted a vegetarian diet through his acquaintance with Oscar Santa Maria Pereira. In the early 1930s, alongside his trajectory in professional jiu-jitsu, Carlos met Oscar Santa Maria Pereira who was an employee in the Banco do Brasil, unmarried, and of humble Spanish background. The latter became Carlos' student, confirming the enduring corporatist liaisons between the Gracies and that financial institution. Santa Maria, like others in this emergent, white middle class milieu, used his professional occupation to achieve social status through intellectual achievement and lavish sporting activities in organizations, such as the Associação Atlética Banco do Brasil (Bank of Brazil's Athletic Association) [Owensby 1999: 53]. He adhered to esoteric religious denominations as a trendy religious alternative to traditional and conservative Catholicism.

In Brazil, spiritualism gained momentum along with modernization and became a class-based religious practice. This was strongly identified with white middle class sectors as a social and racial counter point to the Afro-Brazilian religions identified with by the lower social strata [Brown 1994: 8–14]. Santa Maria was a member of Rosicrucian Order, an esoteric semi-Christian sect [Lewis 1999: 110–111]. This affiliation, however, branched off into different organizations, like the one founded by the German-born Arnold Krumm-Heller, an adventurous physician who fought in the Mexican Revolution, founded an esoteric church there and later traveled throughout South America. In the early 1930s, he opened a branch of the Ancient Rosicrucian Fraternity in Rio de Janeiro of which Santa Maria and Carlos Gracie became affiliates [Dawson 2007: 55]. The partnership between Carlos Gracie and Santa Maria thrived over the years with the former gradually rising from the role of disciple to become the latter's jiu-jitsu master and guru.

Lastly, completing the group of practices supporting Brazilian jiu-jitsu, Carlos Gracie adopted and prescribed a vegetarian diet later known as the 'Gracie Diet'. Although he claimed authorship of the diet, it was the brainchild of Argentinean physician Juan Esteve Dulin who lived and lectured in Rio de Janeiro in the early 1920s. He traveled extensively in search of centenarian individuals to study their habits and gather evidence to produce an ideal type of diet [Dulin 1949]. As a result, a vegetarian diet became one of the backbones of Brazilian jiu-jitsu.

Approaching the 1940s, after passing an entire decade deeply involved with jiu-jitsu, the Gracies developed other interests. Carlos became increasingly involved in a real estate business with his successful associate Oscar de Santa Maria, and decided to move to the northeastern state of Ceará. Santa Maria, meanwhile, rose steadily within the Banco do Brasil, which certainly opened opportunities for their partnership to conduct profitable business operations. Money matters, however, were not Carlos' only concern; he also took seriously his role as a spiritualist guru, surrounded by a small circle of followers.

Spiritual guidance ruled over every aspect of his life. Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether he decided to move for practical reasons or whether he was motivated by spiritual inspiration. Whatever the reasons, he settled along with his five children in what became the most sensitive region of Brazil during wartime. In 1942, Brazil declared war on the Axis powers. The *casus belli* was the sinking of Brazilian ships by German U-boats off the coast of northeastern Brazil.<sup>52</sup> When the war broke out, Carlos was living in the coastal city of Fortaleza, the capital of Ceará State.

During the war, the Estado Novo dictatorship tightened its grip by imposing harsh censorship and controlling mail service and telegraphic communications. The steady flow of correspondence between Carlos Gracie and Oscar de Santa Maria raised the suspicion of local authorities in Ceará. Carlos was seen as an outsider exchanging lengthy correspondence in cryptographic language.<sup>53</sup> The political police in Rio de Janeiro had been informed by Ceará state police that Carlos Gracie – a former jiu-jitsu fighter and former member of the integralist militia – was currently living in Fortaleza. The local police reported that Carlos was exchanging letters, sent by an accountant, addressed to a high-ranking employee of the Banco do Brasil. This accountant had connections with Branca Botelho, the wife of the Swedish consul in Rio de Janeiro, and mistress of a certain German citizen named Osborne who was currently being detained for espionage. Such wartime paranoia was not unusual. Hélio's association with Integralism, the peculiar content of the letters, and an overzealous police officer in a backwater coastal town swarmed by German U-boats, combined to produce a fantastic story.

Among other things, the correspondence dealt with family affairs in which Santa Maria looked after Carlos' children [Gracie 2008: 207–208]. Other than this, they dealt with spiritual, dietary and business matters about which Carlos advised his small circle of followers. He claimed to receive advice in worldly matters through his shamanic connection with a native Peruvian spirit named Egídio Lasjovino.<sup>54</sup> The nationality of Carlos' spiritual guide, as well as the adoption of the diet of the Argentinean physician, leads one to speculate about the actual mentor-role of Santa Maria over Carlos. In both cases, the Spanish language may have been instrumental either for understanding Dulin's diet or in dealing with the Peruvian entity.

Carlos and Santa Maria were aware that their correspondence was being intercepted, which made Carlos resort to even more suspicious terminology. They had business interests mostly dedicated to real estate using Santa Maria's money and connections.<sup>55</sup> However, Gracie and Santa Maria were ultimately able to convince authorities of their innocence of 'Integralist espionage'. The latter was summoned by police and declared he was Carlos' jiu-jitsu student, who over time became a close friend and business associate. Both were spiritualists and vegetarians, which would explain the strange content of their messages. Santa Maria also affirmed that Carlos was not a member of the Integralista party. The espionage affair revealed the relationship between the Carlos and Santa Maria in which the latter was instrumental in many developments that helped the Gracies in the early stages of the Brazilian jiu-jitsu.



Figure 12: Gillette advertisement in 1941. Jiu-jitsu is related to health, hygiene and masculinity without losing its traditional appeal.

Source: *Jornal dos Sports*, 1941.<sup>56</sup>

52 The northeastern Brazil became a highly prized strategic point for the Allied war effort due its privileged positions vis-à-vis the South Atlantic and West Africa.

53 Arquivo Público do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. DOPS/RJ. Correspondência Carlos Gracie/Oscar Santa Maria, 1943. Fundo: Divisão de Polícia Política e Social.

54 Arquivo Público do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. DOPS/RJ. Correspondência Carlos Gracie/Oscar Santa Maria. 1943. Departamento de Ordem Política e Social (DOPS).

55 Oscar Santa Maria was temporarily appointed Minister of Finance in Eurico Gaspar Dutra's presidency after Getúlio Vargas' overthrow in 1945.

56 'Jiu-jitsu: factor de saúde'. *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, March 30 1941, 5.

## CONCLUSION

From 1939 onward, the three Gracie brothers, George, Hélio, and Carlos were taking different directions. George, who had a perpetually stormy relationship with his brothers, was the only Gracie who still occasionally performed in public matches. Hélio decided to retire temporarily from jiu-jitsu at a relatively young age to enjoy his social upward mobility. He married a separated *nouveau riche* woman and became a corporate executive in one of her family holdings [Gracie 2008: 184]. Carlos, on the other hand, dedicated himself to building new pillars of Brazilian jiu-jitsu by incorporating esoteric practices, dietary rules and embedding a clannish structure into its 'soft' cultural format.

The period between the Communist Insurrection in 1935 and the outbreak of the Second World War is particularly relevant to the analysis of the making of Brazilian jiu-jitsu. During this period, the Gracies confronted their opponents on two fronts. They faced opposition among the military and from the Japanese immigrants. Moreover, the very state they had come to represent became an obstacle to their individualistic strategies. Yet under the thin veneer of modernity spearheaded by the new political regime lay a pervasively paternalistic system in which fallen aristocrats like the Gracies remained favorite sons. In turn, they provided their political patrons with their expertise in violence.

In their reinvention of jiu-jitsu, the Gracies engineered an embryonic bundle of traits, including Carlos' personification of the figure of guru and modern patriarch, to turn a loose set of jiu-jitsu techniques vaguely associated with a Japanese martial arts school into a comprehensive local martial art system.

Resilience symbolized by a defensive ground combat became the hallmark of the Gracies' Brazilian jiu-jitsu style, forged in confrontations against foreign opponents with technical superiority especially in standing combat. They would lie under their skilled adversaries, whom they held between their legs. The process described elsewhere as 'self-colonization', which refers to a deliberate submission to a foreign cultural flow, was, so to speak, withstood by the Gracies' strong defense [Frühstrück and Manzenreiter 2004: 8–13]. Yet the fighting system they created was not only a defensive or passive style developed to resist the Japanese technical edge. It evolved into a style designed to defeat their opponents from the guard position. The Gracies thereafter advertised their jiu-jitsu by warning those unfamiliar with their style that those underneath could be winning.

In a time of profound changes in which Getúlio Vargas seized power and imposed a dictatorship, the Gracies established their martial art

firmly at the heart of the new order. Finally, in the 1940s, a long interregnum began for the Gracies and Getúlio Vargas. Of course, both would be back for another round against their rivals in the post-war period. But the formative years covered in this article are crucial. For, if modern Brazil born in the 1930s it is also true for Brazilian jiu-jitsu.

In the following decades, the Gracies continued to navigate the stormy waters of emergent Brazilian culture and society. Post-war, the Gracies moved from being present principally in the sport sections of newspapers to becoming national celebrities in the pages of mainstream media outlets, always against the ever-present backdrop of populism and nationalist ideologies. The changing fortunes of the Gracies and the journey of their jiu-jitsu, through to its global status today, are topics for further works. This work has focused on the formative crucible of the 1930s through to the early 1940s, an era that illuminates the complex political and cultural status of Gracie jiu-jitsu, particularly in relation to nationalism, immigration and identity.

*Figure 13: 'Draw between George Gracie and Geo Omori'. The position above serves as a metaphor of the confrontations between the Gracies and the Japanese martial artists. The match resulted in a cultural gridlock. Source: Jornal dos Sports, 1935.<sup>57</sup>*



57 'O empate entre George Gracie e Geo Omori'. *Jornal dos Sports*, September 9 1935; 3.

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