

**CAPOEIRA AS A RESOURCE: MULTIPLE USES OF  
CULTURE UNDER CONDITIONS OF TRANSNATIONAL  
NEOLIBERALISM**

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the shifting meanings and values attached to capoeira, an Afro-Brazilian ‘martial game’, as it circulates as a ‘cultural resource’ in the context of neoliberal globalization. Since the 1970s, immigrating Brazilians brought their practice to new lands and commercialized their embodied knowledge and cultural difference. While they initially sought to create economic capital, a whole range of indirect repercussions followed: they generated affective communities, disseminated a Brazilian imaginary soon transformed into symbolic capital, and arguably transmitted an embodied memory that can be traced back to the practice’s African ancestry.

This multi-sited ethnographic study uses a mixed methodology to explore how capoeira’s circulation in North American markets enables its multiple uses. A central commitment to theoretical analysis is conveyed by each chapter’s distinctive theoretical framing. Chapter One demonstrates processes of creation of political and ideological value as it examines capoeira’s role in the twentieth century formation of Brazilian nationalism. Chapter Two describes a new paradigm for considering ‘culture’ in a neoliberal political economy in which cultural goods and services assume new valuations. Chapter Three describes capoeira’s commercialization through theories on transnationalism and concepts of economic anthropology. Chapter Four analyses the construction of a field of discourse that renews capoeira’s semantic values, specifically as it relates to the field of Brazilian culture. Chapter Five turns to theories on affect to account for capoeira’s experiential, embodied, and phenomenological power to generate relations of intimacy uniting practitioners. This affective exchange, I argue, drives the whole cross-cultural economy of transnational capoeira. Chapter Six studies capoeira as performance to understand how its traditional system of values is perpetuated.

This study demonstrates that capoeira’s transnational circulation has generated a coherent system of interacting values fueled by individual entrepreneurship but also socially experienced and collectively perpetuated. It shows how cultural objects, representations, and practices can be intentionally wielded to generate a broad range of benefits including, but not reduced to, economic ones. Understanding culture in such pragmatic terms highlights cultural actions’ potential to contribute to broader fields of value, where value is understood as simultaneously economic, politic, cultural, and affective, and both socially and individually generated.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>ABSTRACT</b> .....   | <b>ii</b>  |
| <b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....   | <b>iii</b> |
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....   | <b>1</b>   |
| 0.1. WHAT IS CAPOEIRA? .....  | 4          |
| 0.1.1. Elusive definitions and conflicting narratives.....  | 4          |
| 0.1.2. Kinesthetic approaches .....   | 7          |
| 0.2. PERSONAL NARRATIVE AND POSITIONALITY .....   | 10         |
| 0.3. INITIAL QUESTIONS.....   | 12         |
| 0.4. METHODOLOGY .....  | 14         |
| 0.4.1. Ethnographic fieldwork .....   | 16         |
| 0.4.2. Reflexivity and flexibility.....   | 22         |
| 0.4.3. Embodied research.....   | 29         |
| 0.5. STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION.....   | 31         |
| <b>CHAPTER ONE: FROM PRACTICE OF RESISTANCE TO NATIONAL<br/>POPULAR CULTURE: HISTORICAL CONTEXT</b> ..... | <b>39</b>  |
| 1.1. PRACTICE OF RESISTANCE AND TARGET FOR REPRESSION.....  | 42         |
| 1.1.1. Capoeira in the colonial society: function of liberation in Afro-Brazilian<br>circles .....        | 42         |
| 1.1.2. Towards the penal code: capoeira as target for repression of the African<br>population .....       | 47         |
| 1.2. CAPOEIRA EMBRACED BY THE BRAZILIAN NATION .....  | 57         |
| 1.2.1. Getúlio Vargas, Brazilian nationalism, racial democracy .....                                      | 59         |
| 1.2.2. National-popular, culture and hegemony.....  | 67         |
| 1.2.3. Capoeira Regional – or how capoeira becomes national popular culture.....                          | 73         |
| 1.2.4. Capoeira Angola – counterpoint to racial democracy.....  | 80         |
| 1.2.5. Rise and spread of capoeira Regional.....  | 88         |
| <b>CHAPTER TWO: CULTURE AS A RESOURCE UNDER CONDITIONS OF<br/>NEOLIBERALISM</b> .....                     | <b>98</b>  |
| 2.1. NEOLIBERALISM AND NEOLIBERAL GOVERNMENTALITY .....   | 99         |
| 2.2. THE EXPEDIENCY OF CULTURE .....  | 106        |
| 2.3. USES OF CULTURE AS A RESOURCE .....  | 112        |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 2.3.1. The entrepreneurial approach to culture: economic sustainability and autonomy.....                                  | 112 |
| 2.3.2 The development approach: social and political empowerment.....  | 119 |
| 2.3.3. Seeking full citizenship via cultural rights: the performative value of culture                                     | 123 |
| 2.4. THE ALL-ENCOMPASSING QUALITY OF EXPEDIENCY.....   | 129 |
| <b>CHAPTER THREE: CREATING MARKETS: TRANSNATIONALIZATION, PROFESSIONALIZATION AND COMMERCIALIZATION OF CAPOEIRA ...135</b> |     |
| 3.1. MECHANISMS OF TRANSNATIONALIZATION OF CAPOEIRA.....   | 136 |
| 3.1.1. Mestres' lifestories: from poverty to the dream of a possible future.....   | 138 |
| 3.1.2. Transnational community of mestres mapped on national community .....   | 142 |
| 3.1.3. The dialectic of market and community: from diasporic to professional network .....                                 | 150 |
| 3.2. THE MESTRE'S ENTERPRISE: LOCAL ORGANIZATION OF CAPOEIRA SCHOOLS .....   | 161 |
| 3.2.1. The neoliberal subject and human capital.....   | 162 |
| 3.2.2. The mestre as site of his own enterprise .....  | 166 |
| 3.2.3. Coexistence of economies.....   | 173 |
| 3.3. COMMODIFICATION AND COMMERCIALIZATION OF CAPOEIRA .....   | 178 |
| 3.3.1. The effects of commodification on capoeira .....  | 178 |
| 3.3.2. Self-regulatory community limits commodification and maintains cultural value.....                                  | 189 |
| <b>CHAPTER FOUR: NEW CULTURAL CONTEXTS AND CONNOTATIONS FOR CAPOEIRA: MEDIATIONS AND CIRCULATION OF 'BRAZIL' .....197</b>  |     |
| 4.1. THE CAPOEIRA SCHOOL: A BRAZILIAN DIASPORIC SPACE.....   | 199 |
| 4.1.1. Speaking and hearing Portuguese .....   | 201 |
| 4.1.2. Repertoire of culture references.....   | 203 |
| 4.1.3. Center of gravity for diasporic community.....  | 205 |
| 4.2. IMAGINED BRAZIL: CULTURAL MEDIATIONS WITHIN DISCURSIVE FIELDS OF REPRESENTATION.....                                  | 208 |
| 4.2.1. The Western Gaze: 'Other-ing', exoticization, eroticization.....  | 209 |
| 4.2.2. The Brazil frame: Self-interpretation projected by Brazilians and reinterpreted by North-Americans.....             | 216 |
| 4.3. NEW VALUATIONS OF CAPOEIRA IN REPRESENTATION .....  | 229 |
| 4.3.1. Media representations of capoeira according to the Brazil frame .....   | 230 |

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| 4.3.2. Two new interpretive lenses: the female gaze and the discourse of “global Blackness”..... | 239        |
| 4.4. BRAZIL AS RESOURCE: THE PERFORMATIVE USE OF BRAZIL IN CONTEXTS OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCE.....  | 253        |
| <b>CHAPTER FIVE: AFFECTIVE COMMUNITY AND NEW TERRITORIES OF CAPITAL.....</b>                     | <b>266</b> |
| 5.1. THE “AFFECTIVE AGENCY” OF CAPOEIRA: EMBODIMENT, AFFECTS AND INTIMACIES.....                 | 269        |
| 5.1.1. “Becoming a body”: Individual experience of embodiment.....                               | 270        |
| 5.1.2. The <i>theory</i> of affect in the <i>practice</i> capoeira.....                          | 273        |
| 5.1.3. Collective experience and “muscular bonding”.....   | 278        |
| 5.1.4. The affective community animates an intense sociality.....                                | 285        |
| 5.2. NEW FRONTIERS OF CAPITAL.....   | 293        |
| 5.2.1. “Nothing can pay the energy in there”: affects create value.....                          | 294        |
| 5.2.2. The social context of affect.....   | 297        |
| 5.2.3. The affective labor of mestres in a cross-cultural political economy of emotions.....     | 305        |
| <b>CHAPTER SIX: THE <i>RODA</i>: PERFORMANCE OF CAPOEIRA AS SYSTEM OF KNOWLEDGE.....</b>         | <b>312</b> |
| 6.1. THE <i>RODA</i> AS PERFORMANCE OF CAPOEIRA.....   | 313        |
| 6.1.1. What is the <i>roda</i> ?.....  | 313        |
| 6.1.2. What is a performance?.....   | 325        |
| 6.2. EXCLUSIVE ACCESS TO THE <i>RODA</i> .....   | 330        |
| 6.2.1. Economic capital not recognized.....  | 331        |
| 6.2.2. ‘Brazil frame’ not valid in the <i>roda</i> .....   | 335        |
| 6.2.3. The <i>roda</i> disregards affective bonds.....   | 339        |
| 6.3. THE LOGIC OF THE <i>RODA</i> : A PHILOSOPHY IN MOTION.....                                  | 343        |
| 6.3.1. <i>Roda</i> kinaesthetics: from the body to the mind.....                                 | 344        |
| 6.3.2. <i>Malícia</i> and street life: Brazil re-framed.....                                     | 354        |
| 6.3.3. A philosophy in motion, legacy of the first capoeiristas.....                             | 360        |
| FINAL REMARKS.....   | 364        |
| <b>CONCLUSION.....</b>   | <b>367</b> |
| <b>REFERENCES.....</b>   | <b>381</b> |
| Appendix A: Lithograph - “Negros which will be flogged”.....                                     | 406        |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Appendix B: Early representation of capoeira – Rugendas’ engraving..... | 407 |
| Appendix C: Carmen Miranda in <i>The Gang’s All There</i> .....         | 408 |
| Appendix D: “Blame it on Rio” – Brazilian Carnival in London.....       | 409 |
| Appendix E: Muscular bonding.....                                       | 410 |

## INTRODUCTION

It is a nice summer day in a park of one of North-America's major urban centers. Around twenty five boys and girls, young adults all, wearing white pants, are standing in a circle, clapping hands and energetically singing in Portuguese. One pair in the middle of the circle seems to kick each other without really striking the blows, dodging one another's feet with acrobatic and yet aesthetic movements. Sometimes their exchange gets really fast and the passersby who stop to watch cringe out of fear that one of the player's head might be knocked out by the other one's kick – something that, quite unbelievably given the pace and distance between each person's movements, never happens. Other times, the bodily interaction is slower and mesmerizing as the two practitioners' bodies seem to interlock like pieces of a puzzle. This scene may last several minutes or even hours, as players alternate positions between those playing in the middle of the circle and those constituting its borders. Once they stop, the group leader explains to the gathering audience that what they have just seen is called capoeira, a Brazilian martial art that was created by African slaves in Brazil. As he speaks, some practitioners give out flyers with capoeira classes schedule and price information, on which the main feature is a gorgeous blue-eyed, blond-haired girl – a capoeira student from the group that was just in action. The historical explanation given by the “mestre” (the group leader and expert capoeira practitioner) seems at odds with the entire setting: this quiet public park in the center of New York City, the image used on the promotional flyers, the trendy allure of the practitioners. Yet this performance's very appeal, first generated by the impressive physical feats performed, may also be enhanced by this mysterious

underground history, authenticated by the leader's dark skin as well as the foreign accent revealing his Brazilian heritage as he recalls the origins of the practice in slavery.

A number of paradoxical elements are at play in the scene described above. They point to the long route that capoeira has travelled: a practice that started out as a form of resistance, born from the harshest human conditions, is now a fashionable activity available, displayed, and consumed worldwide. This dissertation explores the shifting meanings and values of capoeira as it circulates as a 'cultural resource' in the transnational context of neoliberal globalization. Since the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, immigrating Brazilians brought their practice with them to new cities in new lands and they commercialized their embodied knowledge and specialized expertise, making these the basis of their livelihood and professions. While they initially used their specific cultural knowledge and difference to create economic capital, a whole range of indirect repercussions followed: the implantation of capoeira in diverse cities generated affective communities and strong human bonds, it disseminated a Brazilian imaginary soon transformed into symbolic capital, and arguably transmitted an embodied memory that can be traced back to the practice's African ancestry. The transnational circulation of capoeira recontextualized the practice, unsettling both its relationship to its immediate national settings as well as its underlying socio-economic, political, and racial connotations. These latter are nonetheless mobilized and influenced by the way that capoeira is presented, marketed, received and consumed in the North American cities where I conducted my research. This dissertation explores how capoeira's circulation in

North American markets shifts the valuations attached to this expressive artform and allows for multiple uses of this performative culture.

It should be noted that this dissertation's central thesis is about capoeira's value as a resource, and not about capoeira per se. My main concern is indeed with the transnational circulation of cultural resources under conditions of neoliberalism wherein capoeira figures as an extended and illuminating example. Others, namely anthropologists such as Delamont and Stephens (2008, 2009), Downey (2004), and Lewis (1992), have written about contemporary capoeira without adopting this emphasis. I draw upon their and others' ethnographies and their scholarly work throughout this dissertation, where their specific arguments on capoeira help to illustrate dimensions of my own larger arguments about the transformation of the practice in its transnational circulation. While I evoke in more detail the scholarly field of research on contemporary capoeira in section 0.5 of this introduction, it would be inappropriate to do a conventional literary review of the topic of capoeira as such. Instead, I will be doing literary reviews of a number of concepts central to my dissertation, as these emerge throughout the different chapters, each one adopting a different theoretical framework in order to focus on the multiple iterations of capoeira as a resource. Having said this, it is impossible to understand the strength of capoeira as a resource without having some knowledge of the nature of capoeira itself, which is what I turn to next.

## **0.1. WHAT IS CAPOEIRA?<sup>1</sup>**

### **0.1.1. Elusive definitions and conflicting narratives**

Capoeira defies categorization, and there are probably as many definitions as there are committed practitioners. One anecdote in the world of capoeira recounts that when Mestre Pastinha (a pioneer figure we will come back to in Chapter One) was asked to explain what capoeira was, he famously asserted: “*capoeira é tudo o que a boca come*” (“capoeira is everything that the mouth eats”). This surprising description evokes the multiplicity of the artform as well as the vital energy it instills in practitioners, while conveniently avoiding fixation of the practice into any concrete category. There are contentions about the practice’s very origins (does it come from Brazil or Africa?) as well as its very nature and purpose (is it a dance, a game, a fight, a ritual?). Most of the time, practitioners define capoeira by alluding to its past, yet the co-existence of multiple narratives perpetuates the ambiguity of its origins and thus its definition. The exhaustive historical review in Chapter One will shed more light on the different perspectives at play in capoeira’s diverse definitions. Here, I anticipate this discussion and suggest that the most popular and widely spread definition asserts that capoeira was a fighting technique developed by African slaves in the plantations, yet disguised under aesthetic movements and music in order to fool the plantation masters into thinking that the slaves were ‘merely’ dancing when in fact they were preparing physically for rebellion. This account,

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<sup>1</sup> The opening description gave a certain sense of what capoeira is; but the practice is so compelling visually that I would recommend to anybody who has never seen it to quickly browse a few videos on the Internet to get a sense of its original kineasthetics before reading this dissertation. A simple search on YouTube with the keyword “capoeira” will suffice. In addition, the next paragraphs provide a general and ‘textual’ account of capoeira, but as the very unfolding of the section will suggest, the best way to understand capoeira is really to experience it corporally.

as widespread as it is, remains disputed; more importantly, it is not even clear to what degree it can be verified historically<sup>2</sup>. In fact, as we will detail in the next chapter, systematic historical investigations rather suggest that at its inception, capoeira was closer to a pacific manifestation through which the enslaved populations perpetuated their cultural traditions, thereby developing a common language and creating human bonds of solidarity that helped them cope with the inhuman conditions inflicted upon them. According to this version, the more aggressive techniques within capoeira have only appeared later, in the context of Brazil's urbanization (see section 1.1.2). Now, while historical documents tend to corroborate the latter narrative, the strength of certain myths within the community perpetuates the former, thus fostering the ambiguity around the real origins of capoeira.

Capoeira's elusive character is not merely discursive: it also reveals an ingrained culture of secrecy surrounding the practice, which conditions the understanding that different people have of it depending on their degree of inclusion within the community (a particularity that I will discuss more in the methodology section, starting on page 21). In fact, many cultural practices of the African diaspora in the Americas share a tradition of secrecy that comes from similar conditions at their inception. For example, in his book on Afro-Brazilian candomblé, anthropologist and historian Paul Christopher Johnson (2002) shows how vital secrecy was for the socio-cultural survival of the enslaved populations' religious practice, which was articulated in reaction to the dominant culture

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<sup>2</sup> The first chapter of Matthias Röhrig Assunção's (2005) historical study of capoeira exposes the conflicting narratives of capoeira's origin, which are replicated in the oral accounts of many capoeiristas in Brazil and around the world.

of the oppressors. Johnson sets out to study “secrets not as content, but rather as a social technique of boundary formation” (2002, 8); his investigation clearly demonstrates that secrecy functioned as a mechanism that was used to maintain agency in structures of power and resistance that characterized the Brazilian colonial social context. A similar argument can be made about capoeira, which developed in the same circles as *candomblé* (see section 1.1). From this perspective, the ambiguous definitions and the difficulty to grasp what capoeira is, both index this historically grounded culture of secrecy. They are in continuity with the social mechanisms developed by groups that had to create exclusive boundaries in order to resist external intrusions of power and ensure their own [cultural] survival.

Even today, practitioners remain elusive, exclusive, and even sometimes consciously contradictory<sup>3</sup> with regard to the information they decide to spread about capoeira. Given the ensuing difficulties of defining capoeira satisfactorily based on narrative accounts, I suggest that instead of attending to what practitioners say about the activity, we may look at what people do. In other words, I suggest looking for capoeira’s meanings in the practice itself. Capoeira is an embodied performance: it is a repertoire of movements containing a knowledge that has been transmitted over generations from the

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<sup>3</sup> For example, during a Q&A at an international capoeira encounter in Bilbao, Spain, one pioneer mestre, Mestre Acordeon, insinuated that capoeira was created in the plantations. One student reacted and asked him why, then, he had written in his book (Almeida 1986) that capoeira stemmed from an urban context. Mestre Acordeon replied that what he had written in his book was “just the truth”; it was what the historians had found through verified sources and scientific methods. In contrast, he asserted, he preferred to keep teaching to new apprentices that capoeira was born in plantations, because he considered the myth to be much richer in significations than “the mere truth”; it perpetuated the magic of capoeira. Mestre Acordeon’s tone while speaking of historians revealed a widespread attitude of mestres towards scholarly knowledge: disregard, irony, and wariness. Moreover, that one individual would appear so contradictory and that he would misrepresent in such a conscious way the practice’s history indicates that the ambiguity surrounding capoeira may indeed be constitutive of capoeiristas’ strategies of resistance, here specifically to institutional knowledge.

slaves to their descendants and now to capoeira apprentices (see Chapter Six). A close examination of the game's principles certainly helps us to decode some of the defining traits of capoeira from the point of view of its practice.

### **0.1.2. Kinesthetic approaches**

If the historical culture of secrecy complicates outsider's access to knowledge about capoeira from the outside, it also instils an evasive, elusive, and ambiguous character in the very kineasthetics of the game. Capoeira is an art of deception: its best practitioners masterfully use cunning, wit, seduction, and opportunism in order to trick and confuse their opponent, ultimately overpowering them.

One of the distinctive traits of capoeira from a kinaesthetic standpoint is the constant movement of its practitioners. Inside the *roda* (the circular space where the game of capoeira physically takes place), capoeiristas (capoeira practitioners) never stop doing the basic step, the *ginga*, whereby the player shifts his weight from one foot to the other in the imaginary space of a triangle on the floor, while his arms move from one side to the other so as to keep the balance of the body and protect the head. This deceptively simple movement condenses many essential principles of the game. The first one is precisely to avoid stillness and be in perpetual movement – which also begins to explain capoeira's resistance to fixed definitions, if only metaphorically. In Portuguese, the term *ginga* derives from the verb 'gingar' which means to sway, to balance smoothly from one side to the other (Lewis 1992, 97). Capoeira's *ginga* recreates this sway: it transforms the capoeirista's body into a wave whose constantly shifting movement makes it hard to read,

deceptive. From the *ginga* stem all the other movements of capoeira: attacks, defenses, dodges, flourishes. This basic step is thus as multi-faceted and polyvalent as capoeira itself; and its principal quality lies in its potential to surprise and confuse one's opponent. Anthropologist Greg Downey (2005, 122–123) quotes the capoeirista and scholar César Barbieri whose comments coincide with mine: “The constant action of uninterrupted movement of one's body – to *ginga* – is the principle that permits the creation of the snares of deception, of trickery, in which the adversary will be taken unawares. *Ginga* and counterattack, counterattack and *ginga* – they are the inseparable elements that allow one to take a person by surprise”. A good *ginga* is graceful and smooth, but also potentially dangerous. These qualifiers announce yet another important aspect of the *ginga*: its core purpose is not strictly physical; rather, its value lies in its ability to play with the other person's mind. That is why it is only possible to grasp the full complexity of the *ginga*, and of capoeira at large, through an understanding of the more ‘abstract’ values and mental attitudes that it embodies and allows to surface.

The *ginga* is the embodied manifestation of an important defining concept of capoeira, an abstract value overarching the game, called *malandragem*. While Chapter Six will delve extensively in the importance of *malandragem* for capoeira, we may initially describe it, using the words of famous Brazilian anthropologist Roberto Da Matta ([1979] 1991, 64), as “the Brazilian art of using ambiguity as a tool for living”. *Malandragem* is a typically Brazilian street-smart quality; a set of skills that allows individuals from lower social classes to navigate the structural predicaments of the Brazilian social order. While *malandragem* has become a symbol of a typically *Brazilian*

attitude (see section 6.3.2), it is, more specifically, a constitutive strategy of the capoeira game. In a series of interviews conducted by filmmaker Lucia Correia Lima<sup>4</sup>, the words that mestres chose to describe *malandragem* pragmatically reveal its elusive character and its essence: *malandragem* is, according to Mestre Cacaú, “*o faz que não vai e vai*” (“pretend you are not going, and go”), while for Mestre Amen, it is “*quando você pensar que ele tá aqui ele tá atrás de você*” (“when you think he is here, he is behind you”). Capoeiristas know how to disorient their opponent, to hide their intentions. Their constant movement via the *ginga*, amongst other tricks, enables them to do that: the more movement they instil in their *ginga*, the less their opponent can foresee their movements and upcoming actions.

Given the importance of *malandragem*, capoeiristas learn never to trust anybody. All truths, assertions, and lessons should thus be questioned in this world of suspicion, an important attitude which had repercussions on the way I conducted my investigation and structured its methods. This also entails that all truths are contextual and relative, contingent on the person who formulates them and on the position, within the community, from where they are formulated. This is why it is important to briefly situate my own self within capoeira.

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<sup>4</sup> The following quotes come from interviews with capoeira mestres in Brazil and in the United States, conducted for the production of the documentary “Mandinga em Manhattan” (2005). Brazilian photographer and director Lucia Correia Lima kindly gave me a copy of their transcripts.

## **0.2. PERSONAL NARRATIVE AND POSITIONALITY**

I was drawn to scholarly research on capoeira through practice. If I had an existing interest in Latin American cultures generally, I nonetheless started practicing capoeira mostly for its physical benefits: it was a great way to exercise after long days of undergraduate studies. Right away, I was compelled by the new relation I developed to my body, feeling muscles I did not know existed, and slowly gaining increasing control over my movements inside and outside the *roda*. This newfound awareness of my embodied self was importantly complemented by an intense sense of belonging to a tight community where friendships easily formed in a hedonistic and festive environment. To the sound of Brazilian rhythms, capoeiristas of all walks of life regularly danced the night away and displayed their bodily agility outside the immediate context of classes. With hindsight, I realize that my infatuation also came from a stereotype that many capoeiristas more or less consciously played with: an idea of the exotic, sensual, alluring Brazilian body, many proud bearers of which surrounded me, and into which I probably wanted to transform mine. As I perfected my capoeira skills and sweated alongside cosmopolitan, urban, young adults in a downtown Montreal studio, it was easy to lose sight of the more tragic aspects of capoeira's history, especially its inception in one of the biggest institutions of human subjugation.

My unexpected discovery of this hedonistic community never completely overshadowed, however, the fact that I had also started capoeira because of my interest in Latin American studies (my undergraduate program at the time) and because, knowing a bit of capoeira's history, I was intrigued by its alleged connections to cultural rituals

preserved across time and space. The more I got invested in the practice, the more I questioned the veneer of stereotype; rather, my school in Montreal became the gateway into a distant worldview closely linked to street survival in Brazil. Capoeira was a pragmatic and embodied subculture of resistance; yet this aspect was concealed behind the powerful symbolic aura of the Brazilian flag always showcased wherever capoeira was on display. And when I sought to learn more about this marginal(ized) history, satisfying information was not always readily available. Why did so much ambiguity surround capoeira?

I undertook exploratory research for a master's degree and went to Brazil, hoping I could get closer to capoeira's roots. Yet the closer I got to them, the further I felt from capoeira itself, even though I was surrounded by capoeiristas and almost constantly playing capoeira. Despite being in the historical and geographical heart of the community, I was invariably confronted with evasive responses by mestres, their skeptical facial expressions when I ingenuously told them I was doing research on capoeira, and their potent use of the art of seduction to circumvent my questions. At first, I attributed the mestres' ambivalent attitude towards me to my gender. In a world mostly controlled by men, my feminine attributes helped in getting the mestres' attention and engaging them in conversation, yet they were often hindrances insofar as they were the only agency I was granted in many capoeiristas' eyes. Yet the more immersed I felt in Brazil, the more vividly I realized that as a white, educated, upper-middle class North-American, I represented multiple oppressive structures of power that capoeiristas had

precisely been resisting for so long. My very own person intensified an instinctive and historically rooted mistrust towards external scrutiny of their exclusive community.

When I came back from Brazil, I became increasingly uncomfortable with the fact that my access to capoeira, a practice born from unimaginable human hardships, was mediated by money. I could not reconcile the exoticized, trendy activity that I consumed in Canada with the practice of resistance still very much rooted in conditions of socio-economic marginalization I had seen in Brazil. I wondered to what extent the commodification of capoeira took away from its political, historical, and cultural value. This experience informed my initial research questions.

### **0.3. INITIAL QUESTIONS**

I was originally animated by the assumption that culture's expressive and symbolic value should not be translated into mercantile exchange-value; I considered that with its commercialization, capoeira could potentially lose its traditional function of resistance to dominant systems of oppression. I was first compelled by Horkheimer and Adorno's (1974) famous condemnation of cultural industries; and the relevance of their arguments seemed only to be reinforced by more recent fears that globalization would further lead to cultural massification and homogenization. I thus set out to write this dissertation about the commodification of capoeira so as to understand what effects it had on the embodied artform. Yet over the course of my exploratory fieldwork in a number of North-American cities, I discovered the existence of diverse degrees and qualities of commodification as well as a spectrum of engagement with and consumption of capoeira.

Undeniably, capoeira could not be reduced to its mere exchange-value, and an important cultural transmission was taking place between mestres and numerous passionate North-American students. It became necessary to question the limits of the commodity form, which led me to my initial question: how could capoeira simultaneously circulate as embodied tradition, as community builder, as consumption good, and as fashionable cultural capital? I set out to trace different degrees and instances of capoeira's commodification along the transnational chains of its circulation and exchange, and to consider how these different moments in the commodification process influence the meanings and consumption of the practice.

The research process, however, led me to adopt an even less binary approach and to move away from the concept of commodity, which seemed too reductive. The commodity form's focus on the relation of monetary exchange failed to explain many other facets of capoeira and its surrounding community that I had observed in the field: the strength of the human bonds at a local scale as well as the density of their transnational network; capoeira's role in the diffusion of Brazilian culture, not merely through representation but also through unlikely channels like the Portuguese language that many North-American practitioners learned via or for capoeira; and maybe the most elusive of all, the intangible force that made apprentices so eager to engage in capoeira with the high intensity I observed. All these elements could not be explained merely by the theories of commodification, from which I thus departed to adopt a new paradigm that conceives culture as a resource. I was enthused by George Yúdice's seminal contribution in *The Expediency of Culture* (2003), which envisions culture as a field of

action intentionally wielded to generate a broad range of benefits including, but not reduced to, economic ones. Understanding culture in such pragmatic terms seemed to much more aptly describe capoeiristas' strategic and purposeful actions. This new framework prompted me to explore the interplay between capital accumulation and other forms and fields of value creation. Increasingly I envisioned a more dialogic model for the marketplace of cultural forms where binaries are not exclusive but relational, and where markets are "terrains of communicative exchange." (Coombe and Aylwin 2011, 2038)

Instead of focusing merely on commodification, then, I paid attention to the shifting valuations of capoeira and the regimes of value thus involved. This new theoretical framework emphasized the *utility* of cultural actions: not only in their symbolic or semantic value, but also for their potential to contribute to broader fields of value, where I understood value as simultaneously economic, politic, cultural, and affective, and both socially and individually generated.

In order to attend to such an elusive object as capoeira, within a paradigm that encompasses such a diversity of perspectives to understand a cultural practice, I designed a flexible, multi-modal and multi-sited research methodology, which I detail next.

#### **0.4. METHODOLOGY**

This dissertation is a multi-sited ethnographic study of a dynamic object. I designed a flexible research methodology in order to observe the broad range of values and the different sorts of capital created through the multiple uses of capoeira as a

resource, by different actors, and in diversified contexts. I also kept the methodology flexible in order to let the practice and the field guide the research process, rather than letting my methodological framework shape the investigation and its results. This flexible methodology was nonetheless constantly reassessed and I developed an ongoing reflexivity about my research which I will address later in my discussion.

Given my initial interest in the commodity form, the overall structure of my methods was inspired by a commodity chain model, designed to address connections between the multiple stages of production, distribution and consumption of cultural objects by identifying the several actors along the chain and their function within it (Gereffi and Korzeniewicz 1994; Gibbon 2001; Jackson 1999; Pratt 2004). While the commodity chain model is better adapted to the study of material commodities – objects that one can tangibly track – it helped to structure my broader ethnographic observation and allowed me to identify different actors and processes that come into play in the commercialization, exchange, circulation, consumption, and semantic interpretation of capoeira as a resource.

The design of my study is also aligned with Cultural Studies' inclination to combine multiple approaches, which has accounted for the field's creativity and productivity since its early days in Birmingham (Saukko 2005, 343). In order to attend to diverse value-adding processes, I used various sources of information and various methods of data collection. The main method, participant observation, took place during the specific capoeira classes, training sessions, and performances of two groups of capoeira, as well as in wider community events, interactions, and social gatherings. As a

participant, I also paid attention to the embodied knowledge accessed by training in capoeira. Although not formally engaged in the practice of auto-ethnography, I nevertheless reflexively drew on my own practice to inform my reflections and enrich my sources. Complementing my participant observation, I conducted a discourse analysis of mass media representations in order to interpret the public meanings of capoeira conveyed in fields of representation and to analyse the construction of a field of discourse that surrounds the practice. Finally, I conducted semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with mestres, senior practitioners, and capoeira students so as to elicit concrete data about the experience of the subjects involved in this community. In the next sections, I break down this mixed method approach into its constitutive parts to provide greater detail.

#### **0.4.1. Ethnographic fieldwork**

Ethnography, “the art and science of describing a group or culture” (Fetterman 2008, 288) has a long tradition in the field of anthropology, but it is now used as a method across a broad range of disciplines in the social sciences and the humanities. Ethnography has evolved quite substantially since the first anthropologists’ initial attempts to uncover an objective truth about foreign cultures. There are now many approaches to ethnography, each evoking different paradigms (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 2–4; O’Byrne 2007). They range from the early positivist approach where researchers were committed to neutrality and objectivity to the most recent postmodern, extremely reflexive and interpretive ethnographies that increasingly blur the genres and question the very existence of cultural truths. As the discipline develops and its methods become more

complex, an increasing reflexivity is required from the researcher, whose choices and person(ality) necessarily influence the course of the study. Before commenting on these aspects of my own ethnographic research, I first describe one of the consistent elements that arguably still unites all ethnographic methods: fieldwork research.

Fieldwork, a hallmark of the ethnographic method, has also adapted to the evolving conditions of research and to the new types of research questions that guide contemporary investigations. The ‘field’ is no longer conventionally concentrated in a single, far-away location where the ethnographer isolates himself until reaching a point of saturation when he believes no new data can be gathered. What constitutes the field, especially in a transnational project like this one, is now increasingly fragmented, multi-media, and importantly, multi-sited. Anthropologist George E. Marcus (1995) famously called for the development of multi-sited ethnographies as a way to acknowledge the incidence of global structures on the objects of anthropological studies that anthropologists traditionally studied locally. Marcus prescribes several “tracking” strategies to shape multi-sited ethnographic research, a model I adapted for my study of capoeira where I set out to “follow the practice” in its transnational circuit. I organized this dominant mode of inquiry around the lives and practices of two mestres: Mestre Pantera and Mestre Lagartixa (all identifiers are pseudonyms). I tracked their life stories, their links to Brazil, their relationships within the capoeira community, their local uses of capoeira, as well as their followers.

These two mestres have taken the practice out of Brazil – or may indeed have been taken out of Brazil by the practice – and brought it to North America, becoming part

of capoeira's dominant promoters. They belong to what I call a second generation of capoeiristas abroad. They work in the footsteps of the pioneer mestres who did the groundwork to develop capoeira outside of Brazil, but they are also more established than recently arrived capoeiristas who benefit from the already established popularity of capoeira, and more so than the non-Brazilians who, after having travelled to Brazil, come back and try to pass themselves as mestres. All these different groups contribute to the transnational circulation of capoeira. Yet observing two mestres specifically from the second generation, having lived almost equal periods of their lives in Brazil and in North America, allowed me to focus on a moment in capoeira's circulation where the practice was located almost equally between Brazil and North-America. (To give a rough chronology, they were born around the turn of the 1970s, immigrated in the 1990s, and this research was conducted in the early 2010s).

The two individuals chosen to allow me to "follow the practice" complement each other in the purpose of this multi-sited ethnography: Mestre Pantera is located in Montreal while Mestre Lagartixa works in New York City. I have been practicing capoeira with the former for ten years, and was able to follow the evolution of his practice and accompany the work he has developed with capoeira much prior to the beginning of the formal research period. In a way, I have conducted unstructured observation at this field site for many years before starting my official twelve-month fieldwork, which simply complemented my knowledge of the group's history. In turn, Mestre Lagartixa was selected for his personal background in capoeira, his current teaching activities and especially, their location in NYC. This city represents what social

urbanist Saskia Sassen (2001) calls a “global city”: it is a hub in the global system, and it constitutes an important nodal point in capoeira’s transnational community. Moreover, NYC is, with San Francisco, one of the first North-American cities where capoeira was exported in the 1970s (I was indeed able to interview one of the pioneer mestres, established in New York since 1975). The practice has since thrived and is now well established, making the capoeira community in this city much bigger and more diversified than it is in Montreal. My fieldwork with one of NYC’s main capoeirista connected me to other mestres in the community, and ultimately enabled a more exhaustive understanding of its broader dynamics. Observing Mestre Lagartixa’s networking activities gave me a greater sense of the diversity of the practice and the various functions that capoeira can take in a global city. For example, Lagartixa runs a capoeira group where students pay for classes, he is contracted by public high schools to provide extra-curricular activities and as gym teacher, and he also has a non-profit organization offering capoeira to impoverished youth. The fieldwork in NYC, also conducted over 12 months, offered a broader scope, though arguably less diachronic depth than the work done in Montreal. Taken together, these two sites provide diversity and perspective.

In this multi-sited fieldwork, some traditional modes of data collection were used. I mostly relied on unstructured observation centered on the two main mestres’ daily actions. I was present almost every day that they gave classes in their capoeira groups, followed them when they taught at various high schools, accompanied them to out-of-town presentations. The countless car rides were an ideal setting for informal interviews.

Overall, I paid special attention to the relations between the mestres' words (namely the long speeches they often iterate after class) and their actions. As sociologist Michael Burawoy (1991, 2) stresses, one particular advantage of participant observation is that it "enables to juxtapose what people say they are up to against what they actually do". In light of capoeira's tradition of secrecy and the practitioners' overwhelming use of deception in life as in practice, participant observation was particularly well suited to identify the tensions and contradictions between the mestre's actions and their words as well as their alleged intentions. It was also a way to get around certain mestres' preformatted and somewhat vacuous answers when they were explicitly mobilized as informants, or even their straightforward refusal to grant me interviews, a frustrating dimension of my fieldwork that I return to later in this introduction. My sustained participant observation gave me the opportunity to conduct multiple informal interviews not only with mestres but also with students. Indeed, given that I was a student and practitioner myself (in other words, a *participant* observer), I also had countless casual conversations with fellow practitioners, thus accessing their own "emic" (ie. insider) perspective on capoeira.

I complemented this participant observation with a content analysis of capoeira's multiple representations: visual representations, historical and contemporary written accounts, and embodied performances. More specifically, I analysed the social and cultural discourses in which those were embedded. By thus "following the representations", to adapt Marcus' tracking strategies again, I attended to the important processes of adding semantic value. This discourse analysis allowed to situate capoeira in

greater fields of meanings that construct a transnational ‘culturescape’<sup>5</sup>. As anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996, 63–64) importantly observed: “[...] many lives are now inextricably linked with representations, and thus we need to incorporate the complexities of expressive representations (film, novels, travel accounts) into our ethnographies, not only as technical adjuncts but as primary material with which to construct and interrogate our own representations”. More specific details of this aspect of my data collection will be outlined when I discuss its results in the core of the text, mainly in Chapter Four.

Finally, I conducted semi-structured interviews, most of them with students of each mestre followed (eleven students in one group, eight in the other group). A series of themes and questions were established and repeated in each interview. These were, broadly: the students’ own individual path in capoeira, why they chose their specific mestre, their relation to Brazil, their relation to payment, their definitions of and more abstract views on capoeira, and a special section on gender issues for women. However, depending on the interviewee, I sometimes insisted on certain themes and/or adapted the questions asked. Because the advanced students provided rich data, had a greater knowledge of the capoeira community, and brought more issues to the fore than beginners, I chose to interview a greater number of them rather than beginners, whose voices I nonetheless did not disregard. While I initially hoped to interview more mestres,

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<sup>5</sup> I am conscious of the ironies involved in referencing, through my use of the suffix ‘-scape’, a model that anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996) has developed precisely to avoid using the term culture. However, I believe that the suffix, despite being applied to the term culture that Appadurai rejected, still achieves its intended function, that is, to “point to the fluid, irregular shapes” (33) of the global cultural flows. In turn, using ‘-scape’ with the word ‘culture’ allows me to more succinctly describe the combination of Appadurai’s ‘mediascape’ and ‘ideoscape’ that I seek to reference with my neologism ‘culturescape’.

I was held up by their refusals. This difficulty to access the mestres' knowledge in an interview setting, however, led me to reflect on important factors proper to my ethnography, namely my own ambiguous insider/outsider position. Reflexivity became an important part of the research process: I tried to make best use of the fact that I was part of the community before becoming a researcher, while managing the potential biases that it also involved.

#### **0.4.2. Reflexivity and flexibility**

Since proposing this research project, I always anticipated that gaining the mestres' trust and confidence, and getting them to talk sincerely to me would be my main challenge, especially in New York City where I knew the mestres less than in Montreal, and conversely, where I myself was less known in the local community. I nonetheless thought that the personal time I had consistently invested mastering the artform over almost a decade would ultimately provide an easier access to my informants. For this reason, I waited many months before I asked mestres in New York for interviews. When I finally did, after 5 to 6 months of steady training with the two mestres I coveted as interview subjects, I was thus surprised by their refusal, especially insofar as both mestres who deflected my requests had generously welcomed me into their group and daily activities, and had even become friends of sorts. Despite the relation of trust I thought I had built, when it came to the interview, they wittily reacted: they accepted in appearance but stayed so evasive as to when and where they would be available that they were in fact basically refusing to grant me the interview. Notably, they both used similar tactics that

played on the ambiguity of gender relations: that is, after I solicited said interviews quite a few times, they suggested that I hold them on my building's rooftop with a bottle of wine, or at 2 AM after a long evening of performances, in a bar. At first, this appeared to be a major obstacle. However, it became the important trigger of a reflection on my position in the field, and how to best negotiate these particular dynamics within the community.

I was inspired by a small passage in communication and culture scholar Melissa Aronczyk's (2008) dissertation on nation branding, based on fieldwork with branding and marketing executives. Despite her completely different field, one of her comments regarding her data collection process turned into a great insight for mine. She explains:

Often respondents insisted on paying for lunch or drinks consumed during the interview. At first this caused some discomfort, as I feared it would compromise my relationship with not only my respondents but also my home university's internal review board. Finally it became clear that *this was part of the logic of the field*; it was simply how this population did business, and thus a normal state of affairs. (2008, 88; emphasis added)

Similarly, I suggest that the ambiguity of the interpersonal relationships and of the modes of exchanging information in the world of capoeira were part of "the logic of the field". Capoeira is an art of deception, and most actions have two purposes – in the game, a defensive move can turn into an attack; or metaphorically, as the overarching argument of this dissertation asserts, the mestres' entrepreneurial actions simultaneously produce economic profit as well as transmit cultural traditions. I soon realized that the explicitness

of formal interviews did not fit this logic of ambiguity and that instead, I would have to use my insider status to get closer to the information I was seeking.

Even before facing these concrete obstacles, I had decided to initially approach mestres as a practitioner. To an extent, this was not even a choice since many mestres already knew me in this capacity. I nonetheless actively made sure to first approach them as a capoeirista, and took [and paid for] many classes with them before announcing my research intentions – in Lagartixa’s group particularly, I took several classes during three exploratory trips to New York City before beginning the official fieldwork. I capitalized on this insider status and built on my previous knowledge of the community, which I knew valued respect for hierarchy, recognition of senior practitioners’ expertise, and commitment to physical training. This is why I made sure to position myself primarily as an apprentice, and regularly signified that I understood that I still had a lot to learn in the practice even though I also did theoretical research on it. My scholarly pretensions were presented as a complement at best, while I tried to maximize my ‘capoeirista-self’ in the field. One key moment confirmed the validity of this strategy.

When one of the mestre who refused to give me an interview saw me reading an ethnography on capoeira, he immediately challenged, even openly discredited the legitimacy of the author’s knowledge. “Who is this guy?”, he asked in a defying tone. “What does *he* know about capoeira? Did he even train? How long? Only for the purpose of this study, right?” I tried explaining the principles of ethnographic research, but I rapidly saw it was to no avail; the mestre would not admit that a book could contain legitimate knowledge on the embodied artform he had himself mastered via hard training

over so many years. I chose instead to playfully point out that he was putting me in quite an uncomfortable position because I was basically doing the same thing as the author he had just discredited. But he responded that I was different because I was also *living* capoeira. He added nuance to his previous discrediting of “gringos who only write books to obtain their degrees”, as he had called the anthropologist I was reading. He noted that I, in contrast, was *also* a capoeirista: “You train hard, you went to Brazil. I mean, how long have you been training capoeira already? Quite a few years, right?” Here, being a capoeirista gave credibility to my research endeavours and without a doubt, it made the mestre favourably disposed to communicatively collaborate with my research project<sup>6</sup>. In another instance, I had tried contacting one famous mestre via email to ask for an interview, to no avail. Only after I participated in a workshop he taught and proved that I was also a capoeirista did I obtain his assent. As we agreed on a time and place to meet, he made me understand clearly that he did not give many interviews anymore, certainly not to non-capoeiristas since someone last misquoted him. “But you’re a capoeirista. I know. I’ve seen you play”, he told me.

On multiple occasions, being a capoeirista was thus my entry into the field. This special positionality within the community certainly characterizes this research and the kind of data it gathered. My informants, both mestres and students, often spoke relatively freely to me (at least when they decided to) because they knew I understood their reality. They could make references to specific dynamics, events, or features of the community,

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<sup>6</sup> Although refusing to give me a formal interview, he nevertheless made me admit, some months after I had finished my active fieldwork, that despite denying my requests, he had indeed given me all the information I sought, only in another format. I had to agree with him. We both recognized that many informal interviews had occurred over the course of my fieldwork and apprenticeship.

knowing that I had the necessary background knowledge to understand what they were saying or alluding to. This favoured access to what sociologist Alfred Schutz (1982) has called “first-order constructs”: that is, the members’ practically-oriented interpretations of the social realities under observation. I was able to engage in an “ethnographic dialogue” with my informants, one where we shared standpoints and spoke on the same basis (instead of having an ‘empty’ researcher asking questions and informants providing answers to fill the gap, in a two way communication). This also meant that my own subjective ‘background knowledge’ was necessary to understand their remarks; and I mobilized it in my interpretation of the events they were recounting as much as they used their own subjectivity. In this process, I believe I achieved the purpose of ethnographic dialogue in the creation of “a world of shared intersubjectivity” (Tedlock 1991, 70). Moreover, because my ‘practitioner-self’ often overshadowed my ‘researcher-self’, informants could express themselves without feeling any pressure to rationalize or show theoretical refinement in their answers, as can sometimes be the case when outsider researcher’s questions are too abstracted from the realities of the field (Bastide 1973, 181; quoted in Johnson 2002, 175).

One of the greatest methodological advantages of being a long time member of the capoeira community was this immediate access to insider meanings. However, being an insider did not mean I automatically circumvented all the layers of ambiguity that surround capoeira. But it did insert me within a complex web of sometimes deceptive relationships involving power and hierarchies, which only made the investigation deeper, richer and more interesting. This insider status required that I actively negotiate my own

positionality and possible bias, that I acknowledge how it influenced my research process, and that I make conscious choices on how to include my own perspective in the final report. My approach to these issues shares a lot with sociologist Leon Anderson's (2006) prescriptions for analytic ethnography. Two of the five key features that he outlines in his article were particularly present throughout my own research and writing processes: "analytic reflexivity" and "commitment to theoretical analysis"<sup>7</sup>.

I relentlessly reflected on the specific relational dynamics that I shared with each informant, and how these influenced the data gathered. Many authors, some of whom have been central in my thought process (Brown 1991; Savigliano 1995) have chosen to account for this reflexivity by writing auto-ethnography, an approach characterized by a special writing style that blurs the genres between academic and literary writing and centrally puts forward the researcher's self in the narrative. Auto-ethnography is usually aesthetic and evocative and privileges self-referential, even autobiographical narratives (Bochner and Ellis 1992; Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011). I chose to stay away from this specific style of writing, however, because its particular form of reflexivity seems

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<sup>7</sup> In reality, Anderson's article describes analytic auto-ethnography, a subgenre, he argues, of analytic ethnography. Given this specific focus, he insists considerably on the researcher's influence on the data collected. For this reason, he calls for "analytic reflexivity", an acute self-awareness of the researcher's own presence, which in turn stems from another key feature of analytic auto-ethnography that he previously proposes, the "complete member researcher status". Analytic reflexivity describes the necessity to recognize that the researcher's thorough involvement in the community studied has repercussions on the investigation. Anderson's model does not only focus on the researcher's role, however. It also prescribes for a "commitment to theoretical analysis", that is, "a broad set of data-transcending practices that are directed toward theoretical development, refinement, and extension" (2006, 387). As Anderson explains: "The purpose of analytic ethnography is not simply to document personal experience, to provide an "insider's perspective," or to evoke emotional resonance with the reader. Rather, the defining characteristic of analytic social science is to use empirical data to gain insight into some broader set of social phenomena than those provided by the data themselves. This data-transcending goal has been a central warrant for traditional social science research." (2006, 386–387) This is achieved, he suggests, by committing to addressing broad theoretical issues in addition to analytically and critically presenting the data.

particularly prone to narcissistic self-absorption and/or excessive relativism, both of which distract from, even possibly counter ethnography's power to illuminate the social (Davies 1999, 5). I did not want this writing style to overshadow the second key feature of reflexive ethnography that I shared with Anderson: a central commitment to theoretical analysis. While my personal experience as a capoeirista necessarily informed my readings of the community – especially the themes I chose to pursue and the research questions I chose to probe – it was not that specific experience that I sought to foreground in this dissertation, but rather the theoretical puzzles that resulted from it. As Anderson cogently reminds us: “The purpose of analytic ethnography is not simply to document personal experience, to provide an “insider’s perspective,” or to evoke emotional resonance with the reader. Rather, the defining characteristic of analytic social science is to use empirical data to gain insight into some broader set of social phenomena than those provided by the data themselves.” (2006, 386–387) I wanted the theoretical reflection that structures this dissertation to characterize my ethnography more than the presence of my own voice.

While I decided to avoid auto-ethnography in the writing process, my research did intersect with this approach in that I acknowledged my own subjectivity and emotional engagement (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011). I mobilized this subjective engagement, however, more as a mode of inquiry than as a way to communicate results. As Carolyn Ellis (2008, 50) suggests in her entry on auto-ethnography in the *SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, “Reflexive ethnographers ideally use all of their senses, bodies, moments, feelings, and whole being; they use the self to learn about the other.”

This specific approach was particularly well suited for the study of an embodied practice like capoeira.

### **0.4.3. Embodied research**

A growing number of dance and martial arts ethnographies (Browning 1995; Farrer and Whalen-Bridge 2011; Ness 1992; Novack 1990; Sklar 2001; Zarrilli 1998) have stressed the importance of reintroducing the researcher's own body in the research process. On the one hand, this focus on embodiment helps rectify anthropology's visual bias discussed by James Clifford (1988). In his essay "Partial Truths", Clifford points out that classical anthropologists rarely accounted for smells, sounds or perceptions, a shortcoming that has created the false impression that what one sees is true and contains all the information needed to interpret a situation. Embodied research goes beyond the visual markers and pays attention to other channels of knowledge, merely recognizing a feature of ethnography that has always existed but was not always made explicit (Conquergood 1991). It attends to a knowledge grounded in bodily experience, one that rejects the sanitized and detached measurement of concrete variables and resists the blind belief in objectivity as well as the Cartesian mind-body split (Elligson 2008, 245). Insofar as this methodology recognizes the researcher's body as a tool to collect [embodied] knowledge, it can also help reduce the gap between scholarly work and the studied, embodied practice. As the late Cynthia Novack (1990, 21) cogently related, one day she had to go directly from an academic conference to a dance class: "The contrast alerted me to what was present or absent in each circumstance, enabling me to take at least a partly

critical stance. I could not forget the absence of ‘body’ in academia, the stubborn denial of the physical self. Nor could I become immune to the potentially problematic skirting of sexual/emotional boundaries in contact improvisation.” As a dancer-researcher who navigated both worlds, Novack benefitted from an original standpoint in each environment.

As a researcher, putting my body to train was a way to access the important repertoire of embodied meanings and knowledge that is constantly enacted and performed in the *roda* and that gives insights into both what capoeira is, and how its practitioners experience it. It gave me some relevant vocabulary both to dialogue with the practitioners and to understand their actions. As much as some mestres could be reluctant to open up in formal contexts of academic knowledge production like interviews, they could be very generous with their teachings in the *roda*; they shared their understanding of capoeira with me, in their own mode of communication. This, I came to conclude, was an equivalent of giving me “somatic interviews”. Capoeiristas often say they think through action; for me as a researcher, training capoeira provided an understanding of their community aligned with this mode of thinking, which I then tried to articulate into words. Through embodied research, I was “actively aware of [my] own [body] in the perception of data, using the kinesthetic sense to perceive other bodies” (Stinson and Dils 2008, 184).

In a practice so fundamentally embodied, the only way to acknowledge the capoeiristas’ – mestres and students – full experience (central to arguments in Chapters Five and Six) was to participate in this experience myself, *with them*. I used the embodied

knowledge thus accessed as raw data in my interpretation of other practitioners' experience of capoeira in general, as one perspective amongst other student's perspectives. I combined, conflated and compared my own experience to the comments that other practitioners verbalized, which were necessarily non-somatic but which I could relate to the very somatic perceptions I had myself experienced. If, as Susan W. Stinson and Ann Dils (2008, 184) suggest, "scholars may perceive a concept somatically before having the words to express it", the same goes for practitioners. Therefore, it was crucial for me to somatically understand what my informants were referring to when their words evoked experiences that they could not yet clearly articulate. I was thus able to translate experiences from somatic to academic language, through my own involvement in both worlds.

The fieldwork research I have described was characterized by its flexibility and by the multiple angles adopted so as to accommodate capoeira's own characteristics and qualities. This diversity of approaches was the result of my deep commitment to "follow the practice" and to let capoeira itself dictate my fieldwork decisions. In addition, a commitment to theoretical analysis structured my inquiry, adding to the multimodal collection of ethnographic data an ongoing and overarching conceptual and critical analysis that ultimately informed the way I organized the material of this dissertation.

## **0.5. STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION**

Capoeira is multidimensional and polyvalent; it therefore can be approached from a number of different theoretical perspectives. It is a dance, a martial art, and a sport; it is

traditional folklore coming from slaves; it is now also a cultural symbol of Brazil as well as a consumption 'good' circulating transnationally. In order to explore all these dimensions of the practice, my study required theoretical approaches stemming from fields as diverse as dance studies; the sociology of sport and of the body; cultural and economic anthropology; as well as my own field of Communication and Cultural Studies. The existing literature on contemporary capoeira already gives a sense of this diversity of possible approaches. While most research comes from the field of anthropology (Delamont 2006; Delamont and Stephens 2008, 2009; Downey 2004; Guizardi 2011; Lewis 1992; Reis 2000; Vassallo 2002, 2007), other interesting studies have stemmed from performance studies (Browning 1995), and the sociology of sports (Aceti 2010; Joseph 2008a, 2008b). Each one of these accounts embraces a different degree of interdisciplinarity, a feature that my own work further amplifies.

Most scholars who have studied capoeira outside of Brazil focus on its local, singled-out manifestations: they analyze the internal organization of specific capoeira groups – their codes, norms, and hierarchy. They outline how the community functions locally in one group, city, or, at most, in one region (Delamont 2006; Delamont and Stephens 2008; Guizardi 2011; Vassallo 2007). Few address the community of practice's organization as it spans borders; none provides the angle I specifically adopt: that is, studying the mechanisms that underlie capoeira as an overarching, global phenomenon. There is no substantial work explicitly informed by the concept and study of transnationalism. Sports sociologist Janelle Joseph (2008b) offers an insightful exception but the article length of her contribution remains inherently limited. It is this interest in

understanding capoeira as a global, transnational phenomenon that motivated my choice to focus on the shifting valuations of the practice at large. This frame enabled me to move beyond the local group scale so as to locate these different valuations at multiple scales (from the intimate bodily experience to the globalized culturescape), in multiple contexts (not only geographical spaces, but also capoeira schools, festivals, bars where performances were held, high schools where capoeira is an extracurricular activity), and through different media (bodies, discourses, and visual representations).

In order to start studying the fields of value that surround capoeira, it was necessary to look at historical literature. By looking at the history of the practice, I tracked the shifts in valuations that had already occurred in previous historical periods. In Brazil specifically, capoeira has often been a prism through which to analyze racial politics (Lima and Lima 1991; Reis 2004), and sometimes to understand Brazilian society at large (Lewis 1992). The practice's historical valuations are so intimately linked with Brazil's national imaginary that I necessarily drew on literature on the nation; in particular, the subfield of this literature that explores the nation as an imagined community, most commented upon by sociologists. The historical review in Chapter One outlines the relations between capoeira's definitions and different visions of the Brazilian nation. This discussion foreshadows my subsequent arguments of capoeira's role in the circulation of multiple versions of Brazilian national culture that I elaborate in Chapter Four and build upon in Chapter Five, where I nonetheless move away from this understanding of the nation as a social fact and I tap into more recent literature which rather understands the nation as a set of discourses and performances.

Chapter One not only provides a historical background for my dissertation. It also exemplifies the processes of creation of political and ideological value with culture as it insists on capoeira's role in the twentieth century formation of Brazilian nationalism. In this sense, it is a complement to Chapter Two, where I provide the theoretical context in which I situate the rest of my analysis. This theoretical framework emphasizes the entrepreneurial and economic values of culture under a neoliberal regime of governmentality. In Chapter Two, I temporarily set capoeira aside and I expand on Yúdice's (2003) influential theory to trace the multiple ways in which culture can be used as a resource. I describe the context of neoliberal governmentality that undergirds this new paradigm and outline three main approaches to culture resulting from this specific socio-economic organization. Overall, this chapter describes a new paradigm for considering cultural practices in the transnational context characterized by a neoliberal political economy in which cultural goods and services, like capoeira, assume new values and valuations, as I develop in the rest of the dissertation. The first two chapters thus work together as an introductory pair that provides a historical context for capoeira as well as the theoretical context in which this dissertation is more imminently inscribed. By juxtaposing two clear moments of construction of power and creation of specific values with culture, they ultimately reassert the topicality of the new paradigm presented in Chapter Two, which frames my analysis of contemporary capoeira.

In close continuity with the theoretical context fleshed out in Chapter Two, Chapter Three discusses capoeira's commercialization and the mestres' role within it mostly through theories of neoliberalism (although I diversify these with concepts drawn

from economic anthropology). I draw more closely on Foucault's ideas on neoliberal governmentality along with the more recent scholarship it has inspired, in order to demonstrate the close correspondence between the neoliberal subject that this scholarship describes and the capoeira mestres. The literature on neoliberalism is doubly relevant to understand mestres' immigration: while neoliberal policies in Brazil created in scarce employment opportunities that prompted mestres to emigrate, the same neoliberal rationality has provided them with a favourable context to commercialize capoeira in North America. It is this commercialization process that Chapter Three then mostly examines: I draw on theories of transnationalism as well as economic anthropology to describe the community of mestres' particular organization and point to different kinds of economies that coexist in the transnational community as well as in local capoeira groups. Finally, this chapter also examines some of the effects of capoeira's commercialization by using more traditional literature on processes of commodification. Overall, the economic, monetary value of capoeira is emphasized.

In Chapter Four, I turn to capoeira's new semantic and symbolic values, specifically as they relate to the field of Brazilian culture. This extensive chapter tackles a broad question: how does 'Brazil' circulate via capoeira? If, as established in Chapter One, capoeira's definition is intimately linked to a Brazilian national imaginary, then capoeira concomitantly becomes a vehicle of Brazilian culture when it circulates outside of Brazil. However, because it is recontextualized, this Brazilian imaginary is transformed, mediated, and prone to multiple interpretations. I thus extend the discursive framework to encompass both the imaginary that Brazilians have of themselves as well as

the imaginary that foreigners have of Brazil. This chapter identifies multiple versions of “Brazil” that circulate via the practice: a “diasporic Brazil” transmitted as a set of behaviors, values, and “habitats of meanings” (Hannerz 1996) of Brazilians who gather in capoeira groups, an “imagined Brazil” where the nation is rather understood as a set of discourses and representations as they cohere into dominant frames, and a “performative Brazil” where national culture is defined as a category of difference in a market. The dominant task is to analyse the construction of a field of discourse that surrounds capoeira; to do so, I draw on theories of the politics of representation from ethnographic, theories of race, and postcolonial perspectives, deriving from literary studies and anthropological theory, and complemented by dance and performance studies. This chapter thus explores the semantic values of capoeira in its new contexts.

The first four chapters look at capoeira from the outside; they emphasize the values created through the actions of individuals on capoeira, through the uses that people make of capoeira. In Chapter Five, I shift the perspective and rather look at what capoeira does to people. I seek to restore some of the practice’s own agency, and do so by adopting an affective turn in my theoretical perspective. Theories on affect have never been used before in the study of capoeira, but I suggest that they are particularly apt to account for the experiential, embodied and phenomenological power of the practice. While I narrow down the scale of my analysis to the intimate, individual body of practitioners, this approach sheds light on the shared, collective experience of capoeira and its potential for building community. While the human and affective values of capoeira are initially emphasised, I ultimately argue that these are also crucial in the very

creation of economic value with capoeira. This is why, in the second part of the chapter, I reintroduce the concept of the market to suggest that affect is mobilized in an economy of cultural difference, especially as the practitioner's intimate experience of capoeira is conflated with specific aspects of the imaginary of Brazil seen in Chapter Four.

Finally, Chapter Six questions the limits of the general, theoretical framework of this dissertation, which considers culture as resource. I ask what values are left for capoeira outside the logic of the resource. For this, I observe a very specific instance of capoeira, the *roda*, which I analyse with theories drawn from performance studies. By defining the *roda* as the essential performance of capoeira, I suggest that it is the place where the practice's intrinsic worldview and its traditional system of values are perpetuated and enacted, potentially even activating its historical legacy. I acknowledge and describe the practitioners' embodied knowledge, perceptible through practice, in order to sketch out the logic of the *roda* in contrast to the logic of the resource outlined in the previous chapters. Chapter Six offers a necessary complement to my previous arguments, but its main purpose remains to show what the frame of the resource and the specific angle I chose to study capoeira could not account for. It thus works like an 'opening chapter' that evokes other avenues for the study of capoeira.

In sum, this dissertation starts by describing two clear regimes of values for culture, the political ideological value under a national-popular regime and the economic and entrepreneurial value under neoliberal rationality. Capoeira can surely be understood within these two regimes and they have indeed influenced and shifted its values over

time. My argument progresses, however, to shed light on more subtle processes of valuation. I describe more flexible processes of valuation that appear and are created first, through discourses and semantic readings of practices as they cohere into dominant frames; second, through physical movement, bodily and phenomenological experience; and third, through shared experience of community life and performance of a complex embodied knowledge, in all of which capoeira's valuations are transformed, mediated both through discourse and performative display. Together, the six chapters provide an overview of an entire system of values and capitals created via the circulation of capoeira as a resource. While the expedient use of capoeira was initially intended to generate monetary value for the practitioners' individual livelihoods, their actions ultimately created an entire transnational system of individually and socially produced values.

## **CHAPTER ONE: FROM PRACTICE OF RESISTANCE TO NATIONAL POPULAR CULTURE: HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

The history of capoeira is hotly debated, partly because its documentation and explanation are fraught with ideological positionings<sup>8</sup>. The uncertainty surrounding capoeira's origins feeds into the ambiguity of its very definition, as I explored in the introductory chapter, which represents a notable challenge for tracing the historical evolution of the practice. Yet these very ambiguities and the conflicted fields of meaning in which capoeira figures are also keys to understanding its positioning in contemporary fields of value.

While a less ideologically marked, allegedly more 'objective' field of historic knowledge about capoeira is growing, the practice's past is still the object of numerous debates in which scientifically-corroborated narratives are opposed by strongly held and widely-spread beliefs transmitted by capoeira's practitioners. While I leave it to properly trained historians to discuss the epistemological debates posed by these different standpoints with regards to 'history', it must be noted that the practice of capoeira itself might be understood as a subaltern means of capturing and transmitting historical experience. If official colonial and national histories were written and archived from a position of (European) power, capoeira offered a counter-space where (African) slaves

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<sup>8</sup> Historian Matthias Röhrig Assunção (2005) published the first exhaustive and rigorous book which puts the methods of his field towards the academic knowledge of capoeira, the history of which had been compiled until then in a rather disorganized and disperse way. Other important studies include Almeida (1986), Lewis (1992), Rego (1968) as well as more targeted investigations such as those by Holloway (1989), Pires (2002), and Soares (1994, 2002).

and their descendants could claim their own memory and record it in their own terms (via embodied and oral means). The collision and confusion between these two sources of knowledge and positionings are further exacerbated by the countless stories and myths that participants have invented, either to fill in the gaps of official ‘history’ or to perpetuate certain traditions internal to capoeira. Many myths and oral traditions are intertwined with the scarce remaining material documents, creating complex entanglement of facts and fiction. As anthropologist Greg Downey astutely notes:

Players’ “historical” explanations for their art borrow from academic discussions of capoeira, but the traffic is hardly one-way. Stories cross back and forth quickly between academic and popular realms, no doubt partly because most students of capoeira history are also disciples of the art. The voracious imaginations of capoeiristas follow close on the heels of historians, quickly incorporating their findings into poetic readings of the rhythms, textures, and gestures of the game. (2005, 56)

For this reason, he suggests, a good history should not “draw a hard distinction between written history, oral histories, and song texts; all influence each other in practice.”

(Downey 2005, 56) A review of capoeira’s history reminds us that cultural forms are inseparable from their social, economic, and political environment, and that they should be studied, not in isolation, but in close relation with the political economy of their emergence and ongoing vitality.

While for the ‘hard facts’ and chronology, I will be relying on Assunção’s (2005) exhaustive historical investigation, I will also attend to the unofficial versions and interpretations of capoeira’s history by people practicing it. In this, I am inspired both by

Cultural Studies' attention to subaltern struggles and subjugated knowledges, and by anthropological concerns with oral history as testament to experiences of marginalization. Cultural Studies take into account multiple points of view, including those of the marginalized, on any given phenomena. As such, they are adverse to disciplinary boundaries and strive precisely to deconstruct the official and hegemonic fields of knowledge, thereby allowing marginalized voices to be heard, while recognizing their respective positions in fields of power<sup>9</sup>. A Cultural Studies approach to capoeira's history will help us to position capoeira within the official Brazilian historiography while taking into account the contestations of this narrative that arise from within the practice itself. Analysing practitioners' reactions to the official construction of their history sheds light on the fields of power that overarch and inform the practice's history. In turn, this prepares us to understand the crucial influence of a new field of power – the contemporary political economy of culture – on capoeira's most recent valuations.

Given its inception amongst the slave populations, capoeira is closely linked to Afro-Brazilian identity. Its history is intertwined with broader ideologies and social discourses on race relations and racial politics that circulate during specific periods of Brazil's history. Consequently, reviewing the history of capoeira and the social treatment it receives contributes to an understanding of the racial relations, politics, and ideologies that have contributed to the formation of the modern Brazilian nation-state. Throughout its evolution, capoeira has been a tool for those in power to define their relationship

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<sup>9</sup> This is the legacy of the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), also known as the Birmingham school of cultural studies, whose members and associated scholars such as Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, E.P. Thompson, Dick Hebdige, and Lawrence Grossberg, to name a few, contributed to the study of culture as a site of struggle. Their scholarship employs Marxist methods and theories to explore the relations between cultural forms and other social, political and economic structures.

towards Afro-Brazilian populations. These latter went from constituting an undesirable majority that authorities sought to eliminate, at least in terms of their racial specificity, to being – at least symbolically – embraced in an inclusive national project under the ideal of racial democracy, to encapsulate a general panorama that frames capoeira's history.

## **1.1. PRACTICE OF RESISTANCE AND TARGET FOR REPRESSION**

### **1.1.1. Capoeira in the colonial society: function of liberation in Afro-Brazilian circles**

It is difficult and very much beyond the scope of this dissertation to give a clear account of capoeira at its inception, since the colonial period was an 'incubation' time for the development of the practice. Indeed, given its crystallization in the merging of many African traditions, it took a long criolization process before there was any distinct practice of capoeira as we now know it, let alone any clear account of it. Some elements present today may have formed part of a number of different activities practiced in the plantations, which were only put together as 'capoeira' over time. Moreover, given the embodied nature of the practice, and the illiteracy of its practitioners, there are few documentary archives of its inception. It is nonetheless important to briefly situate the context of capoeira's inception, especially given that so many myths within the community hark back to this period.

The very origin of capoeira on Brazilian soil is contentious. Some practitioners assert that it already existed in Africa and was carried as such by slaves in their cross-Atlantic journey. We will later see that this position is likely an ideological one,

constituting a reaction to the tentative cooptation of the practice by Brazilian elites (see section 1.2.4). It is more generally accepted that what we know as capoeira today is a merger of many African practices that took place on Brazilian soil. The slave populations that were deported to Brazil did not necessarily come from the same parts of the African continent and thus carried diverse cultural traditions. Longing for cultural preservation and for some sense of group cohesion, they developed common forms of expression from the transformative fusion of their respective traditions<sup>10</sup>. Some elements of capoeira can be found separately in different cultural practices spread across Africa, yet nowhere in precisely the same combination.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, some elements of capoeira may be found in other kinaesthetic practices of the African diaspora in Latin America, though again, not exactly in the same configuration.<sup>12</sup> Capoeira is the result of a unique combination of many elements of diverse traditions that came from Africa (as well as Native and European elements that were incorporated over the course of its evolution).

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<sup>10</sup> Rowe and Schelling (1991, 42–43) perceptively note that “it is necessary in analyzing forms of black popular culture in Brazil and indeed in Latin America as a whole, to avoid a culturalist approach which regards these forms merely as a continuation of African culture. Such an approach overlooks the profound alterations they suffered as they became part of a society founded on slave labour as a result of which they were transformed – to use Bastide’s definition – into a class culture.” They also explain that all the Africans brought in to Brazil were “all reduced to a single denominator of slavery. With all the original forms of ethnic solidarity destroyed, it was not possible to reproduce the African cultures in their new social habitat.” (43) New structures of solidarity such as capoeira were thus developed.

<sup>11</sup> For example, given the centrality of the *berimbau* for the practice of capoeira, many investigations have tried to trace the existence of the instrument in Africa in order to trace capoeira’s origins. Though the presence of the *berimbau* has been found in Angola, along the border with Congo, and in Zimbabwe (Fryer 2000, 32–34), this alone does not suffice to prove the existence of capoeira in Africa. Similar bow-like instruments were also found in Cuba, yet capoeira was not: this suggests that the instrument was associated with a broader range of practices, not only capoeira. Some visual documents also depict the *berimbau* independently of capoeira, whereas the first depictions of capoeira show no sign of the *berimbau*. All this leads scholars to believe that its strong association with capoeira came later and thus it offers no clear indication of a continuity with African cultural practices. (All this is discussed in Fryer 2000)

<sup>12</sup> Assunção’s chapter 2 includes a useful review of diverse combat games of the Black Atlantic.

At the beginning, capoeira may have been undistinguishable from other practices which, though now independent, may at the time have been mixed together in the cultural crucible of the sugar plantations. For example, the religious rituals of *candomblé* or the secular celebration of *samba de roda* materialize through shared movement and rhythm inside a *roda*<sup>13</sup>. All these practices fostered links within the community of enslaved populations who shared living spaces – called *senzalas* – separated from their colonial masters. From this perspective, capoeira was but one element of the cultural complex of the Afro-Brazilian community. This may explain why there are still today invocations to the *orixás*, the ‘African-based’ deities now more directly associated with *candomblé* rituals, to protect the capoeira *roda*, or why the latter sometimes finishes with a friendly *samba de roda* neutralizing in dance some of the tense energies that may have arisen in more combative games. Capoeira sprouted as part of the necessity to find a common cultural language amongst uprooted populations sharing profoundly new and disturbing experiences. It developed amongst other practices that, taken together, constitute a cultural realm specific to African people in Brazil. Brazilian communication scholar Muniz Sodré considers the plantations to be the place of origin of an entirely new diasporic culture symbolically preserved in the modern day *terreiros* (the place where Afro-Brazilian religious ceremonies are typically held). The plantations, Sodré (1983,

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<sup>13</sup> As explained in introduction: the *roda* is the circular space, formed by participants, where people play capoeira. It is also in a similar circular formation that other African-derived practices such as samba, or candomblé, take place. Barbara Browning (1995, 108) puts forward the *roda* to establish relations between all the expressive practices that animated Afro-Brazilian circles: “The *roda* is the circle where [...] ironies take place. The circle of candomblé dance is the space where human bodies incorporate divine energy. The *roda de samba* rather lifts humanity, secular energy, to higher level. In capoeira, the *roda* contains bodies all too aware of their earthly nature.”

164–165) explains, represent the basic structure of group cohesion amongst the African populations, and as such, they are inextricable from the Afro-Brazilian identity.

This early plantation context is the source of the relentless trope of liberation that is found consistently in capoeira’s traditional folklore, its songs, and the oral traditions and narratives of self-interpretation characteristic of Afro-Brazilian identity.<sup>14</sup> Freedom is such a prevalent motif in capoeira’s “worldview” that some argue that it is the driving force sustaining its creation as well as the fundamental objective of its practitioners.

Anthropologist John L. Lewis (1992, 2) asserts that behind the appearance of combat: “the real end is more akin to liberation: a liberation from slavery, from class domination, from the poverty of ordinary life, and ultimately even from the constraints of the human body”.

The trope of liberation is often linked to an unverified, mythical account of capoeira’s early function as a technique designed to contribute literally to the liberation of slaves in their uprisings against their masters. Oral tradition provides multiple references to the alleged use of capoeira in the *quilombos*, communities made up of fugitive slaves who found refuge in the mountains and organized spaces of resistance. Many songs elevate the leaders of the *quilombos* into heroic figures, hailed as the first capoeiristas to use their own techniques towards the concrete attainment of freedom. The most famous of these mythical capoeiristas, Zumbi, was king of the *quilombo* of Palmares, the great maroon community that resisted attacks of both Portuguese and

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, a popular song: “*Às vezes me chamam de negro / Pensando que vão me humilhar / Mas o que eles não sabem é que só me fazem lembrar / Que eu venho daquela raça, que lutou pra se libertar*” (“Sometimes they call me ‘negro’ / Thinking they will humiliate me / But what they don’t know is that it only reminds me / That I come from that race, that fought to free themselves”).

Dutch forces during the entire 17<sup>th</sup> century (R. N. Anderson 1996; Kent 1965). While it is highly improbable that capoeira alone could successfully conquer European artillery, this oral history of struggle is perpetuated through songs and myths which emphasize the importance of capoeira as a tool for political liberation.

Capoeira is also associated with liberation on a more metaphorical level. First, it provided a channel for physical empowerment in a context of physical constriction. In a system that alienated the slaves from their own bodies, transformed into mere labour power controlled by the master, the practice of an embodied technique may have been a way for individuals to regain both physical self-discipline and dignity. Capoeira was a means for slaves to reclaim some agency over their own bodies: they liberated themselves from an alienated position as objects of labour and physical abuse, and became subjects of a creative and playful embodied process. Second, capoeira circles may have served as mental outlets where Africans freed themselves from the oppression of the master. The *roda* was a space where they could forget the hardships of their subordination and take control over some moments, if fleeting, of their existence. Finally, it may be in the combination of this physical and mental empowerment that the real potential for liberation appears most strongly. In an analysis drawing on both Oriental and Western philosophies, Muniz Sodré (1983) (a communications scholar who, significantly, is also a mestre), suggests that the integration of the body and mind within the practice of capoeira allows one to transcend the external structures that condition the self through the spontaneity of embodied experience. The body in capoeira constitutes a way of playfully apprehending the world that circumvents the otherwise rigid social

structure that constrains enslaved populations. It is an affirmation of the self (as human) that comes from within, a refusal to be determined by outside elements.<sup>15</sup> Capoeira offers what Sodr e calls an “embodied catharsis” (*catarse corporal*) where the body is in proud affirmation of itself both in physical and mental existence.

It is important to insist on the trope of liberation to launch this historical account because it provides a crucial lens through which to highlight the paradoxes of capoeira’s history, namely the various attempts by external authorities to control, manage, suppress or eliminate it. Whether it is the police trying to eradicate capoeiristas, or a populist government trying to ‘tame’ them and recuperate them as national symbols, there is something ironic in these official attempts to control a practice understood as setting a people free from the tyrannies first most cruelly experienced by its initial practitioners.

### **1.1.2. Towards the penal code: capoeira as target for repression of the African population**

Although the plantations represent the earliest form of social organization for the African slaves and are inextricable from Afro-Brazilian identity, the development of capoeira and the complexification of its practice are more likely to have occurred in an urban context, specifically in Rio de Janeiro, where enslaved individuals had relative

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<sup>15</sup> According to Sodr e (1983, 214–215): “The jubilation facilitated through the body [...] of the capoeirista is what makes the extraordinary cultural difference of the capoeira game. In the moment when one plays, when one has fun within capoeira, the individuals’ movements free themselves from any exterior cause, from any rational justification bestowed by an Other, making possible an instantaneous enjoyment of the real. In this here and now of the body, the supposed (metaphysical) eternity of the axioms of reality is sketched out and thus the fond feeling of existence may sprout. The rhythm of the berimbau animates the bodies and soul of the negro to play.” [all translations, from bibliographical material and/or interviews, are from the author]

freedom of movement and where intensified exchanges between population groups of diverse origins were more frequent. In contrast to the North-Eastern region of Brazil where the sugar economy was strongly established since the initial centuries of colonization, Rio de Janeiro only really gained importance in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The transfer of the capital of the Viceroyalty of Brazil from Salvador (Bahia) to Rio de Janeiro in 1763 indicates the increasing influence of the city, which was further reaffirmed when the boom in sugar prices (due to disruption of production in the Caribbean) prompted the expansion of sugar plantations around the new capital. As a result, an increased number of slaves were brought in to sustain the growth of the city and its surroundings. Capoeira developed as a multifaceted practice in the complex structure of the Carioca (ie. from Rio de Janeiro) society. While early historical documents refer to it as a game, it is increasingly depicted as a violent fighting technique. Capoeira evolved in a society striving to define itself according to European-inspired ideals of modernization where the black populations, slowly gaining freedom from slavery yet struggling to be integrated in society, were seen as a hindrance to progress. Over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, capoeira thus came to symbolize the undesirability of the Afro-Brazilian population in a racially divided and racist society.

The transfer of the entire royal court of Portugal to Rio de Janeiro in 1808 to escape the imminent arrival of Napoleon's troupes marked the beginning of a particularly adverse social environment for Afro-Brazilian populations. Rio de Janeiro was already populated in great part by slaves, and their proportion in relation to the total urban population kept rising considerably parallel to the city's and region's growth. In 1821,

slaves represented as much as 46% of the population – a number which did not even include liberated ex-slaves (Assunção 2005, 71). Once the city also became the seat of the most powerful white elite aristocracy, the contrast between the sophisticated court life and the conditions of forced labour of the enslaved populations created a social cleavage that influenced greatly the character of the local urban life and heightened racial tensions. Urban slavery, however, was of a particular type: slaves had a little more autonomy (by way of freedom of movement as well as a peculiar hiring system that allowed for accumulation of money<sup>16</sup>), and they were assigned a wider variety of tasks. They had somewhat more independence and could circulate more freely around the city, contributing to a general climate of insecurity already rooted in heightened racial tension. Moreover, because the slaves were not under the direct surveillance of masters, some new mechanisms of control were put in place. Though more general in their aim, these had direct repercussions on capoeira, targeted as one of the potentially disruptive activities to which Afro-Brazilians dedicated themselves in public spaces.

The most conspicuous device for vigilance was the creation of the first professional police force – the Royal Police Guard – that, according to Assunção, was in charge of repressing any behaviors judged ‘unacceptable’ (2005, 73). These included “vagrancy, begging, curfew violation, disrespect to authority, verbal insult, unspecified disorderly conduct, and public drunkenness’ – and, prominently among all these, capoeira.” (Holloway 1993, 9; quoted in Assunção 2005, 73). This resulted in the direct

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<sup>16</sup> This system of “*negros de ganhos*” (slaves for hire) appears when some slave owners let others rent out their slaves for labour. Those slaves have to deliver a fixed sum to their owner at the end of the day, which implies that they can possibly earn more and keep a small amount for their own purposes. Some slaves have bought their freedom this way. (Assunção 2005, 72)

persecution of the practice, leading to its progressive criminalization. Well before capoeira was made officially illegal in 1890, playing in the streets could be the cause of direct punishment, as Frederico Guillerme Briggs's 1840 explicit lithography (see appendix A) shows, its title "Negroes which will be flogged" placed alongside the inscription "capoeira" on the placard describing the cause of punishment (in Assunção 2005, 77).

Another more indirect form of social control was imposed not by the official police force but rather by widespread racist attitudes and the vigilance of the white elite's disciplinary gaze. Indeed, the targeting of capoeira and its direct persecution can be seen as an outcome of a larger racist attitude towards black populations in the city. If playing capoeira in the street was enough to be punished by public officers, this repression was not only directed at capoeira as menacing to public order but also corresponded to a binary racist attitude of the elite. The detention of capoeiristas – in great part 'slaves' or ex-slaves – was part of a broader pattern of racial repression that sought to exclude the Afro-Brazilian populations from the accepted 'national body' and used capoeira as an excuse to detain Afro-Brazilians arbitrarily (Huggins 1985, 124). In this climate of racial tensions and urban violence, capoeiristas are conflated with the Afro-Brazilian population at large: individually, each detained capoeirista suffers from the broader racial prejudice that underlies his punishment; whereas collectively, they become a synecdoche for the Afro-Brazilian population, resulting in repression, exclusion and contempt from those in power.

The progressive liberation of enslaved populations did not necessarily result in a better situation for the former slaves, who were used to having at least their basic needs for food and shelter met by their owners, and who suddenly had to provide for themselves. Afro-Brazilians constituted an ‘in-between’ social class: not fully integrated citizens, they nonetheless stopped benefiting from the basic protections that their owners used to ensure for them as subjects of property. Afro-Brazilians had to resort to petty crime in order to survive, and it is in this context of urban violence and racial repression that capoeira arguably started to be used as an aggressive technique that eventually developed into a real (potentially lethal) weapon (its practice associated with the use of razor blades or jackknives). It nonetheless seems clear from the first descriptions of capoeira in Rio, for example the famous engraving by Rugendas, (see appendix B) that in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, capoeira could still also be practiced in private spaces as a playful pastime: Rugendas’ engraving shows a slave woman watching what appears to be a peaceful game. Even the early police accounts describe capoeira as a vague disorderly practice rather than as a lethal technique of street crime. They underline that individuals were arrested for playing capoeira because they “roam around in the city [...] creating disorder most of the times with no aim [...] even if they don’t provoke injuries or death or any other crime” (Assunção 2005, 74). Assunção specifies that what was called ‘capoeira’ referred to many different practices. Capoeira was then already polyvalent: “At this early stage, capoeira already encompassed different modalities, with or without music and weapons, from friendly games to full-fledged fights.” (77). Despite this polyvalence, it nevertheless seems clear that the racist interpretation of capoeira by the

police, which represented the interests and interpretations of white elites, enhanced the reprehensible and violent connotations of the practice.

It is probable that in this context of socio-economic insecurity and racist persecution, Afro-Brazilians turned to capoeira as a technique providing them both physical and mental strategies (as well as networks of solidarity) to survive in the streets. Capoeira shifted its form in response to the immediate social context. Many authors directly correlate the violence of the urban context with a newly aggressive use of capoeira. For example, in his study of Capoeira Angola, Pedro Abib (2004, 137) asserts that the brutality to which slaves were submitted in and out of their living space pre-disposed them to react with similar brutality to any vexing situation. Capoeira was one of the strategies developed to deal with the brutality of the slave system, morphing into a fighting technique when the context of street life required its practitioners to fight for their survival. Similarly, historian Luiz Sergio Dias, quoting sociologist Florestan Fernandes (1987), explains:

The reigning disorganization in the immediate social environment assisted, naturally, the apprenticeship in the area of vice and of crime. However, it didn't impose the latter as a desired or preferable adjustment. This came to happen because the paths of self-affirmation were blocked. The most audacious, impatient and well-endowed (physically and intellectually), often opted for crime or for vice in order to avoid the slow torture and humiliation. (Dias 2001, 160–161)

Turning to capoeira was as much a response to violence as it was a response to the general lack of opportunities for Afro-Brazilians who were blocked at the bottom of the social ladder (Lima and Lima 1991, 155).

The aggressive use of capoeira reaches a pinnacle in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, epitomized in the organization of capoeiristas in '*maltas*' – street gangs that came to dominate the city and had ambiguous relations to political power. There is undeniable evidence of the presence of structured street gangs organized on the basis of territoriality; but the phenomenon was a complex one and the *maltas*' organization also revolved around ethnic and religious affiliations, as well as their specific association with political parties. According to their main historian Carlos Eugênio Soares (1994, 40), the *maltas* are the fundamental unit of action of capoeiristas in the second half of the century. Eventually, the various gangs, which ranged from 3 to 100 individuals, became organized under two all-encompassing rival groups, also called 'nations' (alluding to the clear ethnic pattern underlying their classification): the *Nagoas* and the *Guaiamus*. Each 'nation' controlled particular neighbourhoods of the city, and entered in fights to defend its territory and gang identity both from the authorities and from other gangs' incursions. Soares emphasizes the criminal nature of these gangs' activities: confrontations frequently involved various weapons and often resulted in casualties, even when they were only between the *maltas* themselves.

This violence amongst the factions was nonetheless enhanced by confrontations with the authorities. Indeed, the police apparatus put in place in the first half of the

century was reinforced, so much so that repression of *capoeiras* and their *maltas* becomes a defining social institution of Rio's history. Soares even concludes that:

The repressive apparatus mobilized to put an end to capoeira [...] was rarely matched in Brazil's social history. Very few times – maybe even never – did a cultural practice that would later be included in the universe of folklore draw that much attention from the powerful class of the slave regime and preoccupied the traditional governing authorities of the Brazilian State to such a degree. (2002, 547)

Such an intense and systematic repression speaks to the real menace that capoeira had become for public order. At the time of the *maltas*, capoeira was indeed “a cultural practice that gave slaves and the likes strong instruments to fight directly against the oppressive agents, whether the brutal master or the truculent soldier” (Soares 2002, 547). Capoeira and its organization into a real weapon is a response to the climate of terror that reigned in Rio.

The *maltas* had their own internal organization, which made them hard to dismantle. Despite the repressive apparatus, their underground organization remained out of the control of white authorities (Abib 2004, 139), pointing to capoeira's defining ability to draw strength from the links of solidarity that united members of its community. In addition to capoeira's real physical potential, the solidarity between gang members was crucial to the power and efficiency of this underground organization. This alternative system of organization gave strength to Afro-Brazilians as a social group, a characteristic still present in capoeira, as Chapter Three will address.

Faced with this underground, alternative force, the police and political authorities opted to form an alliance with the *maltas* rather than trying to fight them. This alliance was also a strategy that fit the political panorama of the city, also divided in two main political parties: the Conservatives and the Liberals. Each of these parties formed ties with one of the two main *maltas*, the Nagoas and the Guaiamus, seeking its help in the political process. Soares' and Assunção's (2005, 93) investigations demonstrate that political parties used capoeira gangs to manipulate ballot boxes during elections, to intimidate voters and influence their decisions. An important consequence of this alliance of specific *maltas* with political parties is that it made the repression of capoeira partial (the party in power would not fight its own *malta*), and thus inefficient. Here, we see how the political interests ran parallel to the capoeiristas'. If this association with authorities might seem contradictory for capoeira gangs that stemmed precisely from the need for Afro-Brazilians to stand in solidarity and work against persecution by elites and their social exclusion, this should not merely be read as a sign of 'submission'. On the contrary, the close relationship of capoeiristas and politicians resulted in many gains for capoeiristas. Their alliance with the political parties was arguably a way for stigmatized Afro-Brazilians to gain "impunity, autonomy of action and influence" in a social context where they were otherwise relegated to a subordinated place (Assunção 2005, 93).

Though this rough summary does not do justice to the complexity of this important period of capoeira's history, it significantly highlights the ambiguous relations that practitioners have entertained with dominant structures of power. Moreover, the social instability that resulted from the inadequacy of official attempts to undermine

capoeira led the government of the new Republic to implement even harsher measures, resulting in one crucial event in capoeira's development: its official inclusion in the 1890 penal code of the new Republic. In an attempt to properly eradicate capoeira, the Republican Criminal Code officially made provision for two to six months of prison for one found doing: "[...] exercises of physical agility and dexterity, known by the denomination of capoeiragem, in the streets and public squares; to run amok, provoking disorder and mayhem, and threatening, frightening or injuring specific or unspecified individuals" (articles 402–4 quoted in Assunção 2005, 94).

Two other historical events immediately preceded the official criminalization and directly affected the conditions of capoeira and its practitioners: the abolition of slavery in 1888 and the proclamation of the First Republic in 1889. After the Golden Law put a final end to their conditions of forced labour, more and more Afro-Brazilians were available for work in the city and were now also responsible for their own livelihoods. Social attitudes, however, were slower to change than laws were to promulgate, and despite the official abolition, racist prejudice persisted and made it difficult for the Afro-Brazilian freedmen to succeed in this endeavour. The politics of the first Republican government further contributed to Afro-Brazilian insecurity. The elite project for the Brazilian society now officially advocated a progressive 'whitening' of the population in order to achieve "order and progress", a slogan inspired by French sociologist Auguste Comte's vision of social positivism that appears on the Brazilian flag (Nachman 1977, 4n5). This projected modernity presupposed the gradual elimination of the Afro-Brazilian population which represented, from the white elite's standpoint, an obstacle to this ideal.

It was buttressed by a specific kind of Brazilian eugenics that sought the biological ‘whitening’ of the population based on the alleged supremacy of white genes (Telles 2004, 28–29). Immigration policies that favored Europeans and Asians were also implemented so as to ‘dilute’ the African element (Rowe and Schelling 1991, 36–39; Teles dos Santos 1998, 118). “By importing white people from Europe, it was hoped gradually to ‘whiten’ the population, as the superiority and strength of white ‘blood’ gradually eliminated African and Amerindian physical and cultural traits” (Fry 2000, 87).<sup>17</sup>

The harsh measures of the Republican regime, though they could not eradicate capoeira completely, did weaken it sufficiently in Rio de Janeiro such that its practitioners were forced to adapt it. According to Assunção, the practice morphed into new forms and survived mostly in a subterranean way in Rio’s shantytowns and suburbs. Given the weakened state of capoeira and its strong, negative social stigma, subsequent developments in the practice’s social vitality stemmed from a new geographical center: the city of Salvador, in the state of Bahia.

## **1.2. CAPOEIRA EMBRACED BY THE BRAZILIAN NATION**

Evidence of capoeira’s presence in Salvador during the 19<sup>th</sup> century is scarce. Assunção mentions the existence of some paintings that possibly have a connection with the practice, although they could depict other African-derived male combat games. The

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<sup>17</sup> The influence of this positivist turn in Brazil has been thoroughly studied by historian Thomas Skidmore (1993) in his widely acclaimed book, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought*.

first explicit written evidence of capoeira consists of brief mentions in newspapers between the years 1866-1870 (Assunção 2005, 100–102). With the exception of Assunção’s chapter discussing – in quite general terms – the capoeira scene in Bahia between c.1860-1950<sup>18</sup>, scholarly accounts are relatively silent about capoeira in the region before 1930, a crucial year marking the end of the First Republic, the rise to power of President Getúlio Vargas, and the beginning of an important period for capoeira’s modernization, institutionalization, and incipient social recognition. In general, Assunção’s chapter insists on the playful, ritual, and mystical aspects of Bahian capoeira, pointing out that most evidence confirms that, unlike in Rio, capoeira had remained a recreational activity. This contrasting evolution, however, should not obscure the lasting “ambiguity between game and fight [that] resided at the very core of the art” (Assunção 2005, 113). “The association of violence and capoeira is undeniable in Bahia”, Assunção argues, “even though the musical and playful aspects [...] seem to have been more accentuated than in nineteenth-century Rio” (120).

The specificities of capoeira’s evolution in Bahia explain that this region, rather than Rio de Janeiro, became the setting for the transformation of capoeira into a representative element of national culture that sustained the formation of the Brazilian nation-state, as the following sections explore.

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<sup>18</sup> The title of the chapter frames the argument between 1860-1950, but the chapter itself provides no explicit and detailed discussion of capoeira after the end of the First republic in 1930.

### **1.2.1. Getúlio Vargas, Brazilian nationalism, racial democracy**

Getúlio Vargas came to power in 1930 following the demise of the first Republic's oligarchic government and transformed the political culture of Brazil. Vargas' government sought to reduce the sharp inequities that divided a rich elite from the rest of the population through populist politics which privileged processes of modernization and industrialization while also addressing the workers' needs.<sup>19</sup> Vargas' populism was nationalistic in character, an emphasis that became stronger over the years, especially during the militarily imposed policy of *Estado Novo*, from 1937 to 1945. Centralized and nationalistic, Vargas' *Estado Novo* strove to create a strong, unitary nation-state, mobilizing varied expressions of popular culture, amongst them capoeira, in order to give the national community a tangible representation. It is first important to theoretically understand the specificities of the kind of nationalism put forward in order to later understand the rationale behind the use of capoeira to promote it. Theories of the nation highlight the ideological premises of Vargas' project, as well as its implications for a national culture in which capoeira is inserted as representative of the unifying ideology of "racial democracy".

The concept of 'nation' has ancient roots and has generated an abundant scholarly literature, especially in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Anderson [1983] 2006; Bhabha 1990; Calhoun 2007; Gellner 1983; Giddens 1984; Hobsbawm 1990). This literature examined the multiple categories used to conceptually define and to materially consolidate nations, as well as distinctions between the nation, nationalism and the

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<sup>19</sup> Many studies address Vargas' politics; amongst others, Levine (1998), Skidmore ([1967] 2007).

nation-state. One productive structuring division differentiates between what Jyoti Puri (2004, 34–35) calls “cultural” and “political nationalism” or, in Craig Calhoun’s (2007, 41–45) formulation, between “ethnic” and “civic nationalism”. This enduring division shapes the field of theories on nationalism and provides two defining conceptions of the nation whose roots go back to the Roman Empire. Given that they are both nationalisms, they both strive to unite people under shared and basic categories of belonging. Indeed, whether political or cultural, ethnic or civic, nationalisms organize solidarities. And while they have also been the basis of profound human divisions and civil wars, they remain a vital part of the many collective projects that have shaped the modern world.<sup>20</sup>

Types of nationalisms vary depending on which factors they posit as the premises of national unity (Calhoun 2007). “Civic nationalism” is defined mainly in relation to the state: the main factor of cohesion is a common membership to a state (citizenship, laws, civic rights and responsibilities, etc.). By contrast, “ethnic nationalism” bases social unity in categories such as ethnicity, race, kinship, language, or a common culture (which is where it tallies with Puri’s notion of cultural nationalism). In this type of nationalism, “the people” are said to be united on the basis of a shared identity, positioning the factor of belonging as something essential, natural, or pre-political. These nationalisms have a history of being particularly strong, for the nation they promote is presented as an immutable fact insofar as its unity is based on primordial links of kinship. Moreover, this

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<sup>20</sup> As we will see elsewhere, the new global condition and the transnational flows that characterize the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century have unsettled the secular concept of the nation – some even argue that nations are on the wane (amongst others Appadurai 1996, 2000; Balakrishnan 1996). I tend to agree more with another school of thought whose authors argue that, albeit under new, shifting, morphing forms, nations and nationalism still matter and offer crucial conceptual bearings to understand even the globalizing world (Calhoun 2007).

kind of cultural nationalism engages subjects on an emotional level insofar as their belonging is related to an identity that is supposed to define them deeply at the same time as it makes them participate in something that exceeds their individual existence. Theories of the nation have nevertheless demonstrated that this overarching entity only exists insofar as it is constructed. Calhoun (2007, 27) reminds us: “Nations do not exist ‘objectively’: before they exist discursively”.

This introduces a certain paradox to the cultural conception of the nation because, while it romantically presupposes a pre-existing, already united people, the latter nevertheless depends on a strong state-guided project wherein the national narrative serves to bridge differences among the population. Indeed, although ethnic belonging and national identities have been recognized as strong binding factors by all those studying cultural nationalisms (Gellner 1983; Giddens 1984; Puri 2004), many authors also argue that these are not strong enough to maintain the coherence of a population under the form of modern nation-states. Cultural nationalism may be invoked as a modern nation-states’ justification or foundation, but political actions remain necessary supplements to “ethnic” sentiments<sup>21</sup>. As Calhoun (2007, 75) summarizes: “While it is impossible to dissociate nationalism entirely from ethnicity, it is equally impossible to explain it simply as a continuation of ethnicity”. This leads him to perceptively argue that nations are recognized only when they have the “capacity to project identity as a nation” (32), for which they need a political organization – hence the hyphen between nation and state in

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<sup>21</sup> And vice versa: as Anthony Smith (1986) argues in *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, as quoted in Calhoun: “[...] modern ‘civic’ nations have not in practice really transcended ethnicity and ethnic sentiments.” (Smith 1986, 216; quoted in Calhoun 2007, 44)

the modern concept. The structure and organization that the nation needs in order to project its identity and give its population a strong sense of belonging can only be achieved via a process mediated by the state, communications media, and a certain degree of collaboration with the governed population.

The political project of President Getúlio Vargas clearly illustrates the practice of cultural nationalism. Indeed, many state actions were taken to foster the strong, common culture that allegedly united the Brazilian nation he envisioned. Historian Robert M. Levine (1998, 55) refers to many of these propaganda measures in his description of what he calls the “*Brasilidade* campaign” (Brazilian-ness campaign). For example, the Portuguese language was reinforced by banning schools and presses that operated in foreign languages; and state flags were lowered and replaced by the emblematic *auriverde* national flag. Vargas clearly expressed his ideal to a crowd gathering during a May Day celebration in 1938, in a quote that is also a fitting expression of cultural nationalism: “A country is not just a conglomeration of individuals within a stretch of land, [...] but above all a unity of race, a unity of language, a unity of national spirit” (quoted in Levine 1998, 57). These words clearly denoted the cultural nationalism of the *Estado Novo*, which claimed the essential unity of the population within fixed geographical borders. In a place like Brazil, whose colonial history had for so long divided the population according to the hierarchical system of plantation slavery, the “unity of race” that Vargas posited was nonetheless neither self-evident nor pre-political. How was it possible to promote a unity of race that would win the allegiance and evoke an emotion of belonging amongst all members of the Brazilian nation-state?

In the discursive formation of the Brazilian nation as defined by Vargas, unity could only be achieved by a reformulation of the specific racial narrative that described the population in order to adjust the historical facts to a new political vision. In this sense, the *rhetoric* of ethnic nationalism and its appeal to primordial links of kinship was mobilized to sustain the *practice* of cultural nationalism. The ideological reformulation of race relations was carried out by a group of intellectuals who developed a new social thesis according to which the population of Brazil was a unique case of racial miscegenation that had allowed the development of a racially mixed yet united population. This rising social ideology became known as “racial democracy” – most often attributed to sociologist Gilberto Freyre (1933), though in fact the precise expression was later coined by Roger Bastide and Arthur Ramos (Guimarães 2002, 12). The ideas put forward by these scholars are of seminal importance for any understanding of “modern” racial relations in Brazil, and their centrality in Brazilian nationalism. They have had such a range of different implications that we need to carefully distinguish between the ideas that sustain the ideology, the further uses that have been made of the latter, and the popular adaptations, uses and interpretations of “racial democracy” that became part of the Brazilian peoples’ own self-interpretation – the ‘myth’, in the anthropological sense of the term, as a story that is not exactly true yet continues to define the identity of a people.

In his influential book *Casa Grande e Senzala* (1933), Freyre proposed an image of Brazil as a country unique amongst Western societies due to an intense miscegenation

that blended people and cultures<sup>22</sup>. Freyre argued that the sexual and racial promiscuity in the large rural plantations of the slave economy led to an unprecedented mixing of populations. His analysis underscored a harmonious mixing of populations from Europe, Africa, and Native Americans as the foundation of a unique Brazilian national identity. Unlike the previous eugenics model where the objective was to ‘whiten’ the population and eliminate undesirable [African] elements, *miscegenação* as described by Freyre created a new and unique Brazilian people. Moreover, this vision of Brazil affirmed that because *miscegenação* made the Brazilian people into the most racially mixed of all populations, racism or segregation based on race had been avoided. This differentiated Brazil from other countries with a history of slavery – like the United States – where strict racial segregation was implemented as a structuring social system. In this vision, the Brazilian population drew its strength and uniqueness from this original crucible. Freyre managed to purge the process of racial mixing from its pejorative connotations in Brazilian society and transform it into a positive and distinctive national feature – indeed, the most powerful symbol of the Brazilian nation. As Telles summarizes: “While whitening was a development strategy of the Brazilian state in the context of scientific racism, racial democracy would become a centerpiece of a consolidating national identity” (Telles 2004, 45).

The “racial democracy” thesis had a tremendous impact on the national narrative that sustained Vargas’ politics. In fact, anthropologist Peter Fry (2000, 89) argues that Freyre himself saw his book as an exercise in nation-building as much as a sociological

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<sup>22</sup> The following paragraph is drawn from secondary sources, mainly Telles (2004, 33–35) and Guimarães (2002).

study. In a way, the process of *miscigenação* at the heart of the Brazilian national discourse enabled the promotion of an “ethnic nationalism” as described by Calhoun (2007, 41). Only through the valorization of the process of miscegenation could the diverse population groups living on Brazilian soil develop a feeling of uniformity and belonging to a national community. Through this image of sexual crossbreeding, the Brazilian population became united in blood, able to see itself as a single “ethnic” group. Miscegenation ‘naturalized’ nationhood and ‘biologically’ united the Brazilian population. But here, it might be useful to remember that there are two dimensions to nationalism according to Calhoun (2007): nationalism is both a “discursive formation” (27) as well as a “structure of integration” (152–157). If the deployment of the ideology of “racial democracy” assisted the “discursive formation” of Brazilian nationalism, other mechanisms were required to actually integrate the marginalized populations, namely those of African descent, into an all-encompassing community structure. In this respect, Brazilian nationalism under Vargas was more cultural in character, insofar as this integration was carried out through the incorporation of African-derived cultural forms into a widely promoted national culture.

Benedict Anderson’s ([1983] 2006) seminal definition of the nation as an “imagined community” helps us to understand how the discourse of racial democracy may have been successfully potentialized and materialized into an integrated community. For Anderson, a nation is an “imagined community”, sovereign and limited, that takes shape and exists because its members share a common imaginary (6–7). Imagination is central to this definition; it points, on the one hand, to the virtuality of the links between

members who will never all meet each other, while on the other hand, it reveals their shared engagement in the construction of the ensemble of values, symbols and images that consolidates their national communion – although the government also contributes greatly to the construction of said national imaginary. In fact, the value of Anderson's theory is precisely to highlight how this commonality is produced, and to point out the processes that unite the population and downplay their differences. For example, he demonstrates that the rise of print-capitalism was crucial to disseminate ideas that people across vast territories could simultaneously embrace and share. Other technologies like maps were used to bind territory and give a spatial representation to the imagined community, museums could display shared cultural history, and the census could offer a portrait, if abstracted, of the national population. According to Anderson's theory ([1983] 2006), those technologies construct the national imaginary via cultural mediations that potentialize a “deep, horizontal comradeship” (7) uniting all national members. The *horizontality* puts all citizens on an equal footing while the *depth* essentializes and naturalizes the feeling of belonging.

Anderson's work has been subjected to great scrutiny and criticized for universalizing processes that applied too specifically to the formation of European nation-states (Balakrishnan 1996; Chasteen, and Castro-Klarén 2003; Chatterjee 1996; Cheah and Culler 2003; Lomnitz 2000; Segal 1992). Indeed, cultural nationalism is accomplished in Brazil through processes that are different than those outlined by Anderson: it is more appropriate, for example, to look at popular cultural expressions – *futebol*, samba, carnival and as I will soon show, capoeira – in order understand how

commonality is created in favor of cultural nationalism. Despite the differences in media involved, Anderson's theory nevertheless remains an important conceptual pillar to highlight the importance of ritualized expressions in strengthening nations. In order to successfully exist in community members' shared imagination, a national imaginary needs symbols, images and cultural forms that give support and communicate the otherwise intangible bond of social belonging. However, through the circulation of these national cultural symbols, members' shared experience is necessarily mediated by technologies of communication and national policies that regulate the circulation and content of the national culture. In Latin America, a Gramscian notion of hegemony is crucial to understand the importance of popular culture in the formation of national communities. Only after this last intervention will we be able to see, in light of the theoretical framework thus built, how capoeira is inserted in the construction of the Brazilian nation, a process that greatly conditioned the development of the practice that now circulates transnationally.

### **1.2.2. National-popular, culture and hegemony**

Many authors have noted the similarity of the Latin American context and the Italian context that spurred Antonio Gramsci to develop his theory on ideology, hegemony and the relation between the popular and the national (Larsen 1990; Rowe and Schelling 1991, 152–153; Ortiz 1985, 127–131; Yúdice 2003, 69). In particular, Gramsci's definition of the "national popular" is useful to describe the construction of Brazilian nationalism within the encompassing frame of the state. Indeed, the 'national

popular' requires an "intelligentsia which 'maintains its sentimental and historical links with its own people', rather than merely importing foreign ideas" (Rowe and Schelling 1991, 155; quoting Gramsci 1971, 19–20). In this process, hegemony is a key concept, because "it includes culture as a main strategic factor in the gaining and maintenance of state power, in the sense that cultural allegiances are an essential factor of social power" (Rowe and Schelling 1991, 152).

Cultural Studies' elaborations and applications of Gramsci's concept of hegemony have demonstrated that although it ultimately contributes to subaltern classes' subordination, it is not synonymous with domination (Bennett 1986a, 1986b; Hall 1980, 1988; Williams 1958, 1977b). On the contrary, hegemony is a dialogic process which allows subcultures and cultures of resistance to emerge (Hebdige 1979). Communications scholar Jesús Martín-Barbero (1987) explores this tradition as it applies specifically to the Latin American context. His interpretation is worth quoting at length:

Perhaps the single most important contribution of Gramsci is his conception of *hegemony*, which made it possible to move beyond the conception of social domination as simply an *outside* imposition without *subjects* of cultural action. In Gramsci's view, one class exercises hegemony to the extent that the dominating class has interests which the subaltern classes recognize as being in some degree their interests too. And the term 'in some degree' means, in this context, that hegemony is not a stable state but that it is being continually disestablished in a 'lived process'. This process is not based only on force but on shared meaning

and the appropriation of the meaning of life through power, seduction and complicity. (1987, 84–85)<sup>23</sup>

The idea of a dialogic balance emphasizes the equal importance of both parties at play in the hegemonic relation: for the national power structure to remain stable, “the people” – or what Martín-Barbero refers to as the subaltern classes – need to recognize themselves in the community proposed by the elite classes in power. This leads, according to Gramsci’s theory, to the struggle between dominant and subaltern groups in order to establish the hegemonic balance, eventually leading to a “reevaluation of [...] the cultural field” insofar as culture is a “strategic field in the struggle for it is a space of articulation of conflicts” (1987, 85). Cultural forms are means to both highlight and control social points of tension. Hegemony thus plays out in culture: the elites embrace popular, vernacular and folkloric cultures seen as natural emanations from ‘the people’ who are thus able to recognize themselves in the hegemonic project. Yet these forms are adapted and reinterpreted just enough so that, without losing popular appeal, they correspond to the guiding nationalist ideology.

These theories apply not only to the Brazilian cultural field under Vargas, but also to a larger context of Latin American history where, in the course of the twentieth century, populist governments all over the region drew on, incorporated, adapted, and arguably co-opted popular representations (in the immediate sense of the term; that is, “of the people”: *el pueblo/o povo*) in order to consolidate ideological national identities.

Typically, Cuban son, Argentinean tango, or Brazilian samba became emblematic, almost

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<sup>23</sup> Translation from page 74 of Elizabeth Fox and Robert A. White’s edition: Martín Barbero, Jesús. *Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From the Media to Mediations*. London: Sage Publications, 1993.

stereotypical symbols of these countries' identities in and around the middle of the twentieth century (Rowe and Schilling 1991; Yúdice 2003, 69–72). Popular culture in Latin America therefore retains its close connection to the people and is associated with a grassroots, bottom-up formation, which contrasts with the understanding of popular culture in the United States, for instance, where the term has drifted from its etymological roots and come to be a synonym for mass culture, produced top-down by the so-called culture industries (Yúdice 2003, 69). Locating the cement and essence of the nation in those popular, vernacular cultures served to mark a difference between the new, modern nation-states and the old tendency of the elites to draw their cultural inspiration from the foreign lands that once colonized them. The cultural field in post-independence Latin America was characterized by a strong feeling of inferiority in relation to the former colonial power, a regional complex that has been described as a “constant experience [of] the artificial, inauthentic, and imitative nature of [...] cultural life” (Schwarz 1992, 1). In literary language, this is epitomized in Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's *Facundo: Civilización y Barbarie* (1845), a cornerstone of Latin American literature and social thought, wherein the author locates the hopes for Argentina's modernization in its cities' civilization while he positions the countryside as the source of the worst barbarisms to be avoided. Though written in 1845 and expressing the predicaments of Argentinean national formation, it also expressed the entire geopolitical region's anxieties about development, modernization, and national culture.

In Brazil specifically, the uneasy feeling about the imitative character of the 'national' culture was analysed by Roberto Schwarz (1992) as a consequence of a class-

based power structure wherein the elite and those they ruled did not share the same cultural referents. The ‘people’ did not recognize themselves in the elite culture that circulated as the ‘proper’ Brazilian culture, resulting in a perception of that culture’s inauthenticity. Moreover, the ideas and values put forward by this elite to sustain the creation of the nation (the Enlightenment and positivist ideas of *ordem e progresso*) were not reflected in the day-to-day life of the larger population whose social reality still reflected the old structures of hierarchy and the inherent predicaments inherited from the colonial period.<sup>24</sup> Seeking to escape the stigma of imitation, Vargas and other Latin American populist nationalists turned to folklore, a notion that in and of itself evoked notions of authenticity and popular rooted-ness. At the outset of their book on popular cultures and modernity in Latin America, William Rowe and Vivian Schelling (1991) explain that the notion of folklore arises in a particular European context of accelerated disappearance of pre-industrial cultures. It is linked semantically to the German notion of *Volksgeist* – the collective spirit of a ‘people’ – therefore pointing to the organic inception of a national cultural identity. In Latin America, Rowe and Schelling explain, the notion was reshaped and adapted to serve national unity: rural populations, which a weak

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24 According to Schwartz, it is this disconnect between the two classes inside the country that creates the cultural dichotomy (rather than a dichotomy per se between Brazil as the imitator and Europe as the holder of culture). Just before Vargas, the modernist movement can be considered the first – though failed – attempt to tackle this imitative problem and to find a properly national culture. To the problem of imitation of European forms, Oswald de Andrade, the great thinker of Brazilian modernism, suggests his two famous manifestos: *Pau Brasil* and *Manifesto Antropófago*, in which he precisely argues that the national specificity is that Brazilians, though they may be inspired by outside cultural movements, “eat” them and transform them such as to make them really Brazilian. This image that has been powerfully evoked, especially when it was retaken in the 60s under the Tropicalista movement, is nevertheless flawed. But antropofagia fails to be a true evocation of a national culture insofar as the *Manifesto Antropófago* does indeed prescribe to cannibalise the foreign influences and make them Brazilian, is itself proposed in a vanguards, elite vocabulary that prevents it from being accessible to the people and it fails to articulate its own national space of appreciation (Larsen 1990).

capitalist economy could not yet fully integrate, were included in the nation via their organic contribution to folklore – as ‘the spirit of the people’ (Rowe and Schelling 1991, 2–5). Mobilizing popular forms of culture to evoke a national identity seeks to create the latter from the bottom up, performatively enacting a crucial balance between the popular classes and those in power which can be understood as hegemonic.

If Brazilian nationalism was rooted in the ‘people’s folklore, this did not mean, however, that it was not subsequently implemented through official channels and across mass media such as education, anthropological museums, as well as in radio and film<sup>25</sup>. On the contrary, the incipient culture industries had an important role in consolidating and circulating the national imaginary, just as the printed book did for European nations and the newspaper did for incipient American nationalisms, as Anderson’s theory illustrates ( [1983] 2006, 32–36). Historian Robert Levine (1998, 59) reminds us that the formation of a national culture was above all else a political project whereby Vargas sought to disseminate “a common and affirmative sense of national identity” through institutions that would spread “a patriotic culture”. For example, the radio and record industries assisted greatly the nation-wide diffusion of samba, a popular musical form thus included in the national imaginary. Radio stations, subsidized by the state, were legally required to allocate higher salaries for composers of those sambas they would air,

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<sup>25</sup> Mexican anthropologist Néstor García Canclini ([1990] 2001) offers an insightful reading of the Museo Nacional de Antropología de México under this light (165–182). He emphasizes the processes of “ritualization” and “theatricalization” of the past that serves the modern nation-state. Exposed in such a monumental and ritual way, the cultural heritage of the country acquires such a symbolic prestige that is thus made unquestionable. The social, racial, or ethnic contradictions that uncover this cultural baggage are erased in favor of the symbolic unification of the nation. The past’s grandeur explains, or supports, the current modernity of the national Project. This is why García Canclini suggests that the “theatricalization of the past” is also a “theatricalization of power”.

yet those same pieces were expected to support the national program and be “patriotic and educative” in their lyrics and message, otherwise they would be censored (Rowe and Schelling 1991, 135). This is a clear case of hegemonic dialogic process: the choice of samba, a form born amongst subaltern populations in the *favelas*, appeals to “the people”, particularly Afro-Brazilians whose integration in the nation required extra symbolic attention given their past marginalization and exclusion; yet the technology of communication that allows the diffusion of samba and carries its symbolism amongst the imagined community mediates its content to make it fit the national project. We will see a similar process at stake with respect to capoeira, whose evolution and so-called modern form cannot be understood outside of these hegemonic dynamics even though the process of its integration was not as seamless as samba’s.

### **1.2.3. Capoeira Regional – or how capoeira becomes national popular culture**

The evolution of capoeira from the 1930s on offers a fertile ground to observe hegemonic processes and the negotiations they presuppose between government and subaltern groups. Capoeira contains many elements that make it suitable for the national imaginary: its close association with the Afro-Brazilian population makes it, like samba, an ideal candidate to symbolize an ideology of racial democracy that sustained the national project at the same time as representing popular roots. However, its past history of illegality and conflict with the authorities suggests that important transformations needed to be effected so as to make it fit with the universal values that the nation sought to evoke for all citizens. For this reason it is said that “modern capoeira” is born during

this period: it springs from heavy shifts in valuation and profound transformations of practice that resulted from its involvement with the dynamics of national hegemony.

The specific form of capoeira that is included in the national imaginary was resignified through a number of initiatives and via many channels, but the work of one man in particular epitomizes the changes that underlie the social acceptance of capoeira. Manuel dos Reis Machado, best known as Mestre Bimba, took advantage of the opportunities brought forward by the new social context in order to seek recognition for the practice of which he was a master. From within the subaltern class, he saw possibilities to revamp a practice that had been discredited by its most recent history. He is held amongst most practitioners to be the founder of “modern” capoeira and was an essential broker in the process of capoeira’s legalization, its increasing social acceptance, and its consequent diffusion as national symbol.

Mestre Bimba was born in 1900 in Salvador. According to historian Antonio Liberac Cardoso Simões Pires (2002), he started practicing capoeira around 1911. At that time, the police still persecuted capoeiristas “like they persecuted damn dogs” (Mestre Bimba’s words, quoted in Pires 2002, 37). He decided to revitalize the practice, probably after experiencing many scenes of police repression and noticing that the bad reputation that capoeira had built up mostly in Rio de Janeiro had spread geographically and had closed any possibilities for it to grow. His work contributed greatly to the resignification

of capoeira, which he achieved through a series of specific adaptations in the environment of the practice and the very form of the game<sup>26</sup>.

To begin with, Mestre Bimba institutionalized the practice. If the evasive, underground, and difficult-to-control social character of capoeira was partly what made authorities so anxious to persecute it, Mestre Bimba gave it a clear structure and explicit norms that made it externally legible and cognizable. He called the renewed practice “luta regional baiana” (literally ‘regional fight of Bahia’; now remembered simply as Capoeira Regional), dropping the word ‘capoeira’ to semantically distance it from the negative connotation then affixed to the term. He created the first capoeira academy<sup>27</sup> – a fixed space for capoeira – and prohibited his students from playing in the streets such as Rio de Janeiro’s so-called “vagrants” used to do. Significantly, there is no official date of inauguration for this first academy because capoeira was still illegal at the time. However, an official certificate was issued to Mestre Bimba in 1937, recognizing him as teacher of physical education and marking the beginning of the process of decriminalization. (Although Mestre Bimba’s academy was recognized, playing capoeira in the streets remained illegal).

Significantly, Mestre Bimba’s academy was located next to the Faculty of Medicine of the Universidade Federal da Bahia, in Salvador, a location that changed capoeira in crucial ways. With the help of new students from the medical school, all well-

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<sup>26</sup> The following demonstration is mostly a compilation of Assunção’s study (2005) based on historical material and archives, and of Pires’s study (2002) which draws on Bimba’s main biographers, who were also his students (see Decanio Filho 1996; Itapoan 1982; Moura 1993) in order to reconstruct Mestre Bimba’s life on the basis of his own words and accounts.

<sup>27</sup> I use the literal translation of the word ‘academia’ used in Portuguese because the particular choice of the word ‘academia’ subtly reveals a desire for the officialization of the space that is not as present in other terms that would sound more appropriate in English – ‘school’, for example.

versed in the field of modern medical science, Mestre Bimba embedded capoeira in an elite health-discourse that gave respectability to the practice. The presence of these students, generally from ‘higher’ social classes and of ‘whiter’ complexion, gradually changed the demographics and social base of capoeira to diversify, pluralize and make the image of the practice more complex.<sup>28</sup> Given the racial connotations still embedded in the social imaginary, this ‘whiter’ group of practitioners automatically gave respectability to capoeira, while distancing it from its previous, more negative ‘black’ connotations. Capoeira became a symbolic microcosm of what Brazilian society was striving to be: an inclusive space where white and blacks alike mixed. The new training environment, field of connotations, and social base all contributed to make capoeira more acceptable in a shared national identity. It sustained the nationalist project because it represented the prospects for racial democracy, downplaying Afro-Brazilian difference to favor an emergent all-encompassing Brazilian identity.

This adaptation of capoeira also corresponded to a larger reworking of the form itself. Mestre Bimba integrated new movements drawn from other martial arts (mostly Asian) in order to buttress the health discourse and associate capoeira with sportive practices<sup>29</sup>. He also developed a systematic and regularized teaching method, creating sequences of movements that each new student had to learn. These sequences were the

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<sup>28</sup> It is important to note that despite this change of clientele, Mestre Bimba never abandoned the lower classes, as Assunção notes (2005, 140–142). He had systems of ‘scholarships’ whereby students with no economic means could still train if they gave back to the group otherwise. His work did nevertheless contribute greatly to capoeira’s diversification.

<sup>29</sup> Although less pertinent to the present discussion, it is interesting to note that this formal reworking of capoeira is not foreign to a broader phenomenon of modernization of sports – mainly combat sports – happening across the world at that time. Indeed, many Asian martial arts were re-structured in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and historian Matthias Röhrig Assunção inscribes capoeira’s reforms in this broader phenomenon (2005, 128–132).

pillars of an integrated pedagogical system which also included codified steps marking the disciplined progression of students and a code of conduct clearly meant to dissociate capoeira from the disorderly life of the *malandros*<sup>30</sup> (prohibitions on smoking, drinking, etc.). These reformations were not limited to Mestre Bimba's academy, but arguably crystallized in it.

Mestre Bimba's actions slowly gained recognition. In 1937, he officially registered his academy with the Department of Education, Health, and Social Security, a benchmark that indicates the decriminalization of the practice.<sup>31</sup> In 1953, the integration of capoeira in the national imaginary culminates when he is invited along with his students to officially present capoeira in front of President Vargas. It is at this moment that the latter allegedly asserted: "capoeira is the only truly national sport" (quoted in Assunção 2005, 141). Capoeira had been sufficiently adapted to align with Vargas' national project both in terms of racial democracy and in terms of national sport (straying away from previous connotations of African ritual or marginalized populations' fighting technique).

The work of Mestre Bimba should be analyzed not only in the strict historical trajectory of capoeira itself, but should also be contextualized in the broader history of sports and physical education in Brazil. Indeed, part of Getúlio Vargas' project to

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<sup>30</sup> The *malandro* – an expert in the previously described art of *malandragem* – is an emblematic figure of Brazilian popular culture. The typical *malandro* can be described as a street-smart rogue who developed morally ambivalent, alternative ways to survive in the streets given the absence of formal working opportunities. The figure of the *malandro* is historically associated to capoeira: although not all *malandros* were capoeiristas, many regularly used capoeira techniques to get by.

<sup>31</sup> This important date is not to be mistaken with 1932, the year when he opened his academy, which he did when capoeira was still illegal. That is why he had to use the name 'luta regional baiana', in an attempt to dis-associate this new modality from the negative connotations that the term 'capoeira' entailed.

modernize the nation was to support projects of physical education that could both ‘discipline’ (in Foucault’s sense) the population and arouse its nationalist sentiments. While many authors have described the general transformations of capoeira from a ‘social nuisance’ to a ‘national sport’ that we are outlining here (Lima and Lima 1991; Reis 2000, 11–60), Greg Downey (2002) describes this as the transformation of capoeira into a “Brazilian Callisthenic”, showing how Brazil, following the examples of other European countries, developed a nationalist regime of physical education, guided by the idea that to discipline the body physically leads to a disciplined, patriotic mind. In this callisthenic logic, capoeira is hailed as *the* national gymnastic par excellence for it stemmed from the specificities of Brazilian history and represents the Brazilian character and ‘national soul’ (Downey 2002, 8–12).

The new definition that circulates in this period reveals the intentions, valuations, and connotations of capoeira under its newly legalized and nationally adapted form. The authorship of the quote below is uncertain: Anthropologists Roberto K. de Lima y Magali A. Lima (1991) attribute it to a physical education researcher in Brazil, Izenil Penna Marinho, while sports scholar Helio Campos (2001) (also known as Mestre Xaréu), rather attributes it to Mestre Carlos Senna, a passionate advocate of capoeira under its sportive, almost military version. The confusion notwithstanding, they all point to the same period, and are representative of capoeira’s surprising valuations in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, under its new guise as an “eminently Brazilian sport”.

Capoeira, in addition to its countless advantages, like *pleasing the eyes* of those who watch it, and being entertaining, ‘relax’ for those who practice it, helps develop the will power, *cultivates courtesy* and promotes

moderation in language, it cooperates with the formation of one's character, providing he who practices it with a *remarkable sincerity*, inducing a *morality* whereby he always seeks not to hurt the other's dignity. In intimacy, those who practice it cultivate a reciprocal respect [...]. In general, capoeiristas demonstrate, in their gaze, *the beauty they carry in their heart* and the trust they have in themselves. (Lima and Lima 1991, 164; emphasis added)

This definition clearly diverges, not only from the one that was included in the Criminal Code, but also from the description capoeira practitioners would likely have given of their practice and the 'embodied definition', as described in the introduction, with its ethos of *malandragem* and moral ambiguity (opposed to the "*morality* whereby [he who practices] always seeks not to hurt the other's dignity") and the accompanying significance of trickery and deception (as opposed to its "remarkable sincerity"). For these very reasons, this adaptation of capoeira was not uncontentious.

The recuperation and insertion of capoeira in the national imaginary was not seamless; it generated a wave of reactions and prompted yet more alternative valuations that contested the allegedly unifying national narrative and protested the cooperation of practitioners with the policy process. Many practitioners criticized Mestre Bimba for 'selling out' to the dominant system, for abandoning the resistant potential of capoeira, resulting in a loss of authenticity for the nationally sanitized practice. Indirectly commenting upon the tendencies of cultural nationalism to assimilate differences, they criticized Mestre Bimba for 'whitening' capoeira so that it could be appropriated by the national popular narrative (Browning 1995, 99–103; Reis 2004). Some wondered if the symbolic integration of capoeira to the imagined community under "cultural nationalism"

really meant that Afro-Brazilians had been successfully integrated in Brazilian society at large, or rather in an institution more akin to a “civic nationalism”, to come back to Calhoun’s categories.

The re-signification of capoeira was never completely and unquestionably achieved, pointing to the unstable nature of hegemonic processes, to the discursive and constructed nature of nationalist discourses, as well as to the shifting role of cultural forms. Amongst the broader population, it took time for its negative connotations to completely vanish – something that is arguably still in process<sup>32</sup>. How could a practice that only half a century earlier was engaged in struggles against the repressive control of authorities now be the symbol of a “deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson [1983] 2006) underlying an inclusive national identity? It is not only capoeira’s integration in national culture that was contested, but the very idea of racial democracy that inspired the imagined community it represented.

#### **1.2.4. Capoeira Angola – counterpoint to racial democracy**

By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, actions to promote the idea of racial democracy had been so proactively implemented that Brazil had gained an international reputation as a country that had found a way to circumvent racism, in striking contrast to the horrors of ethnic segregation highlighted by the genocide of Jews during WWII and the ongoing struggles against apartheid in South Africa. As a result, UNESCO commissioned a series

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<sup>32</sup> For example, when I first travelled to Brazil in 2005, I got a fair warning by my upper-middle class friend’s grand-mother, a woman from São Paulo of Italian background, when I told her I was going to Salvador to practice and learn about capoeira. She told me to be careful, not to mix too much with ‘those people’ – “vagrants”, she could have said (I don’t remember her exact words).

of investigations that sought to ‘unveil the secret’ of racial democracy. Far from finding any miraculous solutions, however, these studies headed by Brazilian sociologist Florestan Fernandes debunked the belief that “racial democracy” had actually been realized in Brazilian society. Instead, they revealed that racism and racial inequality were deeply inscribed in Brazilian consciousness and social practices. What Fernandes now called the ‘myth’ of racial democracy in reality *dissimulated* this racism and made it particularly insidious. Fernandes showed that white people in Brazil still benefitted from better socio-economic conditions than ‘colored’ people, and that they were still favored by the labor market decades after slavery’s end. Racial democracy was deconstructed as a utopian image which concealed different social and power statuses driven by race, which were subsequently confirmed by statistical analyses drawn from the 1980 and 1991 census that clearly established a correlation between race and income levels, illiteracy rates, as well as child and infant mortality rates (Andrews 1992; Fontaine 1985; Lovel and Wood 1998; Skidmore 1993; Wood and Carvalho 1988).

Specific incidents also contributed to raise global awareness of Brazilian racism. For example, in 1951, Katherine Dunham, an African-American dancer, was denied access to a prestigious hotel in São Paulo. As an outcome of this, a law was passed, the Afonso Arinos law, which prohibited racial discrimination in hotels, restaurants, and schools. In reaction to this incident that visibly contradicted his social theory, Gilberto Freyre, who was then a senator, explained the discrimination in Dunham’s case by the specific setting of São Paulo and the regional differences in demographics and racial dynamics of this particular city compared to the rest of the country (Telles 2004, 37–38).

The episode reveals the highly contested nature of racial realities in Brazil. Racism undeniably exists, yet the ideal of “racial democracy” was so powerfully embedded in the national imaginary that it hid the profoundly racialized power relations, which continue to be denied.

While it did not find a miraculous solution to racism, the UNESCO report did contribute to a better understanding of the particular form of racism that existed in Brazilian society. Fernandes’ conclusions revealed that precisely because the belief in “racial democracy” was so widespread across the population, racism in Brazilian society was particularly pervasive by virtue of being concealed: in a famous formulation, he asserted that Brazilians have “the prejudice of having no prejudice” (quoted in Skidmore 1993, 217). Given the widespread belief that there was no racism, acts of racial discrimination were explained by other means. Class was the main category used to explain social differences between whites and non-whites (Telles 2004, 35; Teles dos Santos 1998, 120). Furthermore, the conclusions anthropologist Lívio Sansone (1994) drew from extensive interviews conducted in Salvador and Camaçari, a town of 12 000 inhabitants 50 km away from Salvador, were illuminating. Sansone’s interviews illustrated that although Brazilians recognized that a black person has less chance of finding a job than a white person, they explained this not by skin color, but rather by factors such as appearance (the black person was less well-dressed, or had poor hygiene, negatively affecting the impression he made in the job interview) or lack of education. These answers themselves reveal that racist assumptions were concealed by the “prejudice of having no prejudice” (Sansone 1994, 94). And yet the idea of “racial democracy”, despite

having few concrete manifestations in socio-economic indicators and despite being debunked by international authorities, still has a profound impact on Brazilian society. The “prejudice of having no prejudice” conceals a social system that contributes to the oppression of the Afro-Brazilians, their social subordination, and their relative poverty.

Concrete repercussions from the critique of racial democracy only came later in the century when ‘black’ militant movements would reappear. Vargas had shut down all political parties other than his own, which included the Frente Negra Brasileira, closed in 1937 (Telles 2004, 37). In the late 1970s, as the military dictatorship of 1964-1985 was on the wane, the social context became newly conducive to public manifestations of Afro-Brazilian-ness in a process that the mass media labeled “re-Africanization” (Sansone 2003, 25). In the political field, the formation of the Movimento Negro Unificado (MNU) in 1978 was instrumental in the development of a black activism denouncing racism, struggling against racial discrimination, and fighting for Afro-Brazilians’ rights (Nascimento 1978; Telles 2004, 48; Sansone 2003, 27). Even though it has been underscored that, given the enduring power of racial democracy, the black movement had a limited success in generating widespread social changes (Hanchard 1994; Twine 1998), it was nonetheless critical in its influence on the field of cultural politics.

‘Black’ politics were paralleled by a cultural movement to salvage distinctive African-derived traditions, especially in Salvador, capital city of the state of Bahia where the percentage of whites has consistently been much lower than in the country as a whole (see detailed statistics and discussion thereof in Sansone 2003, 22–24). For example,

Afro-centric carnival groups such as Ilê Aiyê, Olodum, and Filhos de Gandhy were created, and Afro-Brazilian religious manifestations became strong emblems of a specifically Bahian blackness (Sansi 2007; Selka 2008; Williamson 2012). This cultural salvage movement was encouraged by many foreign/Western intellectuals (amongst them Pierre Verger, Roger Bastide, Ruth Landes) who travelled to Bahia to study the African roots of Brazilian culture. Arguably driven by a desire for a certain neo-colonial exoticism, the presence and scientific interest of these outside experts gave value to – and arguably constructed – the African-ness of Brazilian popular culture (Vassallo 2002, 2003). The alliance of these intellectuals with leaders of popular cultural milieus (*babalawos*<sup>33</sup>, *mães de santo*<sup>34</sup>, and even capoeira mestres) contributed to the over-representation of certain cultural forms (namely the construction of the Yoruba heritage as more authentic than others (Matory 1999; Parés 2005)), yet these traditions undoubtedly gained value and renown in this process. In turn, the valorization of the African presence on a cultural level served to denounce the political erasure of the population groups involved. As historian Kenneth Williamson (2012) brilliantly discusses in his article on carnival groups, cultural and organizations and political activism in Bahia are always closely related.

In principle, the desire to valorize and underscore African contributions to Brazilian popular culture that is underlined here could appear to be similar to the desire that animated Vargas' nationalist project. In its implementation, however, it is completely

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<sup>33</sup> *Babalawo* designates a priest in the Angolan divination system of Ifá, a spiritual practice transferred to Brazil and practiced amongst Afro-Brazilians.

<sup>34</sup> *Mãe de santo* designates a priestess in the Afro-Brazilian *candomblé* religion.

different in that it precisely strives to avoid the seamless assimilation of the African difference and instead, to insist upon the maintenance, valuation, and revitalization of African cultural distinctions. A new stylistic tendency developed within capoeira illustrates clearly this tendency. This new development was spearheaded by Vicente Joaquim Ferreira, another seminal individual for the history of capoeira, who simultaneously led a process of revaluation of the practice that was both a reaction to the previous transformations made by Mestre Bimba and an endeavor inspired by the greater cultural movements of re-Africanization. Best known as Mestre Pastinha, Ferreira developed the modality now known as Capoeira Angola. As this name indicates, the will to reaffirm the origins of the practice that Mestre Pastinha thought had been lost with Mestre Bimba's adaptations was an important force driving this new transformation. The qualifier 'Angola' evokes the direct links of capoeira to Africa and contests an ideal of racial democracy in which African-ness is buried under Brazilian-ness. Despite this different take on the place of the African legacy within capoeira, it is important to recognize that both Mestre Pastinha's and Mestre Bimba's endeavours were similar in their desire to move capoeira away from its immediate past of violence and brutality and to revalue it as a cultural manifestation of importance to Brazilian society. While these two important mestres had similar intentions, they have been cast as opposite symbols given their use of quite different strategies.

Mestre Pastinha, who was a philosopher and a more intellectually inclined person, highlighted the internal cosmogony that capoeira evoked by insisting on playful and ritual aspects of the practice rather than being concerned, as Mestre Bimba was, with its

efficiency as a martial arts technique. He codified the music and the songs, reinforcing their function in invoking protection from the *orixás*, and he underlined the importance of the *ladainha*, the ritual opening lament that traditionally tells the story of slaves and ends with an invocation to *Deus* (God) and one's mestre. In response to the techniques that Bimba had introduced from Asian martial arts, Pastinha focused on the playful aspect of what in this context can safely be called the *game*: the dialogue, the theatricality, the internal rituals such as the *chamada* are all underscored to enhance capoeira's playful character.

Mestre Pastinha insisted, moreover, on the African origins of capoeira through the oral history he transmitted. According to his teachings, capoeira was not developed in Brazil but in Angola –a dictate so strong that it was loyally repeated to me by one of his most famous students, 81 year old Mestre João Grande<sup>35</sup>. According to this tradition, capoeira was a direct evolution of the N'golo, also called dance of the zebra, a ritual in Angola where two males imitate the mating ritual of zebras and fight to obtain the first choice of bride amongst the recently pubescent women (Pires 2002, 74). Pastinha used the image of the zebras as well as other visual symbols of Africa in his academy. He even travelled to the continent with some students to represent Brazil at the First World Festival of Black Arts in Dakar, Senegal in 1966 (Assunção 2005, 166).

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<sup>35</sup> Mestre Pastinha's stance of the African origins of capoeira seems clearly established in the oral history perpetuated by his disciples, in the songs he wrote, and even in most of his life actions. However, Assunção surprisingly presents a more ambivalent portrait of the mestre than any other written, where he evokes instances when Mestre Pastinha may have admitted to the Brazilian inceptions of the practice. Given the rigor of Assunção's work, it is a detail that is worth mentioning. However, it seems fair to believe that what Mestre Pastinha did to reinforce the idea of the African roots of capoeira is much more important in the practice's evolution than any other occasions where he may have admitted to the contrary.

Within popular cultural folklore, Capoeira Angola is often said to be the most ‘authentic’ capoeira, the modality that has not ‘lost its roots’ and spreads the ‘ancient knowledge’. On the door of his academy, Mestre Pastinha put up the inscription “*Angola, capoeira, mãe*” (Angola, capoeira, mother), three words that evoke particularly clearly the vision of the old mestre (Pires 2007, 63). This belief in the authenticity of Capoeira Angola is widespread, even amongst many contemporary Regionalistas who nevertheless recognize Angola’s value and insist on its importance for the history of capoeira. However, Capoeira Angola is as much of an adaptation as Regional is. It has been positioned as more authentic because it emphasized the practice’s African origins and drew on a more distant past – both geographically and chronologically, yet it is also an “invented tradition” whose authenticity is [partly] constructed. Within the community of capoeiristas, it was a way for Pastinha to distinguish his practice from Mestre Bimba’s Capoeira Regional which was gaining increasing popularity. More interestingly for this chapter’s argument, on a ‘national’ level, the insistence on the African origin of capoeira can be analysed as a political stance that denounces the conceits of racial democracy which conceal a lack of equal citizenship under the veneer of cultural cohesion.

Pastinha’s actions within the capoeira community were indeed in line with the political and cultural black activism of his time. Although there is little documentary evidence of any active political activism from Pastinha, his insistence on capoeira’s African roots echoed the general cultural re-Africanization movement which, as Williamson (2012) has argued, was never really independent from political activist movements. In this sense, capoeira Angola represented a reaffirmation of distinct Afro-

Bahian identity, rather than its assimilation under a representation of a consensual national identity. This is why capoeira Angola has been widely analyzed as an example of a negotiation of an alternative Afro-Brazilian identity that, unlike capoeira Regional, did not fall prey to the utopian nationalist idea of racial democracy and remained a potential site of black resistance movement (Araújo 1997; Browning 1995; Reis 2004; Vassallo 2005).

### **1.2.5. Rise and spread of capoeira Regional**

The scission of capoeira between Regional and Angola over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century epitomizes the debates that animated the country in terms of the social place of the Afro-Brazilian population within the nation. Tellingly, anthropologist Letícia Reis (2004, 218) concludes her comparative chapter on Bimba and Pastinha by insisting that both represent “symbolic strategies of recognition and social acceptance of the ‘black’ individual”. She suggests that capoeira Regional sought to valorize the contribution of the African population by promoting their integration into the nation. As such, it became a symbol of a ‘new’ inclusive Brazilian identity based on racial democracy, a position that nevertheless lost its potential to affirm of distinct a black identity (216). In contrast, for *angoleiros*, the re-Africanization of capoeira was a vehicle to *reject* that same nation which obfuscated their conditions of oppression. From their perspective, capoeira Angola struggled for the recognition of Afro-Brazilian identity by marking its difference from the dominant representations of Brazilian identity. Many practitioners as well as scholars

criticized Mestre Bimba and his capoeira Regional<sup>36</sup>, yet it is nonetheless this modality that opened the way to the diffusion of the practice, first nationally and then globally. This is why it is important to delve a bit further into the details of Mestre Bimba's strategy and understand how capoeira broke free from the Bahian micropolitics of race.

Mestre Bimba is generally taxed with the burden of having “whitened” capoeira: formally, because he added foreign movements that transformed its aesthetic and mode of transmission; socially, because he broadened the range of practitioners and accepted middle-class students; and symbolically, because by embracing the ideal of racial democracy he arguably diluted the ‘African’ elements (Assunção 2005, 168; Browning 1995, 104; Reis 2004, 195). Most of these criticisms are rather ideological, however, especially considering that Mestre Bimba was in fact well immersed in Afro-Brazilian culture, arguably more so than Pastinha, son of Spanish immigrants who ironically had European complexions. In contrast, Mestre Bimba, a very dark-skinned individual, was active in *candomblé terreiros*, he had a profound knowledge of African percussion rhythms that he also incorporated in capoeira music, and his father was an adept of *batuque*, another African-derived combat game which Bimba himself had also already practiced. Consequently, as Assunção (2005, 168) suggests, he may have felt less compelled to actively make a point about the presence of African elements in capoeira, which for him constituted evidence (168). Still, the quasi official recognition of capoeira

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<sup>36</sup> For example, Barbara Browning relates that in a 1975 work on capoeira, Brazilian ethnographer Edson Carneiro “reduces regional to a dismissive paragraph” that she quotes at length: “The capoeirista Bimba, a virtuoso on the *berimbau*, became well-known when, in the 1930s, he created school for the training of athletes in the so-called Bahian regional wrestling, a mixture of capoeira with ju-jitsu, boxing and tag. Popular, folkloric capoeira, the legacy of Angola, has little, almost nothing to do with Bimba’s school.” (quoted in Browning 1995, 100)

by political powers led both practitioners and intellectuals to claim that capoeira Regional had been co-opted and had lost its potential as a tool for black resistance.

Mestre Bimba's actions can also be analysed, as does performance scholar Barbara Browning (1995, 102), as savvy dissimulations seeking to conquer more widespread social acceptance for the practice, which was then necessary to favor the recognition of the Afro-Brazilian populations clearly still involved. For example, Browning argues that the new name – “luta regional da Bahia” – while it may appear to downplay capoeira's African origins, in fact further reaffirms them. Considering that Bahia is the most African of Brazilian states and that its micropolitics in that period were geared towards reaffirming African specificity, then the new nomenclature can be analyzed as a witty dissimulation of black consciousness. She insists that this strategy operates a direct bridge with capoeira's past history, where dissimulation has always been at the core of the practitioners' cultural survival. From this perspective, Mestre Bimba merely maintained strategies that previous practitioners had used in other historical moments to resist a repressive social system. John L. Lewis (1992, 40) writes, in his own ethnography of capoeira, that: “[...] the most general response to slavery was not to rebel directly, but to pretend to cooperate.” He identifies one of the most traditional songs of capoeira where this strategy is metaphorically explained. The lyrics describe: “go tell my master, that the butter spilled, the butter isn't mine, the butter is *iôio*'s [*iôio* refers to the master's son]” (28)<sup>37</sup>. They evoke, as Lewis explains, the uncertainty at the root of these widespread scenarios of slave resistance: because the slave does not own the butter, he

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<sup>37</sup> “*vã dizer ao meu senhó, que a manteiga derramou, a manteiga não é minha, é da filha do iôio*”

may have been negligent and let it spill, or even spilled it on purpose; but since there is no way for the master to know with certainty which one was the slave's intention, it is difficult for him to punish anyone. Slaves used to manipulate the system of production in order to gain some indirect leverage without resorting to outright rebellion – with such tactics as malingering, slowing down, intentional misunderstandings, inefficiency, etc. Lewis draws a parallel between these strategies of indirect resistance and the broader patterns identified by James Scott as the “weapons of the weak”. Theorizing from his ethnographic study of peasants in Malaysia, Scott observed that whenever direct rebellion was too costly for subordinate groups, they would use indirect strategies of dissimulation, trickery, or deception to counter and undermine the dominating structure (discussed in Lewis 1992, 28–29). The same strategy can be identified in the *maltas'* response to police persecution: by collaborating with the authorities, they undermined their repressive apparatus. It is safe to say that the apparent conformity of capoeira Regional may well hide, precisely, its potential for resistance to authorities.

By conforming to the image of racial democracy, by adapting its form to the projects of national gymnastics/sports, and by concealing itself under the name of ‘luta regional baiana’, capoeira was able to survive repression and be decriminalized; it was beginning to dodge the social stigma under which it had long labored. Capoeiristas, and by extension Afro-Brazilians, recuperated a performative space that had been taken away from them by the penal code. The revitalization carried on under the leadership of Mestre Bimba seems to have been instrumental to capoeira's overall survival. To a certain extent, it could be argued that even Capoeira Angola's ethnic revival would have been

impossible without Capoeira Regional's previous work. The practice's strong negative connotations needed to be downplayed through strategies of dissimulation before capoeira could become the tool of a positive affirmation of black identity. In this sense, I concur with Browning that Capoeira Regional and Angola are ultimately in dialogue, using complementary strategies to negotiate the practice's cultural survival at large and its Afro-Brazilian practitioners' socio-political affirmation. In this sense, I also concur with Assunção (2005, 170) who claims that together, Bimba and Pastinha "rehabilitated the art's public image".

In reality, both modalities are constitutive of the practice as a whole: that neither one of them has taken over the other suggests that 'capoeira' encompasses them both. The division Regional/Angola was in fact the community's specific response to the precise social context of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; that is, to the specific kind of integration of Afro-Brazilians in the national project at the time. Significantly, this division is less persistently reaffirmed and stressed now that the social context has changed<sup>38</sup>. On the contrary, capoeiristas tend to unite again, under the vision "*capoeira é uma só*" (there is only one capoeira): a capoeirista should be able to adapt his game to all rhythms, dictated by the *berimbau* (more on this on page 94). The racial heritage only became a defining driving force of capoeira's development around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century *in relation to* the government's own efforts to negotiate Afro-Brazilians' national integration via this cultural practice. In the global context that frames this dissertation, we will identify new

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<sup>38</sup> It remains most vivid in Salvador, the geographical setting of this specific phase of development in capoeira. In the community at large, the distinction between Angola and Regional arguably corresponds more to stylistic differences than to a deep ideological difference.

driving forces, namely the market, transnationalism, cross-cultural systems of representations, and information capitalism, that have displaced (though not wholly replaced) the racial/national question.

Before moving on to the analysis of capoeira's globalization, it is important to note that processes of diversification had already started with the expansion and growth of capoeira within the national territory from the 1950s onwards. The practice spread through many channels and in diverse locations simultaneously, making any straightforward account impossible. I will only briefly outline, mainly relying on Assunção last chapter (2005, 170–189), the main developments that set the ground for capoeira's global expansion which is extensively detailed in the rest of this dissertation (in the context of North America).

The first capoeiristas travelled out of Bahia to the main urban centers (Rio and São Paulo) mostly at the occasion of wrestling matches or folklore exhibitions. These cities' booming economies also attracted a great number of immigrants, amongst them capoeiristas. While capoeiristas met with an existing tradition in Rio de Janeiro, no capoeira seemed to have survived in São Paulo when the first Bahians arrived in 1948 to demonstrate their skills (Assunção 2005, 176). Despite these local differences<sup>39</sup>, some common trends can be acknowledged, all of which prepare the grounds for capoeira's globalization. Notably, the divisions that may have existed in Bahia were more easily disregarded as uprooted practitioners rather sought to stick together, which contributed to

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<sup>39</sup> The very relevance of the local traditions and their impact on the late 20<sup>th</sup> century capoeira is highly debated. Although natives of Rio tend to underline the importance of the local input, even to highlight the precedence of carioca capoeira, it is not clear how the fragmented traditions that survived repression actually merged and impacted the modalities of practice as they came from Bahia (Assunção 2005, 170)

discard the Angola/Regional division and unite varied styles under the broad ‘capoeira’ umbrella<sup>40</sup>. New styles even emerged: Assunção gives the example of groups like *Senzala* in Rio de Janeiro (173–175) or *Cordão de Ouro* in São Paulo (177), which greatly contributed to the development of capoeira ‘*contemporânea*’. These two groups expanded largely in and beyond Brazil, making capoeira *contemporânea* the principal style initially exported. It is also the style embraced by the groups that this dissertation studies, which is why I now make a small parenthesis to define it in more detail.

Sport sociologist Monica Aceti (2010) defines capoeira *contemporânea* as a “style of capoeira in the lineage of capoeira regional yet which adopts diverse directions according to each group. Some ‘mega-groups’ (like Abada, Brazil, Senzala, Cordão de Ouro, Gerais, etc.), are structured as supra-national networks, each characterized by its style and each developing new technical or ritual innovations” (2010, glossary). Capoeira *contemporânea* is also leader of the previously mentioned tendency to unite under the motto “*capoeira é uma só*” (there is only one capoeira). Anthropologist J. Lowell Lewis (1992, 62–67) rather calls this style of capoeira “*atual*” (current) and suggests it is a postmodern capoeira. Assunção (2005, 204–205) simply speaks of “mainstream capoeira” to refer to the style that drives capoeira’s exportation, nonetheless noting that this capoeira “accommodates diversity” and thus appears under multiple forms. No matter what term we use, the main groups that I chose for my fieldwork are all part of this trend that seeks to rally different traditions. Both groups most closely observed for

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<sup>40</sup> It should be noted however that the styles developed were closest to Regional than to Angola, so much so that Assunção (2005, 185–189) speaks of a rebirth of Angola in the 1980s, suggesting that it had not picked up as strongly in the other parts of Brazil as Regional and its derived styles had.

this study stemmed from the ‘mega-groups’ that Aceti mentions, yet they have chosen to diverge from them so as to develop a more original and freer work.

Over the 1950s and 1960s, to go back to the chronology, capoeira ‘*contemporânea*’ made inroads into young, educated middle-class populations through the efforts of the mestres who now had to seek markets for an activity that slowly became their livelihood. They started teaching capoeira in schools and universities while media outlets contributed to spread an increasingly accepted image of capoeira to the wider population. In the 1970s and 1980s, capoeira spread to other regions of Brazil where no local tradition existed. The possibility of performing capoeira publically and teaching it for a living slowly emerged once the initial difficulties related to the mestres’ immigration were surpassed. These particular developments newly transformed capoeira, mainly through its professionalization and commercialization, processes that announce those that will occur with capoeira’s globalization (Assunção 2005, 181).

The incipient professionalization of capoeira inserted the practice in a market economy, which had a profound impact on the relationships of mentorship that traditionally constituted the community. As Assunção (2005, 182–183) explains, capoeiristas arrived in cities where the practice was relatively unknown and they faced the need to earn money as quickly as possible. This led to an increased number of self-proclaimed ‘professionals’ who did not hesitate to break their genealogical affiliation in order to reduce the lengthy apprenticeship and rapidly set out on their own. Attempts at organizing capoeira in nation-wide federations and associations responded to this situation, but no overarching structure was ever able accommodate the practice’s internal

diversity and the historical tendency of its practitioners to resist any encompassing form of systemic authority. None of the multiple types of organizations, whether at the national level (the inclusion of capoeira under the “National Council of Sports”) or at the regional level (for example the foundation of the “São Paulo Federation of Capoeira” in 1974) were totally successful in imposing norms of conduct and strict rules in a community rooted in resistance and liberation.

Overall, the second half of the 20th century saw an incredible expansion and growth of the practice in the country. Capoeira was now sufficiently socially accepted to be taught in certain schools and institutions, relatively opened to practitioners of different race, gender, class, and geographical backgrounds. For this very reason, Assunção (2005, 185) rightfully suggests that “the very meaning of the practice can change according to the audience and the context”, an important consideration that warns against any clear cut analysis of capoeira.

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This historical overview has underlined the importance of the immediate socio-political context on the meanings and valuations of capoeira. Modern capoeira cannot be understood outside Brazilian politics and the ideologies of national formation, or outside the micropolitics of race in Bahia. The changing definitions, manifestations, and uses of capoeira across time leave no doubt that the cultural field is closely informed by social and political ideologies and schools of thought, whether colonialism, positivism, or nationalism. Cultural meanings are almost never only defined from the top down,

however, especially in the case of cultural expressions that stemmed from marginalized populations groups. In particular, the theories developed in Cultural Studies allowed identifying the subjects' agency and the multiple ways in which they may contribute to define and/or contest the cultural meanings associated with the artform they practice. In sum, this detailed review of the dialogic movement between the official treatment of capoeira by socio-political institutions of Brazil and the ensuing action and reactions of its practitioners has shed light on the multiple fields of power that intersect and play out in the definitions and valuations of capoeira in Brazil over the centuries.

In a similar logic, the rest of this dissertation argues that transnational capoeira cannot be understood outside the specific political economy of culture characteristic of the contemporary conditions of neoliberalism and transnationalism. While the legacies of capoeira's redefinition as a symbol of Brazilian national culture under Getúlio Vargas' undeniably still inform the meanings it carries as it circulates outside of Brazil, new force fields and elements influence its development, meanings and valuations. In the next chapter, I describe in detail a new paradigm for understanding transnational capoeira, which posits that culture is now an expedient resource under conditions of neoliberal governmentality. As such, market rationality prevails over ideological political projects, and it is within these parameters that the cultural work realized with and by capoeira will be best understood.

## **CHAPTER TWO: CULTURE AS A RESOURCE UNDER CONDITIONS OF NEOLIBERALISM**

Before continuing onto the study of capoeira's transnational circulation, it is crucial to address some global trends that gave rise to the concept of culture that this dissertation adopts. Just like it is impossible to understand modern capoeira outside of Brazilian racial politics, this chapter establishes the essential context without which it is impossible to understand recent developments of transnational capoeira and the shifts in its valuation. Under conditions of economic globalization, strong state-led economies have given way to neoliberal governmentality. In this context, culture is no longer mainly the field of negotiation of hegemonic relations where national identity is promoted; rather, it is a field of action and investment where value can be created and benefits can incur. If the first capoeiristas have travelled outside of Brazil through the specific support structure of folklore shows, they soon caught up on the potential to use their embodied skills and knowledge as a way to emigrate and improve their socio-economic conditions. In the new political economy of culture that this chapter traces, they were able to use capoeira as a resource to earn money and survive in the market economy, subsequently developing markets where values not restricted to monetary value circulate. This chapter sketches out the political economy that allows capoeira to circulate as a resource that carries the potential to generate profits if managed properly in a transnational market where cultural difference in and of itself can be transformed into monetary value. This general review of the multiple potential uses of culture under transnational neoliberal

conditions will give broader relevance to the particular investigation of capoeira that I develop in later chapters: it frames it as a quintessential example of the new paradigm for culture rather than as an isolated case study of a discrete [sub]cultural movement.

## **2.1. NEOLIBERALISM AND NEOLIBERAL GOVERNMENTALITY**

The global context that informs this study of capoeira is characterized by the rise of the neoliberal doctrine. Initially a political rationality closely linked to a series of economic policies that repudiated welfare state economics, neoliberalism has nevertheless come to exceed this strict political economic frame and to have broadly encompassing socio-cultural impacts. Political theorist Wendy Brown (2011) compellingly describes this propensity of neoliberalism to permeate all spheres of human life. She explains:

neoliberalism is not simply a set of economic policies; it is not only about facilitating free trade, maximizing corporate profits, and challenging welfarism. Rather, neo-liberalism carries a social analysis which, when deployed as a form of governmentality, reaches from the soul of the citizen subject to education policy to practices of empire. Neo-liberal rationality, while foregrounding the market, is not only or even primarily focused on the economy; rather it involves *extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action*, even as the market itself remains a distinctive player. (2011, paragraph 7; emphasis in the original)

While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to thoroughly review the precepts of neoliberalism, some basic elements will be useful to keep in mind as we delve into more

detail of the impact of this doctrine on the cultural field. Amongst them, the role of the state has clearly shifted, it marks a distinction from the period of modern nation-state building discussed in the previous chapter. Neoliberal theory is often simplified as prescribing a withdrawal of the state (as early descriptions of neoliberalism emphasized, Brecher et al. 2000; Hirst and Thompson 1996), while in fact, it has primarily been repurposed. Indeed, the real tendency to privatize and deregulate sectors previously run and regulated by the state should not overshadow the state's crucial role in protecting individual freedoms (which also includes business and corporate freedoms, because these entities are legally defined as individuals). The neoliberal state has to ensure that ideal conditions are in place for free markets and free trade to prosper, in order to provide an adequate environment for private sector activity (Harvey 2005, 64–65). The state therefore acts to facilitate the market, a relation that Brown (2011, paragraphs 11–14) emphasises by making it reciprocal: not only the state assists the market, but the market is itself the organizing principle of the state. This latter responds to the needs of markets, it is managed like a market, and economic growth is the basis of its legitimacy (see also Clarke 2004; Smith 2007).

In sum, the state does not withdraw completely nor does it lose all its influence, yet this latter now needs to be achieved via the market. Neoliberalism marks the pervasiveness of economic rationality with the search for profit as its guiding principle. As Brown (2011, paragraph 9) explains: “While this entails submitting every action and policy to considerations of profitability, equally important is the production of all human and institutional action as rational entrepreneurial action, conducted according to a

calculus of utility, benefit, or satisfaction against a microeconomic grid of scarcity, supply and demand, and moral value-neutrality.” Profit becomes the justification of all actions. With the withdrawal, or more precisely the shifting functions of the state, individuals and local communities are increasingly ‘responsibilized’ as independent actors: because the market prevails and, conversely, because state welfare is almost nonexistent, individuals are positioned as rational actors encouraged to live according to entrepreneurial decisions made in the market rationality, with profit as the ultimate goal.

If the neoliberal state guarantees personal and individual freedoms and ensures that all citizens have equal opportunities in a free market, it lies with each individual to be responsible and accountable for their actions in the market, to manage their opportunities so as to be economically successful. As a result, any failure in entrepreneurial terms is attributed to individual mismanagement rather than any systemic predicament such as class inequalities produced by the capitalist model (Brown 2011, paragraph 15; Harvey 2005, 65–66). To an extent, then, the state retains a certain control over its subjects by moralizing the freedom it grants them. As Brown suggests:

neo-liberalism normatively constructs and interpellates individuals as entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life. It figures individuals as rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for "self-care" – the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions. (2011, paragraph 15).

This is why neoliberalism can be said to emerge as new mode of governance insofar as it hails, shapes, and positions subjects in a very specific manner. The next chapter will develop in greater details the implications of this specific neoliberal subject position, and

its relevance for understanding the mestres' drive to mobilize capoeira as a resource by adopting an entrepreneurial approach to their embodied knowledge and even to their own lives. For now, we may frame in more detail the specificities of the neoliberal governmentality involved.

Governmentality has become a ubiquitous concept in the social sciences in the past decades<sup>41</sup>. This tendency is attributable to the particular ability of this concept to describe the specific forms in which power is exercised under conditions of neoliberalism. Michel Foucault coined the term '*gouvernementalité*' ('governmentality') to draw attention to the various processes by which the general conduct of a population is governed, pointing to mechanisms of governance that are found both within and, perhaps more importantly under neoliberalism, outside the state institutions ([1978] 1991). In Foucault's theory, the conduct of a population is channelled by the specific arrangements that make up society – institutions and agencies of the state, but also normative discourses and identities, as well as processes of self-disciplining and self-regulation (Foucault [1976] 1990, [1977] 1995). All potential actions are realized within the possibilities of these social arrangements, which grant power to those entities that control the structure and organization of such arrangements. In sum, governmentality has been defined as "the conduct of conduct" (Dean 1999, 17, following Foucault), a way to exert power over a population's conduct from a distance and without imposing direct force.

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<sup>41</sup> Rosemary J. Coombe's (2007) clear and concise review of the concept's recent prevalence in social sciences evokes its multiple uses in studies that address "anthropological approaches to the state", "biological and genetic resources and related subjectivities", "citizenship and sovereignty", "colonialism", "land conflicts", "transnational labour migration", and the concept of modernity itself (Coombe 2007, 284).

Specifically, *neoliberal* governmentality “conducts the conduct” by investing subjects with capacities to be responsible for themselves, while their actions remain channelled by the ultimate structure of the market as the dominant order of power. As anthropologists Ferguson and Gupta (2002, 989) analyse, this is a powerful way to both “empower subjects” to discipline themselves so as to be successful in their entrepreneurial endeavours, while simultaneously transferring the risks and factors of precariousness onto the ‘enterprise’ or rather, onto the ‘individual’ who is responsible for their own private enterprise. Art historian Mary K. Coffey (2003) demonstrates this process of responsabilization in her analysis of the transition from nationally-oriented to community-centered museums in Mexico. If the museums under the “national-popular” period had homogenizing effects, ideologically presenting the nation from a centralized standpoint in a process similar to that I reviewed with respect to the history of capoeira, the community museum approach makes subjects responsible by making them part of the very creation of the museum. In this respect, the ‘community’ becomes a ‘historical subject’ with a voice, and the museum is no longer a space of mere representation and arises as a space of participation. The community stops being cast as passively waiting for state government to create public spaces but instead becomes a subject positioned as a partner with state government and responsible for carving up its own space.

Through neoliberal governmentality, the state exercises power via its subjectification of citizens and communities, while disengaging from its modern welfare-state functions. Anthropological approaches to governmentality have precisely pointed out that governmentality as a concept allows us to break from a monolithic image of state

and government power and to reveal the particular assemblages of power articulated from amongst a multiplicity of entities that facilitate regulatory processes (Coombe 2007; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Li 2007). This is all the more true, it seems, in the current regime of governmentality which is not only neoliberal, but also *transnational*, with inter-scalar fields of power and multi-level institutions at play as we will explore next. Current regimes of power are no longer concentrated in the state but rather fragmented amongst many actors who develop strategic alliances spanning multiple scales of action and jurisdiction.

Many authors have demonstrated the intricacy of the multiple scales of jurisdiction and influence involved in processes of governmentality (Coffey 2003; Coombe 2010, 2011; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Hilgers 2013; Yúdice 2003b). Community-based organizations and local institutions are made increasingly responsible for the sustainability and development of their own regions, but they may also find assistance from globally and regionally focused non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that provide access to international help or widespread media exposure that may help grassroots movements find leverage. It is not rare to find sub- or supra-national organizations assume the traditional functions of the state and occupy the spaces left open by its partial withdrawal. A recurrent example in the literature refers to NGOs that, though they operate at the ‘grassroots level’ to help and empower communities *locally* and though they hold *state-like* functions such as providing citizens with basic security, medical or educational assistance, nevertheless have *international* structures of communication, funding, publicity, and accountability. Examples such as Doctors

Without Borders, Oxfam, or CARE come readily to mind. They make it increasingly uncomfortable to continue to even use such categories as ‘local’, ‘national’, and ‘international’ insofar as these overlap and intersect. In their endeavour to sketch out an incipient transnational governmentality, Ferguson and Gupta demonstrated that the state now cohabits with other structures that it neither vertically dominates nor horizontally encompasses completely. Such institutions overlay and coexist with the older nation-state order, making them “horizontal contemporaries of the organ of the state” and “integral parts of a transnational apparatus of governmentality” (2002, 994).

The transnational aspect of governmentality complicates the theory of neoliberalism and confronts it with the reality of its application. If, in theory, the role of the state is reasonably easy to define, the concrete practices of neoliberalization have departed from the template. The state’s function is to ensure the workings of free-market, but this latter is also embedded in transnational assemblages that further channel the entrepreneurial actions of the individual and local actors. Paying attention to the specific ways that neoliberal forms of power are deployed on the ground suggests that subjects and local groups are not merely independent actors in a free market. Rather, they are embedded in fields of force that they strategically navigate. The transnational quality of current regimes of governmentality is important to consider in order to avoid idealistically positioning subjects as free-floating agents in the market as well as to avoid essentializing community and grassroots movements as if they were driven by some sort of romantic ideal of bottom-up action operating outside of neoliberal dynamics. Subjects and local communities are made responsible for their own welfare and forced into certain

types of “conduct” by an overarching market rationality, but their field of action is directly enmeshed with the transnational assemblages that shape contemporary conditions.<sup>42</sup> This multiscalar dimension of social organization under neoliberal conditions will become more apparent in the next chapter, when we focus on the *mestres* who, in order to carry out their entrepreneurial projects, need to “relocate” outside of Brazil in order to build their markets, while maintaining both their cultural ties to their nation of origin as well as a strong transnational community of solidarity that sustains their work as a whole. Before doing this, we need to address the implications of this neoliberal regime of governmentality for culture, a concept deeply modified by this new context as this dissertation contributes to demonstrate.

## **2.2. THE EXPEDIENCY OF CULTURE**

Under conditions of neoliberal governmentality, culture becomes an important ‘resource’ that responsible subjects may use in the production of their own welfare. Culture can fuel entrepreneurial projects and be leveraged to foster social and economic empowerment, whether at an individual, community, or even national level. George Yúdice’s (2003) influential theory of the “expediency of culture” is crucial to understand the profound change in the very conception of culture that this chapter traces. The central

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<sup>42</sup> Aihwa Ong (1999) makes a similar argument when, against descriptions of transnationalism as unstructured flows that she attributes to thinkers like Appadurai, she rather views transnationalism in terms of structures and regimes of governmentality that affect and shape the transnational relations and movements. These new modalities of “translocal governmentality”, she says, affect “cultural logics of subject making” (6) yet Ong insists that these processes need to be always embedded within the political economy of transnationalism.

premise of Yúdice's book is that culture is now an "expedient resource" that can lead to concrete changes in spheres of society that exceed those fields we would have described as 'cultural' a mere few decades ago. Yúdice (2003, 9) asserts that "culture is increasingly wielded as a resource for both sociopolitical and economic amelioration". The relationship between culture and politics has always existed (let's simply recall capoeira's function in Vargas' political project), and so has the tension between culture and the commercial imperative (which Theodor Adorno most famously condemned). In this new conception of culture as resource, however, the relation between the cultural, the political and the economic fields is deeply modified. Culture is no longer a symbolic field where ideological struggles over meanings are played out and where it is thus possible to identify their social construction. Nor is it a reflection of the social classes and class structuration, as the Marxist tradition would have it. Rather, the "expediency of culture" insists on the *utility* of cultural actions; not only in their symbolic value for identity construction, but also for their potential to contribute to greater fields of development – economic, ecological, and social forms of improvement.

Following neoliberal logic, culture is the site for investments that may yield new types of profit, capital and benefits: just as natural resources contributed to industrial development in the modern period, culture is now the raw material for collective action and development. Economist Jeremy Rifkin (2000), who, like Yúdice, draws a parallel between natural and cultural resources, suggests that both operate according to the same logic, only adapted to their specific economic era. He notes that natural resources had their 'peak utility' when the economy was based on material objects and properties, while

cultural resources characterize the contemporary period where access to networks and to experiences is central. Cultural resources now dominate the neoliberal economy, just like natural resources had a crucial role in the capitalist industrial revolution. Rifkin further reinforces the parallel by addressing the similar consequences of potential *mis-uses* of both types of resources: “Cultural resources risk overexploitation and depletion at the hands of commerce just as natural resources did during the Industrial Age.” (2000, 12) The expediency of culture reveals a pragmatic approach where culture has nothing transcendent in essence: it is conceptualised as a situated strategy, a means to achieve specific goals.

Under the expediency of culture, previous distinctions between high and low, popular or elite, or again, culture as ‘art’, ‘social critique’, or ‘way of life’ (all thoroughly outlined by Terry Eagleton (2004) in *The Idea of Culture* and hitherto forming the basis of Cultural Studies), are all subsumed by a productive imperative wherein culture should wield benefits. This is why, for example, a “high culture” institution like the contemporary art museum of Niteroi, a “folk practice” like capoeira, or the symbol of a “way of life” like a group of friends sipping on a *caipirinha* (typical Brazilian cocktail) may all be invoked to stimulate Brazil’s tourism industry. The ubiquity of this broad, increasingly polysemic category of ‘culture’, alongside its changing social functions, is argued by many authors to be a characteristic dimension of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century (Archer et al. 2007; Brossat 2008; Coombe 2009; Eagleton 2004; Yúdice 2003). Everywhere, culture is invoked for diverse endeavors: to obtain ownership or intellectual property rights, to justify claims to citizenship rights, to secure management of touristic sites, to

foster urban growth, to empower poor marginalized communities, to keep at risk youth from violence and drug trafficking, etc. The proliferation of claims made in the name of culture and invocations of culture to cure social ills signals the current expediency of culture and coincides with its new status as a 'resource'.

Culture-as-resource should not be confused with the more restrictive concept of culture-as-commodity, even though both convey a relation between economic capital and cultural value. A brief review of the evolution of the literature on commodification will help us refine our understanding both of commodification and the nuances that the concept of the resource adds to our understanding of the uneasy relation between culture and economic capital. Since the industrialization of societies and the rise of mass media industries, a long line of scholarship following the Frankfurt school tradition has presented in a rather negative light the cultural industry model, insisting on its harmful potential to trigger commodification, reification and alienation. Scholars from that school of thought tend to predict cultural homogenization, arguing that the mass-production of cultural goods would lead to a global circulation of homogenized commodities (see Horkheimer and Adorno 1974, for reviews of this scholarship, see also Durham and Kellner 2001; Garnham 1993). Since these early Marxist-influenced studies, many nuances have been brought to this critical scholarship (Gunster 2004) and to theoretical approaches of commodification in general. Some have rightly pointed out that commodification is not a binary process but works on a spectrum and may be accomplished to varying degrees (Appadurai 1986; Radin 1996), leaving room for other processes like consumption, for example, to qualify its [negative] consequences and

downplay its importance – even to decommodify (Bridge and Smith 2003; Lull 2001; Miller 2003; Sayer 2003). Commodification, it is argued, is only one moment in the ‘life of an object’ (Kopytoff 1986), and perhaps only the most significant when considered from the standpoint of the producer (Sayer 2003, 346). In contrast, the consumer may consider the symbolic value or the pleasure derived from the uses of the commodity after its acquisition to exceed the exchange-value as such (Binkley 2008; Campbell 2005). Finally, valuable research in cultural geography has examined commodity life cycles and circuits, ultimately showing that commodities do not have fixed meanings or valuations: these vary according to their location within production cycles and within geographical circuits, making it increasingly difficult to emit stark normative judgments on the process of cultural commodification, now understood in its plurality (Cook 2004; Crang 1996; Crang et al. 2003; Dwyer and Jackson 2003; Jackson 1999, 2002).

Despite the welcome nuances it adds, this scholarship on cultural commodities nevertheless studies the cultural process strictly in terms of its relation to a more defining capitalist transaction. The focus may have shifted from the specific moment of exchange to other moments in the production/consumption cycle, but the meanings and value of culture are still evaluated in direct relation to the mercantile, capitalist transaction. In contrast, we will see that culture-as-resource, although it does not completely displace the commodity, nevertheless exceeds it insofar as it attends to a whole range of indirect repercussions of cultural actions that may or may not be related to capitalist market exchange. It shifts the focus away from a dichotomous vision that holds culture and the market to be irreconcilable and instead attends to the multiple collateral effects of the

cultural field as an independent influence in shaping social, political and economic values. The ‘expediency of culture’ paradigm precisely recognizes the complex and dialectical entanglements of cultural and economic processes in a globalized field.

The ubiquity of culture that Yúdice posits as a sign of the new expediency paradigm is an outcome of concrete processes sparked by globalization, that anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996) describes as the “cultural dimensions of globalization”: intense movements and increased circulation of people, goods, capital, but also images and cultural practices; all assisted by changes in technologies of communication that enabled their dissemination, production and consumption. In fact, the proliferation of culture is, according to David Harvey (1990), part of the very logic of capitalist production that drives globalization: aesthetic innovation, a multiplicity of signs, cultural diversity and difference are structurally linked to capitalist production because capitalism needs to constantly innovate in order to sell more. Each cultural difference potentially constitutes a new market; that is, cultural capitalism feeds off and makes profit from difference, hence the ubiquity of culture in capitalist globalization (Eagleton 2004). This partly explains why Yúdice sees “an expedient relation between globalization and culture in the sense that there is a *fit* or a *suitability* between them” (Yúdice 2003, 29). However, our understanding of cultural exchange should not be limited to economic capital accumulation, despite their fitting reciprocal relation whereby the global marketplace allows a multiplicity of cultural forms to proliferate and thrive, or vice versa, the diversity of culture sustains economic globalization. The expediency paradigm highlights precisely how using culture as a resource encompasses much more

than creating markets in order to sustain the consumption of culture leading to capital accumulation. While Yúdice's theory set the broad lines of the new paradigm of the expediency of culture, we now turn to a variety of scholarship that contributes to refine our understanding of how culture can concretely be used as a resource. Studies stemming from fields as diverse as anthropology, development studies, and law have endeavoured to displace the emphasis on the purely economic value of culture in capitalist markets and demonstrate that culture as a resource encompasses and attempts to project a much wider range of aspirations and values, including (but not restricted to): 1- economic sustainability and autonomy, 2- social development and political empowerment, and 3- fuller inclusion in citizenship via cultural rights.

## **2.3. USES OF CULTURE AS A RESOURCE**

### **2.3.1. The entrepreneurial approach to culture: economic sustainability and autonomy**

If the neoliberal context inflects market rationality into all spheres of social life, this contributes to the rise of a possessive rhetoric with respect to culture. Rosemary Coombe (2009) reviews what she calls the “expanding purview of cultural properties” by canvassing a broad and expanding field of socio-legal practices pertaining to culture. She suggests that there is a proliferation of referents for cultural properties, encompassing an expanding number of practices and goods, both tangible and intangible. The possessive rhetoric has multiple effects, both on the legal apparatus that seeks to regulate it as well as on the very meanings of culture that these legal categories refer to and arguably

construct. The bridge operated between the broad anthropological concept of culture as a set of moving social relations, and the bounded, legal category of property involves an objectification of culture, especially insofar as the notion of ownership that underlies the possessive rhetoric is still very much based on a Westernized version of property which reifies that which it describes (Coombe 2009). This reification, in turn, leads to new sorts of management of and approaches to cultural objects. The expanding tendency to claim culture as property may come from the increasing awareness of culture's potential to be approached entrepreneurially by individuals and communities seeking to create markets so as to generate profits from the cultural properties they claim. What I call the 'entrepreneurial approach to culture' greatly informs the transnational circulation of capoeira addressed in this dissertation. Even though there are not yet any significant proprietary claims to capoeira as such (unlike yoga or reiki, for example), the expert practitioners who export it possess a highly specialized knowledge of this original cultural practice, which basically guarantees them exclusivity on its use (at least in its first phase of transnationalization). They mobilize their expert knowledge and its cultural specificity in order to create markets, build enterprises and generate revenues, as Chapter Three will discuss.

The entrepreneurial approach to culture differs from the instrumentalization of culture and its transformation into a commodity, which focuses too strictly on the exchange-value of cultural 'goods' in the capitalist market, as if it cancelled all other possible use-values. Culture as a resource responds to a more complex logic of economic, even ecologic rationality (Yúdice 2003, 1) such that the objective of harnessing culture is

to generate a whole sustainable ‘ecosystem’ that far exceeds the commodity transaction strictly defined – even though it is driven by an entrepreneurial profit-making objective and seeks to generate economic capital. In this ecosystem, culture as a resource is in and of itself the foundation of an entire sustainable economy as opposed to just a good exchanged within it.

One key program implemented by Brazil’s former Minister of Culture Gilberto Gil (in office 2003-2008), exemplifies this trend. “Pontos de Cultura” is a state-based program that subsidizes (by providing financial and technological support) and institutionally recognizes projects initiated by civil society that have a socio-cultural impact in the community (see MinC website <http://www.cultura.gov.br/culturaviva/ponto-de-cultura/>). In 2010, there were an estimated 2500 such ‘pontos de cultura’ in 1122 Brazilian cities. This nation-wide program illustrates a quintessential marriage of cultural entrepreneurship and neoliberal governmentality, a language that is indeed omnipresent in many of Gil’s speeches. For example, in a discourse he gave on the topic of cultural diversity during an official mission in Colombia, Gil (2007, 2) outlined the benefits of the Ponto de Cultura program: “With this program, these communities got to structure the sustainability of their actions [...]. They achieved more and more autonomy and agency to create and spread their own culture”. In a later interview, he referred to the program as a “convocation to agency: come and do your things, come act, come voice your expressivity, come *instrumentalize your capacity to manifest yourselves*” (Gil 2008, 196; emphasis added). Finally, in a talk that Gil gave at OCAD in Toronto on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011, the former minister used the

example of a community on the outskirts of Brasília that made crafts out of recycled material and benefitted from the program, explaining that the ultimate objective of the Ponto de Cultura program is to “incentivize autonomy” through cultural production and diffusion. He insisted that the program sought to avoid becoming patronizing; the government provides the initial ‘boost’ but only so as to enable the communities to start “walking by themselves” thereafter. With the help of Ponto de Cultura, this specific community had been able to develop both a sustainable system of production as well as a communication network that allowed them to commercialize and sell their crafts internationally. “They became a real commercial entity, simply by doing what they had always done”, Gil proudly concluded, clearly evaluating the success of the program primarily in terms of its economic viability. The program enriched the community via revenues from the selling of the craft but the greater demand triggered by the international networking also led to job creation that have repercussion in the community at large.

This entrepreneurial approach to crafts and related cultural knowledge as a way to develop commercially viable entities is not restricted to Brazil: similar examples of indigenous communities commercializing traditional crafts abound, confirming a proliferating trend of approaching (and arguably enclosing) culture as a valid foundation for the creation of enterprise sustaining communities<sup>43</sup> (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2002; Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Kyle 1999; Wherry 2006). The tourism industry in particular offers multiple ways to capitalize on traditional cultural expressions: *Cultural*

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<sup>43</sup> In this respect, Frederick F. Wherry (2006, 125) cites a 1998 UNESCO report that states that handicrafts provide the main source of cash income for an increasing number of communities.

*symbols* can be used as promotional material and contribute to place branding, thus helping communities gain competitive advantage over other similar destinations. *Cultural goods* can be turned into commodities more properly speaking in crafts-based economies such as those mentioned above. Finally, culture, broadly conceived as a “*way of life*” can sustain endeavours like ethno-tourism where traditional ways of life are sold as experiences to tourists (Bruner 2005; Desmond 1999; Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos 2004; Shepherd 2002).

The revitalization of impoverished communities via the creation of sustainable cultural economies is such a strong trend that cultural assets are not only sequestered, but sometimes revitalized and may even be constructed based on distant traditions shaped to meet tourist demands (Coombe and Aylwin 2011; Wherry 2006). In an economic model where the use of local distinction is the basis for capital accumulation, culture becomes a strategy that responds to market-based plans. The entrepreneurial approach not only encourages communities to mobilize their cultural assets as resources, it also creates a felt necessity to *produce* local traditions and cultural distinction, because those who do not are convinced that they will fall behind. Similarly, markets are not simply mobilized for the exchange of cultural resources, they are actively regulated and some new markets are even arguably *created* by a series of legal practices and governmental policies that involve actors from outside the community (the state, the legal apparatus, NGOs) and impinge on its intended responsabilization; for example, “an institution (usually the state) creates the market interface where tourists and artisans communicate.” (Wherry 2006, 138)

The last section of this chapter, the last section of Chapter Four, as well as this dissertation's overarching argument add to these arguments by suggesting that sometimes, the market conversely becomes a strategy that responds to culturally-based plans. The relation is inherently dialectical: while capoeira is the cultural resource that responds to the market-based plans of entrepreneurship by individual mestres, the very market helps them assert and transmit a cultural tradition that perpetuates capoeira. In a way, this dissertation shows that market is the strategy for capoeira's survival as much as capoeira is the strategy for the mestres' economic survival.

The entrepreneurial approach to culture as a resource is not without its pitfalls. While it is premised on an asserted equality of chances and opportunities in a free market, outside factors actively influence the real possibilities of communities becoming economically sustainable based on exploitation of cultural resources. For example, as Coombe and Aylwin's (2011) discussion of Frederick Wherry's comparative analysis of two villages in Costa Rica mobilizing pottery making to build their cultural economy shows, the village whose name was on the tourist maps and where the paved road arrived (both state level decisions influenced by NGO attentions) had developed a much more successful economy than its counterpart only a few kilometers away. Wherry's study demonstrates that "having indigenous cultural traditions is not sufficient for entering the tourist market" (2006, 129); state willingness to promote crafts or Ministries of culture, tourism or education's willingness to include certain villages or regions as part of a tourist itinerary in international representations of the country matter quite consequentially. We should still note, however, that the state's role here is neither

ideologically nationalist nor centralizing, but rather a facilitator and promoter of cultural distinctions meant to be locally capitalized upon.

While proponents of cultural economies tout success stories – like Gil’s proud mention of the “Ponto de Cultura” program – and brandish the miracles that can be achieved via the entrepreneurial use of culture, other cases point to the pitfalls of the market-based dynamic, whose competitive ethos and inherent mechanisms potentially destroy pre-existing structures of community solidarity and may even enhance regional socio-economic inequities. As many anthropological studies confirm, the proliferation of uses of culture to create markets may destroy other dimensions of culture, for example culturally specific forms of community social organization. To this effect, Coombe and Aylwin discuss how Peru’s so-called “success story” in this field – the Chulucanas ‘brand’ pottery sold to American retail stores like Pier One – created and obscured “social relations characterized by distrust, suspicion, and envy, accusations of design stealing, price wars and wage exploitation” that undermined traditional systems of crafts production central to the so-called ‘traditional’ community whose ‘culture’ was so valued (Coombe and Aylwin 2011, 2034). A market-based entrepreneurial system potentially erodes established social structures while the notion of competitive advantage may alienate some communities and divide them, a dual dynamic that appears in the capoeira community discussed in Chapter Three. While it may be a miracle solution for some, it necessarily trumps the chances of other communities who remain even more impoverished; unable to reap these new fruits from the market but no longer benefitting

from the state welfare system which supported them prior to their forced insertion into this neoliberal type of governance.

The dangers inherent to the entrepreneurial approach to culture echo larger criticisms of the neoliberal system overall, a context that paradoxically provokes yet another use of culture as a resource, this time not so much to embrace the alleged possibilities of the neoliberal system but rather to counter its ravages. As a reaction to increasing social erosion, the disparity of economic capital's distribution and the rising conditions of precarity that neoliberalism generates, development practices may ironically turn to culture as a resource precisely to counter these ills.

### **2.3.2 The development approach: social and political empowerment**

If the entrepreneurial approach puts the accent principally on culture as a tool for economic amelioration, what I call the “development approach” wields culture as resource purported to achieve a broader range of benefits<sup>44</sup>. These include social cohesion; education; community autonomy; political recognition of marginalized groups; cultural, linguistic, and environmental preservation, etc. Geographer Sarah Radcliffe (2006, 2) has outlined culture's rising salience in development practice since the late 1990s, unequivocally opening her edited book by asserting that “development thinking in the past decade has experienced a cultural turn”. Another cogent sign of this intermingling of two fields is the publication of *Culture and Public Action*, a book on

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<sup>44</sup> Of course in the bigger picture, the entrepreneurial approach is also intended to lead to empowerment and eventually set the base for a greater social stability and general development, but here, I am making distinctions based on the specific and immediate uses of culture that the entrepreneurial and development approaches entail.

culture nevertheless edited by two World Bank economists (Rao and Walton 2004). Economist Amartya Sen's chapter, for example, outlines in a very positive light the multiple ways in which culture matters in development practices and how cultural capacities have the potential to trigger economic activities as well as to nurture the populations' own agency, allowing them to take the reins of their own developing endeavors. In contraposition to the entrepreneurial approach that potentially erodes the links of solidarity, development scholars precisely argue that it is necessary to pay attention to cultural specificities that already map community solidarity. They recognize culture as a source of meanings that provides social cohesion and may be used positively to sustain development. Paying proper attention to culture also gives insight into a country's past so that development measures work in continuity with local history to ensure greater rates of success. In sum, culture is increasingly seen as legitimate site of investment, so much so that even the World Bank included it in official policy as an "instrument for human development" as early as 1999 (Yúdice 2003, 13).

The logic of investment in culture has a double effect: it is because culture is positioned as a positive motor of human development at large that it is increasingly seen as a proper place for investment, yet conversely, because they seek investment, cultural project managers need to 'prove' to their potential funders that they indeed generate positive outcomes that justify the investment. Therefore, Yúdice explains, cultural projects often piggyback on other projects focused, for example, on education, urban renewal, or the environment, whose outcomes are more easily quantifiable and generate hard data (2003, 15). In both cases, the value of culture and of investing in culture is

associated with fields that exceed a strictly monetary calculus. As a development asset, culture is often associated with projects for environmental conservation, linking, for example, the preservation of traditional culture with the preservation of biodiversity (Coombe 2005; Escobar 1998, 2008; Teubner and Fischer-Lescano 2008; Zent and Zent 2007). Culture can also have a positive effect in public health projects: consultant Carol Jenkin's (2004) work shows that an acute sensitivity to sexual cultures and sexual education is crucial in order to formulate adequate public policies and achieve successful HIV/AIDS prevention. Lastly, culture may be used to revitalize rural areas, so as to reduce the rural-urban gap and prevent excessive migration towards urban centers (Porter and Lyon 2006; Radcliffe and Laurie 2006). The advocates of this culturally informed and culturally triggered kind of development argue that investing in culture provides a variety of benefits, which in turn make communities or regions more prosperous grounds for economic development. The ultimate objective still fits quite neatly within the neoliberal paradigm insofar as the rationale for these 'development' projects' is to create more stable grounds for economic prosperity, yet in doing so it also brings ameliorations of crucial importance for the communities involved, in areas as diverse as health and hygiene, or political and social stability.

This is not the place for a detailed discussion of development studies, but it is important to mention briefly those who question this cultural turn. For example, anthropologist Deborah Thomas (2005) is very critical of the use of culture to foster development, an approach which she claims uses a carry-all concept of 'culture' in a way that conceals the structural predicaments of development. Her case study of Jamaican

cultural policies suggests that placing the burden of social and economic development on 'culture' tends to sidestep in-depth discussions of land reform or job creation policy, for example (2005, 114). Similarly, anthropologist Mary Lorena Kenney's (2009, 161) analysis of the patrimonialization of *quilombos* (communities made up by descendants of fugitive slaves) in Brazil sceptically questions that culture should be elevated to what she calls a "magic bullet for development and poverty eradication". She deplores that 'culture' is the only scaffold left for disadvantaged population groups who, in the absence of state welfare, have no other vehicles for "solving racial tensions", "tackling problems such as crime and unemployment", "reducing structural inequities" and "enhancing [their] well-being and self-esteem" (2009, 161). Indeed, it seems rather too convenient to leave it to the broad and abstract forces of 'culture' to fill in the functions of a state weakened by neoliberal policies. Sociologist of development Dia Da Costa (2010, 619) suggests even more bleakly that the view of culturally-assisted development may serve only to "legitimize neoliberal forms of culturalizing poverty" while maintaining the structures of exclusion that market economies create. Arguably, both of these uses of culture as a resource (the entrepreneurial and development approaches) are two sides of the same neoliberal coin: such policies encourage entrepreneurial initiatives that spur economic capital accumulation for some communities yet may contribute to entrench or further enhance uneven distributions of power and economic capital. In response to that, cultural development seeks social cohesion, restoration of agency and empowerment precisely by drawing on regional cultural histories.

The next and last case outlines a slightly different use of culture as a resource in order to illustrate the performative nature of culture characteristic of the expediency paradigm. This use of culture as a basis for negotiating citizenship rights illustrates the growing relation of culture to national and regional politics: no longer the soothing blanket holding together a homogenizing ideology of national unity, culture is now situated as a strategic factor marking distinction in a game of identity politics premised on the use of difference to obtain rights.

### **2.3.3. Seeking full citizenship via cultural rights: the performative value of culture**

Culture is a performative resource that can be used strategically, a dimension of what Yúdice calls “the social imperative to perform”: “Culture is no longer experienced, valued, or understood as transcendent” (2003, 12) or primordial but rather as a strategic (if often conflicted) articulation of a group’s own identity, the negotiation of its difference, and a strategic positioning in an attempt to further its interests. Culture as a resource is often tied to a calculation of interests; it implies that there is always an end to the cultural act. Yúdice traces the origins of this particular attitude towards culture in the rise of identity politics, specifically in the context of the United States where the legal framework of rights rhetoric allowed groups to claim autonomy and legitimacy on the basis of their particular experience of embodying difference (2003, 56-60). As the regime of neoliberal governmentality spreads more widely, this performative and strategic approach to cultural difference spans other geographical spaces and other minority

groups, of whom indigenous peoples throughout Latin America are perhaps the most remarked.

Many minority groups have undertaken new forms of politics and adopted new strategies to improve their conditions of citizenship that reveal culture's potential leverage for achieving political ends. The new forms of advocacy framed in terms of cultural rights first started amongst indigenous groups claiming sovereignty and rights to self-determination against a state that, in its previous centralizing mode of governance, impinged upon traditional collective social and legal organization (Albro 2005; Nash 2001; Perreault 2001; Stephen 2003; Taubman 2005). In these specific cases, claims to land, territory, as well as management of natural resources, all of which are necessary to indigenous communities' fuller citizenship, are presented as directly dependent on the recognition of their cultural specificities and ancestral traditions. Here, state recognition of a culturally-informed social organization as well as the traditions and forms of expression that sustain it, are the basis for claims to broader and distinctive citizenship rights: the embrace of a traditional identity is a strategic means in the struggle to obtain broader rights to territory, natural resources, and participation in the polity.

However, these types of claims require that indigenous communities reify their own cultural identity. Robbins and Stamatopoulou (2004), amongst others, have suggested that the framework of international law and human rights is complicit with the reification of indigenous cultures and identities, arguably perpetuating a colonial tendency to create 'Others'. Yet, they argue, the claims that are made by these indigenous groups on the basis of their reified culture are too important to just be dismissed on the

premise that these claims are made within a post-colonial Western framework of international law and reifying categories (Cowan and Dembour 2001; Robbins and Stamatopoulou 2004). Communities assert their cultural difference, then, not so much as an absolute statement of their cultural authenticity; but rather perform their own situated constructedness, consciously embedded in a complex field of forces made up of the relations between “institutions of the state and civil society, the judiciary, the police, schools and universities, the media, consumer markets, and so on” (Yúdice 2003, 3). Given the number of actors involved in this force field and the complexity of the concepts of culture and rights in their own right, the relationship between these two fields is obviously very complex. It should not be reduced to opportunism even though the fixity of the legal regimes in which it takes place seems to reduce the multifaceted nature of culture to a mere instrument of rights. Acknowledging the performative dimension of culture is a way to recognize its fluidity despite its entanglements in reifying legal frames.

This very condensed discussion of cultural rights underlines that the political function of culture has quite clearly changed since the national popular paradigm, when culture was primarily mobilized by the state for ideological purposes and to unify the imagined community of the nation. Yúdice underlines the shift from ideology to expediency by referring to Lawrence Grossberg’s “end-of-ideology proposition”: “if ideology implies that ‘people don’t know what they are doing but they are doing it anyway’, then the expediency of culture as instrumental performativity implies that ‘they know what they are doing but they are doing it anyways’” (Yúdice 2003, 335). The

cultural field is a calculation of interests on all sides, leaving the role of the state as an organ of ideology undermined and challenged by other population groups using culture for other political means. The state may still regulate, via policies, subsidies, or diverse interventions, the arena in which these interests are at play, but it is no longer the center holding the means of hegemonic balance. This, in turn, implies that identities themselves are constructed in relation to the field of force that encompasses not only categories of national relevance (like race for example), but others of local or regional application (like territory). For example, Escobar quotes a declaration of Afro-Colombians in the Pacific region of their country who assert: “The identity that needs to be constructed today at the heart of the black communities is not one based on race but on the defense of the territory” (Fundación Habla/Scribe 52-54, quoted in Escobar 2008, 58). Again, cultural meanings and values are defined here in terms of their immediate utility for a group’s specific claims. The central utilitarian value of culture in the expediency paradigm, however, should not obscure and does not exhaust the wide range of values that the cultural assets may carry. For example, territory also exists as a source of identity and meanings, as the basis of the cultural labor that these people require to sustain themselves, and not only as a political instrument of leverage.

Interestingly, the specific conception of culture that informs these indigenous identity politics (linked to traditional ways of social subsistence and reproduction) fits nicely with neoliberal practices of governance which seek to defer sustainability responsibilities to local communities. Rosemary Coombe (2011, 110) points out that “indigenous identity parameters to some extent line up nicely with neoliberal objectives;

concepts of social capital, grassroots empowerment and good governance may correspond to cultural difference, local institution building and traditional leadership practices.” The space left by the withdrawal of the state under neoliberalism has been invaded by a number of other institutions, practices and discourses whose goals and objectives converge with indigenous groups’ cultural claims and struggles to defend their ‘way of life’. Indigenous groups nonetheless seek alliances with actors using other discourses and practices consistent with their goals. It is through such alliances with other interest groups (NGOs working for biodiversity protection, for example) that indigenous peoples successfully articulate their more specific struggles for autonomy through cultural assertion. The cultural rights discourse thus provides a framework in which groups and individuals can struggle to defend their preferences and ways of life. Ironically though, claims to cultural citizenship made possible by the *political* context of neoliberalism are also a response to the precarious social conditions in which neoliberalism as an *economic* system based on market rationality leaves these indigenous groups. The framework of cultural rights is elaborated partly as a space of resistance to the neoliberal system that leaves minority groups in precarious social situations in the absence of state welfare. Yet it is also this very same system of neoliberal governmentality that has fractured the space and the idea of the unified nation-state and that has consequently legitimized claims made on the basis of cultural difference (Speed 2008).

In a similar logic, the rights rhetoric around culture is also a reaction to some anxieties over the perceived negative impacts that the entrepreneurial approach may

entail for local cultures. There is a widespread fear that the wielding of local cultures for expedient and particularly commercial uses may decontextualize, and even possibly ‘destroy’ the local knowledge and cultures that have otherwise been transmitted over generations through much different channels. The perceived exploitation of traditional cultures for the expedient ends of others further propels the indigenous groups to claim the rights to their own culture. The question of the transmission of culture in this neoliberal political economy is an important one that exceeds the discussion of indigenous rights claims to autonomy, and one that I will discuss in Chapter Six by attending to embodied transmission of knowledge.

While the case of Brazilians who use capoeira as a resource may seem far from the indigenous people’s struggles for cultural rights and self-determination, these endeavors intersect in interesting ways, highlighting the similarity of these two groups’ strategies. On the one hand, indigenous politics draw attention to the important potential embedded in the performative use of one’s cultural difference, a potential that mestres also mobilize. Moreover, some authors, for example anthropologist Jan Hoffman French’s (2009) through her work in Brazil, have shown that the successes of specific minority group’s struggle travel to other minority groups and their international salience creates opportunity structures for the latter. These opportunities to reify cultural identities for instrumental purposes, spurred by the specific neoliberal context, also greatly inform capoeiristas’ entrepreneurial activities. Once their migration makes them into minorities in their host societies, they can benefit indirectly from these opportunities. If culture used as a resource can now wield substantial benefits, the case of identity politics reminds us

that it is inscribed in the “social imperative to perform”, making it all the more important to assert one’s legitimacy within that culture. In this respect, Brazilian mestres are in a particularly good position to build on and benefit from capoeira in the global market insofar as they benefit from the advantage of their Brazilian distinction in the transnational field of action they navigate. The next chapters will demonstrate that once outside of Brazil, capoeiristas make performative use of their cultural identity, both their individual identity and personal lifestories (Chapter Three) as well as their national identity and Brazilian-ness at large (Chapter Four). Before delving into these specific analyses, we need to briefly consider some of the limitations of the new paradigm for culture that we have traced so far.

#### **2.4. THE ALL-ENCOMPASSING QUALITY OF EXPEDIENCY**

Culture is the resource that both fuels neoliberal market-based development as well as being the solution to counter its pitfalls. This demonstrates just how pervasive the logic of neoliberalism is in the definition of the new political economy of culture. It also makes it hard to escape its frame, to even find uses of culture that would *not* respond to the logic of the ‘resource’. Yúdice himself states clearly that “there is no way out of the expedient uses of culture” and that we rather should think of ways of dealing with the problems entailed. For this reason, he suggests that the solutions should not be “the exclusive province of governments” but should involve “corporations, the media,

foundations, politicians, and sometimes even citizens” (2003, 286).<sup>45</sup> This all-encompassing quality is in fact the source of the main criticisms that have been directed at Yúdice’s theory in particular, a caveat that I would extend to the general framework described.

The notion of expedient resource is so pluri-faceted that it can always illuminate at least part of culture’s material and political significance. Therefore, many authors conveniently use it to sustain the specific aspects of their own arguments it applies to, yet few address its limits. Development sociologist Dia Da Costa (2010) adopts a particularly critical stance towards Yúdice’s theory; she draws on a study of two theater groups in India and their work of political activism and critical play in order to theorize the political economy of culture as a space that not only responds to an expedient neoliberal governmentality but that is also grounded in a complex history of power and struggle. Da Costa demonstrates that through the very performance they enact on stage, the particular theater groups she studies signal sites of struggle and publicly perform a critique of the very regime of governmentality that affects the community. Her main argument is that the theory of expediency of culture does not account for and arguably even obscures the potential existence of these counter processes. I share her concern with the way in which Yúdice’s theory “subsumes culture entirely within the dynamics of capitalism and, in so doing, entails far too much closure” (2010, 619).

While Da Costa points to the existence of important blind spots in the paradigm, neither her argument nor the rest of her article convincingly undermines the validity of

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<sup>45</sup> That is the conclusion of his chapter 8 specifically on NAFTA and Free Trade Agreements in Latin America, yet I believe it can be extended to a general assertion.

culture as a resource as an overarching framework. In fact, she demonstrates its acute validity as a conceptual model that maps a new field of political opportunity and risk when she describes the community development that has stemmed from the theater group's actions and its collaboration with NGOs working to create a sustainable system of community education, its contributions to the empowerment of women, and its implementation of programs of skill developments. All of these are clear outcomes of the work that has been done by putting culture to work as a resource for development (2010, 628). She admits that "JS [the theater group she studies]'s work intersects with the history of capital and state to produce governmentality" but also correctly insists that "this description does not exhaust what their cultural work accomplishes" (629). Da Costa's case study thus suggests the multiplicity of possible uses of culture, which can even be used as resources *for* and *in* struggle.

Some critics have recommended that we look not only at the ways in which the neoliberal incentive to mobilize culture as resource produces, conditions, and structures individual subjectivities and collective identities, but also how these subjects and communities themselves negotiate these identities in ways that may also mark the limits of neoliberal governmentality (Coombe 2007; Inda 2005). In some cases, cultural assertion potentially marks the point at which people *refuse* the neoliberal framework and instead assert their dignity through the deployment of traditional modes of organization that maintain their traditional beliefs and values (Edelman 2005; Shivaramakrishnan 2005). Others have even argued that uses of culture as resource may constitute clear forms of resistance to neoliberal rationality (Eudaily 2004; Jung 2004). In any case,

cultural assertion might be considered as much a sign of the limits of neoliberalism as it is a sign of its incidence.

It should be clear that there are many ways of husbanding and ‘capitalizing’ on cultural resources that exceeds capital. Nonetheless, I will argue that the multiple uses of culture are contingent upon the use of culture as a resource that sustains capital. It is because culture is now used as a resource that fits with a neoliberal logic in the first place that it then builds and takes on other additional valuations. Culture first needs to ‘clear a space of its own’ (to use Yúdice’s formulation about *funkeiros* in Rio) and become sustainable, and only then will it accomplish other things. This is arguably a problematic aspect of the current political economy of culture: it is only if one is able to create a sustainable ‘economy’ (whether a market where one literally makes money to sustain other uses; or an ‘ecosystem’ where one is able to prove the development benefits of one’s cultural actions and get the assistance of NGOs and international institutions) that a wider field of cultural labour can be developed. At least, that is what the case of transnational capoeira seems to suggest, as I will attempt to show in the following chapters.

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The conception of culture as an expedient resource, I will demonstrate, sheds new light on recent developments in the practice of capoeira and allows us to understand new shifts in valuation of this cultural practice. In the political economy of culture that this chapter has traced, culture is characterized in terms of the different sorts of capital and

value it can generate. It is a political economy where culture insists on difference rather than unity, where it is contextual rather than essentialist. Thus, I argue that Cultural Studies needs to understand culture in more pragmatic rather than epistemological terms. Understanding capoeira through this new conceptual paradigm allows me to explore the interplay between capital accumulation and other forms of value creation; confirming that in a globalized neoliberal world, it is crucial to look at economic matters to understand the circulation of cultural practices, but the importance of these market rationalities does not exhaust their significance. Expressive cultures cannot be reduced simply to the market forces that have focussed new attentions upon these. Seeking to avoid the potential dangers of using the concept of culture-as-resource too narrowly, I strive to refine the expediency paradigm by pointing to the dimensions of culture that it fails to encompass, insisting on the need to draw on different theoretical traditions to attend to the multiple valuations of culture that stem from yet exceed its uses as a resource. Indeed, in the transnational circulation of capoeira, I will suggest that the transmission of affective bonds, traditional knowledge and memories of human dignity, freedom and agency in the face of subjugation are both enacted and perpetuated.

In Chapters Three and Four I outline the uses of capoeira and the Brazilian culture it references as a resource that sustains mestres' livelihoods in a transnational, neoliberal market. Mestres adopt an entrepreneurial approach to capoeira, using their embodied knowledge, their cultural difference and their distinctive and original lifestory to build small locally grown enterprises which are also inscribed in the mestres' transnational community of solidarity. They adopt an entrepreneurial approach to their 'national'

culture, building cultural economies that make use of capoeira's association with a globally conceived notion of 'Brazilianness'. Chapters Five and Six shift the focus of inquiry by asking not what people do with capoeira, but what capoeira does to people. As I will explore, the practice of capoeira triggers the circulation of affect and generates strong interpersonal bonds that both exceed and reinforce capoeira's potential to create economic value. Understanding the internal agency of capoeira asks us to attend to the embodied knowledge that is transmitted through the performance of the *roda*. Indeed, capoeira is an important carrier of an alternative memory of slavery that also circulates alongside, or within, capoeira-as-resource. These chapters examine aspects of capoeira that, at first sight, may seem to run parallel to its uses as a resource, yet may equally explain precisely why it is such a powerful one. The study of capoeira thus helps to refine our understanding of the expediency paradigm, while adding new dimensions to it.

### **CHAPTER THREE: CREATING MARKETS: TRANSNATIONALIZATION, PROFESSIONALIZATION AND COMMERCIALIZATION OF CAPOEIRA**

In this chapter, I describe the processes through which capoeira spread beyond the frontiers of Brazil, becoming a transnational phenomenon as well as a resource that could be used locally to sustain individuals economically. It provides an important context for the analysis of the shifting valuations of capoeira explored in the following chapters. First, I look at the initial conditions that prompted the migration of mestres, and their subsequent organization into a transnational community that both extends and transforms the national community of practice. This transnational network, in turn, supports the individual work of each mestre, which I analyse in the second part of the chapter. Here, I come back to theories on neoliberalism to frame the figure of the mestre as a cultural entrepreneur who uses his human capital, to borrow from Foucault, in order to ensure that his labour within his capoeira group will generate revenue while perpetuating the cultural knowledge and the traditional relations of apprenticeship that constitute capoeira's core. Finally, I evoke the potential transformations of the practice itself spurred by the insertion of capoeira in market exchanges, and the role that the community plays in regulating them. A duality runs through this chapter: while I endeavour to examine the creation of markets for capoeira and its uses as a resource that assist the mestres' entrepreneurial objectives, I also insist on the constant counterpart role that traditional community

organization, values, and residual cultural valuations provide in maintaining a certain cultural integrity and continuity with the practice's historical trajectory.

### **3.1. MECHANISMS OF TRANSNATIONALIZATION OF CAPOEIRA**

Casual conversations with numerous mestres over the years gave me the overwhelming impression that the exportation of capoeira has relied on the personal and, to a certain extent, independent histories of each and every one of these individuals. Each mestre has gone through countless, highly particular twists and turns before assuming a particular shared subject position, namely being 'capoeira teachers' somewhere outside of Brazil (for the sake of clarity, I will call them all 'mestres', even though it is not exact in terms of the traditional capoeira taxonomy<sup>46</sup>). Pursuing varying ambitions and without following any organized plan of cultural expansion, each mestre contributed with his<sup>47</sup> unique lifestory to the overall transnationalization of capoeira. Some have travelled to many countries, even many continents, before finding the appropriate context in which to settle. Others have gone back and forth between Brazil and one single 'foreign' location in order to establish themselves there. Across these highly specific immigration stories, however, some common elements emerge that structure the overarching story of

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<sup>46</sup> The capoeira hierarchy is a complex (and contested) one where many ranks and titles lead to the coveted status of 'mestre'. For the sake of clarity, I will call 'mestres' all the high ranked capoeiristas (whether they are technically '*professores*', '*contra-mestres*'/'*mestrandos*', or '*mestres*') who are spearheading a group outside of Brazil, indistinctly of their specific rank within the strict capoeira hierarchy. By doing so, I distinguish all of them from students who are on the 'learning side' and do not have the duties of leading a group or, in our context, of building a small enterprise.

<sup>47</sup> The masculine is used as neutral, though it is particularly appropriate insofar as the very vast majority of mestres are men, in comparison to only a handful of women in the same position (although things are slowly changing in the international life of capoeira).

capoeira's transnationalization. Capoeira is the resource that allowed these individuals to immigrate: their embodied cultural knowledge could be commercialized, commodified, and used as the basis for a livelihood in a neoliberal market economy. Mestres become cultural entrepreneurs who adapted to their immediate social contexts while nurturing strong bonds of solidarity developed within their community of practice in Brazil. The transformation of capoeira into a resource and the transnational scale of its circulation nevertheless reconfigure the nature of the bonds that unite the community's members as well as the community itself.

The community resulting from the mestres' immigration corresponds to the new forms of communities that emerge from the intense human migrations that characterize transnationalism. Studies of transnationalism constitute a broad field that includes a number of different theoretical perspectives (for maps of the field, see Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt 1999; Vertovec 1999; Schiller 2004). They are concerned with how migrants construct and maintain cultural, social, political, and economic relationships across borders. Scholarship in this field sheds light on the creation of transnational connections that structure communities such as the mestres' community that I will soon describe. Specifically, the political economic approach conceptualizes "transnational communities" as "dense networks across political borders created by immigrants in their quest for economic advancement and social recognition" (Portes 1997, 812). These networks, Alejandro Portes argues, allow people to have dual lives, not completely here nor there, and to be involved in a number of different transnational activities that mobilize resources and impact individuals, communities and economies in multiple places

simultaneously. The following exploration of the mestres' transnational community builds on these descriptions of the new networks of solidarities that have recently emerged across geopolitical borders. I follow Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt's (1999, 220) methodological recommendation, whereby they "deem appropriate to define the individual and his/her support networks as the proper unit of analysis in [transnationalism]". This is why I set out to study the mestres and their network as "the most viable point of departure in the investigation" of transnational capoeira.

### **3.1.1. Mestres' lifestories: from poverty to the dream of a possible future**

The first mestres who exported capoeira outside of Brazil did not necessarily intend to become teachers or to use their embodied knowledge to emigrate. According to historian Matthias Röhrig Assunção, the very first capoeiristas to travel outside of Brazil did so through the intermediary of folklore shows in the 1950s, 60s and 70s (2005, 190). Many Brazilian companies featured capoeira alongside other typical rhythms and dances to showcase Brazilian culture at large. Though the immediate goal was not to spread capoeira, these companies became quite instrumental in its exportation: they were the channel that brought mestres to new countries. For example, the pioneers of capoeira in the United States, Mestres Loremil Machado and Jelon Vieira, first arrived in 1975 to perform in a Broadway play. They then participated in a number of other productions, and finally settled in New York City where alongside their performances, they started teaching capoeira. Such examples suggested to other capoeiristas still in Brazil that it was possible to sustain a livelihood abroad with one's capoeira skills alone. They paved the

way to a much larger immigration movement whereby senior mestres would leave Brazil in search of better lives. In the 1980s, a first wave of mestres who were already established and respected in Brazil flew to the United States or Europe. They constitute what I call the “first generation” of capoeiristas who laid the groundwork and set the example. Those pioneers established the foundation of the transnational community of mestres and supported the entrepreneurial work of many mestres from the “second generation”.

The first generation’s use of capoeira to make a living outside of Brazil soon animated a second generation of mestres to follow the dream created by this possibility. Despite President Getúlio Vargas’ efforts, outlined in Chapter One, capoeira was still somewhat stigmatized in Brazil, catering particularly to a marginalized population. Many aspiring capoeiristas were from modest backgrounds, which made the possibility to emigrate and make money all the more attractive. Most mestres I have closely trained with come from these modest conditions. In fact, one of my main informants recalls starting capoeira because his parents wanted to put him into a self-defence class, but had no money to register all their children in more expensive sports like karate (which also entailed the purchase of a kimono). Capoeira was taught for free at his high-school and required no expensive uniform. Many mestres from the second generation thus chose to immigrate based on their impression that capoeira itself was enough to be economically successful, as the first generation had seemingly proved.

This ideal of a better future abroad was nurtured by specific developments in the capoeira community, but it combines with greater, socially constructed tropes in which

Mestre Pantera himself inserts his own lifestory. The allure of making money with capoeira is enhanced by its insertion within a more widespread ‘American dream’:

In this world of capoeira, there is this dream... it’s not even only a capoeirista dream, but I think it is the dream of many Brazilians, more so those who came from the more humble part of Brazil’s history... those who come from the *favela* (shantytown), from those neighborhoods that are more [he hesitates]... where you don’t have that many opportunities. So, there is this dream about wanting to go to the United States.

This dream has played out in his own story. He admits that although he was not convinced that he wanted to leave all that he had in Brazil (he had a growing transportation business and was still very much attached to his country, its cultural roots, as well as friends and family), he recalls telling himself:

‘I’m going to spend three years and then come back’, thinking that’s the way it works. I said to myself ‘Perfect. I’ve got Jaime’s proposition, he’s done all the paperwork already for me.’ So I said: ‘I’m going to sell everything’. I sold everything [I had], and I left for the United States. I arrived there and I encountered *Lake Placid*. [he says this with an ironic tone that reveals a past bitterness he has obviously overcome yet not forgotten<sup>48</sup>]

While some precedents had been set by the first generation, the trail was not yet blazed. It may have been easy to idealize the money-making potential of capoeira outside of Brazil. The tone in Pantera’s voice as he mentions the small United States’ town where

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<sup>48</sup> At the end of section 3.1.3, I further develop Mestre Pantera’s lifestory and further explain why he uses this tone to speak of Lake Placid, where he spent a particularly difficult few years, isolated and slowly losing the illusions he had of making lots of money and quickly returning to Brazil.

he landed reveals the shock that can follow when this dream of a possible future clashes with the complex realities of exporting and really ensuring a livelihood with capoeira.

Pantera's lifestory is not isolated. On the contrary, throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, a clear pattern takes shape whereby individuals seek to escape conditions of poverty created by neoliberal policies in Brazil by using their cultural and embodied knowledge as resource under conditions of neoliberal governmentality (as seen in Chapter Two). If the adoption of neoliberal policies during the 1990s left many lower class Brazilians with bleak economic prospects in Brazil (Amann and Baer 2002; Mollo and Saad-Filho 2006), they also created the conditions for their success in North-American markets by providing a context where mestres could use their human and cultural capital as marketable resources. Seen in this light, the mestres' migration can be analysed as their first entrepreneurial move in the neoliberal market. In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault ([1979] 2004, 236–238) suggests that mobility is a constitutive element of the use of human capital that he places at the heart of neoliberal rationality, as I further develop in section 3.2.1. If the decision to emigrate surely represents a cost for mestres, it is also, as Foucault adverts, an investment whereby they seek financial improvement. The mestres' migration is a necessary investment to the extent that they may become cultural entrepreneurs in a transnational market where their life experience can be transformed in distinctive cultural value. They crucially need markets outside their

own country which less readily offers market for “their own culture”<sup>49</sup>. The mestres first adapt to the neoliberal context by re-localizing their cultural knowledge and embodied skills. While each mestre’s migration can be taken as an individual decision within a rational, entrepreneurial calculation, all these decisions taken together lead to the apparition of a transnational community of mestres that extends the capoeira community, reconfigures it, and transforms the bonds between its members.

### **3.1.2. Transnational community of mestres mapped on national community**

The transnationalization of capoeira relied on the community of capoeiristas and the bonds between members established in Brazil before their emigration. The relations of solidarity and friendships that united practitioners became the main structure that assisted capoeira’s exportation. Despite the variations in each mestres’ migration story, particular features of community organization in Brazil were transposed transnationally as mestres drew on pre-existing social and cultural traditions to adapt their mutual relationships under new circumstances. Some important continuities exist, therefore, between the community of mestres as it was structured at the national scale and its transnational organization. The latter recreated some of the old bonds between practitioners as well as the alliances (and conflicts) between specific capoeira groups<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> There certainly exists a market for commodified capoeira in Brazil’s higher social classes, but it is responds to different dynamics and most importantly, is of a very different scope and scale.

<sup>50</sup> With the institutionalization of capoeira in the 1930s and the opening of schools and training spaces, came the organization of the capoeira community in ‘groups’. Capoeira groups are identified by their founding mestre, their specific name and logo, some of them have a distinctive group identity or style of game, even special songs, etc. Each group is lead by a head mestre, who nevertheless forms other high ranked capoeiristas who he may grant the right to open other schools under that same ‘group’s name’ (sometimes involving a fee to be able to use the name, especially in big groups whose name has come to

Mestres maintained strong links with the members of the groups to which they belong to in Brazil, travelling back at least once a year for the most part. These travels back home are occasions for them to train with their own mestre and friends, to renew their knowledge and inspiration, and to nourish their relationships at the geographical center of the community, which they will extend transnationally in the process of reconfiguring both the community and its internal social relations. How do old bonds serve the exportation of capoeira and facilitate its use as a resource? How does this expedient use, in turn, transform those old forms of organisation? Some prominent concepts from studies of transnationalism such as diaspora, ethnoscape, and network, will now help us explore the specificities of the transnational community of mestres.

Other authors have already drawn relations between the organisation of capoeira and the concept of diaspora (Delamont and Stephens 2008; Joseph 2008a, 503). The term, broadly referring to communities scattered from one single homeland to multiple geographical locations (Braziel and Mannur 2003; Clifford 1994; Tölöyan 1991), is particularly apt for an artform whose inception is literally an outcome of the forced displacement of African people: describing mestres around the world as a diaspora conveniently echoes the practice's history. Moreover, because, in its transnational form, capoeira retains a close association to Brazil as its nation of origin, diaspora is an apt term insofar as the concept points both to the deterritorialization of nations and to a rooted conception of national culture (Jusdasnis 2001; Karim 2003b; Malkki 1992;

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work like a brand, mainly in the global context/market). The group politics are as complex as capoeira itself, and they are not necessary to understand my argument, but it is good to be aware of this structuring feature of the community.

Morley and Robbins 1995). Indeed, scholarship on diaspora insists that what binds diaspora members is precisely their belonging to – and often times their longing for a return to – a ‘homeland’, a concept that grounds the community in territorial terms that reinforce the geographical grounds of certain cultural groups and their exclusive borders (something made evident by the binary used to describe ‘home’ and ‘host’ countries).

The experience of deterritorialization may indeed not be as fluid as the theories describing it. In fact, Morley and Robbins’s (1995) study of “new spaces of identity” suggest that the imagination and imaginary are much more rooted than people themselves. Scholars have duly noted that increased mobility has often times paradoxically reinforced the precedence of roots, moorings and the need for geographical anchors. It seems that the more uprooted people are, the more they need to remember their connection to primordial categories such as native soil or kinship, hence the recurrence of traditional images and meanings in the diasporic imagination, also sparked by common feelings of nostalgia (Clifford 1994; Jusdasnis 2001, 15; Karim 2003b). Brazil, the ‘homeland’, is central to the shared identity of the transnational community of capoeira practitioners. Mestres often express a nostalgic longing for Brazil (often in the lyrical songs that they compose<sup>51</sup>) and their national belonging unites them strongly at the same time as it differentiates them from their students.

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<sup>51</sup> See, for example, the following songs: “*Saudades da minha terra; Saudade do meu amor; Se hoje estou bem longe; Berimbau que me levou*” (“Nostalgia for my homeland; Nostalgia of my love; If today I’m this far; It’s the berimbau that brought me”) or “*As vezes eu vejo o dia passar; As noites eu vejo cair na janela; Saudades da minha terra Brasilia; Lembranças boas que eu tenho dela*” (“Sometimes I see the day go by; At nights I see it set through my window; Nostalgia for my motherland Brasília; Such good memories I have of her”).

The concept of diaspora may be extended to encompass primarily the connections of support and solidarity typically uniting such a community's members, whether via remittances sent to help those who stayed back home, or via help provided to newcomers upon their arrival (Guarnizo 2003; Tambiah 2000; Walston-Roberts 2004). The mestres manage similar systems. Some mestres abroad contribute to the economy back home by subsidizing social programs in Brazil, or supporting local businesses by buying material exclusively in Brazil. There is also a support system for mestres upon arrival: those who wish to emigrate may count on those who, already outside the country, provide help. Working a bit like a domino effect, many mestres first leave Brazil by invitation of a fellow capoeirista already living outside the country. Whether it is to give a workshop, participate in a special event, or collaborate in teaching, capoeiristas get invited by an established mestre who helps them upon their arrival.<sup>52</sup> The fellow capoeiristas already living abroad, often time also friends, are the main providers of support for the continuing expansion of the community.

Having a foreign connection is almost a necessary condition for mestres to emigrate. There are very concrete legal explanations for this: mestres are usually not ideal candidates to receive the travelling visas required for Brazilians to be permitted to enter the United States or Canada. They are usually unmarried young men with precarious jobs and often times no dependent siblings, making it hard to convince immigration

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<sup>52</sup> There are also other stories that brought capoeiristas outside of Brazil. As with many immigrant tales, some have followed love, others have followed ambitions, work opportunities, or familial obligations. All, however, had capoeira as one principal asset, and the capoeira community as a primary supporting network. Even those who did not have direct invitations could still seek out mestres, friends of friends, and benefit from their support. The capoeira community is not that big: wherever a capoeirista landed, there were good chances that he had some sort of connection to the mestre established closest to him.

authorities that they really need to go back to Brazil and are not trying to immigrate permanently. An official [work] invitation is usually necessary for these mestres to initially leave Brazil. Moreover, the invitation reduces the costs of such travel for the visiting mestre usually invited on the occasion of a special event in the school of an already established mestre whose students pay an extra fee to train with a mestre 'direct from Brazil'. These fees go towards paying for the mestre's plane ticket, the cost of the visa, as well as some of his living expenses. Sometimes the invitation is meant to be temporary; sometimes it is an attempt on his part to permanently immigrate. In all cases, the support network is a key platform in the process.

This system of invitation builds continuity between old friendships and group connections developed in Brazil, and the new transnational community. In a first phase, the structures of belonging remain the same as in Brazil: they deterritorialize the community yet do not modify its structure. The transnational community that individual mestres rely on to export capoeira and to immigrate is thus mapped onto the nationally established community of practice from which they all stem: the specific bonds of solidarity and friendship that structure the community nationally are recreated at a transnational scale and continue to impact the community dynamics. The 'home' community is thus still a strong binder for the 'transnational' one, the same one that assists the immigration process and provides a support network, all of which, again, approximate its functioning to that of a diaspora.

Although critical scholarship on diaspora studies has demonstrated that internal power struggles traverse diasporas and create new alignments within dispersed

communities (Hua 2006, 193), the concept still presupposes a shared homeland as the main binding factor. It thus risks focussing too much on the *roots* while obscuring the dynamic *routes* that are adopted once those communities are uprooted. This is why other perspectives from transnational studies are necessary to underscore different dimensions of community formation, foregrounding multiple scales of belonging that potentially disrupt old categories that give precedence to national or geographical factors. Indeed, although all the members of the transnational community of mestres share a connection to Brazil, their inclusion is based on identifications with and belonging to smaller categories like their specific group affiliation, or their ‘lineage’ within the community of practice<sup>53</sup>. Such categories of belonging are both significant and contested ones, even in Brazil, where the community is fraught with rivalries polarized around stylistic choices and ongoing ‘ideological’ quarrels concerning the way capoeira should be transmitted and developed<sup>54</sup>. The transnational community is similarly organized along these contested lines of identity and to this extent, it is reminiscent of what Appadurai (1996, 48) calls an “ethnoscape” or a “landscape of group identity” that is now spread out across the world, tied by a common structure of belonging that remains strong despite the displacement, constant motion, and the ultimately scattered geographical locations of its members. We will see that in the case of capoeira, this landscape of group identity not only *overarches* the displacement of its members, but also *depends* on it.

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<sup>53</sup> Spanish anthropologist Menara Lube Guizardi (2011), for example, shows the importance of those relations of lineage in the local organization of the capoeira community in Madrid.

<sup>54</sup> In her doctoral dissertation, anthropologist Simone Pondé Vassallo (2001) precisely positions conflict as the organizing principle of the capoeira community in Brazil (see particularly pp.34–35).

The sustainability of the community of mestres is indeed highly dependent on its members' constant travels insofar as the practice that links all these individuals and constitutes the cement of their community is an embodied dialogue that is only possible between at least two members who need to be physically co-present. In a transnational context, this becomes a real challenge: because of the embodied and participatory nature of capoeira, the actualization of the transnational community can only be achieved via corporeal encounters and exchanges, which are particularly hard to concretize with practitioners now scattered across geographical borders. For this reason, a whole circuit of *batizados*, special workshops, and reciprocal invitations – the specific economy of which is detailed in the next section – develops as a structure of exchange which, if it did not emerge with the transnationalization of capoeira (ie. it already existed in Brazil), certainly assumes a reinvigorated importance in the current constitution of the transnational community.

This circuit organises mestres' embodied encounters and creates new clusters of solidarity. Indeed, while friendships welded in Brazil initially motivate the directions of the mestres' travels, new structuring factors also stem from the transnational condition of the community of mestres and exceed its national form. Given the spatial dispersion of the community, some clusters form naturally around local geographies. It is easier and less expensive for someone in New York to invite capoeiristas from Boston, Montreal and Philadelphia than to invite fellow mestres who live in Europe or even in Brazil, especially given the visa restrictions mentioned above, which provide formidable

obstacles to capoeiristas' free travels.<sup>55</sup> The transnational mapping of the new community triggers new alliances based on geographical proximity between capoeiristas who may have never associated in Brazil. Transnationalization thus not only deterritorializes the community, but also reterritorializes its clusters of solidarity according to geographical proximity. This new configuration partly transforms the previous, nationally inscribed organization of the community, but most of the time is able to cohabit with the old, more static map: it adds new alliances without necessarily disrupting previous ones.

The reconfiguration of the community is not only driven by the new geographical conditions of dispersion, however, but it is shaped by new economic necessities. The *batizado* circuit sets the basis for a specific economy that sustains these travels and provides the context for the emergence of the figure of the mestre as cultural entrepreneur in a community now more akin to a professional network. Indeed, the establishment of this travel circuit not only serves to bridge the geographical dispersal of the community, actively maintaining the relationships between its members, but also becomes a sign of the professionalization of mestres who build and navigate this circuit as rational actors pursuing their own individual, entrepreneurial goals. In the following section, I argue that the specificity of this transnational network is best understood by considering its close alignment to the neoliberal rationality that motivates the mestres as cultural

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<sup>55</sup> Despite this extra complication, Brazil has nevertheless long kept – arguably still benefits from – an uncontested plusvalue. Yet this is slowly changing as more and more capoeiristas from the second generation, initially developed and inscribed nationally, now live outside of Brazil. The mestres who want to invite capoeiristas that they know, respect and trust thus end up inviting these capoeiristas they had contact with at the time, in Brazil, who are now living abroad. Another factor that has now changed is that the mestres from the second generation now have obtained papers in their host countries, so they can travel more freely outside of Brazil, without the extra embarrassment of the visa that mestres living in Brazil still need. The dynamics described here are changing very fast and the demonstration in this chapter applies only to the mestres of the second generation who are the main focus and the central informants of this research.

entrepreneurs. I am reminded, here, of communication and culture scholar Ilana Gershon's (2011, 540) question in her article about neoliberal agency: "If neoliberal selves exist before relationships, what are relationships under neoliberalism? They are alliances that should be based on market rationality." Therefore, she asserts, under neoliberal conditions, "every relationship is a business partnership" (540). In view of these considerations, I suggest that the relationships between mestres should no longer only be studied strictly with anthropological concepts that would emphasize lineages, feelings of belonging, and group solidarity, but also in terms of the market rationality that underlies them. This is why I turn, in the following section, to concepts drawn from economic anthropology in order to highlight specifically the interplays between collective and individual objectives that drive the structure of the community's specific economy, organized around the *batizado* circuit.

### **3.1.3. The dialectic of market and community: from diasporic to professional network**

Although there are now more and more exchanges amongst immigrated mestres, the bulk of their travels still happens around annual events called *batizados* (literally, "baptism"), which have great symbolic and economic significance for practitioners. *Batizados* are celebrations during which new students are officially welcomed to the world of capoeira and receive their first cord (or graduation), while older students change their graduation (following the same belt-type system as in Asian martial arts such as karate from which the idea was indeed imported as part of Mestre Bimba's efforts to give

respectability to capoeira as a sport). Since their creation by Mestre Bimba, *batizados* have always been significant ceremonies, marking the life of a capoeirista and of a school. In a transnational context, they assume new functions that add layers to their importance. The transnational *batizado* circuit is particularly apt to reveal the presence of a “dialectic of community and market”, a dynamic extensively studied by anthropologist Stephen Gudeman (2001, 2005, 2008). Indeed, while *batizados* have always been important events for the community social life, the mestres’ participation in them is now also prompted by market-like calculations and means-ends relations. This dialectic is not exclusive to the economy of transnational capoeira. On the contrary, Gudeman asserts it

exists in all economies, even if not fully present in conscious thought or perhaps even denied in formal discourse. At times, the two realms are like one of those puzzle pictures in which a line drawing can be seen either as a duck or a rabbit but not both. [...] Acts and things are seen now as part of community, now as separated in the market, depending on the framing. (2005, 97)

All economies, Gudeman explains, consist of the two realms of market and community, because humans are motivated both by social fulfillment realized through specific, personalized relationships and individual needs attained in anonymous, instrumental transactions.

The transnational *batizado* economy reflects a particularly complex interweaving of individual and community stakes. *Batizados* are crucial for the collective social survival: they offer an occasion for the greater community to gather and generate opportunities to play capoeira with mestres from other schools in the city, the province or

the country, and even from foreign countries. These opportunities constitute motivations not only for the students to participate in their school's *batizado*, but for mestres to participate in those of their fellow colleagues. Indeed, gathering to play is at the very core of what capoeiristas do, and the sheer pleasure of sharing good games and *rodas* is an important motivation for mestres' travels. After mestres emigrate, they are often isolated in distinct cities all over North-America (and the rest of the world)<sup>56</sup>. They may rely on telecommunication media to keep themselves up to date on movements and stylistic tendencies, 'hot' new songs, or community news, gossips and events; but most importantly, they need to physically travel to participate in *rodas* and play with one another: a constant flow of mestres is necessary for capoeira to materialize in the dispersed regions where mestres have settled. A sustained travelling activity becomes a necessity not only for the individuals involved, but for the constitution and vitality of the community at large.

Focussing on the behaviour of single mestres within the circuit, however, highlights economic goals whereby individuals seek to maximize their own interests. Indeed, I suggest that mestres also participate in the *batizado* circuit to pursue their own entrepreneurial objectives – that is, using capoeira as a resource to build a local enterprise and generate enough revenue to sustain their own livelihood. For the mestre who is organizing the event, the *batizado* is significant in the annual budget of a school: they cost a lot to organize, yet potentially generate good revenues if well administered. As one

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<sup>56</sup> It is important to mention, again, that this applies mainly to mestres of the second generation that I am analyzing here. The community is growing fast, and mestres arriving now in the main cities will likely have other patterns of affiliation and community making, insofar as there will already be established groups and mestres in the city where they land. They will not be as isolated as the mestres from the second generation who arrived in cities that had no capoeira at all.

informant mestre explained to me, *batizados* are the occasion to make a little bit of extra money that can be reinvested in the school throughout the year, or that can be used in slower periods when the school's income (mostly membership fees) is not enough to cover the expenses. Furthermore, when recently immigrated mestres are trying to run a school in a city where no one knows capoeira, inviting fellow mestres to one's *batizado* is an expedient choice that helps sustain one's enterprise. Indeed, it is hard to give a real sense of what capoeira is if you are alone in one city (or if the other capoeiristas are your competitors in the market) and when you have no one to play with. Inviting other mestres allows to mount performances where the resident mestre may display his own skills more widely for he may play with another high-skilled player, it allows to create publicity and buzz around an event, and to charge an extra fee for students to participate. It is good publicity and exposure for one's group, one's work, and for capoeira itself.

The *batizado*'s [financial] success, though it largely benefits the organizing mestre and his enterprise, nevertheless relies on a community of peers insofar as it depends on the presence of out-of-town mestres who draw students and other capoeiristas to participate, both from the group and from all over the community. The possibility to play with all capoeiristas who gather at these special events and especially to receive instruction from different mestres drives students to participate in the *batizado* and importantly, to pay the fee that their mestre charges for the event. The presence of mestres from abroad influences the price that can be asked and the economic success of the event. This exemplifies Gudeman's (2005, 97) assertion quoted above that "acts and things are seen now as part of community, now as separated in the market, depending on

the framing”: the mestre who organizes a *batizado* invites his fellow friends so that they may hang out and play capoeira together, maintaining both their friendships and their skills up to date, yet his decision to invite them (and whom to invite in particular) is also motivated by a market-based calculation that seeks to insure the profitability of his event<sup>57</sup>.

The community structure assumes professional importance when the financial success of one’s *batizado* relies on the presence of other members. From this standpoint, it is important for the “capoeira entrepreneurs” to maintain a well developed network of relations in order to assure that respected mestres will participate in their *batizados*. This same community is important for mestres who want and/or need to travel and network to enhance their “portfolio” by visiting other schools, showing off their game and getting their names ‘out there’ so that they make sure to remain active in the *batizado* circuit. Both economist Terry Flew (2005) and human geographer Linda McDowell (2009) suggest that managing “portfolio careers” is a typical feature ensuring the success of cultural entrepreneurs who navigate cultural, knowledge-based economies. From this perspective, this particular behaviour of mestres reinforces the argument that the *batizado* circuit is not only a structure that maintains community vitality, but it is also a specific economy. One conversation I had with Gigante, a mestre based in New York yet who is

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<sup>57</sup> Bourdieu’s concept of social capital could also be relevant to highlight the multiple interests that animate the mestres within the *batizado* network. Indeed, Bourdieu defines social capital as: “the pool of resources, real or potential, linked to one’s *lasting network of relations* [...], in other words, linked to one’s belonging to a group, [in which agents are] united by permanent and useful links.” (1980a, 2) He continues: “The volume of social capital that one particular agent holds thus depends on the extent of the links that he can efficiently mobilize and on the volume of capital (economic, cultural, or symbolic) held by each one of the other agents to whom he is connected.” (1980a, 2). The *batizado* circuit allows mestres to maintain and build their social capital, on which their potential to generate economic capital through their own *batizado* partly depends.

very active on the *batizado* circuit worldwide, confirms the professional function of the community. After he came back from several months of travels teaching capoeira and attending countless events in Europe, I commented on how good a life he had, insisting on how lucky he was to be traveling so extensively. His response was biting: “Well, I gotta pay the bills right? I can’t stop going to those events because how am I gonna pay the bills? The rent just got up this month, too...” Though he did end up admitting, after prompting, that it was fun to be paid to play capoeira and travel around the world, the way he initially framed his response clearly showed that mestres also seek personal profit within the *batizado* circuit. Every visit to another mestre’s *batizado* helps a mestre stay well networked, both for his own school/enterprise to successfully work during the *batizados*, and also in order to be invited to other’s *batizados*, which implies at the same time a work contract, a platform for self-promotion, and further networking possibilities.

It would be wrong, however, to reduce the *batizado* economy to a series of rational, calculated actions by cultural entrepreneurs in a professional network. As Gudeman (2001, 28) points out, communities are “regulated through moral obligations that have the backing of powerful sanctions”; some traditionally binding social norms and moral obligations also influence the mestres’ decisions. For example, each year Mestre Pantera invites in priority the founding mestre of the capoeira group to which he belongs, who is also a friend. This invitation has been relentless over the years, even at times when the mestre in question had almost stopped training capoeira, was in bad shape, or worse, almost mistreated the students during his stays (I have seen him deliberately hurt a student for no apparent reason). From a strictly entrepreneurial perspective, the choice of

this particular mestre as a special guest is certainly not expedient. I have met students from nearby groups who chose to no longer attend Pantera's *batizado* because, they told me, they found the guest mestre did not bring them any new knowledge or inspiration worth travelling and paying for. They would rather travel to events where other guests would attend. Yet Pantera, arguably aware of this, keeps inviting this mestre, certainly out of friendship but also, it seems, because it is part of the capoeira etiquette and social norms. As the mestre from whom Pantera received his own mestre graduation, and as the founding mestre of his group, there is an unspoken, moral obligation binding Pantera. If he chooses not to invite him, he may be perceived in the community as disrespectful and unappreciative, or again, as greedy and too preoccupied with the expedient choice of guests while failing to recognize his own tradition and bonds within the community.

We witness here the presence of what we may call a moral economy, a concept which recognizes that social norms and moral obligations that have traditionally ensured collective survival are not completely erased by the infiltration of market principles<sup>58</sup>. Sociologist Andrew Sayer (2000, 80) argues that the “moral-political norms and sentiments [that influence economic activities] are [conversely] compromised by economic forces; so much so in some cases that the norms represent little more than legitimations of entrenched power relations.” Pantera's constant invitation of his mestre legitimizes the latter's position of power and respectability in the community, despite his

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<sup>58</sup> The origins of the concept of moral economy are in E.P. Thompson's (1991) work on eighteenth century England, but it was anthropologist James Scott (1976) who gave it a more widespread application by using it to explain peasant economies in the Third World, specifically East Asia.

inability or unwillingness to live up to community standards of performance and pedagogy.

More recent scholarship on moral economy (Austen 1993; Carrier 2005; Hann and Hart 2011; Lind 2010; Sayer 2000, 2003) draws, comments, and builds on Polanyi's classical analysis in *The Great Transformation* ([1944] 1957), which emphasized the centrality of concepts like reciprocity and redistribution to understand most economies and underlined "the dangers of over-extending the principle of the market", as Chris Hann and Keith Hart (2011, 14) comment. These authors also argue that: "the crisis of neoliberal capitalism in the first decade of the twenty-first century has lent a renewed relevance to Polanyi's [...] analysis." (Hann and Hart 2011, 14). The case of *mestres* illustrates that reciprocity remains crucial to community organization despite the other motivations that animate its members. The principles of solidarity, reciprocity, or mutual help, all of which traditionally organize the community's social order, also inform its specific economy or the terms of the transactions that occur in it under neoliberal conditions.

As a principle of reciprocity, we can safely assert that *mestres* participate in each other's *batizados* as a way to mutually support each other: each one knows the importance of the *batizado* for a capoeira school, so the visiting *mestre* supports the organizing one, partly out of solidarity and partly out of the expectation of that *mestre*'s participation in return. While reciprocity is not systematic, participating in someone's *batizado* certainly helps at least to forge positive relations amongst *mestres*. The principle of reciprocity can also be seen as a community response to the potentially disintegrating

forces of the market and of geographical dispersion, thus illustrating Christopher Lind's (2010) argument that the moral economy is a form of community resistance. He explains: "The consciousness of [...] a moral economy [...] appears as a response to threat. From Thompson's point of view, consciousness of the moral economy comes into existence in answer to the danger posed by the expansion of free-market ideology or the market economy or (beneath the mask) capitalism." (2010, 62) The mestres' reciprocal participation in each other's *batizados* may be seen as a response to the precarious life that they each face, as a result of their shared experiences of socio-economic hardships in Brazil that forced them to relocate transnationally as well as the instability of their condition as immigrants trying to earn a living with capoeira.

Envisaging the community of mestres as a moral economy sheds light on the continuity between social and economic principles organizing the community, yet it may also illuminate the unstable interplays of solidarity and competition that arise when the community is also governed by market principles<sup>59</sup>. Adopting a slightly different approach to moral economy, Sayer (2000, 80) defines the latter as a specific mode of inquiry: "[...] the study of how economic activities of all kinds are influenced and structured by moral dispositions and norms, and how in turn those norms may be compromised, overridden or reinforced by economic pressures". One episode in Pantera's life especially evokes the different ways in which the introduction of market dynamics

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<sup>59</sup> To be fair, a recent literature studying the rising importance of local communities suggests that internal conflicts and intra-community competition exists even when communities are not reconfigured into markets. At the local level, internal conflicts may always arise within the community concerning their own local management, for example. Many social scientists have warned against the widespread projection of communities as unified, harmonious and integrated groups (Agrawal and Gibson 2001; Brosius et al. 2005; Coffey 2003; Coombe 2010).

may interfere with the traditional norms guiding the mestres' interactions. When capoeira was still relatively unknown outside of Brazil, the help of the community was welcomed. However, as the market slowly saturates (or is perceived to saturate), the arrival of a new capoeirista can also be seen as a threat to a mestre's established 'turf'. A bit like the game of capoeira itself, the community is based on both playful cooperation and combative confrontation. If, as was the case with the Peruvian ceramic makers that we mentioned in Chapter Two (see page 118 of this dissertation), the introduction of market competition in the community triggers potential disruptions of previous moral bonds, it may also reinforce the moral economy whereby members forge alliances to assure community survival.

Mestre Pantera's story exemplifies these new tensions; albeit ones ultimately resolved via solidarity rather than competition. Mestre Pantera first came to North-America under the invitation of Arijua, a friend who had been very wise and successful in making a living with capoeira in Canada. He was the one who prompted Pantera to leave Brazil with promises of greater opportunities. He invited him twice to participate in events, and even offered to host Mestre Pantera for six months, so that he could experience firsthand the North-American life and see if immigration might suit him. In Pantera's account of his journey, this fellow capoeirista was crucial in his own immigration process – both in planting the idea in his head, helping him visit a few times, and providing support once he was here.

Once Mestre Pantera decided to immigrate, he was nevertheless expected to go to a different city than this friend so that he would not interfere with the latter's business.

He therefore moved to a small town where a student had already started generating interest and promoting capoeira to a group of interested people. Pantera soon realized, however, that the town was too small to be able to support a mestre's living from capoeira, let alone to make enough money in three years to go back to Brazil as he had initially envisioned. The town, as he humorously puts it, had fewer people than a *bloco* in the carnival of Bahia. He was nevertheless kind of 'stuck' there – he could not move to the greater city nearby where his friend was already established: if he did, he would become his competitor, and the first mestre's business was not big enough to provide income for two persons. Solidarity became harder, now involving market competition. Though Arijua, the first capoeirista, had prompted Pantera to come, he would not give up his own market share only to help him. Yet because they were also friends and had established bonds of solidarity, he may have felt compelled to help him.

Recalling the whole story retrospectively, Pantera explained that in this case, the friendship was strong enough and the two individuals were sensible enough to work out solutions. They built a collaboration that allowed them both to be in the same city. Even though, as Pantera suggested to me, these solutions came out of business negotiations rather than through practices of solidarity, their story suggests that the community may still be one of the key elements that sustains capoeira's potential as a resource; it is at the basis of the business partnerships and alliances that ensured these two capoeiristas' livelihoods outside of Brazil. In other instances, outcomes are not as happy, and community bonds can be crudely disrupted by monetary relations. Countless stories circulate in the community where the economic objective underlying mestres' actions

triggers feelings of suspicions, jealousy, or rivalry that break relations of solidarity when an economic calculus dominates someone's behavior.

If the community of mestres provides the context for capoeira as a transnational form, we need to turn our attention to the individual figure of the “mestre as cultural entrepreneur” in order to understand more precisely how mestres use capoeira expediently. In the following section, I further characterize the mestres, not only as cultural entrepreneurs, but as clear examples of what I will call “neoliberal subjects”. Moreover, I suggest that the Foucauldian notion of the “individual as the site of enterprise”, underlying many theoretical definitions of the neoliberal subject, takes a particularly adapted meaning in the case of mestres whose very persona, a combination of their lifestory and embodied knowledge, becomes the central pillar of the capoeira school as a cultural enterprise.

### **3.2. THE MESTRE'S ENTERPRISE: LOCAL ORGANIZATION OF CAPOEIRA SCHOOLS**

While the community provided a support network that facilitated the transnational exportation of capoeira at large; within this network, it is the labour of each mestre that transforms capoeira into a resource that ensures individuals' livelihoods. The following sections explore how mestres locally organize their capoeira schools as small enterprises within a neoliberal economy. From this perspective, the mestre's actions, even his very own life, respond to rational, market-based calculations wherein he epitomizes the

neoliberal subject, building an enterprise around his human capital. It would be wrong, however, to reduce capoeira schools to neoliberal enterprises and the mestres to mere entrepreneurs; for this reason, I also highlight the presence of those other ‘economies’ that co-exist with this neoliberal logic.

### **3.2.1. The neoliberal subject and human capital**

Mestres who adopt an entrepreneurial attitude to their own embodied knowledge are excellent representatives of “neoliberal subjects” (as conceived by Brown 2011; Gane 2008; Lemke 2001; Rose 1989; all drawing on Foucault [1979] 2004). I describe mestres as neoliberal subjects in order to highlight the particularities of their cultural entrepreneurship, specifically adapted to conditions of neoliberalism (as opposed to other forms of capitalism). As Foucault anticipated as early as 1979, the enterprise that characterizes the neoliberal paradigm relies on a new form of capital, human capital, rooted in the very body and aptitudes of the subjects, in their very capacity to *do*. Human capital thus defined consists in the aptitudes and expertise that may ensure revenue to individuals ([1979] 2004, 230). From this perspective, zooming in on the figure of the mestre allows us to understand how they experience and navigate neoliberal structures locally, even though these processes remain inseparable from the transnational context in which they occur.

Anthropologists have recently called attention to the local manifestations of neoliberalism so as to stop continuously framing it as an overarching, unified, global, and arguably hegemonic force (Ferguson 2009; Freeman 2007; Gershon 2011; Hoffman,

DeHart and Collier 2006). This exhortation led many scholars to focus on the specific type of subject which emerges in this context; subjects who, under the specific neoliberal governmentality described in the previous chapter, are compelled to adopt a market-driven approach to their lives (Brown 2011; Gane 2008; Gershon 2011; Hilgers 2013; Rudnyckyj 2009). Specifically, communication and culture scholar Ilana Gershon (2011) argues that “neoliberal agency” presupposes individuals who reflexively manage their selves as they would manage a business. She argues: “The neoliberal model of agency insists that all agents are fashioned as autonomous rational calculators, with size and functional ability the primary factors for creating distinctions. So individual people are simply smaller versions of corporations, communities are interchangeable with small businesses” (2011, 541).

This particular subject-position is specific to neoliberal rationality insofar as it responds to the social conditions put in place under this specific system, which encourage individuals to give their lives specific entrepreneurial forms. As Foucault adverts: in contrast to the consumer society, the society of the spectacle, or the society of mass capitalism, “the market-regulated society that neoliberals imagine is a society in which the regulating principle is not so much the exchange of commodities but rather the mechanisms of competition. [...] That is to say, it is a society that responds not so much to the commodity-effect, but it is a society that responds to the competitive dynamic.” ([1979] 2004, 152). Neoliberal society, according to Foucault, is “a society made up of enterprise-units” (231).

Political scientist Wendy Brown (2011) further explores the *social* implications of neoliberalism and demonstrates that neoliberal rationality influences not only economic life but also the greater social organization of countries. “Neo-liberal rationality, while foregrounding the market, is not only or even primarily focused on the economy; rather it involves *extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action*, even as the market itself remains a distinctive player.” (paragraph 7; emphasis in the original). In other words, neoliberal rationality imagines and projects a society that is run like a market, where all actions are justified in terms of a rational calculus, including individual subjects’ life activities. It shapes citizens whose purpose is to be rational actors in this market:

[...] not only is the human being configured exhaustively as *homo oeconomicus*, all dimensions of human life are cast in terms of a market rationality. While this entails submitting every action and policy to considerations of profitability, equally important is the production of all human and institutional action as rational entrepreneurial action, conducted according to a calculus of utility, benefit, or satisfaction against a microeconomic grid of scarcity, supply and demand, and moral value-neutrality. [...] through discourse and policy promulgating its criteria, neo-liberalism produces rational actors and imposes market rationale for decision-making in all spheres. (Brown 2011, parargaph 9)

As market rationality comes to encompass all dimensions of human lives, individuals are pushed to become “entrepreneurs of themselves” – a notion that builds on and extends the ideas put forward by Foucault ([1979] 2004, 232) and that applies uncannily to capoeira mestres. In Foucault’s analysis, neoliberal markets run on human

capital, defined as the capacity to work and turn out a profit in the future. This specific capital is what differentiates the neoliberal context from the previous liberal rationality: the neoliberal economic rationale is not driven by an accumulation of a capital that would be exterior to the subject and allow him to own means of production or material goods. Rather, the subject himself *is* this capital; his capacity to work is what ensures his future livelihood: the neoliberal subject is “entrepreneur of himself, being his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of his revenue” (232). Capital is thus inseparable from the person who holds it; in this sense, it describes exactly the mestres’ situation: the very individual, the mestre himself *is* the “machine” and he uses his own vital energy to produce the flow of revenue. This is why sociologist Mike Gane (2008, 358) insists, in his own review of Foucault, that whereas liberalism considered individuals as producers or consumers, neoliberalism sees the individual as the very site of ‘enterprise’. He explains: “What Foucault picks out is the new conception of human capital, and a critique of earlier liberalism in terms of time. Work is economic conduct; the individual becomes the ‘entrepreneur of himself’. This introduces the conception of the individual’s culture as a form of capital [...]”(Gane 2008, 360) Gane announces, it seems, the use of culture as a resource by locating the individual’s own culture as a potential source of capital.

The use of capoeira as a resource stems from the necessity, in the neoliberal context, to become one’s own enterprise. Mestres adopt an entrepreneurial approach to their lives by drawing on their human capital: their embodied knowledge as well as their cultural capital, made distinctive by its transnational displacement. The mestre becomes

“the site of his own enterprise” in a process that is, I suggest, a quintessential illustration of entrepreneurship by neoliberal subjects.

### **3.2.2. The mestre as site of his own enterprise**

Mestres literally become the site of their own enterprise while their bodies become its medium in a market based capoeira. The mestre himself is the most prominent manifestation of capoeira, which he embodies and performs in its multiple dimensions. His body and physical skills materialize capoeira: they literally give it a tangible form. In a transnational context especially, the mestre is the principal channel through which foreign students have access to and understand the artform and the cultural universe in which it is embedded. Some mestres even see this as one of the most difficult part of their work. Indeed, in a Q&A where a few mestres were asked: “What is the most difficult part of teaching the Brazilian art of capoeira to non-Brazilian students?”, one of them pointed precisely to this exclusive reliance on the figure of the mestre. He explained that it was difficult to know that his students’ whole understanding of capoeira depended entirely on him. In Brazil, he said, capoeira is everywhere: there is already a basic understanding of what the game is and of concepts like *malandragem* or *mandinga* which apply in capoeira but draw on broader socio-cultural meanings and values. Moreover, in a Brazilian class, there are usually a greater number of advanced students who embody capoeira alongside the mestre, thus complementing his own performance. The students already understand the practice in its multiplicity of meanings instead of relying on one single individual’s

explanation and/or performance. In Brazil, capoeira exceeds the mestre while outside of Brazil, he is the principal representative of capoeira.

Economist Jeremy Rifkin (2000) explains that *access* is precisely the main driving force of a new postindustrial economy. In its current form, he asserts, “capitalism is transformed from a system based on exchanging goods to one based on accessing segments of experience” (94).<sup>60</sup> In what he calls the “age of access”, the new economy no longer consists in the commodification and exchange of material products but rather in the selling and buying of immaterial goods such as knowledge or human experience. “Instead of commodifying places and things and exchanging them in the market, we now secure access to one another’s time and expertise and borrow what we need” (Rifkin 2000, 95). From this perspective, the mestre’s very own life experience, his long cohabitation with capoeira, his hard training and the ensuing knowledge he has acquired constitute the intangible ‘thing’ of value that becomes the effective basis of his small enterprise. Mestres hold what Charles Leadbeater (2005, 126) calls “tacit knowledge”: “learnt by osmosis, over long periods, in very particular contexts”; “often intuitive, habitual and reflexive”.

The mestre is in a particularly good position to build an economy around his knowledge because it is a specific knowledge that few North-Americans can claim to

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<sup>60</sup> The notion of “experience” has numerous acceptations: From the sellers’ point of view, the ‘experience’ sold is the know-how of one human being in one discipline. In this respect, the economy revolves around the access to another person’s distinctive knowledge, in other words, his experience. The second understanding of the “experience economy” highlights the experience of the consumer, who buys a “short-term access to simulated worlds and altered states of consciousness.” (Rifkin 2000, 29). Each one of those two understandings of the “experience” sold in the new economy applies to the economy of capoeira. We will leave the analysis of the second dimension for Chapter Five; now, let’s concentrate on the mestre’s experience as the central motor of the capoeira enterprise.

have: capoeira is fairly recent outside of Brazil. The distance travelled introduces a “discontinuity of knowledge” in the “social life” of capoeira, to borrow Appadurai’s (1986) vocabulary, a discontinuity that transforms expertise and authenticity into central concepts on which mestres can build. Appadurai asserts: “[...] as commodities travel greater distances (institutional, spatial and temporal), knowledge about them tends to become partial, contradictory and differentiated” (1986, 56). The discontinuity gives room for maneuver to the mestre who has travelled alongside capoeira and represents the ‘continuity’ of the knowledge. The mestre can add his cultural capital to his specific “tacit knowledge” to foment his enterprise. Yet insofar as the intangible knowledge at the core of the enterprise is closely linked to his life, his nationality and the underlying cultural knowledge associated to it, we can safely draw a parallel with Foucault’s notion of human capital: the mestre himself becomes the very core of his enterprise, which makes even more obvious his coincidence with the neoliberal subject. Like the neoliberal subject, the mestre adopts an entrepreneurial approach to his own life, transforming his lifestory into human capital and selling access to his experience; a service that is “immaterial and intangible”, that is “performed, not produced”, to keep in line with Rifkin’s theory (2000, 84).

The figure of the mestre has always been central in the learning process of any capoeirista. This performative artform has been transmitted over the generations via oral and embodied channels. What I emphasize here is that the recontextualization of capoeira in the “age of access” and the consequent transformation of the mestre into the site of his enterprise shifts the role of this traditional figure: the mestre is no longer only a

transmitter of knowledge but also a “product” of some sort. Tellingly, when I asked the students in NYC, where there is a great variety of groups to choose from, why they chose to train with this specific group, almost all of them immediately pointed out that they particularly liked the mestre’s energy. (Again, it is almost impossible not to draw a parallel with Foucault’s analysis whereby the subject’s vital energy *is* the human capital to be exploited in the neoliberal economy.) The mestre constitutes an important element of differentiation amongst all other similar capoeira enterprises. As such, he needs to present and market his very own person in order for his enterprise to be successful and profitable. In other words, if the mestre is the most immediate embodiment of the capoeira product that he sells, he needs to carefully craft the way he presents himself and his knowledge in order to contribute to the appeal of the capoeira ‘package’ he is offering. For this purpose, I argue, he develops a ‘persona’, a term I use to underscore the performative dimension of the process.

I also use the term ‘persona’ to evoke anthropologist Alexis Celeste Bunten’s (2008) work on self-commodification. In her analysis of Native tour guides’ work, self-commodification, she suggests, “involves any type of product performance that requires the individual to adjust his or her values, emotions, or both, to achieve economic goal” (2008, 381). In this process, individuals construct “a marketable identity product” that Bunten calls a “commodified persona”. While I believe that the mestres are best conceptualized as cultural workers who provide a service rather than as a commodity themselves, I loosely build on Bunten’s idea of the ‘persona’ as the product. After all, the service that mestres sell – a [commodified] access to their knowledge and lifestyle – does

involve as certain *mise-en-scene* of their own person. Just like the Native tour guides that Buntén examines, mestres create a version of themselves – a persona – through a calculated adaptation of their own personalities, emotions and cultural background. They then put forward this persona as a central pillar of their cultural enterprise.

Each mestre I have encountered has a different approach to this aspect of their work that requires them to position their own subjective self within a business strategy. Mestre Lagartixa's case is particularly informative. Specifically, he emphasizes the continuity of his current work with the past of his lifestory to construct an authenticity that characterizes his persona. In his declamations to his students after classes, he often emphasizes the various obstacles he has had to overcome in order to reach the position he now occupies. His narrative strategy constructs a 'persona' defined by an integrity rooted in a history of sacrifice and dedication in the midst of economic hardship. Lagartixa regularly translates those memories into colourful anecdotes about how he had to ride his bicycle for miles in order to get to a particular *roda*, or how he had to arrive early to sweep the floor and clean the academy so he could train for free. His is not an isolated case; it is representative of a wider tendency. Since many mestres come from difficult financial backgrounds and have faced many challenges to overcome them, they often use these circumstances to construct their authenticity, a phenomenon addressed by sports sociologist Janelle Joseph (2008a, 509–510), who notes that the initial poverty of mestres ensures the authenticity both of themselves as 'real capoeiristas' and of the practice that they teach outside of Brazil.

The integrity of Mestre Lagartixa's lifestory thus creates a persona whose authenticity, rooted in socio-economic hardship, drives his [profit-driven] enterprise. Lagartixa presents the authenticity of his own experience as a guarantee that, driven by a desire that his students follow a similar path of integrity, he will *avoid* letting economic factors impinge on the group he is leading, an attitude that, he implies, differentiates him from other mestres he more or less implicitly accuses of doing just that. He insists that he wants his students to learn capoeira how he himself has done and will not modify his teaching to accommodate the urban American context. By so doing, he creates a bridge between his version of his own life experience and what he wants to transmit to his students. The life experience, then, is seen as the benchmark by which all other experiences are compared and it becomes the reference for the group's common objective in terms of the capoeiristas it should breed. By insisting on the authenticity of his own practice via his lifestory, Lagartixa strives to reinforce the bond and attachment that his students should feel both to him as a mestre and to capoeira as an artform. His commitment and integrity both justifies the value of the experience that sustains his enterprise (ie. students should choose to train with him and no one else because he sells 'authentic knowledge'), and prompts a similar commitment from his students, which stimulates their participation in the group.

This strategy also conveniently incites students to *maintain* their economic bond to him even though Lagartixa 'refuses' to let financial considerations influence his relations to the artform and to his students. Indeed, Lagartixa uses his own background of hard dedication to pressure and prompt his current [North-American] students to strive

for a similar commitment to the artform. This commitment takes a different form in the context of transnationalization and commercialization of capoeira, insofar as the current students could never completely re-create their mestre's experience (nor even, incidentally, verify the veracity of the version he presents to them). Not only do they seldom come from the same conditions of poverty that mestres escaped, but even if they did, they would have experienced these in a North-American context where the options are quite different from those available to mestres in Brazil. The contemporary student's commitment is expressed not in sweeping the floor before class starts but rather by regularly paying class fees, constantly renewing their memberships, buying expensive merchandise and participating in other schools' *batizados*, etc. This is what Joseph (2008a, 509–510) calls one of the “logical paradoxes” of the capoeira commodity: contradictory versions of the commitment to and the authenticity of the practice circulate, when applied to impoverished Brazilians or relatively rich *gringos*. Moreover, insofar as students can never experience capoeira as fully and authentically as their mestres, they need to keep returning to the mestre as the knowledge and service provider to experience and learn capoeira by osmosis. In this sense, the insistence on locating the authenticity of practice within one's own lifestory is a means of creating a bond that fuels the market and creates profit. However, it also provides the glue that holds another kind of economy together by fostering values that have always been central to capoeira groups' cohesion. Just like a series of reciprocal moral obligations bind the community of mestres together, they also structure the close community of students around their mestres.

### **3.2.3. Coexistence of economies**

The discussion of Lagartixa's persona offers a perfect transition to reveal the dialogic coexistence of the different types of economies that structure capoeira groups/enterprises. Lagartixa's insistence on transmitting the artform without modifying his integrity in view of the profit motive may have multiple functions and motivations, some of which exceed the entrepreneurial. It also serves a pedagogical purpose that motivates his students to learn and experience the art more fully. It is revealing that he urges them to be committed not only by paying their membership fees, but by also frequently encouraging them to go visit other mestres' *rodas*, to meet and train amongst themselves, or to learn to play music; all activities from which he derives no direct economic benefit. I have observed amongst Lagartixa's students a tangible eagerness to learn capoeira deeply and a commitment that is particular to his group, a possible result of what is not only a well crafted persona with market appeal but also a good didactic technique.

The mestre cannot, then, be reduced to the persona that he puts forward as the marketable face of his enterprise. The relations that he nurtures with his students are more complex than direct commercial transactions providing commodified access to his expertise; some are better characterized as acts of knowledge transmission reciprocated by moral compensations from students rather than financial ones. To examine this dimension of the capoeira's local organization, we need to understand the capoeira group in North-America not only as a neoliberal enterprise but also as an extension and adaptation of the more traditionally organized groups in Brazil, before the necessity to

turn profits was a central issue. Some of the traditional relations based on respect, fidelity and mutual obligations between mestres and apprentices now cohabit with market-based relations between entrepreneurs and clients, creating a complex and always shifting group dynamic.

In her doctoral thesis, anthropologist Simone Pondé Vassallo (2001) describes the organization of capoeira schools in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil extensively. She draws on French anthropologist Marcel Mauss' theory of the gift according to which there are three fundamental steps in gift relations: to give, to receive, and to give back. Building on these, Vassallo insists that relations of gift and counter-gift implicitly link the mestre and his students beyond the notion of material gain (see in particular pp. 204–210). She suggests that the mestre will further reward those students who are personally invested in the group, paying closer attention to their progress, giving them more responsibilities where they further learn the intricacies of the artform, and developing closer personal ties through which the student has a different access to the mestre's psyche and his philosophy within the art. This relation between mestre and apprentice is self-perpetuating, like the gift relation, insofar as once a student receives his mestre's knowledge, he is yet more closely bound to him by what Vassallo calls a 'debt'. This places the student in a situation of perpetual obligation that further prompts his adhesion and devotion to the group. This specific 'indebted' bond, in turn, helps the mestre who needs devoted students to help him in the daily tasks involved in running a capoeira group – whether students cover for him by teaching the classes when he cannot be there, help him organize *rodas*, or find sources of funding when it is time to organize the

*batizado*. In sum, Vassallo demonstrates that in Brazil, mestres and students are traditionally bound by relations that involve much more than monetary exchange and are based on loyalty, obligations, hierarchy, trust and respect.

There are clear reminiscences of this model in the relations that constitute the capoeira groups I have observed in the North-American context. Beyond the market transactions that ensure that students have access to some capoeira knowledge via a paid-for class, the access to the mestre's non-commodified knowledge remains conditional upon the demonstration of a personal commitment by students, just as it is the case in the groups described by Vassallo. The more students show commitment and (counter-)give their time, the more access they have to the mestre's knowledge. For example, inside Pantera's school, where a large student-base ensures revenues through membership fees, there are clearly persons who are more like apprentices than students and who might even be described as disciples. A gift-like economy such as the one described by Vassallo is at work for these students who engage in a reciprocal service exchange dynamic with an emotional investment expressed on both sides. For example, the long fieldwork required for this dissertation made me spend many hours with Pantera, whom I followed not only in classes but also in informal contexts – driving to events in nearby cities or helping him with performances and presentations. The students who were accompanying him at these times had access to invaluable information that was neither commodified nor counted up in view of a monetary exchange. These occasions where students illustrate their greater investment by putting their own leisure time into the artform usually 'pay off' with non-market exchanges where the mestre transmits capoeira of a very different form. In

general, Pantera treats these students with special care: he may give them, during class, nuanced explanations on the side, he may comment on their game and give them specific advices, or invite them to perform at paid events as a reward for their dedication. In return, these students are often mobilized when it comes to teaching for him, showing up at all the unpaid events where the group performs for publicity, and taking responsibilities within the school (making sure the instruments are all in order, that new students get enough attention, etc.).

The types of exchanges described above correspond to a traditional mode of mestre/apprentice relations within the community rather than to a contractual calculus, but they do not completely cancel the latter. I have witnessed various moments of tension when, despite feeling that they had achieved ‘apprentice status’ and were bound to their mestres by acts of reciprocal gifts and services, students were abruptly reminded that they were also clients who could be subjected to the impersonal rules of the market. Despite the time they might have spent as disciples, students are at one time or another again confronted with the reality of capoeira’s commercial structure: there will always be a moment when they need to pay full price for a class which offers much less than what they experienced ‘for free’ on other occasions. In reality, one’s status as apprentice and/or client is shifting and ambiguous. The same person can move in and out of the client/disciple status and navigate both types of economy, recalling Gudeman’s (2005, 97) image of the “puzzle pictures in which a line drawing can be seen either as a duck or a rabbit but not both” that I also used to characterize the relations between the mestres in their transnational community.

The transformation of capoeira groups into small, local enterprises have redefined the role of the mestre as well as his relationships with his students, yet the financial relation that links them does not exhaust the other types of relations informed by the more traditional organizational culture of capoeira. As Appadurai (1986) noted in the edited volume that pioneered the anthropological study of commodity cultures, anthropology has long tended to be excessively dualistic and to conceptualize market and reciprocity exchanges as exclusively opposed instead of acknowledging their constant coexistence within human interactions (13). Capoeira groups, despite their redefinition as small enterprises, also remain communities gathered around a cultural practice that carries its own traditions, norms, and modes of organization. In this respect, the cultural content at the heart of the capoeira community is not exhausted by the entrepreneurial structure that now also overarches the group and motivates the mestres' actions.

So far, we have seen the implications of capoeira's recontextualization and commercialization on the organization of both the transnational community of mestres and the local schools. This chapter would not be complete without briefly commenting on the impact of capoeira's commercialization on the practice itself. To do so, we consider some of the effects of its commodification.

### **3.3. COMMODIFICATION AND COMMERCIALIZATION OF**

#### **CAPOEIRA**

##### **3.3.1. The effects of commodification on capoeira**

The process of commercializing capoeira does not only influence mestres and how they craft their personas for the market, but it also entails transformations of the very practice. Scholars in a variety of disciplines have studied the effects of commodification on diverse fields and forms of cultural expressions – from material objects to ways of living, embodied performances, or live events (Dwyer and Jackson 2003; Green 2007; Hughson and Free 2006; Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos 2004; Liechty 2005; Muir 2007). As I discussed in the previous chapter, commodification has negative, homogenizing, reifying effects on culture, transforming practices and objects that provided identity and meaning into standardized and exchangeable products. Arguably, the most critical take on commodification of culture processes can be found in Theodor Adorno's analysis of the culture industry. His seminal vilification of the 'culture industries' charges them with the homogenization, massification and reification of culture into generic products. Many authors, in a similar Marxist lineage, continued to cast cultural and capitalist processes as incompatible (see Gunster 2004; Kellner 1989; Slater 1998 for reviews). Even though Adorno's position has been much discussed and critiqued as extreme, its influence remains palpable in a number of critical theories positing an incompatibility between the commodification process and the perpetuation of meaningful cultural forms.

I conceptualize capoeira as a resource rather than a commodity precisely in order to move beyond the normative and, I suggest, reductive assessments of the negative effects of the insertion of cultural forms in circuits of capital that are conveyed in theories of commodification of culture. This being said, I nonetheless take this section to acknowledge the transformations in capoeira that seem to be directly attributable to forces of commodification. Some choices that mestres make to attend to clients' demands sometimes lead to transformations of capoeira reminiscent of the gloomiest consequences of commodifying culture predicted by the early theorists affiliated to the Frankfurt School. I acknowledge them here even though, I insist, they do not exhaust the cultural content and potential of capoeira at large. As Canadian communication scholar Shane Gunster (2004, 243) summarizes: "Culture necessarily overflows the commodity containers into which it has been poured by the culture industries". With this in mind, I emphasize here only the most obvious effects of capoeira's adaptation to market exchange; other dimensions of its cultural legacy that survive despite its commercialization and alongside its commodification will be made apparent in the following chapters.

Given the inherent complexity of capoeira as a physical, musical and cultural activity that cannot be dissociated from its community of practice, the range of transaction in the economy of capoeira is diverse. Some represent nothing more than a contractual exchange whereby a consumer acquires a material good or an immaterial service for a fee. Others involve more complex relations where movements, affects and emotions are also shared (as Chapter Five explores in more detail). Not surprisingly, the

effects of commodification on capoeira are therefore equally multi-faceted: they range from the creation of capoeira paraphernalia that gives material indicia to the otherwise intangible commodity to the more subtle transformation of the movements and the ‘teaching philosophy’.

The most immediate and visible outcome of capoeira’s commodification is the creation of a series of peripheral products that both give tangible form to the commodity consumed, allow new capoeiristas to conspicuously signify their belonging, and generate extra money for the mestres who sell these. This is a new aspect of the practice which, given its origins, has not historically relied on a great quantity of material goods. For example, the main instrument, the *berimbau*, is made out of a piece of wood found in Brazil’s forests, a dried out calabash and a metal string that comes from ripping open old car tires: neither extravagant or costly, although mestres now sell these original instruments at high prices (roughly \$85 in 2013). Similarly, while the institutionalization of the practice under Mestre Bimba generalized the use of a common uniform, this latter consisted in simple white pants and t-shirts with the group logo. Let’s remember that Pantera’s parents chose capoeira for him in part because it was less expensive than other martial arts; at the very least he did not have to buy a kimono. In contrast, the commodification of capoeira to practitioners as consumers has resulted in a proliferation of material accessories. There are now a diversity of stylized pants that students buy at costs of up to \$65 – white ones for the official events, coloured ones for training, non-official ones (ie. without the group logo) for street *rodas*, etc. Clothing in general is the most widespread by-product: one can now purchase capoeira jackets, capoeira shoes,

capoeira sports bras, and even capoeira underwear whose inscription ‘capoeira’ shows through the semi-transparent white fabric of the special pants that capoeiristas wear.

The sudden importance of ‘gear’ most obviously symbolizes the commercialization of capoeira. Two senior students I interviewed independently confessed to the discrepancy between their initial attraction to capoeira’s simplicity and their admitted desire to consume the associated goods. One of them explains:

You know when I was telling you [earlier in the interview] that when I started capoeira there was a texture to it... it’s the texture hum... [looks for words] ‘old-*abadá*<sup>61</sup>-in-Salvador’. And then capoeira became so different because we became part of [a new group] where things were very institutionalized: everybody is sexy... everybody has their well-cut *abadá*. [...] Before, the *abadá* did not fit well... and [now] there are even capoeira tops to go with it. And... I mean, I gave into that as well. Me too, I also wanted to have an *abadá* that makes one’s butt looks good and all that. (student interview, 10 years<sup>62</sup>).

Even though she recognizes that the desire for capoeira paraphernalia is taking away the “texture” that she first liked, she admits to participating in the whole dynamic. The other student, when asked if he owned a lot of capoeira-related material, noted with conscious self-derision: “I bought for myself... a little *abadá* for \$60, and a little jacket for \$120, and a little... yeah yeah. We’re quite tagged, you know. [laughs] But it’s all right.” (student interview, 10 years). Immediately afterwards he indirectly admitted to a contradiction:

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<sup>61</sup> Capoeira pants.

<sup>62</sup> This number indicates the years of practice of the students interviewed.

But you know, that is another aspect that I've always loved about capoeira; it's hum... I found it fascinating when I saw, in Brazil, the kids who folded their t-shirt, rolled their abadás, bundled all of it with their cord and went off with it over their shoulder [has a smile in his voice]. It's great. That is what I found rad.. but... you know, of course, I can't deny that I'm consuming. (student interview, 10 years).

In North-American societies where material goods have become important social signifiers, students are eager to demonstrate their passionate commitment to capoeira by the consumption of related goods. Capoeira clothing becomes a symbol of the transformations that have incurred, motivated by the necessity to make some extra money or to brand one's group (group logos are conspicuously printed on most clothing gear). However, it remains peripheral to the core of the activity, which may explain why the students can acknowledge the irony of this tendency, yet keep 'buying into it' without feeling that they are affecting the core values that they so love in capoeira. Other, more subtle transformations of capoeira following from the profit imperative under which mestres now work are arguably more representative of commodification's incidence on the production of culture, ultimately transforming the very practice of capoeira turned commodity.

In his seminal text on the anthropology of objects, Igor Kopytoff (1986) points to a fundamental distinction between the commodity and the cultural form. He explains that commodification produces more and more 'things' that are widely exchangeable for more and more other 'things', leading to a homogenization of value. In turn, culture's own characteristic is to ensure that some 'things' remain singular and not exchangeable. From

this perspective, Kopytoff claims, commodification is “anti-cultural” in its homogenizing effects: it transforms the unique value of culture into an exchangeable, universal value (1986, 73). Indeed, when a commodity is exchanged in the market, the parties involved in the transaction are concerned with finding the common ground necessary for the exchange to successfully occur – the standardization that produces universalizable exchange-values leads to a potential loss of cultural diversity and singularities (Gunster 2004, 245; Hutnyk 2000, 134–135; Sayer 2003, 346). In other words: “commodification homogenizes value, whereas culture values difference” (Jackson 1999, 99). These processes apply, to a certain extent, to cultural forms like capoeira. The mestres chose to teach those dimensions of capoeira that have a universal appeal, while they may downplay other sides of the artform that have less appeal to the public, that are less easily transformed into widely exchangeable values. Mestres may, of course, find alternative ways to keep transmitting these dimensions to those students who are their apprentices; however, overall the practice that most consumers have access to is a transformed version shaped by the necessity of its commodified exchange.

For example, once the capoeira school is structured as a small business, the practitioner is positioned as a client whose demands and expectations shape the way mestres decide to organize their school and classes. Not many mestres are willing to admit that they adapt their teaching to the expectations of their new audiences, arguably because their business relies on the authenticity of the knowledge to which they provide access. Admitting they modify it would undermine their credibility. The informant who most directly addressed this issue was a North-American student, senior enough to have

his own teaching space while also working closely with his mestre's business, yet not subject to the same precarious conditions as immigrant Brazilian mestres who absolutely depend on capoeira as the motor of their revenue. He provided insight into the dilemmas facing those teaching a complex art to students/clients who have specific interests in and expectations for it:

Here, [...] people are going to limit themselves to only what they want to have. [...] And as a teacher, personally, it is something I refuse to do. I teach capoeira? I teach everything. If you want to learn only one aspect? Go somewhere else. That's my own philosophy. But... when you have a big school and things are expensive, you have no choice but to accept people who only want to do their weekly workout, do only the movements and then 'good bye'! You have no choice because if you don't, you go back to having only a small, small studio and running after money, and then it gets rough. Financially speaking, you have to deal with this reality that is really a pain in the ass but that you have no choice but to accept. [...] So you try to push everything on your students – like 'OK, today we're going to do this. And let's try'. But it stays tough because there are a lot of people who come and it's like their *McDonald's* combo: 'I take this and this, and thank you very much'! (student interview, 14 years)

Many senior students regularly voiced informal complaints (amongst themselves), denouncing a certain 'watering down' of the training sessions, while pointing out that classes have become more 'entertaining' than 'challenging'. Although some of these comments may be sparked by nostalgia for their early years when all classes no doubt seemed more difficult, other hard facts corroborate those observations. In one academy where I have been a participant observer over the long term (10 years), classes were

reduced from two hours to one hour and a half over the years, there are more frequent water breaks, there is now more ‘diversity’ in each class, and classes in which students are required to repeat the same drill endlessly were reduced – almost abandoned – despite their pedagogical value. Now that commerce also drives the exchange of knowledge, some mestres feel compelled to modify the structure of their classes or their teaching methods in order to please those who are now [paying] consumers. Their focus shifts to providing a product that people will come back for rather than instructions that can at times be demanding and even sometimes confrontational.

The pressure on mestres to adapt capoeira to the new commercial context can also be observed by the changing attitude towards the martial dimension of capoeira training, a topic of debates and discussion that ran through many groups I visited during my fieldwork. Some techniques within capoeira involve risks when they are trained for adequately; others are inevitably harmful if fully executed. In contrast, many practitioners now do capoeira as a hobby that runs in parallel to their professional lives: they are less willing to take risks than the mestres, who as teenagers with no major life responsibilities when they developed their own skills, had a different need for room to maneuver. This creates a dilemma: how do you teach potentially dangerous martial techniques and how can students practice them while at the same time ensuring that they take no actual risks? How pertinent is it to teach those techniques if you know that students will understandably be reluctant to apply them in *rodas* where ‘violence’ is less and less acceptable?

The dilemma over the degree of ‘martial’ training to be included in contemporary commodified capoeira runs parallel to more general debates amongst practitioners over the place of ‘violence’ in capoeira at large. Indeed, mestres and high-ranked community members in Brazil and abroad have lately reconsidered the place and value of aggressive behavior and harmful techniques in and out of the *roda*. Until recently, overt and intentional provocations amongst community members would lead to real fights that exceeded the frame and the generally-accepted norms of capoeira. Pantera regularly tells his students about street brawls he witnessed or took part in, which were sparked within the *roda* but were resolved outside of it, or vice versa, external conflicts which were resolved in the *roda* by resorting to aggressive movements that far exceed the acceptable level of violence within capoeira. Many practitioners are gradually condemning these types of conducts as pertaining to capoeira’s past and having less and less place in the current period. Mestre Pantera often tells his students that the level of aggressive and confrontational tension had simply become unsustainable in certain cities of Brazil. This is why, he explains, he decided to promote a more respectful, playful, and less violent style of capoeira.

The need to attend to clients’ demands and desires is not the only motor of this new, less violent valuation of capoeira. On the one hand, the mestres concerned are getting older and they may be orienting capoeira to adapt to their aging bodies: according to Pantera, gratuitous violence caused lots of irreversible injuries that forced many capoeiristas to quit, something he himself clearly wants to avoid. On the other hand, the transnationalization of capoeira recontextualizes this martial art in an environment where

the very specific, culturally inscribed kind of violence present in capoeira is unacceptable in those new societies where capoeira is exported. As Pantera explains:

Let's talk about Canada: a very peaceful country where violence doesn't exist. People here are not used to violence. And this type of violence [in capoeira], whether you like it or not, it's a type of violence that came from the streets. So it's a violence of the marginals. It's street violence [*violencia malandreada*]. This type of violence doesn't fit in Canada. It doesn't work. Society doesn't accept this. Automatically, nobody is going to accept this type of street violence in capoeira. (Pantera, interview).

This decision responds to a new cultural context and is thus not entirely motivated by profit, but part of it clearly is. Tellingly, Pantera once urged a student who liked to play 'harder' to keep his game more 'friendly' because, he told him (in private), when new students see tougher games, they seldom come back. Pantera's comments reveal that part of his decision to recast capoeira as a cultural form in which martial techniques are downplayed is thus undeniably an expedient choice to sustain his enterprise. He explains:

Outside of Brazil it's frustrating to hear that people died in capoeira because of a *ponteira* (direct, straight kick). So I mean, if this happens capoeira is prejudiced. Man, if *one* person receives a *ponteira* in the heart and dies, *here*, there's no more work! Work ends, your life ends, everything ends. So I mean, why would you introduce and develop this type of capoeira if you can adapt it in another way?

Here, he leaves no doubt as to what incentives drive his decisions, and they are clearly commercial.

In sum, two tendencies run parallel: there is an undeniable, natural evolution of capoeira towards a less violent, safer physical practice, a tendency that is nonetheless particularly emphasized in the North-American groups I have observed insofar as it fits with the necessities of the market. It is therefore possible to suggest that capoeira's commodification modifies not only the merchandising environment that now surrounds the activity but also the very movements that constitute capoeira and give it a tangible manifestation. However, commodification is just one of the multiple forces that affect the practice's evolution. Scholars of the Birmingham school of Cultural Studies have made it clear that "the essential complexity of cultural processes means that objects have certain dimensions that always elude the grasp of commodification." (Gunster 2004, 242). I have insisted on the overarching discourse of rejection of violence precisely in order to insist that capoeira, like all cultural forms, is a living practice, in constant evolution. In this respect, it is inevitable that it will morph and adapt to the new contexts where it evolves, affected not only by the commodifying forces but by other aspects of its new historical epoch and cultural context.

While it is important to recognize the modifications incurred through capoeira's commodification, it is equally interesting to point to some alternative mechanisms that allow capoeira to maintain its own cultural integrity. To do so, I come back to a discussion of the community of mestres and show how it serves as a regulating force limiting the consequences of commodification.

### **3.3.2. Self-regulatory community limits commodification and maintains cultural value**

As the site of his own enterprise and the main provider of knowledge, the mestre is the principal actor driving the commercialization as well as the commodification of capoeira. This ensures both his own economic empowerment and a certain degree of control over the meanings that circulate via this commodity.<sup>63</sup> Each mestre retains the power to voice his own narrative, which frames what capoeira becomes in the immediate space of his school. To an extent, this individually-driven export and the absence of official policies explains the variability of capoeira: the narratives and definitions circulating, the degree of commodification, and the type of experiences it provides all depend on the immediate, local cultural work of each mestre. However, though these latter are adaptable, independent actors in the market, they are not free-floating actors in the field of capoeira itself. The community of mestres described in the first part of this chapter, provides an important context for these individual mestres' actions. Just as the community is an instrumental support network in the general process of transnational exportation, it also acts as a force self-regulating the commodification process entailed by the insertion of capoeira in commercial, market-driven exchanges. If ultimately the mestre has the last word in the way he decides to transmit, sell and commercialize capoeira, he cannot escape the impact that this decision has on how the community will perceive him and the place he will thereby hold in it.

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<sup>63</sup> A control which nevertheless remains informed and contained by tropes of meanings of Brazilian culture in general and other related subfields of meanings such as exoticism, blackness, and sensuality, as Chapters Four and Five will detail.

The community shields the practice from transformations resulting from commodification that would be too drastic or take it too far away from what is generally accepted as the tradition. As we will see, individual mestres who step too far from the prevailing, if sometimes uneasy consensus alienate themselves from the rest of community, which they clearly need to carry on their work. The constant gaze and informal ‘peer-review system’ whereby all mestres evaluate each other’s work, assessing its validity and integrity, is a powerful disciplinary force. Individual mestres may transmit, sell, even transform capoeira any way they please in their immediate cultural enterprise, but insofar as the support of the community enhances one’s work – as exemplified by the *batizado* circuit – mestres can hardly afford to exclude themselves from this network. The collective pressure to remain ‘true’ to capoeira in order to be recognized by one’s peers acts as a regulator of the pressures of the market that might lure mestres towards excessive adaptations of the artform.

Here, we may go back to Stephen Gudeman’s dialectic between market and community, especially his concept of ‘the base’ which he coins to designate the realm of ‘things’ that the community has in common. The base includes: tangible goods and material possessions, but also intangible things such as the community’s shared knowledge, the skills and expertise of its members, and the ancestral identities that give social consistence to the group. “As the lasting core, though changeable over time, the base represents temporality and continuity.” (Gudeman 2001, 27) The base ensures social cohesion and reproduction such that its erosion or its appropriation by outside parties would destroy the community; this is why there is a natural tendency for communities to

protect their base, establishing mechanisms to ensure that it remains within the control of the community. In Gudeman's dialectal framework, the base distinguishes the community from the market. As he explains: "the base is 'property' in one sense of the term. But it is not market property, because it is connected to a community of people as part of their identity and legacy. It lies outside the realm of market logic." (Gudeman 2005,105). I suggest that the 'natural', survival drive that animates communities to preserve their base, as well as the awareness that the latter should fall outside of the market realm, exists amongst the community of mestres and allows mitigating its members' individual commercial endeavours and the ensuing commodifying effects on capoeira. By discussing the broad, rarely defined category that mestres refer to as capoeira's '*fundamentos*' (foundations) in light of Gudeman's concept of the base, I argue that the community offers a self-regulating mechanism against excessive infiltrations of the market logic into the field of capoeira.

Throughout my fieldwork, I noticed a general discursive emphasis around the importance of '*fundamentos*', a word used in a variety of contexts which does not designate any precise set of skills or techniques, nor a specific corpus of knowledge, but rather refers to some kind of essential, yet infinite knowledge of the artform. For example, one day Lagartixa, urging me to attend a special workshop, wrote to me "You want to learn a new '*fundamento*'? Come today! [to a workshop he had put together with a guest mestre] The world of capoeira is very vast." (personal communication, June 12, 2012) This evokes an infinite number of potential *fundamentos* and suggests that the concept does not refer to a corpus that one can work towards learning and then finally

dominate. Based on those observations, I understand the common ground of *fundamentos* as characterized by the depth of their roots: there are countless *fundamentos*, as long as they have deep links to the practice's history and "essence". *Fundamento* is not necessarily a physical skill, but can refer to an understanding of the game, a mindframe, or even an intangible energy. For instance, Lagartixa sometimes scolds his students for playing the musical instruments "without *fundamento*". In that particular case, what is at stake is not the technical ability to play as such and to produce sounds; it is rather the intention that players put into it and the resulting energy that should be conveyed via the music (which is supposed to bring in *axé*, or vital energy, to the *roda*). In other contexts, mestres will say someone does not play with *fundamentos* if s/he has lots of [flashy] moves, but does not understand the *malícia* or purpose of the game.

The mestres's insistence on the importance of perpetuating and learning the *fundamentos* reveals their awareness that without the preservation of this base, the capoeira community would risk destruction. The importance that *fundamentos* hold in the community demonstrates a constant concern for 'keeping things real', while the lack of definition of the *fundamento* category – like so many other categories in capoeira – allows for its flexible interpretation and implementation. The knowledge of capoeira's *fundamentos* unites the community of mestres; it discriminates between those who are included in the community and those who are excluded. While the discursive emphasis on *fundamentos* is often used to informally judge students and foreigners and evaluate their integration into the community of capoeiristas, it is also a benchmark to assess mestres and their teaching activities. Although there is no real consensus, there is an

implicit knowledge of which mestres surrender to the profit imperative and teach capoeira “without *fundamento*”. These are criticized for not perpetuating the base of the community and thus contributing to its destruction. An organic, regulatory process is activated on this basis: when a mestre no longer develops capoeira with *fundamento* and, instead, accommodates the business dimensions too much, other mestres simply stop attending his events or supporting his work. What ends up being a punitive action is in fact just the result of a natural mechanism: if a capoeira group lacks *fundamento*, their level of play, their events, and their *rodas* become less interesting and they stop attracting the most knowledgeable mestres. This, in turn, weakens the quality of group events even more and impedes the transmission of *fundamentos* by external capoeiristas, which perpetuates the mediocrity of the the group’s practice, in a catch-22 cycle that is self-perpetuating in accomplishing processes of exclusion.

This self-regulatory mechanism and the importance of the community to mitigate the effects of the market and commercialization of capoeira can be further described by drawing a comparison to an era when the transnational community was not yet as developed as it is today. In the late 90s and early 2000s, a great number of junior capoeiristas who were compulsively attracted by the allegedly miraculous possibility to earn a living with capoeira outside of Brazil travelled out of Brazil to try their luck (Assunção 2005, 182). These capoeiristas were wittily called ‘Mestres da Varig’, because they were said to have acquired their mestre status by buying their plane ticket with

Varig, the Brazilian airline<sup>64</sup>. Although they were not fully formed in the art of capoeira, these so-called mestres banked on a combination of public ignorance and the absence of self-regulation by the community (given the absence of other capoeiristas in the areas where they immigrated) to pretend they were mestres and teach whatever they knew to make money. Mainly seeking quick profit, they did not care for the perpetuation of *fundamentos*. In fact, because they aborted their apprenticeship and were not completely formed as mestres, they may have lacked *fundamentos* themselves. The growing presence of the community outside of Brazil has nevertheless hampered that phenomenon and increased the importance of the self-regulatory mechanism I am evoking, as the following conversation with an important pioneer, Mestre Jelon Vieira, will demonstrate.

Mestre Jelon, one of the first two mestres to arrive in the United States, is well placed to comment on the evolution of capoeira since its initial export. In 2001, he gave an interview to the online capoeira magazine *Planet Capoeira*, where he diagnosed an infection in the state of capoeira. “Capoeira is swollen right now”, are the words reported (Vieira 2001). When, in 2010, I asked him why capoeira had been swollen, he explained that it had been “infected by people who are not ready to teach.” He further explained: “They don’t have the knowledge, they don’t have the “fundaments” [we can recognise here the echo of the *fundamentos* present in his loose English translation], they don’t have the..... they don’t understand the tradition and they start teaching.”

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<sup>64</sup> There is no consensual or uniform process to become mestre. Generally, it is one’s own mestre who decides when the disciple is ready to be a mestre, based no longer so much on his skills (these are recognized earlier in the hierarchy, when one becomes ‘formado’ – ie. ready to teach) but rather on one’s maturity and contribution to the world of capoeira at large, namely the quality of the work one develops for and within the community. For this reason, one mestre’s approval is not in and of itself enough to be really recognized and respected as a mestre. The community’s recognition is thus a determining aspect for someone to earn the mestre status.

Mestre Jelon's allusion to the so-called *Mestres da Varig* to explain capoeira's swollen state contrasts with the rest of this comment, which confirms the importance of the community in monitoring the transformations of the practice. As he goes on to explain, the infection is almost gone now, because "so many mestres and contra-mestres and professores [...] are coming from Brazil. But also a lot of Americans, Canadians and Europeans who are dedicated to capoeira [and understand it unlike others before]". The presence of an increasingly large community of advanced capoeiristas and mestres reduced the infection he had identified, which he admits still has residues. Yet Jelon's response to these residues further confirms the existence of what I call the self-regulatory mechanism of the community. He bluntly explains that when people without *fundamentos* go seek him: "I [don't] bother. [...] I keep my distance from stuff like that. I don't support." The less the recognized mestres support a practicing teacher, the more likely he is to find himself without the means to participate in the community. Mestres who only use capoeira instrumentally, without at the same time sustainably reproducing and transmitting the 'base', become isolated and eventually, Mestre Jelon speculates, they are excluded and die out. Capoeira, he says, is becoming strong enough outside of Brazil and enough people are educated about its *fundamentos* that it will regulate itself.

The regulatory mechanism only seems to work because the community is indeed bigger than before, yet still relatively small (even if spread across vast distances) and still relatively monopolistically controlled by Brazilians. Is there a point when this self-regulation becomes impossible given the size and diversity of the community (as non-Brazilian mestres get recognized, for example)? Only time will allow formulating more

than speculations; it is still too early to assess the limits of the self-regulation by the community as well as the limits to such resistances to commodification.

I have focussed on the mestres and their network to describe the transnational expansion of capoeira and the mechanisms of its local implantation. Neither of these two processes could be conceived outside of the neoliberal context which prompted both the migration of mestres and their re-organization into a transnational network as well as their adoption of an entrepreneurial attitude to their own individual life. The transnationalization of capoeira relied on the mestres' ability to use cultural and human capital in order to create their own enterprises and sustain their livelihood. However, our discussion of both the transnational and the local communities showed that this recontextualization of capoeira within a neoliberal market economy and the transformation of its internal relations into business transactions did not completely override the traditional relations of mutual help, reciprocity or apprenticeship that traditionally organized the community. The economy of capoeira is at times a moral economy, at times a neoliberal economy. It is not centered only on commodity exchange, or on service provision, but also involves gifts and moral obligations that work to maintain or create the social tissue of local and transnational communities. This dual incidence of new market forces and old cultural traditions is replicated in many aspects of capoeira's circulation and changing valuations, crucial characteristic of the capoeira resource, as will become apparent in later chapters.

## CHAPTER FOUR: NEW CULTURAL CONTEXTS AND CONNOTATIONS FOR CAPOEIRA: MEDIATIONS AND CIRCULATION OF ‘BRAZIL’

Capoeira now circulates transnationally in new cultural contexts and on new platforms, and is practiced and displayed by a diversified demographic, all of which modify its meanings, connotations, and valuations. This recontextualization of capoeira unsettles its relationship to its immediate national settings as well as its underlying racial connotations. These associations are nevertheless put to use in the way capoeira is projected, represented, received and interpreted in North America. This chapter analyses the construction of capoeira’s contemporary semantic values as these cohere into dominant discourses that frame its interpretation by new publics. Within Brazil, capoeira has had contested meanings throughout its history, whether repudiated and illegal or celebrated as a national symbol. Once the practice circulates outside the country’s geographical borders, it concomitantly becomes a representative cultural form of ‘Brazil’ at large<sup>65</sup>. In this chapter, I analyze capoeira as a vehicle of ‘Brazil’, both as projected by Brazilians and as imagined by foreigners. There are of course important continuities between the meanings circulating now through capoeira and the historical narratives that once were attached to this cultural practice: the complex racial politics and their importance in the definition of the Brazilian nation as an imagined community still

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<sup>65</sup> Here, it is useful to remember that this is a study of capoeira *contemporânea*, not capoeira *angola*, which has quite a different relationship with the racial legacies of capoeira and their representation.

inform capoeira's connotations, even though some semantic shifts and ruptures happen as the practice opens up to new populations, new publics, and thus new perspectives.

This chapter carries out two parallel endeavors: first, in its overarching structure, it delineates multiple forms under which ideas of 'Brazil' circulate through capoeira. For this, I distinguish various modes of cultural mediation, as 'Brazil' is conveyed both through interpersonal encounters and direct exchanges between Brazilians and non-Brazilians in the capoeira community, as well as through more mediated systems of representations that draw on constructed discourses developed over time and deeply rooted in broader fields of semantic value. This chapter suggests that capoeira is the gateway to Brazilian spaces that are both diasporic and imagined. Ultimately, these fields of meaning combine into a performative field of culture where yet another version of 'Brazil' circulates as a category of difference that mestres mobilize in a market economy to enhance the entrepreneurial work they initiated with capoeira.

The second endeavor complements the first one by adding nuances to one of its components. Insofar as one of the main forms under which 'Brazil' circulates via capoeira is the important imaginary of the country that surrounds the practice, both as projected by Brazilians themselves and as imagined by North-Americans, it was necessary to analyze the archeology of the construction of this national cultural imaginary so as to understand its inner workings and mechanisms, as well as the ensuing tropes that influence capoeira's own meanings. This specific discursive analysis, however, would have been incomplete without an analysis of broader, more diverse fields of dominant discourses that all cohere into the interpretation of capoeira in its transnational context. I

thus delineate, in addition to the formation of Brazil's imaginary as such, a number of discourses that also inform capoeira's contemporary valuations. I evoke the mechanism of the Western gaze as well as the discursive field of global black consciousness, both of which intermingle, interweave and intersect with the Brazilian imaginary to construct new interpretations of capoeira. This chapter is a ride with stopovers in these various fields of discourses; we sometimes need to depart from the close analysis of capoeira so as to deeply understand the archeology of their construction before analysing, subsequently, how they inform readings of capoeira.

These two endeavors joined together thoroughly contextualize the representations and connotations of capoeira in the North-American culturescape, as well as their interpretation by new publics. I carefully show how all these fields of value (the diasporic, imagined, and performative Brazil; as well as the more general discursive fields of the Western gaze and global blackness) converge and reinforce one another in constructing capoeira's contemporary meanings and renewing its semantic values.

#### **4.1. THE CAPOEIRA SCHOOL: A BRAZILIAN DIASPORIC SPACE**

“The energy and enthusiasm are palpable: this is not a cold night in Britain; it is Brazil, it is capoeira” (2006, 163).

So British anthropologist Sara Delamont describes her arrival in one of the three capoeira schools where she conducted fieldwork in the UK. Her sense of the indelible association between capoeira and ‘Brazil’ is amplified by countless spontaneous

comments consistently made by new practitioners. For example, a Finnish girl I encountered in the research process said that when she stepped into her capoeira school, she felt she was being ‘teleported’ to Brazil. There, she explained, the value system and the underlying rules were no longer Finnish but Brazilian, so much so that she had a hard time making her [Finnish, non-capoeirista] husband accept that she could not give him an exact time when the class would end and she would be back home. These comments, which might appear like superficial assessments made by foreigners charmed and lured by cultural difference, are nevertheless corroborated by Brazilians themselves: “As soon as I step there, in Pantera’s academy, I am in Brazil. I am *not* in Montreal. It’s really strange”, affirms one Brazilian student explaining her new infatuation with capoeira. These examples point to an important effect of capoeira’s transnational recontextualization: it has become a place where people can find “Brazil outside of Brazil”. The next section examines the capoeira school more precisely as a diasporic location of Brazil, where elements of Brazilian cultural, social, and day to day life may be accessed via interpersonal encounters rather than more mediated systems of representation which usually condition and limit the public’s access to foreign cultures. As such, I present the capoeira school as a ‘Brazilian space’, or microcosm of Brazil, where foreigners and Brazilians alike have a firsthand contact with elements of Brazilian cultural life. These are not coherently planned or organized, but rather manifest themselves in the accumulation of details that evoke Brazil in one way or another, such as the Portuguese language, varied cultural referents, and the demeanor of the mestre as well as the other Brazilian people that he attracts.

#### **4.1.1. Speaking and hearing Portuguese**

The omnipresence of the Portuguese language, strikingly prevalent in capoeira schools worldwide, establishes their Brazilian character. Not only is Portuguese the mother tongue of most teachers, their disciples have countless incentives to learn it – it may even be formally required of advanced students in certain groups. The most immediate contact with the language is through the musicality of capoeira, where most songs are in Portuguese (with occasional words in Yoruba or other African languages). There is rarely a capoeira class without the background sounds of the Portuguese language, because music (whether it is a recorded CD or a live group of students) is always playing. This soundtrack familiarizes the student with the sounds and rhythms of the language. In the *roda*, however, music is played live and the students need to actively sing the songs. At first they may only repeat the chorus, but eventually, any capoeirista should learn how to become the lead singer. Though there are a few advanced students who have memorized all the songs phonetically and have only a vague idea of what they are singing, it becomes clear that a basic knowledge of Portuguese will greatly assist in one's musical development. Moreover, insofar as songs serve referential functions by offering commentary or advice on the physical game, students who do not learn Portuguese face a considerable obstacle that hampers their personal growth within the artform.

The songs are the greatest door to the Portuguese language, but the incentives to actively learn the language are plenty. Though its use may vary from one school to the

other depending on the mestres' proficiency in the local language or their style of teaching, Portuguese always constitutes one, if not the only language of instruction. All mestres have to use it to some degree, if only to refer to the movements which all have Portuguese names ('*meia lua*' translates as 'half moon'; '*tesoura*' as 'scissor'; '*benção*' as blessing, etc.). What's more, even those mestres who speak the local language properly will often resort to their native tongue when giving more subtle lessons, or explaining culturally specific concepts that apply in the game. The language is so intimately associated with capoeira pedagogy that it is not unusual for foreigners teaching their own classes to give certain instructions or make particular comments in (more or less broken) Portuguese, despite speaking the local language perfectly well.

Portuguese becomes all the more important in a transnational context because it constitutes a sort of *lingua franca* for the broader community. Whether students want to travel to other groups, or are interacting with mestres visiting from out of town, it is necessary for them to speak and understand Portuguese if they want direct contact with the holders of knowledge. Mestres who have immigrated in diverse countries usually learn the local language, but when they visit another locality of the transnational network, they give their instructions or lessons in Portuguese. This goes without saying for mestres who come directly from Brazil. Of course, there will always be a student doing an informal translation for those who do not speak Portuguese; but the frustration of having to wait for that translation, of not being able to laugh when those who understand Portuguese laugh, and the clear imbalance between the length of the initial speech and the short translated version are all incentives for students to learn the language.

Speaking Portuguese becomes a factor of inclusion and a marker of social capital within local schools. Advanced students generally end up learning Portuguese, which they practice by speaking with their mestre. When visiting mestres arrive, these students automatically have a greater insider status because they are able to welcome the visitors and are included in their conversations. In the day to day life of the school, this language barrier also leads to some exclusive conversations between the mestre and specific students, to which non-Portuguese speakers have no access. This linguistic divide is experienced on a day-to-day basis and permeates the daily life of the capoeira school. It sometimes overlaps and thus potentially enhances the earlier divide we addressed between those who are treated as clients and those who are disciples, even though the dividing criteria are not identical.

#### **4.1.2. Repertoire of culture references**

Students of capoeira not only access a linguistic universe, they are also immersed in a greater field of Brazilian cultural references. Again, the music plays an important role: the songs and their lyrics offer a repertoire of themes and terms. North-Americans sing about culturally specific concepts like *axé* and the *orixas* (amongst other terms related to Afro-Brazilian religiosity), geographical places in Brazil or even specific places, streets and buildings of Salvador, Bahia, as well as historical events like the Paraguay War (in which African slaves were enlisted) and the abolition of slavery by Princess Isabel. It is left to each student's curiosity to inquire what greater world of signification is behind these passing references, yet these provide an inevitable first

contact with a Brazilian realm. Arguably, many cultural referents permeating the music are specific to the subfield of Afro-Brazilian culture, but other elements also encompass a more general Brazilian cultural realm, like geography or the language itself.

If the songs offer the repertoire, the mestres necessarily filter which elements of this cultural realm they highlight or explain; they steer the flow of Brazilian realities that are carried over borders and into their academy, and ultimately how these are interpreted and imagined by foreign students. Thus, I suggest that the mestre offers not only access to his lifestory and knowledge of capoeira, as I argued in the previous chapter, but also to Brazilian-ness at large. In the transnational setting, the mestre “becomes a specialist of all things Brazilian. He thus not only explains what capoeira is, but how Brazil is.” (Assunção 2005, 194). Each mestre offers access to his own vision of Brazil – which can be quite distinct from one mestre to another, depending on each person’s background and upbringing.

The mestre is thus the main link between Brazil and the ‘Brazilian space’ recreated in the capoeira schools. He not only *explains* what Brazil is, as Assunção suggests, but he is the very embodiment of national character, the tangible incarnation of a ‘Brazilian way of being’. Given the mestre’s position of authority, the values and norms that he lives by are elevated to a guiding norm in the school, to which many students defer. For example, North-Americans professionals who are often on a tight schedule and have a punctual relation to time have had to accept that capoeira activities almost inevitably start and/or finish late. As a beginner student explains:

I've noticed that in Brazilian culture; the Brazilians, they are late. There is a certain neglect... [But] I think that when you go into capoeira, you need to accept that cultural aspect. I went to a class at [the University sports' Center] and the teacher, Tucano, was always, *always* late. But Tucano, between you and me, there is no more typical Brazilian than him, you know! He's the classical Brazilian, really. And so you need to accept, to a certain extent. If you get into capoeira there is not only the aspect of practicing a martial art, there is also the cultural aspect. Because the mestres, they are Brazilians. (student interview, 2 years)

This points both to the authority of the mestre's standpoint – accepted by the students as 'part of the cultural dimension of capoeira' – and to the learning processes that stem from the interpersonal encounters at the heart of the capoeira school. The accumulation of small details which, in great part, stem from the mestre's "habitat of meaning" (Hannerz 1996), confer a "Brazilian character" to the capoeira school.

#### **4.1.3. Center of gravity for diasporic community**

Precisely because they are closely associated with Brazil, capoeira schools attract Brazilian immigrants, one further element that contributes to their "Brazilian-ness" outside of Brazil. Whether they are just trying to reach out to other Brazilians, to find information as banal as where they can buy Brazilian products in town, or seek to become students, Brazilians constantly surround capoeira schools. These latter become centers of gravity for the diasporic community of Brazilians, crystallizing their characterization as diasporic locations of Brazil.

Though Brazilian students never constitute the majority, groups without any Brazilian are very rare in North America. Almost all the Brazilians students I interviewed considered capoeira a way to stay close to their own culture, in some cases even to learn more about it. Indeed, most Brazilian students I encountered in my fieldwork came from higher social classes in Brazil, where capoeira is still perceived with a negative prejudice. Away from the social ‘stigma’ that they would have suffered in Brazil for participating in such a racially marked activity, they delve comfortably into the world of capoeira, both assuaging their nostalgia for ‘home’ while learning about new aspects of their national culture. In his doctoral dissertation, ethnomusicologist Jason Stanyek (2004) underlines the particular rallying function of the capoeira group for immigrant communities. Despite the highly racialized artform through which it occurs, he argues, the diasporic identity negotiated inside the *roda* downplays the complex racial relations that characterize their home society (2004, 191–192). In contrast with its connotations inside Brazil where capoeira has polarized identity politics around racial issues, outside of Brazil it is transformed into an inclusive activity where Brazilians step outside of these racial politics and reformulate a consensual Brazilian-ness, away from social stigma and prejudice. For example, one white, upper-middle class Brazilian student told me she appreciated learning about the history of slavery from a point of view that contrasted with the official history she was taught in school. Similarly, another Brazilian, also white and upper-middle class, says that her involvement in capoeira led her to investigate the “anthropological past of her country”, as she called it. Since she had taken up capoeira, she was keener to value a latent cultural baggage that was part of her heritage as

Brazilian, even though she had never fully explored it, given her social milieu whilst in Brazil.

Members of the Brazilian community converge in the capoeira school because it makes them feel closer to their ‘home’, both confirming that capoeira schools are “Brazilian spaces” outside of Brazil, while simultaneously contributing to this association. Indeed, these Brazilian students intensify and diversify the intercultural encounters through which foreigners learn about Brazil. Conversely, many Brazilian students told me that they appreciate meeting foreigners interested in Brazil with whom they can share their cultural baggage. The interests of both the foreigners and the Brazilians are well aligned.

The interest in Brazilian culture that connects the mestre, his North-American students, and the Brazilians who converge towards the school is an important factor of cohesion in the group. Arguably, all members of the capoeira school are bound by a “diaspora consciousness”, one of the six angles that, according to Steven Vertovec (1999, 450), define transnational formations. Just like the ‘homeland’ that symbolically unites members of more traditional diasporas and fuels their feeling of belonging, Brazil functions as a symbolic territory which unites all the new capoeiristas, no matter what their nationality. I would suggest that in its symbolic dimension, Brazil is comparable to the lost land of the people of a diaspora. In part, it *is* the lost land of many Brazilian mestres who have moved away to teach capoeira. Their nostalgic feelings run through the lyrics of the capoeira songs they compose, which voice their attachment to the Brazilian

landscape<sup>66</sup>. These same songs are sung and repeated countless times by non-Brazilian students who make these words a little bit more their own with each utterance. The members of the school are thus united not only by a common interest but also through this symbolic attachment to the land of Brazil.

Foreigners inscribe their experience of capoeira in a subjective, ‘lived’ experience of Brazil that simulates some sort of immersion occurring locally in the capoeira schools acting as ‘Brazilian spaces’. However, capoeira also circulates in contexts other than these schools: it is displayed in the media, in advertisements, in performances, on stage. In these new contexts, the meanings of ‘Brazil’ conveyed through the artform are mediated not by direct interpersonal interactions, but rather by a cultural imaginary that we now describe.

## **4.2. IMAGINED BRAZIL: CULTURAL MEDIATIONS WITHIN DISCURSIVE FIELDS OF REPRESENTATION**

Capoeira is now performed in various shows and festivals, and it appears in all sorts of media platforms and products. In contrast with the geographical *re*contextualization examined in the previous section, these new settings rather

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<sup>66</sup> Some examples include: “*as vezes eu vejo o dia passar, às noites eu o vejo cair na janela, saudade da minha terra Brasília, lembranças boas que eu tenho dela*” (“sometimes I see the day pass, at night I see it disappear through my window, I feel nostalgia of my land Brasília, I carry such good memories of it”); or “*salve São Salvador, salve a Ilha de Marê, salve o mestre quem me ensinou, a mandinga de bater com o pé*” (“a praise to São Salvador, a praise to the Island of Marê, a praise to my teacher who taught me, the secrets of fighting with the feet”), etc.

*de*contextualize the practice.<sup>67</sup> Capoeira takes on stereotyped meanings it did not have at its inception; it becomes, from what I have observed, an exotic dance-fight where sexy Brazilians show off their skills. Why is this popular (mis)representation of capoeira so pervasive when it is in fact so far from the historical narratives of resistance and oppression that have characterized the activity for centuries? In the following sections, I trace the origins of these connotations to broader fields of discourse that inform the way North-Americans interpret “foreign cultures” in general (not only capoeira) as well as to pre-established representations of Brazilian culture as imagined by North-Americans as well as Brazilians themselves.

#### **4.2.1. The Western Gaze: ‘Other-ing’, exoticization, eroticization**

Many of the contemporary valuations of capoeira can be explained by looking at more general processes of meaning-making, especially those occurring in cross-cultural contexts. Indeed, we may understand capoeira’s current representations in continuity with a long history of cultural encounters in the course of which a certain Western way of looking at ‘non-Western’ places, peoples and cultures was developed. A vast scholarship has addressed politics of representation in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, initially pressed by the so-called ‘crisis of representation’ in anthropology. Western

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<sup>67</sup> There are also countless videos circulating on the Internet, and the digital presence of capoeira is undeniably a new, important aspect that changes the way capoeira is represented and circulates. I do not explicitly examine those, however, because these videos are usually shot and uploaded by practitioners themselves and feature *rodas* as they happen in the immediate/natural context of the community of practice. For this reason, they arguably constitute a closer extension of the practice than the recontextualized and re-signified appearances of capoeira in contexts that exceed the community of practice. The resignifications and new valuations that I am addressing in the following section are not only due to a shift of medium of circulation of capoeira, but also more importantly to a shift of the very context where capoeira is performed and consequently, a change in who has the authority to frame the representation of capoeira (often non-capoeiristas).

anthropologists, amongst them James Clifford, George E. Marcus and Michael Fischer (Clifford 1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1999), initiated the reflection upon the problems inherent to the anthropological process of writing about “Others”, in particular the implicit power relations involved when one group has the agency to speak for others. What started as an epistemological discussion meant to renew the specific discipline of anthropology and its complicit relation to the enterprise of imperialism (Asad 1973) became a greater critical reflection on the impact of historical power differentials on the way Western intellectuals study and represent different cultural realities. Other disciplines in the social sciences and humanities further refined this fundamental discussion.

Postcolonial critique considerably contributed to demonstrate that representations are always embedded in relations of power. Edward Said’s seminal book *Orientalism* ([1979] 2003) was instrumental in unveiling the “Western gaze”, through an exhaustive demonstration of the way this gaze *constructed* cultures of the East rather than ‘*represented*’ them. Said compellingly showed the relations between the construction of the East and global geopolitics of power; building on Foucault’s power/knowledge nexus he demonstrated that “Orientalism” – a ‘way of looking’ at ‘oriental’ cultures through the Western gaze – relies on the assumed superiority of the West in relation to the Orient’s implied inferiority as well as the West’s presumption of a privileged knowledge of the East. “Knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense *creates* the Orient, the Oriental, and his world. [...] The point is that in each of these cases the Oriental is *contained* and *represented* by dominating frameworks.” ([1979] 2003, 40;

emphasis in the original). The Western gaze conceptualized by Said may be extended to diverse situations where cultural differences are embedded in unequal relations of power; it describes the mechanism that produces ‘Others’ in relation to Western culture at the same time as it excludes and entraps those ‘Others’ in the representations that it creates. I will henceforth use the term “Western gaze” to describe a “way of looking”<sup>68</sup> from the point of view of the West; that is, from an un-marked, hegemonic point of view. The meanings that are affixed to ‘foreign’ cultural practices through this gaze speak to the hierarchies that control representations of difference, yet the power mechanisms involved make them appear natural as they essentialize and reify the ‘Other’<sup>69</sup>.

The Western gaze, this system of representation that constructs cultural difference, may be rooted in colonialism, but it continues to actively shape the way we look at foreign cultures as they circulate in the market, in global media, or in the ‘culturescape’ at large. I will argue that the Western gaze shapes both the Brazilian imaginary (the way Brazilians define their shared belonging) and the imaginary of Brazil (the way non-Brazilians imagine Brazilian culture) that in turn informs capoeira’s new valuation. This is why I take time to describe, next, its mechanisms and the particular

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<sup>68</sup> The idea that it is important to distinguish the different “ways of looking” comes from bell hooks. I take that locution from her.

<sup>69</sup> Typically, Homi Bhabha is invoked as a counterpoint to Said’s thesis. In an early essay, he taxes Said of “historical and theoretical simplification” (1983, 25) and suggests that colonial power and its resulting discourses are not fixed nor entirely controlled by the colonizers. Bhabha’s work on stereotype and on the figure of ambivalence, which will come back later in the chapter, offers welcome nuances to the all-encompassing nature of Said’s view on discourses of representation. Bhabha rather insists on the dialogic nature of representations, especially the stereotypes they contain, such that there is no gaze that does not involve a counter-gaze which works like a mirror effect, both reflecting the image of the colonized and revealing something of the colonizers’ own identity. Bhabha insists on the open and processual nature of identities, of systems of knowledge, and of representations both of the self and of the others (see especially chapter 3 in *The Location of Culture* (1994): “The other question: stereotype, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism”).

tropes it privileges. For this, I am indebted to two authors whose decidedly polemical voices leave little doubt about their opinions of the objectifying outcomes of the Western gaze. Deborah Root is an art historian whose book *Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation and the Commodification of Difference* examines issues of consumption and the aestheticization of cultural difference in a postcolonial framework; arguing that the way the West consumes the Other is clearly embedded in power relations. Martha Savigliano is a dance scholar whose concern in *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* leads her to trace the complex and manifold politics of representation of this dance form, from Argentina, to Paris, back to Argentina and in Japan. Savigliano focuses on the political economic and power relations revealed through the prism of the dance, arguing that tango has been *produced* by the Western gaze as an erotic and exotic embrace that erases racial and class issues. Both Root and Savigliano are fierce critics of the Western gaze; they deconstruct it and reveal its mechanisms of power. They offer many insights into how the Western gaze operates; namely, they both identify the process of exoticization of ‘Others’ as one of its important mechanisms.

The discourse of exoticism evokes a long tradition of romanticization and aestheticization of racial, ethnic or cultural Others, and the oppression and exploitation that follows from it. It has mostly been discussed as part of colonial and imperialist projects, and is especially identified with contexts of Orientalism (Alloula 1986; Kabbani 1986; Rousseau and Porter 1990; Said 1979; Yegenoglu 1998), but as our discussion of Brazil’s case will soon evidence, similar exoticizing discourses have also been produced about the Latin American region (López 1998; Wasserman 1994). In all these contexts,

exoticism contributes to mediate cultural difference and to translate ‘Otherness’ into something readable and acceptable. Exoticism is traditionally, as literature scholar Renata R. Wasserman claims, “the discourse that the powerful use to oppress the powerless” (quoted in López 1998, 27).

Exoticism works in association with a multiplicity of other tropes typically associated with the Western gaze. Indeed, Root demonstrates the depth of the semantic field of exoticism by pointing out that it consists not merely of stereotypes but rather taps into broader tropes of meaning that have been constructed over time and prove to be particularly resilient precisely because they have been naturalized over the centuries. Stereotypes, she argues, are simple and binary, and thus easily contested. Giving conspicuous and tangible form to exoticism, the more complex tropes also confer strength and power to this mechanism of the Western gaze. “Exoticism is multifarious and works, not through single images or stereotypes, but through entire complexes of notions that evoke, bleed into, and reinforce one another.” (Root 1998, 42) According to Root, tropes (as opposed to narratives) work by organizing and binding together diverse concepts, images and symbols, “like a rope binding together many strands” (1998, 34). Because their precise functioning can be extremely complex, for the sake of clarity I organize them around their relation to the Cartesian dualism in which they arguably have their roots.

By strictly opposing the mind to the body, Descartes set the ground for a series of binaries that help us to understand how the Western gaze constructs Others. In contrast with the assumed roots of Western civilization in rational thought as expressed by the

importance of the written form in the colonizing and civilizing process, the exotic ‘Others’ are associated with an embodied, non-rational human existence, a tendency to be guided by instincts, and a closer relation with the bodily senses<sup>70</sup>. The Western gaze tends to underscore the sensual potential of Others, defined in terms of a liberal relation to the body. Both Root (1998) and Savigliano (1995) point out how closely eroticization follows exoticization – a trope that reveals yet another mechanism of power inherited from the colonies. As Root summarizes:

Exoticism always seems to pertain to sex in some way [...]. The interest in sexuality links up in fairly obvious ways to how authority is articulated in colonial situations. Exotic images of women have to do with colonial fantasies of power, and the sexual availability of women classified as exotic is for the most part dependent on the colonist to coerce, that is, to militarily and economically control the colony. (1998, 40)

The tropes of exotic eroticization under the colonial Western gaze, while they seldom address gender dynamics explicitly, always seem to presuppose women’s oppression<sup>71</sup>.

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<sup>70</sup> In her book on the presence of ‘the exotic’ in the United States and Brazil’s incipient national literatures, Renata R. Wasserman (1994) insists on the importance of the written word in colonial constructions of the Other. Print, she explains, facilitated the diffusion of fictions and stories narrating the contact between Europe and the Americas, thus making widely available “a repertoire of images out of which grew the various strains of the European discourse of the exotic” (1994, 29). In contrast to the importance of writing for Europeans’ civilizing process, the absence of written culture among American peoples was all the more striking and led to the construction of what Wasserman calls the “fiction of emptiness” (30). The alleged “absence of civilization” amongst the American people not only justified the colonial conquest but it also prompted their association with a primitive mode of existence that is relegated to the ‘Other’ side of the Cartesian dualism.

<sup>71</sup> Meyda Yegenoglu (1998), for example, criticizes Said for failing to discuss the gendered nature of Orientalism, a shortcoming she endeavors to fill by offering, in her book *Colonial Fantasies*, a feminist reading of Orientalism that recognizes the sexualized nature of this discourse. Robert C. Young ([1990] 2004) makes a similar criticism of Bhabha’s discussions of desire in a colonial context. He explains: “[...] while the structures of desire are central to [...] Bhabha’s exposition of his psychoanalytic model (as we have seen in the case of fetishism), when it comes to the structures of colonial discourse as such the question of sexuality and sexual difference is nowhere apparent in Bhabha’s texts. [...] Bhabha’s model nowhere broaches the question of a gendered colonial subject, but rather seems to regard the troubled structures of sexuality as themselves a metaphor of colonial ambivalence.” (195)

As I will suggest later in this chapter through the close examination of shifts in valuation of capoeira particularly, an exotic and erotic masculinity will appear through subtle transformations of social structures and power relations within the transnational capoeira community.

The Western gaze mobilizes the trope of exoticism discussed above and operates via two main mechanisms that will inform capoeira's contemporary valuations in a transnational context: the transformation of the object of the gaze into an exotic 'Other' associated with the body and sensorial modes of approaching the world, and the 'eroticization' of this 'Other' via this exoticization. These mechanisms will become clearer as we develop them in relation to Brazil and later in relation to capoeira, especially insofar as the narrative of self-interpretation held by the Brazilian people themselves is also rooted in the workings of the Western gaze, which subsequently became internalized.

Now that we understand the Western gaze's main mechanisms, we will be able to better deconstruct the cultural imaginary of Brazil which circulates through capoeira and informs its connotations. On the one hand, in the immediate context of globalization, the Western gaze informs the imaginary of Brazil that North-Americans draw on to understand and interpret capoeira. This imaginary of Brazil, on the other hand, is in dialogue with the Brazilian imaginary that mestres tend to project themselves when they teach and market capoeira. Yet this Brazilian imaginary is *also* a product of the Western gaze, one that goes back to colonial times but that has been internalized through a process that Homi Bhabha (1994) calls mimicry. These two imaginaries combine in what I will

call the “Brazil frame”, a semantic field whereby Brazil is imagined, that indeed ‘frames’ the way capoeira is interpreted in North-America. Insofar as both imaginaries that constitute the Brazil frame are in part constructed through the Western gaze, the stereotypes, tropes, and underlying mechanisms that the latter activates (the emphasis on exoticism, sensuality and bodily pleasures) are particularly accentuated in said frame. In the next section, I extensively analyse the construction of this vast field of discourse through which Brazil is imagined. I will argue that the intense focus on the body and the sensual, hence seductive attributes of capoeiristas that North-Americans ascribe to capoeira in fact reinforces internalized tropes of self-interpretation of Brazilians, who may therefore contribute in the instantiation and perpetuation of the attributes which thereby become the realities of a fantasized and fetichized practice.

#### **4.2.2. The Brazil frame: Self-interpretation projected by Brazilians and reinterpreted by North-Americans**

Transnational capoeira not only provides an access to a diasporic location of Brazil; it is also the vehicle for an imagined Brazil produced by the Western gaze we just described. In its representations, capoeira is often associated with a cultural imaginary that indeed seems reduced to a reified and simplified vision of Brazil that appears to be the mere construction of the Western gaze that interprets it. The vitality of Brazil’s cultural imaginary in the North-American culturescape has received very little scholarly

attention.<sup>72</sup> Its omnipresence around capoeira during my fieldwork was nonetheless undeniable, manifested as an endless series of stereotypes of tropical, sensual and physical pleasures in the hedonistic environment of carnival<sup>73</sup>. Capoeira is inevitably redefined when, once outside of Brazil, it is inserted in this imaginary by virtue of its national origins. Given the strength of Brazil's imaginary, both as imagined by its population and by non-Brazilians, it seems surprising that very few scholars have analyzed the archeology of its construction. How has Brazil become this land of tropical, sexual pleasures? How was it made into such a sexy, 'cool', and vibrant culture that even the country's most impoverished areas (the *favelas*) have become valuable symbols that trendy restaurants and nightclubs cynically adopt as brand names (*Favela Chic* in Paris, *Miss Favela* in Brooklyn)? These semantic associations are so widespread that these questions almost sound rhetorical. But it is precisely for these reasons, and because of these stereotypes' powerful influence on the way capoeira is interpreted transnationally, that we need a more in-depth analysis of this vibrant cultural ethos, which can be traced back to its colonial roots.

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<sup>72</sup> There is very little literature on the representations of Brazilian popular culture in North-American media. This is also Paula Botelho's (2011) observation, in her own, very targeted article on contemporary representations of Brazilian culture via the analysis of *New York Times* articles on Brazilian music. In fact, Botelho's article is one of the only sources I found that examines representations of Brazil in print media (she also refers to an article by M.E. Lucas (1996) on a similar topic, but I was not able to retrieve it). Bernadette Beserra (2008) examines the consequences of the stereotyped exoticization of Brazil on Brazilian women immigrants in an ethnographic study in Los Angeles, but she takes the trope of exoticism for granted without examining how it is constructed.

<sup>73</sup> Though this description comes from my own ethnographic observation, the importance of these images is roughly corroborated the literature cited in the above footnote. Anthropologist Gustavo Lins Ribeiro (2004) also highlights happiness, sensuality, hedonism and tropicalism as features generally representative of Brazilians. Like myself, he makes this claim in a general context that, in his case, encompasses representations of Brazilian culture in Brazil, in Argentina, and in the United States. Some more specific studies of Argentineans' perceptions of Brazilian also point to similar stereotyped images of a sensual, happy, and sexually liberal people (Achúgar and Bustamente 1996; Frigerio 2002; Schmeil 2002), pointing to the existence of a powerful imaginary of Brazil that circulates outside the country.

In the following pages, I exhaustively analyze the construction of Brazil's cultural imaginary, first as a shared self-interpretation of Brazilians themselves, and then as a strong export culture that contributed to the construction of an imagined Brazil amongst North American publics. With this demonstration, I suggest that what seems like an accumulation of stereotypes and gross misrepresentations of capoeira as constructed by the Western gaze is in fact entwined in a more complex and subtle discursive field.

Many stereotypes at play in the Brazil frame inform capoeira's meanings outside of Brazil; in particular, a focus on the body, on a liberal, carnivalesque environment that values hedonistic pleasures, and consequently an overall aura of 'sexy'-ness. Arguably, these are all connected to the centrality of sexuality to the Brazilian identity itself. This characteristic is not only widely observable in popular culture but has also been established by an academic literature largely produced in the 1980s and 1990s (Batinga 1981; Fry 1982a; Gaspar 1985; Muraro 1983; Parker [1991] 2009; Perlongher 1987; Vainfas 1986, 1989). This scholarship, most of it produced in Brazil, has underscored the positive connotations that sexual permissiveness assumes in Brazilian culture, focusing on its most transgressive elements – maybe even with a little bias<sup>74</sup>. Amongst those works which addressed the pervasive presence of a 'public' and liberal sexuality as a

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<sup>74</sup> In her review of the literature exploring Brazilian sexuality, Goldstein (2003) notes that the bulk of the anthropological research on sexuality in Brazil emerged from male scholars interested in male homoeroticism (Fry 1982a, 1982b; Green 1999; MacRae 1992; Parker 1999; Trevisan 1986). These groundbreaking investigations tinged the field of sexuality studies with a particular focus on transgressive sexuality from a masculinist standpoint. The latter also explains an important interest in what Goldstein calls "the carnivalization of desire", the permissiveness and lax norms that shape Brazilian sexuality. An important lineage of scholars interested in transgender and transvestite culture is another outcome of this particular interest in sexual transgression (Kulic 1997, 1998; Silva 1993). Goldstein notes that feminist studies have been marginalized in Brazil, partly because of their potential to undermine this "sex-positive" discourse that characterizes Brazil as an eroticised tropical paradise (2003, 232–235).

defining aspect of Brazilian cultural identity, anthropologist Richard G. Parker's *Bodies, Pleasures, and Passions* ([1991] 2009) remains a seminal contribution, despite being over two decades old. Parker asserts that seduction is a central feature of the Brazilian people's sense of identity. One of the first fieldwork experiences he describes positions sexuality, or more precisely sensuality, as an important aspect of a specifically Brazilian ethos. Parker argues that Brazilians see themselves as sensual individuals *by virtue of their shared Brazilian-ness*. He suggests that the perception of sexuality in Brazil plays out at a broad, societal level: "While sexual life in North America or Europe has been treated as an essentially individual phenomenon, in Brazil it has also emerged as a central issue at a social or cultural level, and has been taken, for better or for worse, as a kind of key to the peculiar nature of Brazilian reality." ([1991] 2009, 32). Being sensual and nurturing a liberal attitude towards sexuality is a feature that seems to provide a "self-interpretation of an entire society" (8), which then trickles down to influence individual subjectivities.

Parker's specific argument has been criticized for the broad scope of its claims. For example, anthropologist Donna M. Goldstein (2003, 228) argues that she is "more hesitant than [Parker] about interpreting sexuality as central to *all* of Brazil"; but nonetheless does "take it for granted that sexuality is a key metaphor used by Cariocas [inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro] in their everyday language and description of almost all aspects of social life.". While Goldstein's caveat is important, it seems reasonable to adopt Parker's general argument insofar as it can also be argued that the Carioca imaginary stemming from Rio de Janeiro has become hegemonic within Brazil (Ribeiro

2000, 2004), namely because it is the location of so many symbols actively promoted in diverse processes of construction of Brazilian-ness (whether under Vargas' popularization of samba, as we have seen in Chapter One; or through *Embratur's* promotion of the *mulata*, as we will see below). This important dimension of the Brazilian imaginary will have repercussions on the way North-Americans value capoeira as well as how mestres tend to project it, which is why we now analyze it in detail.

The depth and strength of the myth of Brazilian sensuality can be traced historically to the colonial period. Both Parker ([1991] 2009) and Ribeiro (2004) go as far back as the famous letter of Pero Vaz de Caminha (the scribe who accompanied Pedro Álvares Cabral in 1500 when they 'discovered' Brazil) to understand the unique features of Brazil's sexual liberalism. In that letter, Caminha describes the lax sexual practices of indigenous people in a voice that Parker analyses as highly ambivalent. Although Parker does not use Homi Bhabha's theory of the stereotype, he points to similar tensions between desire and repulsion in the colonizers' reaction to the colonized subject. The Europeans were clearly seduced by the tropics – both by the sheer fertility of the land and by the sexual liberty of its inhabitants – yet they were also horrified by what they interpreted as 'savage' acts: at this point, there was still a clear distinction identified between the sexual practices of the natives and those of their colonizers. This Western gaze clearly maintains the 'Others' in their distinctive, 'primitive', yet exotic sexuality.

The institution of slavery introduces an African component to colonial gender dynamics and multiplies the situations where different population groups interact on unequal grounds. This new social organization, according to both Parker and Goldstein,

favours sexual promiscuity between different racial groups and makes it possible for all to be included in a shared trope of sexuality. Goldstein (2003, 115–116) explains that the European gaze represented the colonies as “places that embodied the primitive” as well as “racially uncivilized places of chaos and sexual and moral abandon”, perceptions that fueled the white colonizers’ sexual desire for the African female inhabitants. In turn, the power position of white men in the system of slavery justified the concrete sexual acts which followed from a realization of this desire<sup>75</sup>.

While colonial elites everywhere have attributed an unrestrained sexuality to colonized subjects and questioned their morality in order to justify their domination (Helg 1995; McClintock 1995; Stoler 1995; Young 1995), these historical elements are revisited in the specific context of Brazilian nation building in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Our previous discussion of racial democracy and its importance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century populist politics under Getúlio Vargas has already established the crucial importance in the national imaginary of the idea that Brazilian people are a crucible of the European, African, and Native ‘races’ and an original product of their intermingling. The idea of *mestiçagem* (“miscegenation”, the mixing of racial groups underlying the formation of the Brazilian people) implied in the concept of “racial democracy” is only possible given the concrete mechanism of inter-racial sexuality. Sexual intercourse, then, is quite

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<sup>75</sup> Although in a very different context of study (the Netherland Indies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century), Ann Laura Stoler (2002) similarly underlines the necessity to account for affectivity, sentiments, and sexuality in studies of colonial politics. She laments that sensibilities and subjective experiences of the colony are all conveyed in literature but that historiographies downplay them. And yet, she argues, questions of emotions, the management of sex, and intimacies greatly influenced the way power was exerted in colonies. Her study confirms the need to treat “sexual matters not as a metaphor for colonial inequities but as foundational to the material terms in which colonial projects were carried out.” (2002, 14) See also Ribeiro (2004, 182) for a similar argument regarding the importance of considering sexual energy as a factor as important as Christianity and commerce in imperial colonial endeavors.

literally at the heart of the metaphors, myths, descriptions, and stories that the Brazilians tell about themselves and their formation as a people. Insofar as the idea of “racial democracy” is so fundamental in the modern imaginary of Brazil, then inter-racial sexuality, the necessary mechanism for it, also acquires a crucial significance. The two notions are joined in the ideological process of national building that transforms unequal racial relations into a positive and celebrated myth of national formation: insofar as the image of liberated inter-racial sexuality contributes to the positive representation of *mestiçagem*, it therefore assumes a favorable valence in the formation of Brazilian identity. Here, we may understand *mestiçagem* as a form of hybridity, and thus read it through Bhabha’s (1985, 154) account of that concept as “a strategic reversal of the process of domination”. In this sense, it is through a displacement and reorganization of authoritative discourses of racial oppression that the trope of *mestiçagem* is able to transform a history of sexual abuse based on colonial power into a positive celebration of a liberal sexuality. By the same token, these tropes stop being contingent only on the colonial gaze’s construction and are rather internalized and naturalized as a defining national character.

Goldstein’s ethnography of one of Rio de Janeiro’s *favelas* clearly illustrates the continuity between Brazil’s historical narrative and Brazilians’ contemporary perceptions of their cultural identity and social organization. She demonstrates how the promotion of the idea of racial democracy has led to a parallel, yet much less theorized belief in what she calls a “color-blind erotic democracy” that continues to define contemporary Brazilian social relations. She addresses the dynamics of this erotic democracy and

explores their contemporary reach, observing the practices of poor black/*mulata* females who take part in intimate, yet exploitative relationships with older rich white men, thereby obtaining favors ranging from small change for food to a new apartment outside of the *favela*. While the fact that these black women need to sexually engage with white men in order to move upward socially in and of itself shows that racial categories continue to play out in Brazilian social positions, the women, ironically, see white men's desire to have sex with them as proof that there is *no* racism in Brazilian society. As Goldstein notes: "The tendency is to interpret the sexual desire of these men as a signal of a liberal, even enlightened, racial worldview and not as part of a racially and economically skewed system" (2003, 127). Their attitude conveys their belief in a Brazilian sensuality so strong that it transcends racial categories<sup>76</sup>.

It is important not to simplify a complex situation whose structures of racial and gender oppression, concealed by the ideological workings of the so-called racial and erotic democracies, Goldstein so insightfully deconstructs. The belief in an erotic democracy encapsulates the same pitfalls as the very idea of racial democracy that it sustains. Goldstein demonstrates that the white men's desire stems *precisely* from the sexualisation of the *black* female, and is based on racist classifications rather than

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<sup>76</sup> It could also be argued that these *mulata* women partly resist their socio-economic oppression by using the white men's favours to better their economic situation. Interestingly, it is the very same discourse that oppresses them via racial stigmatization that nonetheless also allows their resistance, made possible by their hypersexualization, also based on their racial stigmatization. As such, they exemplify the contemporary validity of Bhabha's assertion that "the discursive conditions of colonialism do not merely undermine the forms of colonial authority but can actively enable resistance" (paraphrased in Young [1990] 2004, 189). If these women's 'blackness' is the cause of their socio-economic oppression, it is also the very factor that allows them to use their sexuality as a bait that attracts the favors of white men and enables them to better their economic situation. Sadly enough, black women's sexuality has, even since slavery, been a tool of resistance: many historical studies put forward the view that it was one of the few devices that enslaved women could use to achieve freedom, at least in the specific Caribbean context (Beckles 1989; Castañeda 1995; Kerr 1995).

evidence that these latter do not exist. If for Goldstein's informants, their stories serve as "a legitimization of Brazil's racial and erotic paradise" (2003, 109), the ethnographer shows how this belief supports the idea of racial democracy that maintains sexuality as a mechanism of racial oppression. Similarly, she demonstrates that Brazil's self-interpretation as an erotic "tropical paradise" accompanied with a "sex-positive" discourse, although it describes a certain social reality, is nevertheless "a masculinist vision of desire and transgression" (228) that conceals counterdiscourses of female oppression. While acknowledging these ideological underpinnings and the problematic realities they serve to conceal, we can also deduce from such studies that the image of Brazil that foreigners represent as a land of sensuality is also deeply inscribed in the Brazilian self-imaginary.

While the initial gaze of Europeans onto the colony contributed to the sexualisation of Brazil and to the exoticization of this sexuality, the mythos of Brazilian sensuality has subsequently been internalized in the processes of nation building and Brazilian identity formation, to the point where it is now normalized as a national ethos. This complex trope linking perceptions of sexuality and racial relations forms the basis for the understandings of Brazilian culture that inform semantic valuations of capoeira in a transnational cultural economy. This celebrated national worldview takes on multiple manifestations that reinforce this particular ethos, often further simplified and stereotyped in its projection outside of Brazil's borders. Enhanced by a process of auto-exoticization and auto-eroticization, this ethos heavily influenced the export culture that the Brazilian government promoted in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; and ultimately, it informed

the interpretation and reception of that culture in new workings of the Western gaze in the North American culturescape.

The powerful intermingling of racial, sensual and sexual tropes of Brazilian culture were newly celebrated, fixed and made exotic in the production of an export culture. While the production of the latter occurs mainly during the post-war period, the best starting point for its analysis is arguably the figure of Carmen Miranda. This singer and show-woman, who became an icon of exotic Brazil in the United States in the WWII period, epitomizes the seductive power that characterizes Brazilian export culture all the while showing the perfect alignment of the internal conception that Brazilians have of themselves as a seductive people with the Western gaze upon that same culture. Despite her ironic ‘whiteness’, Miranda draws on a vast repertoire of Afro-Brazilian cultural elements that she transforms or, some might argue, dissolves into a generic image of the *latina* woman (Stam 2004, 84–88). Miranda’s brand image came to a paroxysm in the ‘Lady in a Tutti Frutti Hat’ scene from the 1943 movie *The Gang’s All There*, infused with stereotyped and generic imagery of Latin-ness, screaming with exoticism, tropicalism, and sexual energy (see appendix C). The Freudian choreographies in this scene involve giant bananas that a harem of scarcely dressed showgirls move up and down in an awkward, unmistakably sexually-loaded scene. Miranda herself wears a hat that follows the banana theme<sup>77</sup>, and is dressed with suggestive strawberries only

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<sup>77</sup> It is impossible not to associate the choice of the banana, in addition to its phallic shape, to the political economy of the fruit itself, linking the United States’s economic interests via major companies like United Fruits and Latin American countries dismissively called Banana Republics, as providers of this raw material. In fact, feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe (1989) takes Miranda as the very starting point of her discussion of gender and labor relations in the international banana economy, proposing that Miranda “helped smooth the way for a more subtle form of American regional influence [in Latin America]” (149).

partially covering her body. Contextualized in the greater path of Miranda's career, this scene arguably announces her demise: incapable of renewing her image, she tries to reaffirm the stereotyped image of the exotic Bahiana that made her so successful; yet she does so in a self-caricature that pathetically enhances the stereotypes in which she got caught up, powerfully highlighting the objectifying and fixing effect of the Western gaze.

Carmen Miranda's stereotyped image cannot be reduced merely to an instance of Brazil's export culture (although Getúlio Vargas himself facilitated her initial 'exportation'). Indeed, soon after she started her singing career in Rio de Janeiro in the 1930s, Miranda was discovered by a Broadway producer, Lee Schubert, who invited her to perform in the United States in 1939. However, she refused to go without her musicians, for whom Schubert did not want to pay, leading Vargas to subsidize their expenses in a gesture that already marks Miranda as a clear tool of cultural diplomacy. When she was invited to the United States in the years leading to this country's entry into World War II, diplomatic relations between Brazil and that country were tense. In this context, Vargas recognizes that Miranda's visit to the US could be a good international relations coup. Miranda became a sort of goodwill ambassador and an important pawn in the geopolitical relations between the US and Latin America at large (García 2004b; Mandrell 2001; Shaw and Conde 2005). A white woman singing samba at a moment when this musical style was still associated with the marginalized, 'black' *favelas*, obviously aligned well with Vargas' use of national-popular culture to promote the idea of racial democracy (García 2004a, 186; Shaw 2005). Despite this transparent objective, the American public and the Hollywood studios (or, in other words, the Western gaze and

the culture industry's production machine) nonetheless had as much to do with Miranda's image as her Brazilian heritage, all of which was highly conditioned by the geopolitics of the period. The case of Carmen Miranda shows the dialogical nature of any export culture, which has no life independent from its reception in the countries of its export, which in this case was reified and exoticized by the Western gaze. Miranda provides an entry into the imaginary of Brazil with tropical, sensual, and exotic connotations that circulates outside of the country.

Another institution that played a crucial role in the production of Brazil's export culture is *Embratur*, the Brazilian Tourist Agency that was created in 1966 during the military dictatorship of 1964-1985, with the objective of revamping the image of Brazil abroad and of working towards stabilizing the country's unstable economy (Alfonso 2006, 38). The military regime was indeed associated with accounts of torture and abuse; it thus proactively produced an export culture so as to counter the negative connotations it itself contributed to the country's international image. In their article on the political economy of sex tourism in Brazil, Bandyopadhyay and Nascimento (2010) identify *Embratur* as responsible for the production of the image of the *mulata* (roughly defined as a brown-skinned, scarcely dressed samba dancer) as a sexual object at the centre of Brazil's tourism promotion imaginary. Though the authors also trace the colonial history of the sexualization of the *mulata* (much as I have done with respect to the trope of *mestiçagem* and racial democracy), they nevertheless suggest that *Embratur* explicitly sexualized the image of the *mulata* and used it inside the greater frame of carnival as a space of law-less-ness and sexual freedom, in order to attract international tourists

(Bandyopadhyay and Nascimento 2010, 939–940; see also Alfonso 2006; Gilliam 1998; Gomes 2009, 50–55). As a result of *Embratur*'s campaigns, Brazil became internationally associated with the specific image of Rio de Janeiro's carnival, women and nudity. This image, in continuity with the image of the sensual Brazilian woman already sowed by Carmen Miranda, helped to further consolidate an association of Brazil with sensuality and sexual freedom in the global imagination.

The image of the *mulata* as a symbol of Brazil was so powerful that even after *Embratur* explicitly abandoned images of naked women in carnival settings and re-shaped its branding strategy<sup>78</sup>, it remained well-established in the global imaginary (Corrêa 1996; Gomes 2009, 116; Gilliam 1998). The resilience of the *mulata* can arguably be explained by the fact that it was not merely the artificial product of *Embratur* but rather the culmination of the amalgamation of many tropes that draw on an entire complex of meanings built throughout Brazil's history. The continuous thread from the colonial sexualization of Brazil as an exotic land to the ensuing conception of Brazilians as a sensual people, and its tourism industry promotion via a sensual image of the sexy *mulata* is indeed seamless.

The cultural exports showcasing dance, music and embodied pleasures, from Miranda to the *mulatas*, fuelled an image of Brazil as the quintessential land of tropical fun. This self-image is first projected by Brazil itself, yet its persistence is later crystallized into stereotypes under a new interpretive layer that perpetuates the

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<sup>78</sup> Efforts to re-brand Brazil's tourism image (potentially related to incipient problems of sexual tourism) sought to diversify promotional images, showcasing Brazil's historical attractions, its modern architecture, its diverse and luxurious natural attractions as well as its potential for ecological tourism (Alonso 2006).

foreigners' gaze. Movies like *Blame it on Rio* (1984), *Wild Orchid* (1989) and *Woman on Top* (2000) are representative vehicles of this Western interpretation of Brazil. All three of these American movies play on sex, senses, and sensuality to portray the country. For example, *Blame it on Rio*, which came out in the early 1980s, is a satirical depiction of two fathers and their young daughters who find their sexual bearings turned upside down when spending holidays in Rio de Janeiro. It can be read as a direct interpretation of the *Embratur* promotional narrative and the image of Brazil that it triggered in the Western popular imaginary. Despite being fraught with stereotypes, as a low budget Hollywood comedy would be, it is nonetheless a poignant example of how Brazil was perceived in the early 1980s, exactly when the first capoeiristas were arriving in North-America.

It is within this 'Brazil frame' that, I argue, capoeira is first received and consumed in the North-American culturescape. The frame provides a certain perspective on an 'imagined Brazil', which in turn shapes capoeira's new meanings.

#### **4.3. NEW VALUATIONS OF CAPOEIRA IN REPRESENTATION**

Once re/de-contextualized, capoeira becomes a vehicle of Brazilian culture and is therefore consumed and received through the Brazil frame described above. Of course, capoeira differs from the main symbols that assisted this frame's construction in some striking ways, namely because it showcases Brazilian men rather than the feminine bodies through which the central themes of sensuality and exoticism have so far been negotiated. This gendered difference can be explained by the shift in the traditional

demographics of the community, in terms of racial background, gender, and nationality. The new composition of practitioners also introduces new gazes on the practice, not only the stereotypical Western gaze but also a new female gaze on a traditionally ‘masculine’ world, and a ‘racially-informed gaze’ on a practice now associated with (global) Blackness. These gazes insert capoeira in yet larger semantic fields that also modify its meanings. By virtue of its Brazilian origin, however, capoeira has enough overlapping elements with the Brazil frame that some of the latter’s meanings colour its new valuations, as I will verify by analysing representations of capoeira in some of the new platforms (mainstream global media, in television shows, videoclips, advertisements, etc.) on which it circulates.

#### **4.3.1. Media representations of capoeira according to the Brazil frame**

In order to corroborate the influence of the systems of representations described earlier on the meanings of capoeira as they circulate amongst a larger public in the North-American culturescape, I tracked the occurrences of the word “capoeira” over a period of 24 months in websites and blogs through a “Google alert”. I then analysed the context of these mentions as well as the specific way capoeira is presented, defined (or not), and qualified, in order to verify that the semantic fields favoured by the Western gaze and the Brazil frame were at play in these contemporary media representations of capoeira. I found that the representations of capoeira in written media were indeed influenced by the cultural tropes and systems of meanings outlined above, with ‘keywords’ such as ‘body’, ‘exotic’, and ‘sexy’ appearing regularly. An important number of articles clearly made

reference to the semantic fields present in the Western gaze or the Brazil frame, indicating their influence on the contemporary, global meanings of capoeira. This data analysis confirmed the presence of two prominent semantic fields, one that associated capoeira with “health, fitness and weight loss”, and the other with a “sexy dance/fight” – the latter category often grouped with other Latin American ‘sensual dances’. These interpretative categories were regularly confirmed by random manifestations of the public’s perception of capoeira in other contexts, namely the strong reaction to capoeiristas’ physical appeal. Indeed, I cannot count how many times I have heard comments with a stereotyped, sexual undertone while in the audience of capoeira performances. “Sexy” and “hot” are certainly amongst the adjectives that most often came up, but I have heard more comical comments such as an older lady whispering “what a fine specimen of a man!” as the mestre walked amongst the crowd towards a street-performance venue. Below, I analyse written media representations in conjunction with my ethnographic observation of embodied representations, not only because, often times, the former are nothing more than reviews or reports on the latter, but also because their analysis is complementary. Tracking mentions of capoeira in written media covers a broad scope and locates semantic trends, but this needs to be combined with a more qualitative observation of the contexts in which the general public can access capoeira in an embodied form in order to identify what specific elements trigger those interpretations.

The very settings where capoeira is displayed usually directly and explicitly mobilize the Brazil frame. This explains why media representations, often times

commenting on these same capoeira performances, fit with the semantic fields attached to the Brazil frame and the underlying Western gaze. The capoeira groups followed for this research were solicited on a regular basis to participate in shows where they performed alongside other easily identifiable symbols of Brazil like samba dancers and percussion ensembles. In these Brazil-themed events (ranging from festivals that celebrate “world cultures” in which capoeira showcases Brazil or trendy parties in nightclubs using a Brazilian theme), capoeira is quite literally inserted in the ‘Brazil’ frame, which automatically informs its new valuations in North America.<sup>79</sup> This phenomenon is particularly prevalent during carnival season. Countless parties are organized where, despite the cold weather afflicting many North-American cities at that time of the year, bare-chested capoeiristas appear alongside samba dancers in meager feathered attire, with images of sand beaches all surrounded by the national flag’s omnipresent yellow and green.

Capoeira performances are turned into supports that spread and constantly reassert a fixed representation of an imagined Brazil. The picture in appendix D offers a visual demonstration of the process I am describing: the capoeirista is literally *contained* in a fixed frame of representations of what North-Americans assume ‘Brazil’ to be, which traps him in between colourful feathers and curvaceous samba dancers. The flesh overload exudes sensuality, the smiles suggest hedonistic attitudes, and the colours highlight the exoticism that codes Brazil in this system of representation. The capoeirista

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<sup>79</sup> Even when it is not a Brazilian themed event per se, capoeira groups are usually presented, when they are about to perform, as representatives of ‘Brazil’ such as it is rare that capoeira performances are not inserted more or less explicitly in the ‘Brazil frame’.

in this photo is subjected to the frame that includes (and reduces his practice to) his body, his bare chest, his dark skin in an image of Brazil impossible to detach from the 'Brazil frame' that conforms to the Western gaze and exoticizes his practice. The headline of the article, "Blame it on Rio", reasserts the tropes that it is evoking. The final section of this chapter will qualify this vision, and identify the ways that mestres mobilize to maintain agency even within this frame of representation by using it performatively. For now, however, I insist that because the contexts where capoeira circulates are also contexts where 'Brazil' is displayed, capoeira acquires, by osmosis, all the meanings that are usually attributed to the entire culture that, for North-Americans, is 'Brazil'.

The usual settings of live capoeira performances not only reassert the reified tropes of a fixed system of representation. They also privilege a simplified display of the practice, where the absence of explicative elements allows only for a surface reading of the practice. The public needs to resort to readily accessible meanings such as those provided by the Brazil frame to form their own interpretation of capoeira performances.

The format of a capoeira presentation is almost always incompatible with any depiction of the artform that would convey its complex internal system of meanings. For example, the time frame will not usually allow for the development of a whole game, privileging short exchanges between players, if exchanges happen at all. Indeed, one modality, the 'solos', was invented precisely for such shows: a capoeirista performs alone and is generally expected to demonstrate the most acrobatic moves of capoeira<sup>80</sup>.

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<sup>80</sup> To be fair, I have heard from older mestres that this modality was invented in the context of tourist shows in Brazil but it has probably become more and more important outside the country, especially when mestres arrived alone in a city and nobody could play properly with them and display the 'real' game in any case.

Moreover, because those presentations are always partly also a promotion for the mestres' school, students doing the performance are usually reminded not to complete 'take downs' (techniques that would make people fall), and not to play games so aggressive as to scare potential students off. The games in such contexts of representation are usually friendly displays where capoeiristas collaborate more than they compete. They leave each other space to display flashy moves and know that they will not get caught upon their landing by a direct kick meant to hurt – as could potentially happen in contexts where capoeira is not on display. Similar modifications happen in the musical component of capoeira. Sometimes, capoeiristas have to perform to recorded music – if there is capoeira music at all – and if they do get to play the instruments and sing, the public most generally will not understand what they say nor the insights that the lyrics provide for understanding the game. The performances certainly display some elements that are indeed part of capoeira, but they do not display the art in its full complexity and do not provide enough background for the public to understand what capoeira, already a foreign activity, really is. Capoeiristas know this, which leads them to contribute to what becomes a vicious cycle of partial representations. The following reflection of one mestre summarizes this cycle clearly:

[During presentations], you're going to play capoeira, but you're not playing *capoeira*. [...] Because you're going there only to display yourself. There is no capoeira there, in reality. [...] In this performance environment, you only have to show the acrobatic part of capoeira. [...] Because sometimes people [...] are only waiting for this acrobatic part. If we were to play only a *benguela* game [note: a less flashy, more intricate

and awkward-looking game that one needs more knowledge to understand and appreciate], people would say ‘what the f\*\*\* is this? It’s great, but it’s weird’. Nobody understands anything. (Pantera interview)

He then goes on to confirm that the very format of the capoeira performance is responsible for this misrepresentation:

You’re only going to understand when you *live* the thing. You only understand capoeira when you really live it. So in a context like this, the basics [*fundamentos*] of capoeira... the people do not get that at all.

By not giving access to the full spectrum of meanings, the context of performance privileges surface readings, which also explains the first interpretive category prevalent in media accounts that associate capoeira to the vitality of the human body – in shape, healthy, toned, both graceful and powerful. This is a category that needs unpacking. On the one hand, the focus on the body seems inevitable insofar as the body is indeed the most spectacular component of the capoeira performances and the more visible signifier. Yet on the other hand, it also conveniently fits with a long tradition of the Western gaze and the Brazil frame specifically; both of which unfold a series of connotations that automatically inform, by association, the specific reading of these bodies on display.

A considerable number of media representations foreground ‘healthy’ bodies: they are “ripped” bodies, “muscular” bodies, bodies “in shape”. Most entries corresponding to this semantic field appear in sections of websites or magazines suggesting various ways to ‘stay healthy’ and listing capoeira classes as one of them. It is an undeniable fact that training capoeira is a way get in shape. In addition, the performances accentuate the embodied dimension of capoeira – they put forward

spectacular moves, acrobatic feats, and necessarily display the healthy and toned bodies that result from training. Now, it is important to unpack the new meanings, (and their consequences on the overall valuation of capoeira), that stem from this insistence on the body *when inscribed in the greater semantic field of the 'Brazil frame'*, as it is in these contexts.

Under the light of the 'Brazil frame' and especially of the Western gaze that accompanies it in a North-American context, the quasi-obsessive focus on the body can also be interpreted as a sign of the fragmentary nature of the Western construction of "Others". The mechanism of exoticization removes signs and objects from their original contexts and rearranges them under new systems of representations (Mason 1998); or, as Deborah Root (1998, 42) once again eloquently puts it: "Exoticism is synechdochal, and fragments of culture work to exemplify and evoke a larger whole." The blind, almost monomaniac focus on the capoeirista's fit body recalls the reduction of all forms of expressions coming from 'Others' to the embodied side of the Cartesian dualism. The bodies of capoeiristas are decontextualized from the very activity in which they are engaged. Being in shape and having developed muscles are no longer a means to the greater purpose of the game or a consequence of the work it entails; rather, they are an end in and of itself – "get fit, train capoeira!", as the media proclaim. Importantly, this shift in valuation also contributes to erase capoeira's complexities, its historicity, and its racial differences. Whereas in its initial context, the capoeirista's body was intimately linked to a 'communal body' of Afro-Brazilians who shared socio-economic conditions of subordination that could be worked out through capoeira, the circulation of the practice

in the global culture industry has isolated the capoeirista's body, which now stands on its own, able to function as a sign in and of itself. This recontextualization of the capoeiristas' bodies in the frame of 'Brazil' seen through the Western gaze turns the focus away from the racial history and reduces it to a reading of a single body in its mere physicality. Capoeira is no longer an embodied performance of racial struggle, but a singular expression of an agile body.

The isolation of the capoeirista's body from the shared social and historical context of capoeiristas' bodies explains the presence of the second semantic field that stood out of this specific data analysis, the qualification of capoeira as a "sexy dance/fight", which is moreover enhanced by the imaginary of Brazil at play in those instances. Once singled-out, the capoeirista's body becomes a 'sexy' body – an interpretation that draws on the self-imagined seductive power of Brazilian people, the ideal of sexual freedom exported by *Embratur* via the carnival, both lumped to an all-encompassing Brazilian, sometimes even Latin-American sensuality affixed on the exotic Other via the Western gaze. It may appear surprising, given that Brazilian sensuality has thus far been negotiated via women, that the male capoeiristas would be similarly connoted. Although the next section will outline some of the reasons for this reversal, we can already note that this speaks to the strength of this trope of Brazilian sensuality, which the mestres themselves performatively and somewhat narcissistically play up on, especially given the new reality of the transnational context where a large contingent of women constitutes a significant part of the community and audience with whom they interact.

My overview of written media nonetheless unmistakably confirms the presence of this eroticising mechanism in the interpretations of capoeira. The Google Alert turned out multiple entries describing capoeira or its practitioners as ‘sexy’, ‘hot’, or ‘beautiful’; for example, a headline on the Philippine Entertainment Portal is particularly eloquent when it declares that the actor Rafael Rossel “goes pescetarian and practices capoeira for his sexy body”, while another entertainment blog recommends the show “Warriors of Brazil” with a promise that it “will entice and entertain with sexy sounds, back flips and samba moves”. A little more elaborate is a blogger’s comment on a performance piece that included capoeira at Toronto’s 2011 *Alternative Fashion Week*. The overall review of the specific fashion show with its focus on sustainable fashion is quite biting. The blogger criticizes references to hippies, dreads, and organic cotton shirts, suggesting these are incompatible with a fashion environment. In sum, he describes the entire night as “painfully uncomfortable”, with one concession however: “If it weren’t for the two topless and ripped men doing a Brazilian air-karate dance—er, capoeira, that is—then we would have been dreaming of an apocalypse. Thankfully their glistening chests kept us distracted from the interpretative planetary explosion.” (Bahrapour 2011). The visual appeal of well trained bodies and the acrobatic moves they perform are here intertwined with an aura of cataclysmic mystery that exoticises the practice. These surface readings understand the practitioners’ bodies as completely detached from their own individual histories (ie. the mestres’ lifestories inscribed in the neoliberal political economic context, as seen in Chapter Three) and the history of the practice – the very nature of

which is made irrelevant by consciously mistaking its appellation (“Brazilian air-karate dance—er, capoeira, that is”).

#### **4.3.2. Two new interpretive lenses: the female gaze and the discourse of “global Blackness”**

Contemporary representations of capoeira draw on and echo the entire cultural frame of ‘Brazil’. They are also attributable to a series of new factors that interweave with the Brazil frame yet are rather more direct outcomes of capoeira’s transnational recontextualization. The new demographics (gender and ‘racial’) conforming the transnational field of practice contribute to shift the meanings of capoeira: there are now women practicing capoeira, and they usually do so in multicultural, cosmopolitan environments where the strict Brazilian imaginary is no longer the only field of reference shaping racial meanings. These two new elements entail new gazes on capoeira and its insertion in systems of representation that add new layers of meanings and value to the activity.

The high ratio of women to men practitioners in North America, for example, constitutes a major change following from the transnationalization of capoeira, a traditionally masculine world that excluded women. The exportation of capoeira has opened the practice to many female practitioners, which now constitute at least half of the students in the many different classes observed in North America. Contentious discussions concerning the place of women in capoeira permeate the community (both national and transnational). These are unequivocal signs of women’s established

presence, even though all practitioners are still struggling to know how to specifically integrate them<sup>81</sup>. While the consequences of the strong female presence in capoeira is a vast [and crucial] topic that could lend itself to a discrete investigation, I merely highlight here the direct consequences that this new demographic has on the valuations of capoeira already discussed in this chapter (that is, the focus on the body and the “sexy aura”). The presence of women introduces a new point of view on capoeira, one that enhances the connotations present in the Brazil frame. The interpretation of the capoeiristas’ agile, muscular and sweaty masculine bodies as ‘sexy bodies’ is also contingent on a desiring female eye. The presence of independent, so-called liberated North-American female practitioners looking at and engaging with the masculine performance makes it necessary to address the gender interactions and interpretations that have stemmed from this shift.

The *roda* has certainly always been an important performative space of masculinity in Brazil, even though this has yet to be systematically researched: it involves a group of men simultaneously displaying and enacting strength, agility, and wit, and has in some periods of its history been linked explicitly with subcultures wherein masculinity was actively negotiated. Under the gaze of young Western women, predisposed by the latent presence of the “Brazil frame”, this idea of masculinity is made all the more desirable, sensual and ‘sexy’. Their reading of the *roda* through both a Western and a

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<sup>81</sup> The gender politics within the capoeira community itself are an immense topic that exceeds the scope of this study, let alone of this particular demonstration. The number of female mestres, for example, can still be counted on one’s finger tips: multiple reasons, from the traditionally *machista* culture to the physiological predicaments of motherhood, seem to make it harder for women to reach high ranks in the community – though it is starting to happen. However, the growing presence of women, their incipient but resolute organization and their determination to be recognized and respected (via countless methods, the more conspicuous being the *encontro femininos* where they impose themselves as leaders) are impossible to go unnoticed.

female gaze is an important factor that embeds capoeira into a semantic field that highlights these ‘sexy’ qualities. This interpretation, furthermore, is corroborated with actual facts of the community, where sexual interactions between hedonistic mestres and willingly seduced North-American women are far from rare. The fantasy and desire spurred by cultural other-ness is hardly one way; as Assunção (2005, 194) duly notes: “a number of Brazilian instructors indulge in the national obsession with blond women”. Capoeira mestres may put to work their charisma, their position in the hierarchy, as well as the tropes of sensuality attached to their Brazilian identity in order to seduce their female students. This intercultural desire leads to all sorts of romantic and/or sexual relationships – whether they last a night or form the basis of strong marriages. The next chapter will examine in detail the affective and emotional relationships generated in the capoeira community. It is hard to assess exactly how much these specific, intimate gender dynamics influence the overall reading of capoeira as a sensual activity, one that is necessarily partial because it fails to consider the interpretations of these students’ male counterparts. It is certainly justified, however, to suggest that it reinforces the already pregnant potential to eroticize the practice under both the Western gaze and the Brazil frame.

Insofar as Brazil is already associated with sensuality and seductive power, and insofar as the body is the medium of sensorial and sensual experiences, it is easy to understand how capoeira, both a Brazilian and an embodied artform, would be the place of a synthesis that enhances these connotations. The influence of the female gaze also explains the reversal briefly mentioned before: the shifting location of perceived

sensuality from the feminine to the masculine body. Indeed, while the tropes addressed so far affixed connotations of sensuality and erotic power onto the *mulata*, their projection by female participants in capoeira contributes to the eroticization of *masculine* bodies. This latter process cannot however be fully explained only by the new female gaze; it may be attributed to the influence of one last system of representation on capoeira's meanings, that emphasizes not so much the Brazilian origins of the practice, but rather its African legacy.

An analysis of the systems of representations that give new meanings to capoeira in its transnational recontextualization would be incomplete without a mention of the important semantic field that links capoeira to the history of the "Black Atlantic" (a concept I conceive to include not merely the UK-US-Caribbean triangle popularly theorized by Paul Gilroy (1993), but all locations of African transnational routes including Brazil and Canada). The African origins of capoeira have greatly influenced its history in Brazil where, as we have seen, its evolution was closely associated with racial politics. As an artform literally born out of the global displacement of Africans through the slave trade, it is deeply linked to the history of these populations, and the history of their representations. If the Brazilian cultural imaginary as seen through the Western gaze minimizes the specific racial historicity of capoeira, the transnational context reconnects capoeira to its African origins because it permits the practice to exceed the racial politics

of Brazil and retrieve its place in a transnational imaginary born from the displacement of Africans<sup>82</sup>.

A brief contextualization of capoeira in the scholarship on the African diaspora and black consciousness cannot be wholly omitted from our discussion of capoeira's new valuations, although a detailed analysis of this vast literature exceeds the scope of this dissertation. Recent scholarship that examines and interrogates the African diaspora (Clarke and Thomas 2006; Rahier, Hintzen and Smith 2010; Yelvington 2006) shows the complexity of the debates that traverse this field of study. For example, Thomas and Clarke (2006, 2) note that discussions regarding the respective validities of ontological and culturalist approaches to blackness and whiteness have gained renewed theoretical attention in debates spurred by the global context. Definitions of the "African diaspora" constantly evolve alongside contemporary migrations of people of African ancestry that problematize both local and transnational notions of blackness and black consciousness (Clarke 2010; Forte 2010; Hintzen and Rahier 2003; Koser 2003; Rahier, Hintzen and Smith 2010). Broadly-encompassing concepts such as Gilroy's "Black Atlantic" appropriately highlight some of the definitional commonalities of diasporic black cultures, developed from dialogue and exchange amongst diasporic populations sharing common African legacies, a shared experience of slavery and displacement, as well as

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<sup>82</sup> This semantic association of capoeira with the specific African roots of Brazilian culture is reinforced by the distinctive use of capoeira as a tool of promotion for tourism in the state of Bahia, widely labeled as the most African state of Brazil. Bahia's promotional material draws on its specific aura of blackness to attract international tourism, spreading strong associations between capoeira and a specific African heritage (Hedegard 2011; Sansone 2003; Santana Pinho 2010a). While the complex use of Afro-Brazilian cultural practices to construct and promote a not less complex notion of blackness in Bahia cannot and should not be reduced to this straightforward association, the constant use of capoeira to promote tourism in Bahia more than any other region of Brazil contributes to the activation of tropes of blackness in the interpretation.

more contemporary effects of racism. Acknowledging the shared outcomes of this dialogue and exchange should not, however, erase the misunderstandings, differences and internal hierarchies that traverse the so-called African diaspora, which is not exempt from its own power dynamics. The geopolitics of blackness are structured through complex relationships at various levels of interaction, with the notable influence of an African-American imaginary and experience on diasporic imaginations (Brown 1998, 2005; Campt 2004; Pabst 2006).

Capoeira intersects with this complex field of black consciousness from multiple angles. First, given its origins, the way it is represented and valued transnationally necessarily enters in dialogic relation with afro-diasporic imaginaries linked to histories of colonialism and slavery. To be fair, capoeira *contemporânea*, given its already transformed meanings in Brazil under the ideology of “racial democracy”, evokes the symbols and tropes of its African origins much less explicitly than, for example, capoeira *Angola* groups clearly do<sup>83</sup>. In contrast, the mestres in this investigation draw much more on the appeal of the Brazil frame than on any black consciousness to create their market – as we will see in the last section of this chapter. Yet despite ideological transformations and resignifications, African origins are constitutive to capoeira, and are, significantly, mentioned whenever capoeira is performed. Indeed, no matter how ‘Brazilian’ the context of performance is, mestres usually take time, before or after their immediate performance, to present and promote their own school. On those occasions, they routinely explain that capoeira was created *by slaves* in Brazil. It is also a message that disciples

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<sup>83</sup> See Araújo (2002), Costa Araújo (1997) Joseph (2012), Vassalo (2003) for accounts of Capoeira Angola that emphasize this modality’s special relationship to the African roots and legacies of the practice.

spread very diligently, as their own way to nuance the stereotypes otherwise associated with the activity they love. In my interviews with capoeira students, these latter most often mentioned slave origins when asked how they explained what capoeira is to their friends and family. This groundwork is reinforced by groups of capoeira *Angola* who, despite their omission from this study, nonetheless contribute to the overall image of capoeira that circulates transnationally. Very few people in the general public differentiate between the distinct varieties of capoeira, and thus the more afro-centric imaginary that surrounds capoeira *Angola* groups and their own performances arguably also influences the imaginary surrounding capoeira *contemporânea* studied here.

Capoeira's position within afro-diasporic dialogues and the ensuing cultural imaginary is complicated by the new demographics of its transnational community. On the one hand, 'white' non-Brazilian people who practice capoeira may amplify the perceived racial divisions between blacks and whites that underlie the very existence of systems of representation of blackness that we will discuss below. On the other hand, there are now 'black' people from all parts of the African diaspora who practice capoeira (Haitians, Jamaicans, Cape Verdians, Congolese), all of whom extend the signification of capoeira in the diasporic imagination. In their interviews, some of these new 'black' practitioners have expressed feeling a particular connection to the artform given their shared history in relationship to the enslavement of African people. Capoeira's recontextualization in multicultural contexts and in new racial imaginaries makes its African legacies play out differently and acquire new connotations. The interpretation of its 'black' origins stops being informed strictly by the specific racial politics of Brazil and

may build on the local race relations that characterize the immediate environment of practice (African-American movements in the USA, or the multicultural ideology of Canada), or again, in the broader framework of ‘global blackness’, that is, the more hegemonic frame of globally recognized symbols and stereotypes of blackness that we will now delineate.

What defines ‘black’ and ‘white’ is far from universal. Since the incipient discipline of anthropology, backed up at the time by advocates for slavery and colonial expansion, based human differences on biology (Baker 1998), a vast scholarship has clearly established that these contested categories are specific to countries, societies, or cultures<sup>84</sup>. Despite regional differences regarding racial categorizations, there exists a common cultural imagery circulating globally and representing a common ‘black identity’, both stemming from within the African diaspora and working as an external frame of representation. It is this system of shared representations that I call “global blackness”, the existence of which is confirmed, for example, by anthropologist Lívio Sansone’s assertions that there are global black symbols circulating and exchanged throughout the diaspora, something that Gilroy (1993) has also exposed with his theory of the Black Atlantic, which he describes as “a system of cultural exchanges” (14) and “web of diaspora identities and concerns” (218). A great number of symbols and referents

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<sup>84</sup> While we have seen that race relations in Brazil are defined on a spectrum created by *mestiçagem* (where there are not only ‘blacks’ or ‘whites’ but an almost infinite range of denominations for *preto*, *pardo*, *mulato*, *moreno*, *cafuso*, etc., all highly contextual, socially specific, and subjective), the United States, in contrast, is known to be territory to a binary conception of racial categories where the ‘one drop rule’ categorizes as ‘blacks’ all those who have even the most remote African ancestry (or a slightly coloured skin) (see, for example, Davis 1991)

included in this shared imagery are drawn from English-speaking regions of the Black Atlantic:

Because of the power of U.S. black (and white) imagery within global cultural flows – for example in the way black people are portrayed in advertising campaigns for popular status symbol like sport shoes – many such images are now well known worldwide. They permeate the imagery of black people, as well as black people’s self-images, even in faraway places. (Sansone 2003, 153–154)

The notion of “global blackness” includes a series of stereotypes that intersect with the Western gaze. Indeed, a central locus of this specific construction of blackness from a white perspective is the body, a particularly loaded site of semantic negotiation insofar as it is also claimed strategically from within the diaspora itself. Indeed, the discussion of the so-called “black body” as a carrier of racializing stereotypes that intersect with the Western gaze and reify ‘blackness’ should first acknowledge the historical significance of the body for the self-construction of the own African diasporic experience. As discussed by anthropologist Patricia de Santana Pinho:

According to Stuart Hall (1992; 1996b), one of the major characteristics that make black diasporic cultures ‘black’ is the strategic use of the body. As an important form of capital for slaves, their descendants, and the impoverished in general, the uses of the body have gone along with the centrality of music and style for diasporic black cultures. (2010a, 4)

If the body was a productive site of negotiation of social meanings for the enslaved populations (via practices such as capoeira, precisely), it has also been unfortunately reduced to the unique motif of construction for a singular, unchanging and

undifferentiated idea of blackness. In the economy of slavery, people of African descent were, after all, only valuable for their physical labour and its benefits for the slave owner. From this historical condition, a whole series of stereotypes have nonetheless been affixed to the 'black body' through the workings of the aforementioned neocolonial Western gaze.

Franz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* (1967) is the seminal reference for considering the phenomenon of the "epidermalization of blackness", that is, the inscription of social meanings on skin colour. His much quoted "Look, a Negro!" encapsulates the racializing look onto 'black bodies', which homogenizes their individual experiences, objectifies their meanings, and reifies their existence. More recently, authors like Paul Gilroy (2000) and bell hooks (1992), as well as exciting researchers in the field of dance studies (Castaldi 2006; Dixon Gottschild 2003; Pietrobruno 2006; Savigliano 1995; Thomas 2003) have critically analysed and thereby shed light on a discourse of race particularly affixed on the bodies of African and African diasporic people through a certain way of looking at their bodies. Finally, Harvey Young's (2010) performance study of phenomenological experiences of black bodies across time highlights "the ways in which an *idea* of the black body has been and continues to be projected across actual physical bodies [...]" (2010, 4). In particular, Dixon Gottschild's book *The Black Dancing Body* (2003) is based on extensive interviews where she prompts practitioners to name the stereotypes of the 'black' (and the 'white') body without holding back. She argues that the only way to end stereotypes is to acknowledge them first and work 'through' them. This method allows her to identify the main connotations circulating

about the 'black body'; namely its 'exotic', 'erotic', 'primitive', 'untamed', and 'animal-like' nature; as well as its 'explosive', 'dynamic', 'strong' limbs and muscles (see pp. 41–52 in particular). One is never too cautious when dealing with stereotypes, for there is only a fine line between addressing them critically and reproducing them. This is why I will draw precisely on those that Dixon Gottschild's exhaustive work has allowed to surface in order to read capoeira.

The Western gaze's production of 'blackness' through the production of stereotyped black bodies has been so hegemonic that it has influenced representations of 'black people' in regions as foreign and culturally distinct from the Western imaginary as Japan. Indeed, some surprising ethnographic studies of Japan reveal the presence of a long history of desire and fantasy for a constructed and fetichized Black hypersexuality (Cornyetz 1994; Kelsky 1994), that relies on a domain of Japanese representations of 'blacks' that John Russell (1991) has proven to be strikingly similar to imaginary Western conventions. More importantly, the cultural construction of blackness mapped onto the black body has also been internalized by 'black people' themselves. As Harvey Young (2010, 13) notes: "[...] the black body is both an externally applied projection blanketed across black bodies and an internalization of the projected image by black folk". The creation of the 'black body' thus stems not only from the white gaze but is only complete "when popular connotations of blackness are mapped across or internalized within black people" (7). In what can be seen as a reaction to the racialising and hegemonic reduction of the expressive cultural forms of the African diaspora to a stereotyped 'black body', the latter was recuperated as a symbol of affirmation of black

identity. Sansone (1994, 90–91), amongst others, has noted that the body has been mobilized as a site of empowerment where ‘black people’ reaffirmed their agency: multiple social issues have been negotiated via symbols of ethnic identity located on the body (the hair is the most conspicuous). The celebration of the black body, best encapsulated in the “Black is beautiful” movement in the 1970s, is meant to reverse negative stigmas. A similar, positive affirmation of African heritage on the body is particularly prevalent in Bahia, a trend that seeks to produce and restore dignity to historically stigmatized and structurally disadvantaged Afro-Brazilians (Santana Pinho 2010b). Both these trends nevertheless work together to reinforce the centrality of the body as a site of meaning, a new context which adds up to the semantic fields that already underline the importance of the capoeirista’s body in its Brazilian frame.

The idea of the “black body” produced in the discourse of global blackness clearly influences the new valuations of capoeira. Indeed, we should not reduce the new interpretations of the sexy capoeirista body to the mere female gaze addressed above: there is also a sensual reification of the masculine body which happens through a specific valuation of the ‘black body’. This triangulation between blackness, sexuality, and the white [female] gaze<sup>85</sup> explains the sensualisation of the capoeirista body and the reduction of capoeira to a series of sensual bodies that this chapter has traced. The sensual connotations already present in tropes of Brazilian culture work in tandem with the interpretations of the ‘black body’, described by Dixon-Gottschild (2010) and Young

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<sup>85</sup> I borrow the idea of such a triangulation from Ariana Hernandez-Reguant’s (2006) discussion of *timba* music in Cuba and the reappropriation of black masculinity as a positive signifier through an embrace of its hypersexualized connotations.

(2010). Now that it is practiced and interpreted by a new group of ‘white’ foreigners, capoeira performances are likely to be interpreted in terms of the racializing narratives and the stereotypes of the ‘black body’. The physical skills and rhythm required to perform the powerful yet smooth movements of capoeira seem to naturally associate the practice with strong physicality and explosive limbs that characterize the black body in the discourse of global blackness seen from the white perspective. The agility of capoeiristas’ moving bodies also recalls, from this standpoint, the untamed and erotic ‘nature’ that has been mapped onto ‘black’ physicality. In such a cross-cultural context, ‘black’ Afro-Brazilian *mestres* and especially their bodies become the holders of the smooth quality of capoeira’s movements, while ‘white’ practitioners struggle to make their ‘stiff bodies’ move the same way. These preconceptions are sometimes confirmed by the higher level of skills that the ‘black’ Afro-Brazilians display in performances – but this is also because they have been practicing capoeira for longer than their [white] students who embody the movements in a much coarser way. These lines are increasingly blurring, however, as more foreigners acquire skills that force a reassessment of the superiority of ‘black’ *mestres* by sole virtue of their ‘blackness’. For these reasons, it is important to insist that this discourse of global blackness really only explains the underlying tropes (rather than accurately accounting for the hard facts) that are behind the new valuations of capoeira. In fact, it speaks to their particular resilience as they still inform the way people interpret artforms of the African diaspora even though in reality, if we look at the capoeira performances for what they are now, it is undeniable that not all the bodies, not even all the *mestres*, are ‘black’. This exemplifies an interesting idea put

forward by Harvey Young (2010, 7) who asserts that: “[as] an instantiation of a concept (blackness), the black body does not describe the actual appearance of any real people or group of people.” The black body is only a device that evokes a historically, socially and culturally informed conceptual idea of blackness which “manages to become a *fact* through repeated deployment across a range of bodies [yet] encourages the (mis)identification of individual bodies (*a body*) as the black body” (Young 2010, 7).

The semantic tropes discussed here are particularly resilient because they do not work in isolation. Given that ‘Brazil’ is also part of the Black Atlantic, some historical processes have overlapped, and consequently, some ideas and tropes intersect. Indeed, both the Brazilian idea of *mestiçagem* and the reduction of ‘black’ people to bodies in the framework of ‘global blackness’ are outcomes of the “eroticization of racial difference” that I traced back to the colonies earlier in this chapter. The reading of blackness in the global imaginary is made possible given the colonial origins of capoeira and its consequent inclusion in the African diaspora. This origin makes it possible to associate capoeira both with the trope of global blackness and with Brazil’s trope of *mestiçagem*: the exoticism and sensuality evoked by the ‘black body’ in the global imagination fits with the specific/local myth of *mestiçagem* in Brazil (which also frames capoeira) that, as we have seen, presupposes the mixing of bodies in a very literal, sexual way. This superimposition of two tropes of sexualized and gendered desire gives even more power to a reading of capoeira that stresses the erotic possibilities of the bodies at play/on display. The stereotypes of blackness in the global imagination conveniently fit with the stereotypes of Brazil – they have, after all, the same origin in the colonial institution of

slavery. Therefore, the stereotypes that intersect in both the Brazil and the blackness frames, in particular the erotic possibilities of the bodies, are particularly strong in the readings of capoeira. This double trope then makes it all the more likely for capoeira to be interpreted in terms of stereotypes of ‘sexy-ness’, especially with the added element of the female gaze. In sum, the insertion of capoeira within the frame of global blackness only reinforces the meanings based on the eroticization of racial difference already present in the Brazil frame, although it transforms them, allowing both men and women of African descent to be eroticized based on racial difference, and thus to be the carriers of a sensuality that stems from the Other’s desire.

Capoeira’s contemporary meanings synthesize diverse interpretations of Brazil mediated by fixed systems of representations and particular gazes on the practice in the new North American context of cultural difference. The discussions above demonstrate the strength and resilience of these interpretive categories, especially given their multiple overlaps and their dialogic interplays. This analysis would remain incomplete, however, without a closer look at how those who are represented, here the mestres, navigate these representations.

#### **4.4. BRAZIL AS RESOURCE: THE PERFORMATIVE USE OF BRAZIL IN CONTEXTS OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCE**

One crucial discussion within postcolonial theories of representation concerns the *agency* of those being represented. On the one hand, some theorists, with Edward Said as

their main representative, consider that the power differential on which these systems of representations are based necessarily produces a monologic and confident discourse on the Other, whom it homogenizes, fixes, and overpowers. From this perspective, the West drives the representation of the 'Other' who then has no choice but to be contained within representations that the West has already defined. This vision leaves little or no agency to the represented; it offers no way 'out' of the Western gaze. On the other hand, scholars such as Homi Bhabha (1994) have argued that no discourse is ever fixed or unilateral, even a dominant, neocolonial one. Bhabha argues that there is always a circulation of contradictory assumptions and affirmations in any discourse; and that modes of representations are always dynamic and shifting. How do mestres navigate the discourses and fields of representations that we have outlined so far?

I will now suggest that mestres use both the 'Brazilian space' (described in 4.1) and the 'Brazil frame' (described in 4.2) in order to turn 'Brazil' itself into a resource that they may use expediently, which grants them a performative agency within otherwise reifying systems of representation. Importantly, this argument is specific to the current political economy of culture described in Chapter Two. Indeed, it is the performative value of culture (see section 2.3.3) that makes it possible for the mestres to use their own Brazilian-ness as the basis of an entire cultural economy based on cultural difference. The possibility to use culture as a resource and to adopt an entrepreneurial approach to Brazilian culture at large opens up a space for mestres to benefit from the 'Brazil frame' which nevertheless inevitably contains their practice. In other words, despite the overwhelming salience of this frame of representation, the mestres can retain some sort of

agency insofar as their ‘semantic objectification’ opens up a space for ‘economic action’ – which further sustains their work in the school where they are the ones controlling the meanings.

In the current political economy of culture, value can be created out of the performance of one’s own reified identity, as has been analysed with regards to some indigenous groups’ cultural right claims, for example (see section 2.3.3, Cowan and Dembour 2001; Robbins and Stamatopoulou 2004). By adopting a performative approach to one’s own culture, people can insert themselves in the dominant system of representation, negotiate their own agency, and benefit from the same system of representation that otherwise objectifies them. This, I suggest, is what *mestres* do with ‘Brazil’: they adopt a performative approach to ‘Brazilian culture’ and benefit from their participation in a “Brazil frame”, that they mobilize to build an entire cultural economy that further sustains the entrepreneurial approach to their lives discussed in Chapter Three. In this context, what I call performative Brazil is defined as a category of difference in a cultural economy. The very idea of a performative Brazil is contingent on the existence of a cultural difference generated by the immigration of *mestres* (and other Brazilians): it is *because* they are in a North-American context where the Brazilian imaginary frames the meanings and gives value to capoeira that the *mestres* can use their Brazilian-ness expediently and performatively.

Performativity is a concept with a dense and complex genealogy<sup>86</sup>. For the purposes of my discussion, I narrow it, here, to *a relation between saying and doing*. Judith Butler's (1990) influential theory of gender performativity posits that gender is not some essential category but a set of gestures and actions; in other words, it is a "doing". There is a performative relation between *what you say you are* and *how you act what you are*: 'how you act what you are' is a constant negotiation between a set of fixed, socially constructed tropes that dictate how you are supposed to act and how you individually and contextually decide to act. From this perspective, the notion of 'performative Brazil' accounts for how *mestres* deliberately *act* Brazil in order to reinforce their cultural difference and pro-actively benefit from it. The range of actions that I include in the category 'performative Brazil' is broad. At one end of the spectrum, it includes the most pathetic cases of auto-exoticization. For example, I saw a show during my fieldwork that consisted of a mere patchwork of diverse folkloric traditions of the Afro-Brazilian cultural realm. Multiple thematic scenes unfolded back to back: it started with capoeira *Angola*; was followed by *orixá* dances; then *maculêlê* (a folkloric stick-dance mimicking slaves working and fighting with machetes in the sugarcane plantations); a piece of Afro-

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<sup>86</sup> Performativity's lineage in philosophy can be traced to "British philosopher J. L. Austin's interest in speech acts, particularly the relationship between saying and doing." (Barad 2003, 808n8). French poststructuralists, namely Derrida and Foucault, have added important amendments that shed light on the socially constructed nature of subjects and identities as well as the regulatory effects of power against which performativity defines itself. Building on these theories, feminist scholar Judith Butler (1990, 1993) is a fundamental reference for the development of the concept. Her work, on gender performativity specifically, contributed to define [sexual] identity not as an essence but as a performative process of "doing", an active positioning within and against the hegemonic norms that structures social categories and define subjects. Further developments in theories of performativity are eclectic, they stem from disciplines as diverse as performance studies (see Bial 2007; Davis 2008; Schechner 2002), cultural geography (see Nash 2000 for a review) or Karen Barad's (2003) unique proposition of a "posthumanist notion of performativity", drawing on both feminist studies and philosophy of science, which is nonetheless quite far from my own use of the concept.

Bahian dancing; and finally capoeira *Regional*. After the intermission, the show consisted of the mestre's musical band playing a popular Brazilian repertoire. None of the first thematic scenes were contextualized nor was the public given any explanation on what they were seeing. It seemed like a poor use of 'performative Brazil', one that did not happen to give mestres much agency or further possibilities for action, judging by the absence of sequels. On the other end of the spectrum are more subtle ways for mestres of benefitting from their Brazilian-ness and from capoeira's participation in the Brazilian imaginary by generating a sustainable economy around it.

In the case of Mestre Pantera, the performative use of Brazil combines successfully with the entrepreneurial approach to one's life at large (ie. sections 2.3.3 and 2.3.1 of this dissertation). Like many other mestres, yet in a particularly successful case, Pantera has built an entire cultural economy out of his position as mestre of capoeira, capitalizing not only on his strict embodied knowledge in his capoeira enterprise, but on his entire cultural difference in a whole cultural economy that revolves around diverse Brazilian cultural forms. From his position as capoeira mestre, on the hinge between Brazil and the local society, he has fostered an entire economy capitalizing upon the "Brazil resource": the combination of the "Brazilian space" and the "Brazil frame" in the context of yet another combination of the "performative use of culture" and "entrepreneurial approach to culture", as seen in Chapter Two. On the one hand, mestres expediently use the foreigners' interest in Brazil and use their capoeira group as a market base. On the other hand, they also use the strength of the Brazilian imaginary and the strong value of the imaginary of Brazil in the North-American culturescape in order to

frame their actions in a recognizable field of meanings that enhances their own individual value.

Over the years, Pantera has rapidly caught up with the entrepreneurial potential of cultural difference in North-American markets. The interesting aspect of his story for our purposes lies in how *capoeira* was instrumental to building this cultural economy that nevertheless relies on the much broader Brazilian imaginary in which capoeira is inserted once it circulates transnationally. Pantera used capoeira expediently to the extent that he used his group of students, whose interest for capoeira often translates into an interest in Brazilian culture at large, as his market base for the greater cultural economy by promoting the Brazilian parties and events in his school and prompting his students to attend them. He used his position as group leader to channel the already existent interest of his students for Brazilian culture at large towards the promotion of Brazil-related shows that he himself produced. In turn, he used the Brazil frame expediently to diversify his resources and expand his source of revenue. He put together a musical band whose shows had a ‘captive’ audience, his capoeira students, who he prompted and animated to attend (an exhortation that does not stand totally outside the dynamic of gift and counter-gift described in Chapter Three). Many of the group’s older students said they could hardly count how many times they went to listen to their mestre’s [then] limited repertoire in the back of a small bar. They recalled supporting and encouraging him partly because he exhorted them to go, but also because it was always a fun night out with their friends. On those occasions, everybody could further delve in the shared

interest in Brazilian culture that had either brought them to start capoeira, or that had been aroused by their participation in the ‘Brazilian space’ of the school.

Slowly, Pantera’s band and its public grew, and so did the shows he organized. He started promoting a yearly carnival event, which included capoeira performances, samba dancers, and Brazilian music. These events became popular and multiplied outside of the carnival period. He transformed his work into a real labour of cultural promotion and event production. He developed his own brand, ‘Copacabana’, for a show-business enterprise through which he promotes parties, and also coordinates capoeira events and the *batizados* he organizes. Pantera’s case may be extreme in that he really is fully leading these two endeavors (capoeira and entertainment enterprises) simultaneously. In fact, the last show that I attended in the context of my fieldwork seemed to no longer have any relationship with capoeira. Capoeira and entertainment have become two parallel endeavours that could work independently, although they never really stop reinforcing one another. Hence, that last show he organized under the ‘Copacabana’ brand did not include a capoeira performance (even though it was advertised on the ticket as one of the attractions) and there were at least as many non-capoeiristas in the audience as there were capoeiristas. Pantera surely did not depend on his capoeira group to fill the venue – though they certainly still greatly contributed to do so. In fact, the show also worked partly in combination with a minor capoeira event: there was a special *roda* and workshop organized that same day with an instructor from a nearby city, that people from other capoeira groups came to participate in. The party was an additional incentive to

travel from a nearby city to attend the capoeira event; and once people came for the *roda*, they likely went to the party. Both events contributed to each other's success.

Pantera uses Brazilian culture to promote capoeira, and vice versa, capoeira is re-framed in this cultural economy, in a performative display of Brazil. The flyer for the most recent party was a perfect example of the alignment of all these endeavours: it promotes the party on one side with the stereotyped Brazilian samba dancers and serves as publicity for the capoeira school on the other. The "Brazil resource" thus contributes to the neoliberal mestres' initial and overarching profit-making objective: it helps sustain their livelihood because it is an extra source of revenue and conversely, it reinforces the cohesion of their capoeira school, which remains the very base of their individual enterprise. Pantera's efforts not only contributed to the growth his 'showbusiness' enterprise – they also contributed to the health of his capoeira group, reinforcing its sociality, enhancing the links of friendship, belonging, and community on which capoeira groups thrive and that contribute to the creation of yet more affective value (a concept the next chapter describes in depth). The intensified social interaction welds bonds of friendship and the feeling of a tightly-knit community that to some degree help to account for the widespread success of capoeira. Similarly, the insertion of capoeira into a larger cultural economy centered on parties and hedonistic enjoyment surely contributes to capoeira's popularity.

The strategic role of each element in that cultural economy should not make Pantera's vision seem merely driven by profit. It should reveal, instead, his ongoing mission to teach capoeira as more than a limited set of technical skills, as an all-

encompassing cultural tradition that is best understood in its Brazilian cultural context. It is this latter that Pantera prompts his students to experience by themselves and subjectively, through the multiple facets of the cultural economy he builds on ‘performative Brazil’. As one of Pantera’s [Brazilian] students recognizes:

It is an enterprise that he is working tirelessly to keep afloat. And that he tries to keep alive through multiple ways. Because nobody is forcing him to organize parties, to rent big venues... It is really because this man has a passion for his job and a passion for the cultural development *around* capoeira; so that it would not be something simply monomaniac: [ie.] ‘we go to class, learn the steps, become good, and change graduation.’ It’s all linked: he wants us to be awakened to the musical aspects, the dance. It is all linked. (student interview, 2 years)

Capoeira is the window into a complex and multifaceted cultural realm that Pantera transmits at the same time as his entrepreneurial endeavors benefit from it. Via the cultural economy he has created, he is able to transmit capoeira not only in and of itself but in a somewhat more complete cultural context that includes diversified elements of Brazilian culture – including but not limited to stereotypes. Given the cross-cultural contexts of representation and the performative aspect of the “Brazil resource”, it is indeed inevitable that the cultural imaginary transmitted would include reifying, commodifying, and auto-exoticizing dimensions. Indeed, despite Pantera’s alleged intentions for ‘Copacabana’ to promote parties ‘by Brazilians for Brazilians’<sup>87</sup>, the Brazil frame is well at play and samba dancers evoking the *mulatas* regularly share the stage

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<sup>87</sup> My interview and research questions did not address this issue directly with Pantera, but other close friends and collaborators of Pantera reported this information to me.

with the musical groups, because stereotypes are indeed one dimension of the performative “Brazil resource”. Yet the latter also includes the ‘Brazilian space’ of the capoeira school and the diasporic-like community thus generated, all of which also sustains the cultural economy. The combination of all these elements therefore also allows Pantera to avoid transmitting a reified and reductive version of capoeira to his students, because, as the student quoted above expresses, he transmits it as part of the entire cultural realm that includes reified symbols of Brazil but cannot be reduced to them when combined with other modes of transmission of ‘Brazil’. The cultural economy based on performative Brazil also provides diversified spaces for the community to gather, around the creation of a broader cultural context.

Of course, Pantera’s particular skills in managing an entrepreneurial approach to his own life, to refer back to Chapter Three, certainly contributed to the success of the overall cultural economy that he also built. Not all the mestres have turned their life into such successful enterprises, and many are still hustling on a daily basis or need to complement their work with capoeira with un-related employment (whether in construction, the service industry, physical education, etc). Having said this, I want to emphasize that Pantera’s cultural economy is only possible insofar as the “Brazil resource” has value in the political economic context of culture as resource that values performative cultural difference.

But how dependent is the capoeira enterprise on the “Brazil resource”? A brief discussion of non-Brazilians students who have now reached high enough ranks and are starting to develop their own teaching work helps assess the extent to which these new

added-values have become almost an integral part of the transnational circulation of capoeira, even though a longer time span will allow seeing this impending development more clearly. Some non-Brazilian students have indeed showed concerns regarding their [in]ability to insert capoeira in the performative Brazil field, speaking to its significance in the reality of working with capoeira (or maybe in the reality of what capoeira has become). This particular preoccupation was voiced by a female, non-Brazilian advanced capoeirista who foresaw some limitations to her ability to transmit capoeira the same way she had learnt it, precisely because she was not Brazilian. While my observation of multiple classes she taught for her mestre and the unanimous appreciation by the students left no doubts as to her excellent skills for the transmission of the techniques and physical aspects of the game, multiple conversations with her suggested that she still wondered how to instill in her students the whole cultural knowledge peripherally attached to capoeira. She was also preoccupied by her inability to offer as many side-products (ie. the folkloric traditions that usually complement capoeira performances) in promotional settings and how this would affect her potential to grow her capoeira work. As she often said: she could do a capoeira performance without a problem, but it is harder for her to put up a *samba de roda* show, something that was natural for her mestre, she said. Brazilians still have the advantage of the entire “habitat of meaning” that they offer in addition to capoeira.

While the preoccupations evoked above reveal that particular student’s acute sensibility to the subtleties of the artform, other foreigners teaching capoeira are not as concerned as she is with all those details. In fact, this very absence of preoccupations by

others may suggest that the whole place of Brazil in the cultural economy of capoeira will likely change as more and more non-Brazilians begin to teach. The new direction it will take is still hard to assess: on the one hand, it could reinforce the value of the “Brazil resource” and make the Brazilian-ness of mestres into an even greater plus-value by contrast with foreigners. Or, the increasing presence of qualified foreigners could also potentially detach the art of capoeira from the greater field of Brazilian culture in which it is currently inscribed and give more importance to other valuations more closely embedded in its transnational context (values of resistance or liberation evoked by its slave past yet which are easily transposed in new contexts, or again, completely new values, for example its fitness value). This scenario would transform capoeira under the influence of the new meanings acquired in its transnational transplantation, an eventuality that the Brazilian government’s recent efforts to reaffirm capoeira’s national affiliations may be designed to counter. With the presence of famous singer Gilberto Gil as Minister of Culture from 2003-2008, the Brazilian government of president Lula proactively promoted capoeira both within and outside of state borders, creating nation-wide programs and funding projects as well as displaying capoeira on the world stage through performances and film productions. Capoeira was recognized as national cultural heritage and as knowledge to be protected (Fonseca and Vieira 2012; Ministerio da cultura do Brasil 2010; Robitaille 2011), all of which contribute to reassert the Brazilian-ness of the activity even as it circulates worldwide.

My fieldwork observations suggest that capoeira’s circulation is still very much embedded in a “performative Brazil” that mestres actively mobilize to foster the cultural

economy that in turn assists their successful capital accumulation. Yet the association of capoeira with Brazil is not merely or exclusively performative, which explains its resilience. Multiple other layers and modes of cultural transmission underlie – and thus nuance – this semantic relation, such as the circulation of a diasporic Brazil mediated by subjective and direct interpersonal encounters as well as the circulation of an imagined Brazil entwined in broader fields of discourse that complexify its meanings. It is the combination of these processes that enables the creation of an economy around Brazil as a resource; thus, it is important not to reduce the idea of Brazil conveyed via capoeira to a reified category that only exists for a market, despite the conspicuous stereotypes that it indeed involves and displays. If the *image* of capoeira as an activity is partly contained within fields of value that fix some of its meanings and points to the inescapability of systems of representation, the mestres are nonetheless able to retain some agency by using this fixed discursive frame to pursue their initial profit-seeking objective. To an extent, it could even be argued that this expedient and performative insertion of capoeira within the Brazilian imaginary is what sustains the transmission and perpetuation of other valuations of capoeira. Indeed, the circulation of capoeira in the cultural economy adds to the mestres' entrepreneurial potential and contributes to give them more economic stability. This thereby allows yet other values of capoeira to surface and flourish, for example the affective community and the transmission of memory, which the next chapters respectively examine.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: AFFECTIVE COMMUNITY AND NEW TERRITORIES OF CAPITAL**

Capoeira mestres have immigrated by using capoeira as a resource, which they have further inserted in a cultural economy mobilizing imaginaries of Brazilian culture at large. But the transnational structure of capoeira, so far defined in terms of the markets it animates, also generates a new form of community. Research in the field of Cultural Studies has long established the importance of practices of consumption in the reproduction of identities and communities of belonging, adapting the notion of “interpretive community” (Fish 1980) to describe shared cultural understandings mediated by consumption practices (García Canclini 1995; Storey 1999; Yúdice 2003c). In this chapter, I further adapt these notions to develop a concept of ‘affective communities’ created by the cultural consumption of capoeira, which generates human bonds and emotions that are shared in practices of consumption but circulate beyond it. I thus adopt a particular stance upon the study of consumption by integrating notions of affectivity and embodiment into scholarship that has already pointed to the importance of consumer subjectivity and desire in consumption practices (Bauman 2001; Coombe 2008; Elliott 1997).

This chapter sets out to study an aspect of capoeira that a strict economic perspective cannot adequately address: it describes and seeks to understand how capoeira compels people into new spaces of embodiment and creates relations of intimacy that support and are further projected into deep community bonds, first locally and,

sometimes, even regionally and transnationally. Although this chapter ultimately sheds light on the most intricate and fundamental mechanisms that create the value of capoeira as a resource, it achieves this by adopting a completely different theoretical framework in order to understand capoeira in its microscopic mechanisms. It zooms in on the affect set in motion through the embodied experience, both individual and collective, shared within the community of practice.

The theories of affect, which were so far never applied to the study of capoeira, shed light on the existence of what I coin the practice's "affective agency", one that the logic of capoeira as a resource cannot explain, even though it is precisely this affective agency, I argue, that sustains the ongoing capacity of capoeira to function *as* a resource. Indeed, the sensorial, affective, emotional, and relational experiences may be lived viscerally, and experienced as exceeding the economic relation itself; but I suggest that this feeling of belonging, based on an intense embodied experience, is rather precisely what helps capoeira consolidate its market by insinuating itself in people's subjectivity and intimacies.

In this chapter, I expand and complexify the understanding of the cultural economy of capoeira described in the previous chapter and suggest that it does not build merely on the performative use of Brazil by mestres, on an interest for Brazilian culture by students, and on the strong aura of the specific Brazilian imaginary. In fact, capoeira's economy is also inscribed in a broader economy of emotions and desires that is specific to a contemporary, cross-cultural – and arguably neocolonial – context. Dance scholar Marta Savigliano (1995) referred to a "political economy of passion" to describe similar

dynamics at play in the transnational circulation of tango where what she presents as a generic 'desire' from the West fuels the circulation of tango as the raw material representing 'passion' that fulfills this desire. She clearly evokes geopolitical relations of power to define her framework:

Paralleling the extraction of material goods and labor from the Third World, the passion-poor core countries of the capitalist world system have been appropriating emotional and affective practices from their colonies for several centuries... The Third World's emotional and expressive actions and arts have been categorized, homogenized, and transformed into commodities suitable for the First World's consumption. (as quoted in Altman 2001, 40)

The "political economy of passion" is rooted in the same colonial history in which I situated the discussion of the Western gaze in Chapter Four. As discussed there, tropes of desire for the 'exotic Other' rooted in geopolitical power differentials arose from the encounter of different cultures well before current conditions of globalization. However, the cross-cultural encounters that set these particular tropes of cultural difference in motion have multiplied exponentially as an outcome of the diverse flows of humans, goods, images, and practices that characterize the current global period (Appadurai 1996). In view of the diversity of encounters specific to the current era of globalization, I would argue that Savigliano slightly over-accentuates the colonial roots of the current dynamics of cultural circulation. The new contexts where cross-cultural encounters thrive suggest that we consider other mediating factors, particularly the embodied dimensions of these cross-cultural encounters as well as market forces, to understand their contemporary

specificities. While Savigliano develops the political economy of passion as a framework to study politics of *representations*, this chapter turns to the concept of affect as a means highlighting the subjective, bodily experience and feeling of intimacy that arises from the intercultural practice of capoeira.

### **5.1. THE “AFFECTIVE AGENCY” OF CAPOEIRA: EMBODIMENT, AFFECTS AND INTIMACIES**

In the introduction to his edited volume on embodiment and experience, Thomas J. Csordas (1994) draws on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and puts forwards the concept of “being-in-the-world” as a counterpart for “representation”. “Being-in-the-world”, a concept with roots in phenomenology, is at the center of the embodiment paradigm that Csordas develops, “not to supplant textuality but to offer it a dialectical partner” (1994, 12). He endeavors to counterbalance what he considers to be a “dominance of semiotics over phenomenology” and “a concern with the problem of representation over the problem of being-in-the-world” in recent scholarship addressing social and cultural phenomena (11). This chapter follows Csordas’s exhortation by looking at the way capoeira makes people “be-in-the word” as a counterpart to the representational and textual frames of analysis privileged in Chapter Four.

So far, this dissertation has mostly studied what people can do with capoeira (as a resource); here I turn the question around, asking rather what capoeira does to people: I explain how it compels persons in unanticipated directions and new states of

embodiment, giving rise to various relations and degrees of intimacy (with their own body, amongst themselves, with Brazilian mestres). With this new perspective, I acknowledge a [relative] autonomy of the cultural practice so as to observe a phenomenon that seems at first to exceed economic relationship and to generate experiences lived and described subjectively as powerful and even sublime. To do so, I turn to theories which share a similar rationale to that inherent in Csordas' emphasis on the phenomenological dimensions of 'being-in-the world'. In the past years, scholarship in cultural and social theory has adopted what sociologist Patricia Clough (2007) calls an "affective turn": in an attempt to respond to semiotic and deconstructionist approaches that had become hegemonic, the affective turn, following the path opened by feminist and queer studies, reintroduced an attention to sensations and emotions by writing the body back into critical cultural theory. The next section follows this so-called 'affective turn' in order to attend to the experiences felt by capoeiristas through their bodies-in-motion.

### **5.1.1. "Becoming a body": Individual experience of embodiment**

One's participation in capoeira, even if it is by way of paid consumption, always entails an individual and subjective experience of embodiment. A major aspect of capoeira practice is both very physical and requires a well-trained body. Students' bodies are necessarily transformed and their physical aptitudes change when they start practicing capoeira, even at a beginner's level. In fact, the contrast between one's beginner body and physical aptitudes and what is required to follow a class without falling behind may come as a fundamental shock of (self) recognition. At first, if only in a very mechanistic

way, capoeira makes students aware of their own corporeal existence by bringing them to new spaces of embodiment. This newfound attention and relation to one's body echoes Canadian Fine Arts scholar Erin Manning's (2007, xix) comment that "to become a body is to alter all conceptions of what a body 'is'". Capoeira makes people "become a body" as they develop an awareness of and consequent practices of care for their body, both easily ignored in contemporary North-American lifestyles. One student who has been training for around 4 years offers the following self-reflection:

[Capoeira has] been important for me personally because it helps me exercise on a regular basis. And I think also the more you train the more you want to do supplemental training, like make sure you stay strong or whatever *for capoeira*. But if you can't always get to it, you know you can just stay in shape just from training. And... that is important so that I can feel good about my body but also so that I can feel good *in* my body. Feel that I am getting enough endorphins and oxygen to my brain and stuff... and you know, I think it's good for you to get blood in your head when you do headstands and stuff... (student interview, 4 years)

Capoeira makes people aware of their body in a very sensory way, as evoked by this student's almost tactile comments about the flow of blood in her head or the endorphins in her brain. It also makes practitioners aware of their embodied existence, first in a "biological" way, through an awareness of the corporeal mechanisms that constitute the self; the pain in one's muscles after a training session, or the well-being produced by feeling one's heart pumping, remind the student that s/he *is* a body. The corporeal experience of training triggers a newfound attention to one's body, one that constitutes a

physical education in many senses of the term, and one that supplements a relative lack thereof in modern North-American societies.

The newfound awareness of one's body also comes from the relation of this body to and with others. Capoeira forces students to position their body/themselves in relation to the gaze of others, given that the activity happens in a circle made up of fellow practitioners. Unlike other embodied activities like yoga where students may take a class yet still practice individually, capoeira puts the students in the open, in the middle of the *roda* where, at the end of most classes, they have to put their skills, or lack thereof, into practice. It is a self-awakening process insofar as one learns to get over oneself and go, vulnerably, into the middle of the *roda*. This requires yet another transformation of one's relation to one's body: it requires becoming comfortable enough to move it in front of everybody else. As one student of two years asserts:

I think I was a lot more self-conscious about my body and how I move it [before starting capoeira]. And now, just learning capoeira is forcing me to, hmmm, put myself out there. [...] Being in the middle of a *roda* and everyone's looking at you; and you're forced to just get over some of those fears. (student interview, 2 years)

This process is epitomized in its extreme form in the ceremony of the *batizado* where new students are welcomed in the world of capoeira (ie. given their first graduation cord). At this occasion, each new student plays in the *roda* with a senior mestre until the latter takes him/her down, either with a masterful technique or with a funny, deceptive trick. In all cases, the newcomer ends up falling on the floor, helpless, vulnerable, and defeated, but officially initiated. This ritual reminds newcomers that they still have a lot to learn,

and it also forces them to accept public display of their [lack of] skills, consequently forcing upon them a particular self-awareness.

To “become a body”, Manning suggested, necessarily transforms one’s perception of one’s own body. But capoeira does not only awaken unexplored dimensions of one’s own corporeality; it also, significantly, sets bodies *in movement*. This triggers a newfound attention to what I call the ‘sensorial body’ as a medium of approaching the world on the basis of a sensory experience. When s/he learns capoeira, the student progressively liberates himself from the constraints that were restricting the use of his own body, which s/he moves in new ways. A particular feeling of elation and exhilaration is produced by this experience as well as the feeling of liberation that comes from breaking conventional bodily constraints. This sensation, even though it was never easily verbalized by subjects, was nevertheless palpable in most of the capoeira spaces where this study was conducted. The following discussion will give theoretical grounding to my ongoing observation of this intangible phenomenon.

### **5.1.2. The *theory of affect in the practice capoeira***

The capacity of capoeira to set bodies in movement relationally makes this practice particularly conducive to drawing attention to the affect involved, a concept linked to the incessant emergence of a body-in-movement. Interest in the concept of affect in social theory derives from various traditions of thought. Nigel Thrift’s (2004) early and cursory overview of the field identifies four main approaches to the concept of

‘affect’, all of which strive to explain “a sense of push in the world” (64)<sup>88</sup>. How do subjects negotiate the interface between their selves and the exterior world? I draw the concept from the line of thought that Thrift (2004) and Clough (2007) trace back to a tradition in both philosophy and psychology that includes thinkers such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Henri Bergson, and goes as far back as Baruch Spinoza. In this scholarly lineage, Clough explains,

affect refers generally to bodily capacities to affect and be affected, the augmentation or diminution of a body’s capacity to act, to engage, to connect, such that autoaffection is linked to the self-feeling of being alive – that is, aliveness or vitality. (2007, 2)

This theoretical tendency finds contemporary voice in the work of philosopher and communications scholar Brian Massumi (2002), for whom affect is the always emergent capacity of the body to relate to the world; it is the body’s potential for direct interaction with the world, in which both the body and the world are in a constant state of change and becoming. Affect – that moment of encounter between the body in motion and the world – necessarily provokes change: the body is affected and affects, it transitions from one state to another. Affect is closely linked to bodily perception: it is what the body perceives that resists cognition. Thrift (2004) explains that studies in psychology provided insight into this fleeting yet crucial moment when the body is affected and

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<sup>88</sup> The first approach seems aligned with the phenomenological tradition even though Thrift presents sociologist Jack Katz as a main representative. This line of thought “conceives of affect as a set of embodied practices that produce visible conduct” (Thrift 2004, 60). The second approach is usually associated with psychoanalytic theories and locates – arguably reduces – affect as the root of human drives or pulsions. The third approach that Thrift identifies is the Spinoza - Deleuze - Massumi line that this dissertation works with. Lastly, a fourth approach to affect is linked to Darwinian thought conceiving affects and expressions of emotions as a product of evolution that is not limited to the human realm (Thrift 2004).

reacts, thus interacts with the world. Tools developed to calculate sensory registers were able to record a range of infinitesimally small movements in the body. Formerly invisible and imperceptible, these movements undeniably indicate a human bodily capacity to grasp things preconsciously. These studies demonstrated that “consciousness takes time to construct” and that there is a “half-second delay” when the body anticipates action and preconsciously acts on it (Thrift 2004, 67). This split second between bodily sensation and the conscious awareness of it is where affect resides. The identification of this moment is crucial because it clearly identifies the body as an agent and opens up possibilities for explaining how people may act upon bodily sensations (see also Lyon and Barbalet 1994).

*Affect theory* thus contributes to expand our understanding of embodiment in this split-second, providing tools to focus on this elusive yet crucial moment of bodily agency<sup>89</sup>. In turn, capoeira as a *practice* allows persons to ‘understand’ this phenomenon through their body<sup>90</sup> because its kinaesthetics is based precisely on this split moment when they react instinctively to the way someone else’s body has affect-ed their own and changed the situation in the *roda*. Capoeira is a practice of constant motion and transition, just like affect is a concept describing the constant emergence of a body-in-motion. Massumi’s (2002) definition of the body is indeed directly applicable to the body in

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<sup>89</sup> Sociologist Nick Crossley’s (1995) attempt to articulate the premises of a “carnal sociology” by drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s work in phenomenology discusses what Crossley calls the “elusive body” in terms that are similar to affect theory, pointing to the strong affinities between both theoretical traditions.

<sup>90</sup> While it may still sound unusual to claim that one can ‘understand’ an abstract phenomenon, best described with theory, with one’s body, it is nevertheless a possibility that thinking in terms of affects puts forward. In a conversation with philosopher Mary Zournazi, Brian Massumi evokes this possibility eloquently, if abstractly: “[...] affect is thinking, bodily, consciously but vaguely, in the sense that is not yet thought. It’s a movement of thought, or a thinking movement.” (Massumi, quoted in Zournazi 2003, 217)

capoeira. He develops his theory on affect in *Parables for the Virtual*, where he offers this initial insight: “When I think of my body, and ask what it does to earn that name, two things stand out. It moves. It feels. In fact, it does both at the same time. It moves as it feels, and it feels itself moving” (2002, 1). This consideration echoes performance scholar Barbara Browning’s (1995, 87) more poetic description of her capoeira memories: “my friends and I used to stride through the park leonine and muscular, feeling the mechanism of our bodies walking, the material presence of the sun on our shoulders.” Capoeiristas learn to inhabit their bodies, to fill and feel them with sensations. Tellingly, Browning concludes that the main lesson her mestre taught his students was “how to throw ourselves headlong into the pleasure of having a body” (1995, 88). Capoeira brings individuals to feel their bodies in the very way that Massumi defines ‘a body’: “It moves as it feels, and it feels itself moving.” (2002, 1)

Although they should not be confused, affects are related to emotions at the conscious moment of interpretation of the otherwise preconscious, embodied moment. In *Politics of Touch*, Erin Manning (2007) makes a very useful distinction between affect and emotion, two concepts still often mistakenly conflated:

Affect is not emotion [...]. Emotion is affect plus an awareness of that affect. [...] Affect is that which grips me first in the moment of relation, *firstness* in Charles Pierce’s vocabulary. Affect is an ontogenetic power of existence. Emotion is the back-gridding of affect. (2007, xxi)

The mind uses recognizable categories that we know as emotions to make sense of preconscious, affective sensations. For this reason, even though the body is the medium through which these affects come to being, affect should not be theorized only in bodily

terms. There is a constant back and forth between body-affect-emotion-affect-body: the body is affected, the mind makes sense of it via emotional recognition, which in turn affects and changes the body, thus influencing the individual's capacity to act and interact in the world. This constant interaction between bodies, affects, and awareness is what creates the ongoing motion of the body in the world. The intricacy linking these concepts explains why affective experiences necessarily engage people emotionally.

These theories of affect allow us to acknowledge that fleeting moment when the individual is seized, via his body, into the capoeira universe, as well as to zoom in on the bodily sensations that people then experience. I argue that this moment is so evanescent, visceral and preconscious, and it unleashes such intense sensations, that it tends to be lived as sublime and potentially transcendent. While the idea of transcendence is usually associated with religious experience (see for example Csordas 2009; Hick 1989; Norris 2005), I rather use the term following George Bataille who, as sociologist Chris Shilling (2007) explains, focuses on a somatic sense of transcendence manifested in profane, everyday life situations like intimacy and eroticism. Rebecca Sachs-Norris (2001), whose work combines anthropological studies of religion and neuroscience, offers a similar perspective on transcendence as somatic experience in the secular context of folk dance. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, she defines transcendence as “a state of the body”:

“transcendence is not a disembodied spiritual experience [...]; it is experienced by and in the body” (2001, 115). Transcendence arises on the basis of bodily practice: ultimately, Sachs-Norris argues, “it is the feeling faculty of the body that is capable of a direct perception of the transcendent” (118). I describe the experience of capoeira as

‘transcendent’, from this somatic perspective, to emphasize its particular physical, sense-ational, and perceptual quality. Capoeira makes people reach the ‘state of the body’ that Sachs-Norris associates with transcendence. Now, because this state of the body is often associated with religious and spiritual experience, people tend to dis-associate their experience from the mundane materiality of the world<sup>91</sup>. They relate it to an experience that is sublime and uplifting, to something that cannot be reduced to a mere product of the confining societal norms surrounding them. This is why I position transcendence not so much as ‘sacred’, but rather as an opposite of ‘socially constructed’. Transcendence, unless otherwise noted, refers to transcendence from the social, to an exhilarating somatic experience lived as genuine and thus exceeding social constructions. Zooming in on the affective experience that spurs feelings of transcendence helps us to understand why and how capoeira seems to so thoroughly captivate people, as well as the intensity of the bonds forged in the community.

### **5.1.3. Collective experience and “muscular bonding”**

The practice of capoeira makes people develop an acute sensibility to the realm of intangible sensations. More importantly, however, it is the presence of individual bodies amongst other bodies that enables affects, emotions, and intimacies to consequently

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<sup>91</sup> While, I insist, I use the term in a non-religious way, I am fully aware that a lot of religious experiences are lived as transcendent. I thus consciously use it to evoke the possibility that, because capoeira is lived sense-ationally and non-cognitively – as somatically transcendent – it may generate such strong feelings that they may approximate a religious, at least a spiritual experience. In the next chapter, I will evoke in more detail the links between capoeira and trance-like experience, yet I will situate this relation in the specific context of the *roda*. The experiences I am discussing in the present chapter occur in the larger context of classes and training sessions, and therefore cannot, I believe, be interpreted as trance, a word alluding to very specific experiences of body/soul transformation.

emerge amongst practitioners. The group is crucial in the experience of capoeira: affects are exponentially generated and exchanged when a student's sensorial body is experienced relationally with the bodies of others sharing similar sensorial sensations. When participants take a capoeira class, they share a confined space where they all move closely together (see appendix E). In addition to the individual experience of embodiment, a collective energy is created. This introduces a phenomenon that world historian William H. McNeill (1995) calls "muscular bonding"; that is, "the human emotional response to moving rhythmically together in dance and drill" (vi) and "the euphoric feeling that prolonged and rhythmic muscular movement arouses among nearly all participants in such exercises" (2–3). According to McNeill, who first observed this phenomenon in military drills yet later expanded its application to small communities and religious groups, shared embodied experiences create not only feelings and emotions in and between the individuals, but they consolidate group solidarity, making the phenomenon described even more relevant to understanding the strength of the intimacy in the capoeira community. McNeill asserts that "moving our muscles rhythmically [...] consolidates group solidarity by altering human feelings" (viii).

The generation of strong feeling, emotions, and bonds of solidarity that McNeill points to has been discussed in other fields of research, namely the sociology of religion coming out of a Durkheimian tradition. In fact, in their re-reading of Durkheim's theories, sociologists Chris Shilling and Philip A. Mellor (2011) draw attention to the sociologist's concept of 'embodied intoxication' as a basic mechanism of creation of social bonds. Embodied intoxication refers to "the process[es] whereby people are

excited, enthused, inebriated, stimulated and made giddy in a manner that encourages them to transcend the egoistic parameters of their bodies”<sup>92</sup> (2011, 19). What Durkheim calls “collective effervescence” and “intoxication” in ritual assemblies leads individuals to instinctively reproduce the affective foundations and the consciousness that constitute them as collectivities. While Durkheim links this collective effervescence to the realm of the sacred, I suggest that reading his (and McNeill’s) ideas in light of affect theory not only better explains physiologically the phenomenon that Durkheim describes, but it also allows its transposition to non-religious settings such as the capoeira collectivity.

The ideas of “muscular bonding” and “embodied intoxication” become even more powerful when read through theories of affect.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, they echo the interpersonal and relational dimension of affect (I affect as I am affected) that Massumi posits when he elaborates:

In affect, we are never alone. That’s because affects [...] are basically ways of *connecting*, to others and to other situations. They are our angle of participation in processes larger than ourselves. With intensified affect comes a stronger sense of embeddedness in a larger field of life – a

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<sup>92</sup> Durkheim understands the body as a paradox he calls ‘*homo duplex*’: he argues that all humans are born individual bodies and have asocial, egoistic impulses, yet “the embodied nature of humans [also] provides individuals with the capacity and the need to transcend their natural, individuated state, and to join others possessed of shared ideas and moral ideals” (Shilling 2005, 212).

<sup>93</sup> McNeill was writing before the so-called ‘affective turn’, but I would see him as a precursor. He himself admits that he has found no experimental studies that would give scientific grounds to the phenomenon of ‘muscular bonding’ that he describes (1995, vii). He also recognizes that because it deals with ‘emotions’, what he describes has not been attested by written sources and is hard to prove or measure. This leads him to conclude his preface by the following ‘disclaimer’: “The thesis of this little book is simplicity itself. Moving our muscles rhythmically and giving voice consolidate group solidarity by altering human feelings. This, I believe, is well attested by experience, though little discussed by any learned discipline.” (1995, viii). I believe that the affect theories developed since then provide the broader, more systematic theoretical framework McNeill was looking for.

heightened sense of belonging, with other people and to other places.  
(Massumi, quoted in Zournazi 2003, 214).

The proximity between McNeill's and Massumi's theories leads me to suggest that moving rhythmically together in a capoeira class generates affects that circulate and are exchanged back and forth amongst practitioners, who cannot *but* be affected while they affect others. The coordinated, repetitive movements of a class to the rhythm of the *berimbau* arouse shared affects and emotions that indeed unite bodies in sweat and consolidate the cohesion of what I call the 'affective community'.

Sweat is a recurrent motif in capoeira: students sweat when they train, they feel each other's sweat dripping on each other's skin when they practice closely together two by two, and they constantly breathe the heavy air of stuffed rooms where windows are filled with condensation. Certain nicknames given to students build on this motif, for example Cachoeira (waterfall) or the less flattering Gato Morto (dead cat), alluding to the latter's smell. The noticeable presence of sweat, generally absent from public spaces, creates a specific proximity that may reinforce the feeling of connected-ness that McNeill describes more abstractly as "a strange sense of personal enlargement; a sort of swelling out" (1995, 2) wherein the boundaries between self and others are dissolved. Again, similar feelings of collective belonging and communal bonding have been more frequently observed in religious, ritual settings.<sup>94</sup> However, serious attention to

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<sup>94</sup> Shilling and Mellor (2011, 12) explain: "to be intoxicated, for Durkheim, is to be open to transcendence of the individual, egoistic characteristics of one's physical self". They further note: "Contemporary theorists such as Deleuze and Guattari (1972) utilize various terms, including 'Body without Organs', to express the openness of embodied subjects to external linkages. Durkheim not only recognized over fifty years earlier that this can occur, but also explored how individuals assume this expansionary existence through an intoxicating inhabiting of the collectively marked body. *In focusing upon intoxication, moreover, Durkheim anticipated biological and psychological arguments that reinforce the significance he*

embodiment, affect and muscular bonding indicates that such collective bonding can also happen in secular settings such as capoeira.<sup>95</sup> I suggest that insofar as the act of connecting happens through shared embodiment, it precisely creates an intimacy between all members of the community, in addition to the close feeling of self that is also created individually, with one's own body.

Of course, we should not ignore the potentially opposite effect of forced contact with other people's sweat, which may also provoke a feeling of aversion and a repulsion that creates rather than dissolves boundaries. Sara Delamont's (2006, 172–173) observations are appropriate here. Her ethnography also insists on the sweat motif in capoeira, though she uses it to contrast British corporeal conventions with the "Brazilian character" of capoeira which, she argues, overrules the former. She suggests that in other contexts of British society, it would be considered offensive to make close physical contact when one is "dripping" and "soaked" as capoeiristas are after training sessions, but that the Brazilian norm dictating that people should hug each other to say good bye overtakes British conventions and makes people disregard their aversion to sweat in the 'Brazilian space' of the capoeira school. Delamont's conclusion corroborates my own observations that in the particular capoeira setting, the potential repulsion for sweat is often downplayed, rather allowing feelings of intimacy to emerge. The effects of

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*attributes to this process.*" (23; emphasis added) This last sentence announces the affinities between Durkheim's account of religious collective effervescence and the production and exchange of affect sustaining it.

<sup>95</sup> In fact, in an article on folk dance, embodiment, and community formation that I came upon only after writing this chapter, Rebecca Sachs-Norris (2001, 118) makes this very parallel explicit: "Just as one element of religious feeling is that of belonging to something larger than oneself, so, too, participation in folk dance, with its social and gestural history, entails the experience of belonging to something larger than oneself."

proximity, connected-ness, and intimacy thus created participate in a particular social cohesion that unites the community not only as a potential market base, nor merely around a shared interest in Brazil, but also in an embodied, intimate, *affective* way. This particular kind of *affective* bonding, felt preconsciously via students' bodies, sets the grounds for other processes to unfold and further solidify the community.

Emotion is an inseparable dimension of affect, as discussed previously. Emotions are the categories that give recognizable form to an immaterial energy that we perceive and that humans use to make sense of evanescent feelings of together-ness perceived in affects. Sara Ahmed's (2004) definition of emotions as "impressions" that never exist in isolation underlines the importance of the social group in their creation. Ahmed insists that emotions never exist in and of themselves; they are generated in reaction to a cause, whether an event, a person, or an object. In this sense, emotions always appear *in the contact between* two entities. In capoeira, bodies training together in a same space *impress* on one another and affect each other, releasing emotions, also appropriately defined by Ahmed as "the feeling of bodily change" (2004, 5). This phenomenon is all the more powerful in capoeira, which is literally an 'embodied dialogue' where one tries to 'manipulate' (to affect) the other's mind via embodied interaction, or conversely, to make the other's body move into specific positions by using the power of mind games. Acknowledging the particular emotional dimension of affective exchanges enables us to discern how they are lived, in consciousness, by the people involved. In sum, the 'muscular bonding' felt by students via the precise corporeal experience of capoeira generates intense emotions insofar as these are manifestations and interpretations of

affects, those not-yet-categorized states of being. The emotions released reinforce group cohesion insofar as, like affects, their ‘contagious’ nature redefines the boundaries between those involved.<sup>96</sup>

The moment when one person is touched on an affect-ive level tends to be experienced as bare and transcendent insofar as it is felt deeply, partly preconsciously, which makes the experience all the more fleeting and evanescent. The emotional reaction that follows further contributes to the impression of living an experience that exceeds outside manipulation and is inherently genuine, insofar as one perceives it as coming from one’s own intimate subjectivity. It is important to acknowledge this ‘affective agency’ of capoeira, a practice that indeed compels people into embodied and affective states through which they open up and extend themselves, deeply connecting with one another, impressing and affecting each other mutually.

The affective underpinnings of human interactions in training give a special quality to the social relationships that constitute the community. While it is not surprising nor specific to capoeira that friendships would be created amongst practitioners who spend so much time together and share interests, the projection of the affects shared in training transforms these natural relations into human bonds that appear to be unconditional. The muscular bonding gives birth to and extends itself in an intense sociality that is felt deeply by those involved.

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<sup>96</sup> Sara Ahmed refers to Silvan S. Tomkins’ work and the model of emotional contagion often associated to it, to demonstrate the collective work of emotions. She asserts: “So emotions are not simply something ‘I’ or ‘we’ have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ are reshaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others.” (2004, 10)

#### **5.1.4. The affective community animates an intense sociality**

Capoeira groups around the world tend to constitute intricately woven networks of solidarity and sociality. The sheer amount of time needed to become good at capoeira means that practitioners spend many hours a week together. Human bonds are necessarily created, some of which are prolonged after training sessions when friendships are established. After hard physical training, it is not rare for students to get together to share food and comment on class, group gossip, or the latest *roda*. Many older capoeiristas express fond memories of the countless hours they spent watching capoeira videos in group, commenting on specific games, on so-called ‘epic’ *rodas*, or on certain mestres’ styles, attitudes, or speeches. If web technologies, YouTube in particular, have now made this occupation less extraordinary, there was a period in recent memory when students had to seek the privilege of an invitation, after training, to go watch VHS tapes of historic and symbolic value, containing material, almost clandestine in nature<sup>97</sup>, obtained primarily as favors from this or that mestre. These tapes, which had to be watched in group because only one copy was available, were even more valuable at a time when capoeira was less widespread and occasions to actually watch a variety of capoeiristas in

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<sup>97</sup> Mestres often prohibit people from filming *rodas* or public demonstration of capoeira, for reasons that they never really explain. It seems relatively easy to speculate that it may be a reminiscence of capoeira’s illegal past, when any proof of one’s participation in capoeira practice could be used against them. The capoeira game also relies on trickery and on surprising one’s opponent (one of the rules established by Mestre Bimba was never to show one’s full capoeira potential until one really needs it in the *roda*), and therefore mestres might be reluctant to have their games filmed because a diffusion of their tricks would make them lose their efficiency. Lastly, the prohibition on filming might be related to the fact that many capoeira techniques can be used in harmful, potentially lethal ways; they must therefore be accompanied by teachings that could not be conveyed via video. Mestres may believe that the techniques they apply in the *roda* should not circulate without an attached explanation on how and when to use or not to use them. For all these possible reasons, video recordings of capoeira used to be somewhat illicit; that is, until the explosion of technology made it increasingly difficult, if not impossible to control filming and the diffusion of videos.

action were scarce. But they were obviously not the central reason for those gatherings, because even now that the digitalization of media has completely eradicated the scarcity issue, students still gather after class; sometimes to watch videos, sometimes just to chat randomly. Capoeira groups tend to generate an intense social life that enhances the feeling of community belonging.

In their interviews, most students signified, in one way or the other, that the social aspect was an important dimension of their relation to the artform. One senior practitioner (10 + years) remembered the first summer she started practicing capoeira by calling it: “the summer of the super motivated group”. She explained: “It was really a group thing [...] the idea of the capoeira *group*<sup>98</sup> took all its meaning [...] We were really an inseparable bunch. We trained together, we partied together, and we were always doing shows.” (student interview, 10 years). This group cohesion, judging from interviews with beginner students, is still present, even though capoeira itself has changed a lot since the epoch described by the previous participant, when it was a much less widespread practice. Hence, two students who started only 2 years ago also commented, in their joint interview, on the friendships they forged: “when we started we thought it would be like ‘oh we’ll go once a week on a Saturday’ [detached tone] [...] We thought it was gonna be just a small little facet of our life and it’s slowly becoming bigger.” (student interview, 2 years) They went on to explain that they have made really good friends through capoeira, who remained friends even after they had stopped training capoeira regularly. Many times, students referred to friendships that exceeded capoeira; so much so that one

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<sup>98</sup> She refers here to the organizational structure of the broad capoeira community, divided in groups headed by one mestre and his followers, all working under one ‘group name’.

student (a practitioner for over 10 years) described capoeira as having slowly shifted the course of his whole life:

If you look at it now, all my friends are in capoeira. I've gone out with [another capoeirista] for 7 years through capoeira. I travelled to Brazil, I met people. And I keep meeting friends of friends... It becomes, like... your entire lifestory. If you do this 3 or 4 times a week, you have no other choice anyway. [...] The number of hours you spend there. And at the same time, it has been a series of incredible encounters, and a beautiful culture, a beautiful way of living... All this, whether you like it or not, it orients who you become. (student interview, 10 years)

These testimonies convey the existence of strong social bonds and solid relationships amongst practitioners, the long term nature of which is especially revealing of the all-encompassing character of the experience that capoeira can provide. In fully consuming capoeira, it seems, practitioners are also consumed by it, their lives thoroughly transformed (see also d'Aquino 1983, 90–91; Vassallo 2001, 287–288). In contrast with an activity that one may take up part time, capoeira involves students' entire selves – body, friendships, and life stories are impacted by their experience in the community. As they acquire expertise and skills, even their own minds and value systems are transformed, as the next chapter discusses in detail. Capoeira consumption happens on a spectrum; not all students delve into the more philosophical aspects, nor do they all take part to the same degree in the community of friendship that surrounds capoeira. The strong social life corresponds to some practitioners' needs and personality more than to

others; but it is nevertheless a prominent feature of capoeira that surely constitutes one of its appeals, judging by many students' interview comments.

In their most extreme manifestation, these strong human bonds are evoked under the metaphor of the family employed to describe the group. Kinship vocabulary permeates the conversations and the fieldnotes generated for this study. To give only one example, when asked what made him stick around in capoeira, one beginner student responded: "the sense of community, you know, as a group: they take you in as a family. And they take care of you, they're trying to teach you. And it feels so like – *family*. [And] you're working out. You get a whole package! [laughs]" (student interview, 2 years). In both groups studied, many couples were forged and weddings and babies followed, transforming metaphoric familial links into real ones. One day around Christmas time, the mestre evoked the strength of the bonds uniting his group when he commented on a dinner party he had gone to at the home of one of his older students. Everybody around the table had met through capoeira, he explained, yet they had reconfigured into four young families whose children all knew each other. These latter, like their parents, met regularly at the capoeira school – at least once a week at the kids' class just before the weekly *roda* where their parents took turns playing while the other spouse watched the kids.

The sense of collective community may be experienced more intensely at a local level, partly, as I have argued, because it is rooted in the affects circulating in the group. Yet interestingly this bonding may even be projected transnationally. Indeed, the intense sociality sometimes seems to extend itself into a seemingly unconditional solidarity

amongst capoeira practitioners, one that spans borders so that when a capoeirista is travelling abroad, he can most likely find a “home” in foreign capoeira groups. For example, the extended fieldwork for this research brought me to visit countless groups outside of my immediate network, sometimes only for a single, exploratory visit. Quite often, I was invited to share food and drinks after class with people I did not even know. On one occasion, a student I had emailed ahead of time about the class schedule even told me in her reply that their group usually went out to eat after the Saturday night class and she was telling me in advance so that I could free up my schedule if I wanted to join them. There seems to be an assumed sociality linking capoeiristas.

During *batizado* events, students mobilize to host other capoeiristas who are visiting from out of town. Students are prompted to open up their homes on a reciprocal basis: when they travel, they will also be welcome to sleep at other capoeiristas’ houses and reduce the costs of attending out of town events. Significantly, the ‘Brazilian character’ of capoeira is often invoked to prompt hospitality: students are reminded by their mestres that in Brazil, it is common to be ‘more generous’ and hospitable. They are told that Brazilians ‘naturally’ open up their houses to friends of friends, and that in capoeira it should be the same. Yet another incentive to host other capoeiristas is to make friends with capoeiristas from other groups, to share capoeira stories and folklore, to hear about other mestres’ ‘lifestories’, or to learn vicariously lessons that other mestres teach their students. In an activity where knowledge is transmitted either bodily or orally, these are all valid ways to enrich one’s understanding of the artform. Conversations amongst capoeiristas from different groups diversify the perspectives and expand the knowledge

of all parties involved. In this sense, it is a lateral way to access ‘capoeira experience’ that stands outside of the consumer relation through which students primarily access information at their school.

The value of hospitality is so embedded in the community that it exceeds the *batizado* frame. Multiple factors combine to extend feelings of proximity and intimacy felt on a local level to a generalized connected-ness deployed transnationally. On a week-long exploratory fieldwork trip to New York, one student (that I had already met in Brazil) asked me immediately if I had a place to stay, because, she said, “you should not be paying expensive hotels in New York”. Another [Canadian] student told me that one summer he travelled across the United States with his girlfriend (who was not even a capoeirista) and they primarily slept at ‘unknown’ capoeiristas’ homes, accepted and welcomed due to a shared identity as capoeiristas from the same group, linked by their mestre. To be fair, capoeira as an activity may attract people who are open-minded, have travelled, are interested in other cultures and people, and would be amenable to hosting virtual strangers on their couch. This tendency may further be animated at the community level through a “residual valuation” of capoeira, in Raymond Williams’ sense, inherited from myths of slavery and constantly reiterated in capoeira songs, which claim that people are stronger when they stick together and mutually support one another. The following comment from a student evokes this trope:

You see for me, [...] it’s very much related to this African culture and this entire traditional way of living [in a simple and communal way]. People have learnt to live simply since millennia and they still know and do it today, despite the difficulties... [And I feel like we still find this in

capoeira], I find that already at the community level, you know, at the level of the group, we find that: there is a pretty good group cohesion [...] and I find that yes, indeed, this draws on the cultural richness of community life stemming from Africa. (student interview, 4-5 years)

Finally, capoeira's residual valuations arguably also contribute to the current community solidarity in yet another way. I argued in my MA thesis that the initial North American interest in capoeira might be attributed to the parallels between the residual narratives of capoeira commending resistance to dominant authorities and an antiglobalization movement claiming – not without lack of nuance – opposition to capitalist modernity and advocating “resistance against a dominant global ideology” (Lechner and Boli 2005, 156). The irony in the fact that it was capoeira's affinity with antiglobalization discourse that assisted its very own global expansion is quite blatant. In fact, Assunção (2005, 196) skeptically asks “to what extent the growing popularity of [the oppositional attitude that capoeira embodies] can still count as ‘resistance’”, suggesting that it may even be “bound to become the dominant mindset of advanced consumer capitalism”. Moreover, the mobilization of these tropes of resistance carries biting ironies given the overall participation of capoeira in capitalist accumulation. This residual valuation and the evocation of its alternative model as a resistance to global capital is nonetheless transformed into an important element of a current, all-encompassing identity that some capoeira practitioners may relate to (Robitaille 2007). The values of hospitality and solidarity arguably manifest a certain desire amongst practitioners to experience and act on those values opposing a widespread capitalist modernity. While I can only speculate about this given that it was not an angle that I

explicitly took into account in my research, certain initiatives, for example a capoeira association in France founded explicitly as a contestation of the capitalist system and the dominant order (Vassallo 2007), seem to confirm the validity of my analysis. Of course, the current day re-interpretation of these residual valuations is not unrelated to the romanticization of the activity's inception and its 'other-ing', as seen in Chapter Four. All the factors outlined above reinforce feelings of solidarity amongst practitioners at both transnational and individual scales: they point to the capacity of bodily sensations to dissolve borders between bodies and create collective feelings and communities.

While the previous chapter demonstrated that the community was united by a shared interest in 'all things Brazilian', a deeper exploration of its intricacies has suggested that a prolonged and embodied involvement also provides practitioners with an inclusive, affective community where the links of friendship and intimacy exceed (or complement) this initial interest. These strong bonds arise through shared, embodied affects and are projected and concretized in an intense sociality. This affective, inclusive community adds yet more value to capoeira: in a world where traditional social structures are losing strength and contemporary, urban lifestyles lead to feelings of isolation, the social life that surrounds capoeira is yet another incentive to practice. The dazzling expansion of capoeira can partly be explained by the human sociality it creates, which responds to a specific post-modern and transnational condition of North-American city life. The increased mobility that characterizes the transnational period creates situations of individual isolation for immigrants arriving in new countries and cities. Capoeira responds to a specific need of people to find comforting places with familiar values and

referents – places where they may feel more at “home” in foreign geographical spaces. Similarly, capoeira responds to the specific predicaments of urban lifestyles; as one famous mestre in NYC reflected: “New York: there’s over 8 million people and a lot of people get lonely in the city and they’re always looking for a place to gather and meet people, to socialize. And capoeira is one of the reasons for it. You know. Capoeira is so broad.” (Mestre Jelon, interview) Lastly, capoeira may also respond to a society where the body tends to be negated, where online social networks create a disembodied sociability that disregards the affective level of connection that gives texture to human relations. The muscular bonding of capoeira acquires even more power and relevance in contrast.

## **5.2. NEW FRONTIERS OF CAPITAL**

While the affective relations and the exhilarated liberation of one’s sensorial body that we just described at length may be lived as ‘genuine’, ‘sublime’, and ‘transcendent’ by participants, I suggest that these are, in fact, the very place where capital thrives. I will argue that the practice’s ‘affective agency’ is precisely at the very heart of capoeira’s potential as a resource. It may actually be *because* the affective experience of capoeira is lived as so deeply intimate and visceral that it can effectively sustain the flows of capital that keep the mestres’ enterprises afloat. The following demonstration suggests that the ambiguous relation between affect and capital is the very motor of capoeira’s capacity to generate economic value. While affective value does not wholly displace those other

factors that allow the commercialization of capoeira, affect is nonetheless the motor of the resource. In other words, I suggest that it is not so much capoeira itself that people are so eager to consume, but the way it makes them feel. I now reintroduce the framework of culture as a resource in order to highlight how capital and market relations are now invading even spaces of intimacy, particularly those that are otherwise subjectively experienced as exceeding the economic relation.

### **5.2.1. “Nothing can pay the energy in there”: affects create value**

Capoeira participates in an “affective economy” that relies on what Michael Hardt (1999) calls “affective labor”. According to Hardt, growing sectors of the postmodern, information-based global economy depend on “affective labor”: “health services, for example, rely centrally on caring and affective labor, and the entertainment industry and the various culture industries are likewise focused on the creation and manipulation of affects” (1999, 95). He argues that affective labor is immaterial insofar as “its products are intangible: a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, passion – even a sense of connected-ness or community” (96). Students taking part in capoeira certainly seem to pay to be ‘affect-ed’ or, more precisely, once they are ‘affect-ed’, they are more than willing to pay. Consider this statement from a relatively new student (practicing 2 years):

I think that nothing can pay the energy that is in there, the friendship... this way that people commit themselves. [...] The people who have been going there for a long time, they don’t pay only for capoeira. You pay for the pleasure you feel when you are in there. Not only to practice capoeira.

But it's the companionship of the others. It's that moment. You pay for the moment – which is very pleasurable. So much so that there are days that I don't even feel like doing a capoeira class. But I hop on my bike and I go to capoeira. [...] I want to be in there, because I feel pleasure when I'm in there. (student interview, 2 years)

This excerpt powerfully expresses the pursuit of a sensation of well-being that significantly influences the decision to pay for capoeira. It is for “that moment” of friendship and pleasure that people go back to capoeira each day. The formulation used (“nothing can pay the energy that is in there”) is telling, and can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, the quote asserts that this enchanting energy is priceless, that the benefits of being in the capoeira environment exceed the economic relation. And yet the rest of the comment indicates that it may well be the very reason why people *do* pay. The non-quantifiable nature of affects and emotions blurs the market relation. This ambiguity facilitates the use capoeira as a resource and livelihood by mestres: if the relation were transparently obvious, it would not work. Once individuals are ‘affected’ by the exchange of embodied sensations and emotions described in the first part of this chapter, they constitute a potentially ‘captive’ market because they are willing to do anything to get it.

My interviews also demonstrate that this same ambiguity allows students to *minimize* the importance of this relation of capital, to dismiss it and focus only on the priceless feeling that *justifies* their consumption yet is not its equivalent. The market relation is thereby made even more invisible, and thus all the more efficient. For example, when asked “Do you think it is expensive to practice capoeira?” most of my informants responded in the negative. This is very surprising given the great number of

complaints I heard, in other more informal circumstances, about the fees for certain events that students found inflated or feelings of being unjustly perceived as ‘rich gringos’ by Brazilians mestres who thus justified their extorting of money from them. This surprising discrepancy is nevertheless explained by the affective justifications that inevitably qualified the students’ formal interview answers. For example: “No, I don’t [think it’s expensive]. I mean, if I compare to all the benefits that it brings me, I don’t think it is” (student interview, 6 years). Even those who found capoeira to be an expensive activity tended to add a concession:

Yeah, in Western countries I feel like it is really a sport for rich people. [...] I think it is very much mimicking the Western model, with the integration of the notion of profit. [...]. But let’s say that I see it and I try not to think about it too much. [...] I see all the other aspects that it brings me. (student interview, 4-5 years).

These answers reveal the intricate entanglement of affect and capital in capoeira’s commercialization. The subjective and non-quantifiable value of feelings of well-being makes students willing to accept the quantitative exchange-value fixed for capoeira. Capoeira’s economy thus corresponds to the specific postmodern economies based on affective labor that Hardt describes:

In the production and reproduction of affects, in those networks of culture and communication, collective subjectivities are produced and sociality is produced—even if those subjectivities and that sociality are directly exploitable by capital. This is where we can realize the enormous potential in affective labor. (1999, 96–97)

If the liberating experience of embodiment and the resulting exchange of affects through muscular bonding generate renewed individual subjectivities and an intense collective, even transnational sociality, these also constitute the raw material that fuels a specific cultural market. This capital-affect nexus suggests that even though affects may be subjectively experienced as authentic and transcendent from the social, they are not as completely “autonomous” as Brian Massumi (2002, 23) claims (see also Clough 2007, 2). Affects are embedded in fields of social meaning that influence their conscious interpretation, something that a strict description of the body-movement-affect-emotion connection fails to anticipate. It is therefore crucial to examine how even the individual, bodily experience of affect is contextually and socially informed in order to fully understand the powerful strength of the affects generated in capoeira and their successful mobilization in circuits of capital.

### **5.2.2. The social context of affect**

In her critique of the “affective turn” in social theory, feminist theorist Clare Hemmings (2005) questions the validity of positioning affect as a celebrated locus of freedom that offers an escape from social determinism. She criticizes Massumi in particular for not recognizing enough the social nature of affect, and for positing the ‘autonomy of affect’. In contrast, Hemmings argues that affects are only relevant *insofar* as they are [also] social. She goes back to the Deleuzian roots of the concept, which emphasizes a constant back and forth movement between body and mind, which in turn facilitates an ‘affective cycle’ whereby interpretation is always secondary to bodily

response, yet always immediately trickles back to the body (2005, 563). Her final conclusion emphasizes that affect is a valuable concept for cultural theory “precisely to the extent that it is not autonomous” (565).

The close link between affect and emotion makes their social nature more explicit. As previously discussed, emotions are conscious categories that humans often use to make sense of the preconscious, fleeting moment of affect. While in popular perceptions, emotions are still sometimes attributed to individual subjectivity and intimacy, thus perceived as autonomous, research in anthropology and social theory has widely recognized that emotions contain important social and cultural dimensions (Ahmed 2004; Le Breton 1998; Lyon and Barbalet 1994). French anthropologist David Le Breton (1998, 7) asserts in his anthropological study of emotions that: “sensorial perceptions or the feeling and expression of emotions seems to be the emanation of the most secret intimacy of the subject; however, it does not make them less socially and culturally shaped”. Sara Ahmed (2004, 6) also explains that by understanding emotions as ‘impressions’, she intends to “avoid making analytical distinctions between bodily sensation, emotion and thought as if they could be ‘experienced’ as distinct realms of human ‘experience’”. This justification for using the word ‘impressions’ is closely related to the philosophical rationale behind the concept of ‘affect’ that Hardt (2007, x–xi) describes: “one of the central challenges for research posed by this Spinozian perspective of the affects, then, resides in the fact that the affects straddle these two divides: between the mind and body, and between actions and passions”. Both perspectives try to reconnect the preconscious sensation and the conscious interpretation, while

acknowledging their discrete existence. Embodied, affective experiences are never completely independent of their ‘conscious’ interpretation, yet some aspects of sensorial experiences can only be grasped in their fluctuant, unstable nature via ‘preconscious’ embodiment, insofar as making them intelligible also stops and fixes them, thus misrecognizing them. As Patricia Clough explains:

There is a reflux back from conscious experience to affect, which is registered, however, as affect, such that ‘past action and contexts are conserved and repeated, autonomically reactivated but not accomplished; begun but not completed.’ Affect constitutes nonlinear complexity out of which the narration of conscious states such as emotion are subtracted, but always with ‘a never-to-be-conscious autonomic remainder.’ (2007, 1–2)

It is essential to acknowledge these complexities between affect, body, and emotion as well as their social dimensions so as to avoid essentializing the ‘sensorial body’ and to recognize the multiplicity of elements giving texture to the experience of capoeira, even though it is mainly grasped bodily in the first instance. Affects are made conscious via fields of signification embedded in larger social relations and their interpretation is influenced by what Ahmed (2004) calls the “cultural history” of the contact between the two entities that mutually affect each other. Ahmed uses the example of a child who experiences fear when he sees a bear in order to argue that the fear is not only an instinctual reaction, but rather, is an emotion that is shaped and modeled by “cultural histories and memories”, by “past histories of contact” not necessarily available at the moment or to consciousness, yet that make the bear fearsome in the child’s eyes (2004, 7). Building on Ahmed’s point, I propose that the Brazil frame, which informs the

cultural history of capoeira in North America (Chapter Four), brings students to interpret the affects that they physically experience through the prism of the reified, exoticized, and partly stereotyped version of Brazilian culture delineated in the previous chapter. This phenomenon is crucial in order to understand the intensity of the bonds and the feeling of belonging to the affective community.

The affects that circulate and unite the community, the liberating effect of capoeira on one's body and mind, are all associated with the tropes of sensuality, the significance of the body and of liberal sexuality available in the "Brazil frame" already internalized. These discursive tropes reinforce the pre-verbal impression of sensorial, embodied, and sensual liberation that arise in training, especially insofar as these correspond to the embodied channels through which affects are first felt and experienced. In this sense, the intimate experience of capoeira doubly participates in circuits of capital: not only are affects themselves raw material giving value to capoeira and making people willing to consume it, these same affects also partake in the cultural economy which feeds and feeds off the Brazilian imaginary that reinforces what is first felt through shared physical exercise.

The cultural economy that surrounds capoeira can be re-examined in light of the previous discussion on affect. While I have demonstrated that the feelings of intimacy that emerge in the immediate 'classroom' setting merge with an intense sociality that animates a new kind of affective community (section 5.1.4), I now reinscribe this sociality in the specific context of the cultural economy built around the performative use of Brazil (see section 4.4). This particular cultural environment favours the interpretation

of affects via the socially and culturally informed tropes that make up the Brazil frame. The festive gatherings organized in the context of the cultural economy not only consolidate the affective community by fostering social cohesion; they also mobilize the Brazil frame, which students thus likely use to interpret their affective experience of capoeira, even though the latter has roots in the class setting. In sum, the newfound spaces of embodiment and intimacies first experienced via muscular bonding are reinforced when they are later transposed in the context of hedonistic parties that activates the image of Brazil as a sensual and exotic environment and shape students' experience of embodiment and their interpretation of it.

The Brazilian-themed parties organized around capoeira groups supplement the process of 'physical awakening' occurring in capoeira training sessions (the process that Erin Manning called "becoming a body"). Students get acquainted with other [stereo]typically Brazilian embodied practices such as samba, samba-reggae, funk carioca, or forró dances that are informally performed by the Brazilians attending these parties. Indirectly, students expand their own repertoire of embodied movements and perfect their bodily awareness at large. Moreover, those parties provide new, sexually charged occasions for new capoeiristas to display and enjoy their own transformed bodies, shaped by capoeira training. These observations corroborate anthropologists Stephens and Delamont's (2006, 120) conclusions: "In our fieldwork, we saw students becoming more comfortable with the sensual aspects of their bodies and their movements as their capoeira skills grew". Stephens and Delamont (2013) also more recently argued that mestres gauge the success of their instructional work not only in classes but also "in

the nightclub”. They suggest that male British capoeiristas’ propensity to dance in parties (which is unlikely for British men) reveals the formers’ new senses of embodiment, confirming the close links I am outlining here between bodily transformation through capoeira training and the enhancement of this sensational experience through its inscription in a Brazilian cultural frame. Capoeira training, even when it is not complemented by any other specific dance classes<sup>99</sup>, seems to increase the capacity to enjoy the sensorial pleasure of embodied movements and to disregard the external gaze, two abilities that are further mobilized in these social events, especially given their hedonistic and festive characters. Parties act as catalysts (triggered by typical Brazilian cocktails called *caipirinhas*) for the affective tensions built relationally over hours of intense training wherein capoeiristas’ sweaty bodies intensely worked out in close proximity. Perceived intimacies are often acted upon, materializing in concrete sexual encounters that work to confirm the reality of the tensions and bonds that people had preconsciously been feeling.

Furthermore, the association of intimate experiences of embodiment with a broadly conceived experience of Brazilian culture may give students the impression of apprehending a foreign culture from a very intimate, subjective place. Indeed, the affect felt prior to the social context of interpretation give an increased resonance, even a

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<sup>99</sup> The field of Brazilian dance is never really far from, nor completely disconnected, from capoeira. Sometimes during special events, there will be a samba dance workshop, or a special *orixa* dance workshop. One year, for Christmas, Mestre Pantera gave his students a present: the last class before the holidays was a samba workshop with a special dancer from the Brazilian community. Some mestres even warm up their classes with *axé* dance, a quite aerobic dance style from Bahia, on a regular basis. While I heard newcomers make sceptical comments, wishing he would concentrate on ‘capoeira’, some of his devoted followers shed light on his rationale. As one of them explained, ‘we’ gringos don’t even have a basic sense of rhythm to start with, which is necessary in capoeira even prior to mastering any specific movement, thus it is necessary to use a non-capoeira rhythm to warm up and ‘loosen’ the body.

perceived 'authenticity' to the representational, partly commodified and exoticized, meanings of Brazil. The embodied experience of capoeira, because it is conflated with an experience of Brazil at large, allows North-Americans to vitally experience representational tropes on an embodied, experiential, affective level. This points to the importance of attending to the affective and embodied dimensions of the cross-cultural encounters at the heart of the phenomenon of transnational capoeira. Indeed, these help better understand the power of the cultural economy centered on a performative Brazilian culture. The use of 'Brazil' as a resource may be particularly expedient in this context precisely insofar as students come to experience Brazil intimately, in their own bodies. There is a conflation between the cultural tropes mediated by fixed systems of representation and affects felt preconsciously, sensorially and through the body, giving an intimate, subjective and 'natural' dimension to external and socially constructed tropes.

From this perspective, the cross-cultural consumption at play is not so much an act of cynical and impersonal "appropriation" of affective and emotional raw material "categorized, homogenized, and transformed into commodities" as described by Savigliano in the introductory quote for this chapter (see page 268). Consumers of capoeira are not only 'eating the Other', to borrow bell hooks' (1992b) expression; they are also, rather, consuming their own selves being consumed by the Other. That affects give resonance to the tropes of representations used performatively in the cultural economy suggests that processes sustaining the latter operate at a preconconscious level and should not be equated to a mere calculative transaction made to acquire an exotic commodity. A series of preconconscious sensations reinforce the performative foundations

of the cultural economy as they fuel feelings of well-being that are also the products of this [affective] economy. Affect gives a certain density to the cultural meanings, values and symbols that animate and support the cultural economy; meanings, values and symbols whose capacity to sustain an entire circuit of capital would likely dwindle if it depended only on representation. Mestre Pantera's work of building a cultural economy to complement his livelihood is thus not only dependent on his honed skills at adopting an entrepreneurial approach to his culture, but also builds on important affective labor under a specific epochal context of an economy of cultural difference, as we will see below.

We are thus in the presence of two co-constitutive and contingent phenomena: the whole world of fantasy that Brazil evokes frames the embodied experience, yet the bodily sensations thus interpreted also have an existence prior to their conscious interpretation, which strengthens the vitality of their interpretation. There is a constant back and forth movement between the embodied sensations and the tropes that give meaning to them in a cross-cultural setting. This specific movement characterizes phenomena permeated with affect, where the researcher's main challenge, to recall Hardt (2007), is to straddle the divides between body and mind, or, in other words, between embodied sensations and socially informed interpretations.

### **5.2.3. The affective labor of mestres in a cross-cultural political economy of emotions**

The circuits of capital that structure the flows of Brazilian performative culture not only influence the interpretations that students make of the affects and bodily sensations they experience; but also concretely thrive on these affects via the mestres' "affective labour", which, to return to Hardt's theory, consists in "the creation and manipulation of affects" (1999, 95). The mestres are able to further develop the affective economy to the extent that it is embedded in a larger social dynamic where cultural difference itself has the potential to be transformed into capitalizable affects. The ambiguous interface between affect and capital may be mobilized by mestres who find diverse ways to foster, even manipulate and reinforce affect and affective bonds on which their livelihood depends. For example, many mestres willingly reinforce the community solidarity amongst capoeiristas or the feeling of belonging to the group by giving these historical resonance. It is not rare for them to establish a link between the current social cohesion of the community and the fact that the enslaved people who created capoeira were able to survive only by sticking together, helping one another, and remaining united. Their invocation of relations of mutual help to prompt students to host out-of-town capoeiristas during *batizados* is an example of this use of the historical trope. By associating the experience of the affective community with a mythical slave solidarity, they affix a nobler signification to students' emotions. They inscribe them in a 'History' that conveys a more universal value for their affective experience, which reinforces its perceived transcendence: indeed, it makes them connect to "something greater than

themselves” by situating them in a universal history of humankind. This economy of mutual help and solidarity is also a reminiscence of the moral economy that links participants and *mestres*, as seen in Chapter Three. But we can now appreciate that the latter’s strength is also rooted in affect; not only in moral obligations but also in affective feelings of connection to other members of the community.

The manipulation of affects for economic motives is also inscribed in a broader economy of emotions and desires in a specific epoch where travel facilities and immigration flows have made cultural difference accessible first-hand. The cross-cultural encounters thus generated set in motion a broad range of processes where affects, emotions, and feelings of intimacy, enhanced by the cross-cultural tropes of desire and passion, are mobilized to create economic value.<sup>100</sup> It can be best observed in the tourist economy, specifically in “romance tourism”. For example, Herold et al. (2001) present the case of young males they call ‘Beach Boys’, who work more or less informally in Dominican Republic’s tourist industry. Their affective labour is not clearly defined: it ranges from services as personal tour guides to something closer to prostitution. The specific product of this industry is not clearly defined either: the Beach Boys’ labour may at times produce access to a culture and direct contact with ‘locals’; but they may also at times be ‘selling’ love (at least a pretense of love) and the pleasure usually associated with this emotional state; and other times, more straightforwardly, the product of this industry is sex. The mode of payment further reveals the ambiguity permeating all spaces

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<sup>100</sup> Several streams of research examine this broad topic I call ‘love and globalization’ (Altman 2001; Jankowiak 2008; Padilla et al. 2007) ; they include issues ranging from sex tourism (Bandyopadhyay and Nascimento 2010; Frank 2007; Padilla 2007), romance tourism (Pruitt and LaFont 1995; Herold et al., 2001), or weddings and immigration (Brennan 2008; Hirsch 2007), for example.

of this affective economy: indeed, the ‘Beach boys’ labour does not always have a clear and determined exchange-value and their compensation may also be at the level of affect: aside from occasional established fees, tips or material gifts, they may also perform their labor primarily to enjoy the satisfaction of fancy meals or the relaxing pleasure of a nap in a fancy hotel. The tourist ‘romance’ economy clearly points to the possibility for cross-cultural intimacies to be converted into economic value.

This affective economy of cultural difference, as opposed to Savigliano’s ‘political economy of passion’ evoked at the start of this chapter, is not rooted exclusively in a narrative desire for the Other. Rather, it builds on the subjective experience that these contacts create and the feeling of intimacy that arises. The ambiguity of the nature of the labour, the product, and the payment, as well as the one-on-one and the non-systematic nature of most transactions, leaves place for people to have the impression of genuine human encounters (which do indeed sometimes spring forth), an impression that dissimulates the economic value of cultural difference and actually increases the value of the affect produced. I highlight the parallels between the cases of romance tourism and capoeira in order to point out that the phenomenon in capoeira is also a reflection of an entire epoch where cultural difference itself has value. In this sense, the economy of capoeira is clearly the product of a zeitgeist: the capoeira resource builds not only on affect experienced by the body-in-motion but on the specific affective value attached to cultural difference. The latter is nonetheless reinforced by its association to the former, in the strong experience of embodiment at the root of the capoeira experience.

The affective labour of mestres is undoubtedly much more subtle than the Beach Boys', although it plays with similar, dynamic lines of cross-cultural affect, desire, and intimacy. The fundamental cultural difference at the heart of the transnational capoeira community ensures to Brazilians, particularly mestres, a symbolic power position in the specific hierarchy of the group. This superiority is manifested, namely, by their bodies, previously modeled by capoeira. The mestres' sculpted body becomes the object of admiration spurring desires for physical emulation and for identification whereby students wish to become as skillful physically as their mestre or to embody the same combination of charisma and stamina. It becomes clear that affect provides a preconscious and subjective basis for the desire attributed to cross-cultural encounters in the political economy of passion. This chain of effects consolidates the symbolic power of Brazilian mestres that would presumably progressively weaken if it were based *only* on their more skillful and muscular body, or on the aura of the Brazilian imaginary playing in their favor, the exploitation of which is more likely to become obvious and lose its power than the exploitation of preconscious affects. This is why I suggest that the affective exchange is really what drives this whole cross-cultural affective economy: it is because the symbolic power of mestres is rooted in a desire that is experienced subjectively and affectively – not only the byproduct of neocolonial-laden politics of representations – that the mestres have so much success 'creating and manipulating affects' to build their economy.

Indeed, the epochal possibility of transforming globalized, intercultural experiences into economic capital encourages mestres to actively build on the effects of

the tropes of desire that give texture to their practice and that they know influence students. When they reunite the community outside of training and broaden the social life of their group by building a parallel cultural economy, as we saw in the last chapter, they are creating opportunities for the affects to thrive: they are ‘creating’ affects. By exploiting the hedonistic sense of party peculiar to their Brazilian culture, they are, moreover, ‘manipulating’ affects by providing a context where the intimacies first felt in training may eventually materialize in new forms of friendly, seductive, or sexual relations. All of these new affective bonds further unite the affective community, which thereby also consolidates the market on which the mestres depend.

Finally, although my focus has been on the way mestres build their economy, I do not wish to reduce them to mere calculative subjects. To the extent that affects are relational and never circulate in isolation, the mestres, too, participate in their exchange and in the affective community, although they do so from a different angle. Their capoeira group is also, for them, an affective space and an important social environment, often their first network as new immigrants having left friends and family back home. There, they recreate a friendly, familiar, Brazilian ambiance where they can put forward and live according to values that are close to their home culture where intimate, personal and kinship links have a particular importance<sup>101</sup>. Many mestres even consider their group to be their second family, some noting that they spend more time there than in their

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<sup>101</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer at *Brésil(s): Sciences humaines et sociales* for pointing to my attention the importance of the concepts of family, intimacy, and personal proximity in Brazilian social thought. A great number of authors, including Roberto Da Matta ([1979] 1991), Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1936), Gilberto Velho (1987) and Gilberto Freyre (1938) have analysed the importance of relationships of kinship and proximity in Brazilian social formations. The mestres’ preoccupation for building a homey, cozy, affective community environment in their capoeira group is certainly not independent from the importance of these values in Brazilian culture at large.

‘real’ household. Moreover, many examples of mestres in long term relationships with their North-American students suggest that they, too, are involved affectively and emotionally, and that genuine, sustainable human relations can also stem mutually from these affective dynamics. In sum, while I have shown that there is more at play in students’ consumption of capoeira than a mere economic transaction, it would be incorrect not to apply the same logic to the mestres’ side of the transaction. The affects that circulate in the capoeira group are relational, and the economy that the mestres half-consciously build on affect also preconsciously involves them insofar as they, too, are part of the community. It would be wrong to suggest that mestres are making a purely instrumental use of the community that they lead, only for their entrepreneurial endeavours. The mestre’s implication in the affective exchange should nonetheless not conceal the economic relations and the possibility for mestres to profit from these affective bonds<sup>102</sup>.

The relatively direct association between affects and desires, reinforced by intercultural tropes peculiar to the political economy of passion, allows students to consciously channel their affective experience of capoeira towards their involvement in

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<sup>102</sup> Neither should the real human connections and relations of intimacy that arise amongst the capoeira community hide the potentially controlling effects that the presence of affect in circuits of capital entails. Indeed, that capoeira’s value as a resource is found in affect has many implications that I can only briefly mention here but that would constitute fertile grounds for further research. I have shown that capoeira powerfully seizes the subjects through affect, and that this in turn motivates their consumption. It could be argued, then, that this affective intensity contributes to perpetuate a system of reproduction of capital. This argument, specific to capoeira, can be inscribed in a field literature that has already evoked the potential, in contemporary neoliberal societies (that Gilles Deleuze (1992) calls “societies of control”), for power and control to lie precisely in preconsciously and immaterial forces of biocapital (Deleuze 1992, Hardt and Negri 2000, Lazzarato 1996, Thoburn 2001). It would be interesting to further analyse capoeira’s political economy, rooted in affective and subjective exchanges and values as this chapter has identified, in view of those notions of control and power involved in contemporary economic and social conditions of neoliberal capitalist production.

the community via their consumption. In turn, because the mestres' symbolic power is rooted in a preconscious, affective desire, they necessarily play with these affects when they act to consolidate their market, even if they themselves, just like the students affected, may not really do it in any conscious way. Crucially, this is also why capoeira exemplifies the logic of the cultural resource, as opposed to the cultural commodity or to an instrumental use of culture as an asset. The economy of capoeira is sustained by more than the exchange-value which characterize the commodity logic; it also differs from cynical cases of auto-exoticism, which would characterize the instrumental use of culture as an asset. The logic of the resource as exemplified by capoeira is firmly rooted in the depth of individual subjectivities and from there compels practitioners to participate in the circuits of capital that sustain the mestres' livelihood and their own circuits of sociality. Capital has invaded new territories in individuals' subjective, intimate, affective preconscious states.

## CHAPTER SIX: THE *RODA*: PERFORMANCE OF CAPOEIRA AS SYSTEM OF KNOWLEDGE

Capoeira, its community and its connotations were transformed by the transnational circulation of the practice and its uses as a resource. In light of the practice's dazzling international success and fast expansion, we might well ask how capoeira retains and maintains its integrity and value. As other types of resources, cultural resources risk exhaustion. As seen in Chapter Two, Jeremy Rifkin (2000, 12) warns about potential *mis-uses* of cultural resources: "Cultural resources risk overexploitation and depletion at the hands of commerce just as natural resources did during the Industrial Age". To complete our analysis of capoeira as resource, this last chapter asks how this resource is able to regenerate itself, maintaining a strong core identity while inevitably transformed by its transnational circulation. Is capoeira, now such a valuable and widely commercialized resource, at risk of overexploitation? What mechanisms ensure that its cultural value will not be 'watered down', exhausted by its commodification, by stereotypes that modify its new valuations, or by the affective nature of the bonds that welcome new members to the community on a broadly inclusive basis? To answer these questions, this chapter focuses on one particular manifestation of capoeira that this dissertation has not yet examined in detail: the *roda*.

The *roda* is a circle made up of practitioners standing side by side, in the middle of which the game of capoeira is played. This last verb is significant: even though practitioners describe capoeira as a martial art, they talk about the *game* of capoeira and

say that they ‘play’ (*jogar* or *brincar*), not that they fight. Individuals are nonetheless constantly competing with their peers to access the coveted center space where the game is played, whose boundaries are marked by the other practitioners themselves, most of whom are also trying to go in and demonstrate expertise. This chapter will suggest that the *roda* is an important collective space of performance where the community constitutes itself according to factors that differ from those which govern the circulation of capoeira as resource. As I will demonstrate, the *roda* is a unique space in globalized capoeira because it operates according to its own logic, one that preserves and perpetuates a traditional knowledge through the practitioners’ bodies in motion.

## **6.1. THE RODA AS PERFORMANCE OF CAPOEIRA**

### **6.1.1. What is the *roda*?**

On the floor, a series of instruments have been meticulously laid out; they are lying still, the announcement of the *roda* about to happen. Three stringed berimbaus, ready to be picked up and played, are aligned side by side on the floor in the traditional order: the *gunga*, with the biggest calabash and the deepest sound, is in the middle of all the instruments. The *medio* and the *viola* follow on the right. On one side of the berimbaus, stands the *atabaque* – a tall hand-drum whose body is made of special Brazilian wood with a head of tensed calfskin that gives it a rugged and deep sound. On the other side, we can see a *pandeiro*, a tambourine-like instrument, as well as an *agogô*, a double-bell instrument that marks time through a repeated rhythmic figure that all can follow. In the room around the instruments, capoeiristas are slowly congregating; they

have changed into their *abadás* and are stretching, chatting; all are waiting for the *roda* to start like bees roaming around a honey jar.

When the mestre picks up the berimbau *gunga* and starts playing the solemn *iúna* rhythm, no words are necessary. All the capoeiristas stop their activities, slowly gather around the instruments, and form a circle including the instruments in the perimeter. The mestre's most advanced students pick up the other instruments and start accompanying the rhythm. The room suddenly fills with an indescribable energy, as if the music, its vital rhythm marked by the *atabaque*, and the buzzing, distinctive sound of the berimbaus, had somehow hypnotized everybody present and taken hold of room. The *roda* is ready to start.

Two players leave their position around the circle and squat at the feet of the mestre playing the main berimbau. They already seem to be wary of one another and of their environment: their eyes are lit up and they keep one arm close to their face the whole time, prepared to counter any attack that could already be coming their way (I have seen a player break another capoeirista's nose just as they were squatting near the instruments, waiting to go in the center of the *roda*). When the mestre gives them a sign by moving his berimbau over their heads almost like a blessing, they each make cryptic gestures that seem to salute the instruments, shake each other's hands while gazing straight into each other's eyes, and cart-wheel into the center of the circle. Their interaction is playful, courteous, and well-behaved. The players move circularly and gracefully inside the *roda*, responding to each other's movements in an embodied dialogue, and displacing their bodies so as to flow in and out of the other person's space.

They have a smile on their faces even though anyone who understands capoeira sees that they both constantly keep their guard up. They seem to be teasing each other more than trying to hurt each other, but an attack can always appear. At one point, one player, Tucano, points in one direction, as if he was warning his opponent Neguinho of a menace coming from his back. Yet when Neguinho looks over, the menace actually comes from Tucano himself, who uses this moment of inattention to gently trip Neguinho who falls flat on his bum. He nonetheless gets back up on his feet so quickly that he manages to return the surprise by executing a fast take down technique on Tucano, who is still so proud of his former trick that he does not expect Neguinho's retaliation so quickly. The biter has been bit, but the entire interaction has occurred in good spirit. This game goes on for about a minute, after which another player leaves his spot around the *roda* circle and, from where the mestre stands with the *gunga*, he carefully 'buys the game', as players say, and enters the *roda*. To do so, he inserts his body in between the bodies of the two capoeiristas already interacting and, without stopping the overall movement, he takes the place of one of the players, who backs off and reintegrates with the circle of participants forming the perimeter of the play space.

The *roda* keeps going on like this for a while: in turns, the capoeiristas access the center space in an ongoing yet unequal rotation (some clearly get to play more). Their interactions shift from playful to more aggressive, from slow-paced and close to the ground to fast and acrobatic, depending on the rhythm played on the instruments and on the contextual synergy between the two persons inside the *roda*. After 45 minutes, Zumbi, a student of about 4 years, still has not played, and decides he will try going in

the *roda*. He has finally managed to stand close to the instruments, a coveted space which gets crowded with capoeiristas who all accumulate there in their attempt to be the next ones playing in the center. But Zumbi has been standing there at least 10 minutes and higher ranked capoeiristas constantly bypass him, ignoring his presence and going straight into the *roda* while he remains stranded on the side. His problem is that he does not know exactly when it is acceptable for him, a relatively beginner student, to assert himself despite his lower rank and go play. He is not sure if it is acceptable to interrupt two players of higher rank when they are playing, an action that could potentially break the entire synergy of the *roda*. When, slightly exasperated, he finally decides to ignore the conventions that he does not even clearly understand and to enter the *roda* regardless, the rhythm of the music and the games have nonetheless reached a very fast pace. He thus clumsily “buys the game”, gets in the center, and then finds himself playing with a more advanced player who is not happy to see a beginner end the speedy, challenging game he was just playing. Little does Zumbi realize, he is completely confused by the movements of his opponent, cannot follow the dialogue, and unexpectedly receives a straight kick in the ribs. He is not hurt, however; mostly just surprised. The other, more experienced player had indeed known to calibrate the power of his kick in order to scare Zumbi sufficiently so that he would learn a lesson, yet not fully condemn his eagerness to play, which he considers, in the end, a respectable display of boldness, sometimes necessary to actually access the *roda*.

Over the course of this small episode, Zumbi has learnt that hierarchy is to be respected in the *roda* and that some games should not be disrupted by lower level

students, unless the latter are ready to deal with the consequences and learn the hard way. Yet he also learned that without a certain degree of fighting to get in, without pushing the limits of certain conventions, namely this same hierarchy that needs to be respected, he would have stayed on the outskirts for the entire *roda* and would have never accessed the center space to play capoeira. The *roda*'s playing field is not levelled and it certainly does not favour fair play. Practitioners often insist that the *roda* is a microcosm of life: both are unequal struggles where all try to stay afloat in any way they can.

There can never be more than two capoeiristas at the time playing in the *roda*, but there can be many dozens attending and forming its contours. Capoeiristas thus compete amongst themselves, not only once they are playing in the *roda*, but also to access its very center and make sure they are the next ones to play. Capoeira is a game of power, and this characteristic permeates the physical game itself as much as the interactions between participants in the activity at large. Power dynamics are at play in the organization of the *roda*: the specific hierarchy that ranks the practitioners according to the cord system is only but one component of these relations, which also involve egos, competitive hubris, and narcissistic challenges. Capoeiristas may train all they want, but only in the *roda* where games happen in an improvised format and with an unpredictable outcome can they really test their own skills or display them in order to earn the respect of their peers (which ultimately matters much more than their official graduation, I would argue). In this sense, the *roda* represents a sort of agora for the community: it is the place where capoeiristas meet to actually play capoeira; it is the place where they assert themselves as capoeiristas within the community, where they assess one another, and

where they build reputations. This overarching competitive dimension adds a layer to the immediate power games at play for the control of the *roda*'s center.

There are certain general, structuring elements common to most *rodas*, some of which were outlined in the description above. Any *roda*, regardless of where it happens, is lead by one mestre (or a senior capoeirista). The mestre in charge usually plays the *berimbau gunga* and he directs the music: he has the authority to change the rhythm played, consequently controlling the pace and nature of the games unfolding within the closed circle. Some rhythms call for a playful interaction, in which the practitioners strive for a more conversational game and privilege the flow of their embodied dialogue. Other, faster rhythms call for technical takedowns and more aggressive games. The mestre who heads the orchestra may also use the songs' lyrics to guide the interactions in the *roda*. For example, he could urge one player who does not know he is playing with an inexperienced student to be careful by singing a song such as the classic "*Ai ai Aidê, joga bonito que eu quero aprender*" ("Oh please, Aidê, play nicely because I want to learn"). However, even when a mestre is in charge and monitoring interactions, the spectrum of acceptable behavior varies according to the context, making it almost impossible to further describe the *roda* in general terms.

Tellingly, when students ask about the specific 'rules' of the *roda*, mestres are always reluctant or simply incapable of giving clear explanations. Many times, I have heard students ask specific questions such as: "Is it acceptable to intentionally kick the other person, or should I show the kick but always stop it before I hurt the other person?", or again, echoing Zumbi's situation described previously: "if two people of higher rank

are playing, can I interrupt their game and go play with one of them?”. The main answer to these types of questions was always: “it depends”. At times, mestres would qualify their scant words with concrete examples, explaining how they would have acted in certain specific situations. The discrepancy between the students’ anxiety to know the rules and the mestres’ casual disregard for their questions can be explained partly by a certain cultural difference spurred by the transnational recontextualization of capoeira: while North-Americans are used to navigating within clear, established systems of rules where all are equal before authorities, Brazilians may be more comfortable with contextual arrangements. In fact, Brazilian society at large has been analyzed by its great anthropologist Roberto Da Matta (1995, 281) as a society that “legitimizes ambiguity” and “institutionalizes the intermediary”. Da Matta explains that “we must think of Brazilian society as a process of mediation between poles and not, as has been the practice, construe our reality as having but a ‘dualistic rationale’.” (281). This makes it possible, for example, for personal favors to occur in situations where all citizens are allegedly equal. The ability to navigate this ambiguous social system certainly contributes to the Brazilian mestres’ comfortable demeanor in the absence of clear rules, in contrast to the North-American student’s bafflement with the same ambiguous system.

Mostly, however, mestres are unable to give clear and precise answers about specific rules and norms because these change contextually: the *roda* has no clear rules and norms. Indeed, there are different types of *roda*: street *rodas*, open *rodas* inside a mestre’s academy where capoeiristas from different groups are welcomed, ‘house’ *rodas* only for the mestre’s group, training *rodas* at the end of the class, and *rodas* ‘for display’

in a show or a *batizado*. The rules, organization, types of game, and overall unfolding are never exactly the same; each *roda* holds a different set of contextual norms, each one calls for its own behavior and attitudes. For example, the *roda* described above took place inside a mestre's academy. The hierarchy between players was clearly signified insofar as all were wearing their official uniform with a cord of color marking their rank. This identification system made it easier for players to assess the level of their opponent; it also compelled them to respect certain norms based on this hierarchy – avoid interrupting a game where two high ranked capoeiristas are playing, for example. In a street *roda*, by contrast, capoeiristas attend without any uniforms, making it harder to identify their level or their affiliations. Moreover, the public space makes it difficult to recognize who the mestre in charge is: the authority is more diffused, creating a sense that 'anything goes'. The residual valuations of capoeira as a street fight tend to surface in the absence of the material signs of the practice's institutionalization (the academy space, the uniforms, etc.). The relative anonymity of street *rodas* favors a feeling of lawlessness where players know they need to be especially careful because they have no idea who they are playing with and what their intentions are. In turn, this sense of real physical danger palpable in certain street *rodas* disappears almost completely in contexts when capoeira is on display in a controlled setting. An uncontrolled fight will seldom happen in a *batizado roda*, a ceremony of celebration where a public, including some of the students' parents, is watching and where the mestre in charge thus monitors carefully the interactions. By contrast, in street *rodas*, I have witnessed fights where the most widely recognized rules

of capoeira, the absence of closed fists punches for example, were temporarily suspended.

The multiplicity of settings and types of *rodas* bring forth many contextual norms and many codes of behavior, all of which are situated rather than explicit. For this reason, the only way to understand the *roda* is by acquiring a cumulative experience through participation in a great variety of *rodas*. Each one sets an example for what can or cannot be done and gives a better sense of the overarching organization of ‘*rodas*’ in general. One day I stumbled upon a *roda* while travelling in Bogotá, Colombia. I had no idea what the politics of the community were, nor who the mestre in charge was. With my experience of previous *rodas* over my past eight years of capoeira, however, I could identify enough elements to be able to understand what particular conventions I had to follow in order to participate in this particular *roda*. I spent long minutes observing the games, assessing what level of aggression was accepted, and identifying what kind of techniques the players were mostly using. I identified how the players bought the game (if they asked permission to the mestre in charge before going in, if they squatted under the *berimbau* before going in or just went in directly from where they stood in the *roda*’s perimeter, etc.); I observed how long they let the games last before they interrupted them, etc. Finally, I made eye contact with most advanced players present, made them understand that I was a capoeirista by singing the songs and clapping hands; and ultimately, with a gaze, I asked the one who seemed to have the most authority his approbation to go in and play. All those actions conducted prior to going in the *roda* had been essential to my ability to access the *roda* and be accepted in it as a peer. I had been

practicing capoeira for eight years at that time, and this was the first time I had actually been confident enough to participate in an unknown *roda* by myself. I knew I had enough accumulated experience to enable me not so much to sustain the level of play of the most advanced players there if they decided to really test me; but rather, to know how *rodas* work and which elements I needed to identify in order to understand this *roda*'s specific, contextual organization and to access it with no mishap that could lead the capoeiristas there to want to test me or teach me a lesson aggressively.

In addition to the physical play in the *roda*, capoeiristas thus need to have, and to a certain extent to display, a great depth of understanding of the *roda*'s implicit rules in order to be able to access the center space and play capoeira. Knowing *how to enter* in the *roda* or *when not to enter* is as important as knowing what to do once inside. It is necessary to acquire experience over time and across space to grasp the changing infinity of the *roda* as well as the consistency of its structuring elements. This lengthy, inductive learning process restricts access to the *roda* to skilled and qualified individuals: it is a discriminating factor. From this perspective, it is possible to assert that access to the *roda* is contingent upon the players' ability to understand and display what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu would call a specific "cultural capital" that marks their distinction and allows their access to the *roda*. While Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital is part of a complete theoretical apparatus developed to understand social reproduction in the specific context of French society, it may be partly transposed to our analysis. Particularly, Bourdieu (1979) describes three "states" in which cultural capital exists: the embodied, objectivised, and institutionalized states. The knowledge required to access the *roda*, as I

have just described it, corresponds to Bourdieu's description of the first of those states, "embodied cultural capital", insofar as both suppose from the individual an unrelenting effort in order to learn and 'incorporate' said capital. Embodied cultural capital, Bourdieu insists, cannot be acquired nor inherited, it requires a process of enculturation through which the subjects learn to understand and embody their community's distinctive cultural capital. The real, deep knowledge of the *roda* remains exclusive because the ability to play in the *roda* requires time and dedication and, just like cultural capital more generally described by Bourdieu, it is not accessible via quick consumption of capoeira as a commodity. This is why I suggest that the *roda* is the space where capoeira materializes in its most complex and complete form; or, as I will soon argue, it is the space of performance of capoeira.

One final consideration will complement this presentation of the *roda*. The *roda* is a live, organic event. It occurs between individuals who constitute both its form and its substance. There is a constant movement between practitioners, who share roles and spaces in the *roda*. Participants will at times physically play in the center; at times play the musical instruments (also a physically demanding task). At other times they will simply encircle the *roda*, contributing to its energy by clapping hands, singing, and occasionally even shouting comments about the interactions happening inside. This ongoing rotation and rearrangement amongst participants keeps the *roda* alive. The product of the gathering and interaction of many individuals, the *roda* is never still. The resulting, general happening is nonetheless greater than the sum of its individual parts. A specific synergy is produced by the close proximity of all practitioners who interact in a

particular dynamic of tensions, competition, and exclusions, which is nonetheless also a celebration of play, joy, and liberation<sup>103</sup> – or, as anthropologist Greg Downey (2005, 103) puts it: “the *roda* is suspended in a commemorative frame between ludic and agonistic extremes”.

The diversity of elements that combine to give material existence to the *roda* (music, physical play, competition and celebration, individual and collective energies, physical and emotional degrees of exhaustion, etc.) makes the outcomes particularly unpredictable and always changing. This uncertainty is an essential feature of the *roda* because it is the one that triggers and fuels the players’ improvisation, the motor of capoeira. The variability is so important to the materialization of capoeira that many practitioners explain it by alleging that the *roda* has its own spirit and is ‘alive’. Often time, capoeiristas indeed allude to the active presence of an irrational energy, one that exceeds individual subjects, and gives the impression of taking control of the *roda* at specific moments. They call this energy *axé*, a term that comes from Afro-Brazilian religious circles. *Axé* refers to the divine energy that participants in ceremonies incorporate during a state of trance and that establishes the communication between the sacred and secular worlds (Daniel 2005, 81). There is indeed an element of trance in the *roda* that should not be neglected. The late Mestre Decênio, a loyal student of Mestre Bimba and a specialist in neurology, considers that the Ijexá rhythm played on the *atabaque* during capoeira *rodas* produces the necessary vibrations in the brain for one to

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<sup>103</sup> I invite the reader to go back to the very first chapter (section 1.1.1) where I comment on the trope of liberation as one essential element of capoeira, an activity developed as a way to playfully apprehend the world that circumvents the otherwise rigid social structure and inhuman living conditions that constrained the enslaved populations.

enter into a trance (personal conversation 2005, corroborated in Decânio 2002, 5). This grounded rhythm, the *roda*'s heartbeat, is the same one played in *candomblé* ceremonies where it is said to bring down the ancestor spirits that then inhabit the bodies of worshippers<sup>104</sup>. This musical superimposition leads to the idea, put forward by many capoeiristas, that capoeira music's connection to protective *orixás* divinities induces the necessary energy for players to perform risky movements without hurting themselves. This widespread belief not only evokes the historical links between the two practices, but more importantly, expresses the strong experience of a specific energy in the *roda*, whose presence is infectious and intoxicating. Not all the *rodas* result in the same synergetic intensity. However, when a strong *axé* traverses all practitioners present, it takes hold of the *roda* and defines it, driving the material manifestation of capoeira itself.

### **6.1.2. What is a performance?**

Equipped with this better understanding of what the *roda* is in practice, I turn to the concept of performance to describe the *roda* in theoretical terms. The vast scholarship that studies performance, from older anthropological approaches (Fabian 1990; Turner 1982) to the newest field of performance studies (Bial 2007; Davis 2008; Schechner 2002), is helpful to conceptualize the *roda* as a performance of capoeira at large. Based

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<sup>104</sup> Capoeira and *candomblé* share strong historical links, especially insofar as both practices cohabited in the social spaces of enslaved populations. French anthropologist Cécile Benneget (2006, 94) suggests that, during the inception period, most capoeiristas were also *candomblé* worshippers and that their practice of capoeira naturally mixed with their daily religious practice. There are also formal elements linking the two practices; the most apparent is the circular space of the *roda* in which both take place. As I suggested in Chapter One, it is not clear when all the Afro-Brazilian cultural manifestations became independent practices with clear distinguishable boundaries. For a more detailed discussion of links between capoeira and *candomblé*, see also Wilson 2001, 29–33.

on this scholarship, I understand ‘performance’ as an embodied and contextualized event – the *roda* – that is simultaneously a synchronic and diachronic producer of meanings. Indeed, the concept of performance evokes a tension between continuing and situated knowledge, making it a particularly useful theoretical tool to explore the *roda*. While each *roda* always articulates its own meanings at the very moment of its occurrence and in close relation to its immediate context, setting and participants, it also, importantly, always does so in continuity with the practice’s history. It maintains traditions that have constituted capoeira’s strength, its value, and its appeal across time and now across space.

Amidst the multiple definitions of the concept, it is generally accepted that performances are “embodied practices and events” that often draw on a vast repertoire of knowledge and as such, ensure the continuity of this knowledge and its transmission over generations (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2007; Schechner 2002; Taylor 2003). Richard Schechner (1985), one of the pioneers of the field, defines performance as a “twice-behaved behavior”: it is a behavior that is always subject to revision, and that must be reinvented whether it is the second time or “the nth time”, because it cannot happen exactly the same way twice. And yet the consistency of performances’ transmission across generations is “astonishing”, Schechner argues (1985, 36). According to this definition, a performance always exists in continuity with the past and with the previously performed behaviors of the same kind, a process that ensures the preservation of collective memory (Roach 1996; Taylor 2003).

Based on this definition, I suggest that in each *roda*, capoeira practitioners’ bodies newly ‘behave’ their previous mestres’ ‘behavior’ – to use Schechner’s vocabulary –

thereby perpetuating past mestres' memory and knowledge. Each apprentice carries, through their gestures and their attitude in the game, traces of their mestres: whether it is the use of a particular technique, their general manners in the game, or some subtle quality of movement (the swing in their *ginga*, the tilt of their head when swaying from side to side, their pinky finger's eccentric position), apprentices learn, almost by osmosis, to imitate their mestres' demeanour<sup>105</sup>. It is fascinating to see how some bodies are able to recreate with such accuracy distinctive features of their mestre's style of play – so much so that it is possible to recognize, only by watching someone in a *roda*, his or her 'capoeira lineage'. For example, at an international capoeira encounter in Spain, I saw one unknown capoeirista playing and was able to tell without a doubt that he was the student of a senior capoeirista I had previously met in Brazil: the whole genealogy of his capoeira training was inscribed upon his body, or more precisely, the way his body moved conveyed his capoeira lineage. While each capoeirista develops his own way of moving and adds his personality to his game and style, the ensemble of all the capoeiristas' bodies collectively store a pool of embodied demeanours, techniques, and ways of moving that create bridges between previous and current *rodas*<sup>106</sup>.

The *roda* as performance carries cultural memory and constitutes an independent “system of knowledge”, manifested and perpetuated in the bodies of practitioners whose

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<sup>105</sup> For an in-depth analysis of this process of skill acquisition by imitation and mimetism, see Greg Downey's (2010) discussion of capoeira from a “neuroanthropological perspective”.

<sup>106</sup> Anthropologist Margaret Wilson (2011, 31–32) makes a similar remark in her study of the influence of capoeira angola practice on human consciousness. She notes: “*Mestres* also say that when they are playing in the *roda*, it is often not them who plays the game but the old *mestres*, now dead, who taught them and who taught their fathers. This includes both the player's actual *mestre* and the entire lineage of past *mestres*. The essence of these *mestres* is considered to be present in the *roda*, in the moves, the *malicia*, the strategy and the *brincar* (playfulness).”

very access to the *roda* is conditioned, as I have suggested earlier, by a deep, long-term understanding of this system. I take the particular notion of “system of knowledge” from performance scholar Diana Taylor (2003, 16) who, in her book on cultural memory in the Americas, defines performance precisely as a “system of learning, storing and transmitting knowledge”. This perspective sheds light on the *roda*’s function as a system of knowledge that carries and perpetuates the memory of slavery through the bodies of practitioners. Indeed, Taylor describes two main systems of storing knowledge: the “archive” and “the repertoire”. The former refers to the enduring materials in which a certain type of [hegemonic] knowledge is stored, while the latter is made up of embodied practices and includes “all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge” (20). While the archive has traditionally been presented as the only enduring and allegedly neutral repository of knowledge, Taylor’s research demonstrates that the embodied practices that constitute the repertoire also store knowledge and memory that endures through time. She succinctly yet irrefutably justifies why studying embodied cultural practices as performance is insightful to access a fuller range of social memory: “if performance did not transmit knowledge, only the literate could claim social memory and identity” (2003, xvii). Performances such as the *roda* store the memory of those who occupy subaltern positions in society and who may not have had the power to modify the archive nor the literary education to create their own. Studying embodied performances as systems of knowledge is the only way, Taylor argues, to retrieve non-hegemonic knowledge that the official archive did not admit. This is what I strive to do with respect to the *roda*.

It is essential to draw attention to the system of knowledge that is performed in the *roda*, even though it is impossible to thoroughly account for it in a single chapter. It is nonetheless crucial to at least acknowledge the ongoing presence of mechanisms of transmission and conservation of knowledge that coexist with the other forces influencing capoeira described throughout the dissertation. Otherwise, this study would risk misrepresenting capoeira as overly defined by the logic of the resource. As both a critical researcher but also a practitioner, my intention is not to reduce capoeira to the resource it has [also] become, or to the affective community it creates; neither is it to suggest that the practice is completely bound to the logic of capital accumulation and that it kept nothing of its initial potential for resistance or of the collective memory of those marginalized population groups who initially developed it. This general analysis of the *roda* as performance is a necessary complement to the previous chapters; it evokes important dimensions of capoeira that still constitute the practice even though this dissertation's focus on the specific functioning of the resource could not predominantly account for them.

It is important, then, to study the *roda* as a performance of capoeira in order to highlight the mechanisms that perpetuate capoeira's cultural memory and that ensure that its internal organization and value system are upheld. To do so, I will now provide a case study of one particular *roda*. It will shed light on the confluence of traditions that converge in *rodas* by pointing specifically at the frictions created, in that particular instance, when these traditions came up against the logic of the resource that otherwise characterized the context in which this particular *roda* took place.

## **6.2. EXCLUSIVE ACCESS TO THE RODA**

During my fieldwork in New York, I attended one *roda* that involved some extremely exclusive interactions, making it especially difficult for many of the new and even some of the advanced students to access its center and participate fully in it. This particular *roda* took place following a special workshop that Mestre Lagartixa organized with a mestre friend living in Florida. For weeks he had been encouraging all his students to pay the extra fees required to attend the workshop. He stressed that, as a group, it was important to support such initiatives that improved the group's collective knowledge of capoeira. Moreover, Lagartixa insisted, it was also desirable for each practitioner individually to take a class with a capoeirista other than their mestre, in order to access new knowledge and diversify their experience. The turnout was quite impressive, and many eager and obedient students diligently paid the \$30 fee to take the special workshop. As happens after most workshops, a *roda* followed the instruction. In addition to the students who had paid to participate in the workshop, many high ranked practitioners from the surrounding area, including friends of Lagartixa, fellow mestres, and recognized capoeiristas from other groups in the city, had gathered at the academy to support and participate in this *roda*. When the latter began, these capoeiristas, who had just arrived and had not participated in the workshop, entered the *roda* one after the other and played exclusively amongst themselves, leaving little opportunity for students who

had partaken in the workshop to play. This situation generated palpable disappointment amongst students, and even, I would say, some resentment.

The unhappy reactions and frictions that the *roda* triggered that night shed light on the limits of the mechanisms that influence capoeira's circulation as a resource. The value system that usually linked the practitioners and students gathered there for the workshop – where the acquisitive power of money is highly regarded, where the Brazil frame provides an interpretive lens for social interaction, and where affective bonds generate a tight sociality and comradeship – ceased to be recognized. Other internal forces seemed to drive this particular performance of capoeira, despite the practice's insertion in other productive circuits. In the next pages, I will review the different variables that I have so far associated to the new valuations of capoeira as a resource and analyze their dwindling influence in the specific space of a *roda* which clearly exceeded their logic.

### **6.2.1. Economic capital not recognized**

Following the workshop, I had an extensive conversation with a relatively new student who bluntly told me that she really wished she had spent the \$30 workshop fee on something else. Although she admitted to being particularly sensitive about money matters, she also asserted: “I mean, we're all hustling, right, I shouldn't expect anything for free. But at least if I pay something I want to have for my money's worth. I hate that *we* paid today for *them* to get together and play in the *roda*...” (student's (4 years) remarks as collected in fieldnotes). The economic capital that she had deployed to participate in the special event that day, while it gave her access to the workshop, did not

grant her any special access to the *roda* itself, where she had been unable to go in and experience capoeira in all its improvised complexity. The *roda* clearly set limits to the power of economic capital: a player's experience of capoeira, that is, the deep knowledge acquired through his participation in countless other *rodas*, his capacity to effectively fight his way to the center space, his position and recognition within the community hierarchy, all these elements that have traditionally governed the *roda* were still crucially more important in determining who had access to the *roda* than the students' prior act of consuming the workshop as a service. It was clear from this *roda* (and many more throughout my fieldwork) that the *roda* recognizes embodied cultural capital much more than it does economic capital, which explains why the students present that day, despite having paid for the workshop, were not automatically allowed in the coveted center space, particularly if they were incapable of accessing it through the application of skills that conveyed their understanding of the practice's traditional system of knowledge. A subtle balance between the relatively established hierarchy of practice (signified by the cord system as well as personal alliances) and a survival-of-the-fittest type of logic were definitely at play in determining who would be able to access the center of the performative space.

'Client' satisfaction for those who had participated in the workshop clearly did not matter to those capoeiristas who showed up expressly for the *roda* and took control of it with a disregard for any outside conventions that would hamper their impulse and legitimacy (as higher ranked practitioners) to play capoeira. In fact, Mestre Lagartixa did little to thwart the specific synergy and he let the *roda* unfold with no concern for his

students who had paid to participate yet were quite obviously excluded. Only once did he stop the *roda*; aware of the exclusions that were happening, he told his students that if they did not fight their way in, his friends and he would simply continue to play and control the *roda*. In reality, I tend to analyse this comment more as a defiant [pedagogical?] tease, a provocation almost, rather than as a real attempt to change the dynamic of the *roda*. Indeed, it is the only, very rhetorical, intervention that he made, and he took no action to change the dynamic of the *roda* after this clearly ineffective verbal intervention. Other forces were at play that were stronger than those framing the event's external structure, namely the market sustaining it. Indeed, the very existence of that *roda* was contingent on the creation of a market-base of students willing to pay for the workshop. Only by successfully mobilizing this economic capital could Lagartixa subsidize the travel of the mestre he had invited from Florida to teach, and potentially profit from the endeavour. Yet, even though a market-driven organization gave tangible structure to this entire event and made its realization possible, when it came down to capoeira, the market's overarching order was lost to the logic of the *roda*.

Despite the above quoted student's reaction, prompted by a very specific situation, practitioners generally agree that the *roda should not* be subjected to economic relations. When I asked practitioners at large if they had ever felt uncomfortable paying for capoeira, many pointed to situations involving the *roda*. One student recalled that he refused to pay \$5 to participate in a so-called "open *roda*". To his mind, the *roda* should not be about money, particularly if it is designated as 'open'. On the contrary, he said:

it is precisely there [in the *roda*] that the spirit of capoeira should logically come together [sic]. The *roda* is really the center of capoeira. It is really the thing that should be free and that should be completely outside constraints, where everybody can [participate], whether you are poor, rich, white or black – everybody can get in. (student interview, 4-5 years)

Similarly, another senior student explained that while she appreciated why she should pay when she takes a workshop, because such special events cost a lot to organize and they provide a service to those who attend them, she felt differently about paying for a *roda*:

When it came to *roda*, I felt like you're gonna give your energy and add to it. So sometimes I felt like: 'oh, I'm paying for a *roda*?! When I'm actually coming to help you guys, you know, with my attitude and you know, give information back to you and have a good exchange. Those types of things [have always made me feel like] *rodas* should be free because you're inviting people. [...] To me it was all about the energy to have a good *roda* [so you invite the most people possible to have the best energy possible]. But then people, they come and [if they have to] pay, sometimes they don't come with the same energy... when they find out they have to pay it's like: 'Oh, we have to pay for a *roda*?'... [then she mimicks someone's disappointment whose energy goes down] (student interview, 13 years)

Practitioners generally agree that the *roda* should not be commodified, a tendency I attribute to the fact that the *roda* is the essential place of capoeira's performance; capoeira only really comes to its full materialization in the *roda* where the games are improvised, the outcomes are uncertain, and the balance of power is unstable and always potentially changing. Only in those conditions will capoeiristas come together to play,

compete, and collectively create energy – *axé* – all of which then drives the *roda* and the interactions therein.

The attitude of the mestres in the particular case discussed here further confirms that the *roda* is a space of exception within the economic organization of capoeira at large. Their eagerness to play, their disregard for the other students, suggests that they still hold the *roda* as the space where they can experience capoeira fully. In the improvised situations generated by the *roda*, they may flaunt their distinctive experience and their understanding of capoeira's specific system of knowledge. It is also the place where they update and rejuvenate this pragmatic knowledge of capoeira and keep their embodied and mental skills sharp. Finally, the unstable balance of power and ongoing fight for the center space makes the *roda* a perfect place for them to negotiate and assert their status by displaying their “*roda-know-how*”. In sum, the *roda* works as an essential barometer of practice, the place where practitioners are judged for their embodied capital and situated within the hierarchy of practice. In their entrepreneurial careers, the mestres adapted multiple dimensions of their practice to accommodate profit, to build their cultural economy, or even to manipulate affect, but their attitude in the *roda* indicates their desire to maintain that circle as an untouched space of performance of capoeira as they have learnt and understand it.

### **6.2.2. ‘Brazil frame’ not valid in the *roda***

Another student's reaction reveals that the *roda* also sets limits to the Brazil frame's capacity to shed light on the meanings of capoeira and add value to the practice.

As we were walking toward the change room after the *roda*, my eyes caught those of an intermediate level, female practitioner. Her exasperated gaze silently commented on how difficult it was to play in the *roda* that day. It did not take her long to start venting:

Did you see how many women played? Two or three and that's it. [...] They just wouldn't let us play, that's ridiculous. That makes me so pissed off. Then they go and call you '*meu amor*' [my love]: "let me get in the *roda meu amor*". F\*\*\* that – first, I'm not your *amor*, and second, let me play. That makes me so pissed off because this is just plain ignorance. They just don't realize that it could be fulfilling to play with women too, because it makes for a dialogue, we play differently, we add things to the game... it just makes the conversation richer. But no, they keep going on in their f\*\*\*ing *macho* energy... (student remarks as collected in fieldnotes).

Her strong reaction reveals the disconnect between the semantic frame that provides meanings to capoeira at large and the specific codes of the *roda*. This clash between the economy of cultural difference in which the resource circulates and the traditional 'economy' of the *roda* is apparent in the gender dynamics characteristic of each. The student's irritation with being called '*meu amor*' as she is bypassed in the *roda* shows that the economy of cultural difference, where the Brazil frame gives a positive and inclusive connotation to gender relations, usually read as affective, sensual and seductive, does not apply to relations between female and male participants in the *roda*. While seductive, affective interactions between members of the community may enhance capoeira's value in the cultural economy, in the *roda*, women tend to loathe being treated with seductive innuendos, because they have excluding, belittling effects. In the traditionally male-dominated *roda* where women are still struggling to carve their own

space, the seductive power of Brazilian mestres is not perceived as ‘sexy’ as it is in the Brazil frame; rather, it is perceived as a *machista*, “ignorant”, almost condescending attitude that too often excludes women from the *roda*. The ‘female gaze’ discussed in Chapter Four as a mechanism responsible for capoeira’s valuation as a sexy activity, operates quite differently when women are competing to play and to assert themselves in the *roda*, a space traditionally reserved to men. The masculinity on display is no longer read in its exotic difference but is perceived with exasperation, frustration, and even with ‘disgust’. This is in fact the term another female student used to express her reaction to that same *roda*, which she described as “a situation where I felt that the egos of men were just mounting. It was visibly like I was watching a volcano mount. [...] I was like: ‘Wow, this is just so *clear*’. Like they were ripping their shirts off [...]”. (student interview, 4 years)

The masculinity on display in that particular *roda* was read as a factor of exclusion by these women who wanted to play capoeira. Even though they also might have engaged in seductive behaviour with these same mestres outside the *roda*, *in the roda*, they expected another ethos to regulate their interactions. And in fact, this is exactly what happened: while the ‘*meu amor*’ may have slipped from the male practitioners’ mouths, these men were not treating women as potential prey for their seductive endeavours. On other occasions, I saw mestres attempt to seduce women capoeiristas by facilitating their access to the center of the *roda*, or playing repeatedly with them and making them feel included. Here, on the contrary, mestres did not treat women differently: they bypassed them to go play in the *roda*, just like they did any other

capoeirista standing in their way. The competitive objectives of the *roda* and the desire to play superseded other gender dynamics informed by semantic fields and systems of representations external to the *roda*.

These women's struggle to access the *roda* that day should not be solely attributed to gender. The specific selection of mestres present, their own motives and personalities, all led to this highly exclusive *roda* where the highest ranked capoeiristas' desire to play, fuelled by their competitive hubris, simply took over the event. Yet this is representative, I suggest, of the specific dynamics that drive the *roda* itself, those that constitute the system of knowledge traditionally defining capoeira. These traditions still structure capoeira's quintessential performance space, the *roda*, even though other processes may now also govern capoeira's circulation (as commodity, as reified representation of Brazilian culture). The *roda* creates boundaries that exclude those who cannot navigate and are not part of this system of knowledge.

One last example will finalize my first argument for this chapter, which is to demonstrate that the various frames through which I have explored capoeira's new valuations become less significant in the *roda*. As we will now see, *rodas* also downplay the significance of the affective bonds of friendships created during training sessions and social activities, as seen in Chapter Five. In contrast to the relatively inclusive nature of the affective community, *rodas* such as the one described above exemplify how exclusive the performance of capoeira can be, despite the increasing number of practitioners that take part in the community of practice at large.

### **6.2.3. The *roda* disregards affective bonds**

The difference between the capoeira scene in Montreal and New York reveals the specific resistance of the *roda* to the affective relations uniting the members of the capoeira community. In Montreal, the capoeira community is still small. At the time of my research, there were not a lot of open *rodas* where capoeiristas from different groups gathered and played against one another. Rather, the *rodas* I observed were mainly attended by students of Mestre Pantera's group – with the exception of special events that people from out of town attended. This made the difference between the affective community and the *roda* harder to establish. Bonds of friendship more likely interfered with embodied interactions in the *roda*: people tended to be nicer to one another and downplay the competitive interactions that usually arise in *rodas*. I have seen many capoeiristas avoid bypassing their friends and let one another access the center space by respecting some sort of 'fair' order – that is, if they saw that someone had been waiting to get in for a long time, they would give him a friendly nudge to make sure he got his chance to play. The *rodas* in Montreal were permeable to the affective relations and this lessened the competitive tensions and exclusions generally inherent to the practice.

According to some participants, this change in the organization of the *rodas* impaired their very essence because it fundamentally changed their dynamics and the necessity to possess the specific knowledge that has traditionally characterized capoeira. In other words, it was no longer necessary to have and to display embodied cultural capital in order to access the *roda*, and this arguably fundamentally disrupted the community's traditional system of distinction. One senior Canadian student even

questioned the very presence of capoeira in Montreal given the absence of ‘real’ *rodas*. He deplored the fact that capoeira did not materialize fully in Montreal, because the *rodas* lacked the element of surprise and tension that triggers the performance of capoeira. He explained:

[in Montreal] we don’t live the reality of capoeira [...] [We would only live it] if we could go to *rodas* here and there two or three times a week, and that there was a tension already there. You know, a normal capoeira tension. Not, not, not... I am not talking about fights within capoeira or anything like that, but a tension: a certain ambiance where you go and you really play capoeira. And, hum... you may have a relationship already established, but maybe you don’t. You know? You don’t know it. You don’t necessarily know who you’re playing with, so you can play your game with no hard feelings. If there were *rodas* [where this] surprise effect [were present], where you could play your game and apply capoeira in life at large, [then we could finally live capoeira in Montreal]. (student interview, 10 years)

This student, who had experience of *rodas* in many places around the world, felt that the *rodas* in Montreal were missing the crucial tension that forces practitioners to assert themselves and display their expertise in the *roda*. When he compared the *rodas* in Montreal to those in Brazil, he realized that it was so much easier to get in the circle of play in Montreal because participants did not have to assert themselves and define their identity as capoeiristas; that is, they did not have to build their reputation by showing expertise and embodied cultural capital, they did not particularly try to define their place within the hierarchy and competitive tensions that make up *rodas*. In other words, he suggested (and I further observed) that in Montreal, many practitioners did not have to

compete, fight, and show their understanding of the particular system of knowledge that since capoeira's inception has forged 'capoeiristas players'. He bemoaned that people in Montreal too easily accessed the *roda* based on their mere participation in the affective community.

In New York, by contrast, the community is much larger and there are regularly *rodas* where practitioners do not know all the other players. This contributes to the creation of the crucial capoeira tension that the student above lamented was missing in Montreal: if you do not know your opponents, you do not have a preconceived notion of their personality in the *roda*, and you cannot know what kind of game will unfold. You have to be prepared to respond to any situation, to defend yourself, and to mobilize your capoeira skills. This is probably the reason why, in New York, Mestre Lagartixa kept repeating to his students that they have to go play in other groups' open *rodas* if they want to be recognized as capoeiristas. Mestre Lagartixa is unequivocal: he constantly reminds his students that it is too easy to play only amongst themselves. "You know each other too well", he often claims, "both in and out of the *roda*." Confirming Lagartixa's assertions, when I accompanied some of his students to open *rodas*, they had to fight to make their way into the *roda* much more than they did in the *rodas* organized in their own academy.

The examples discussed above point to the limits of the interpretive frames I have used previously to understand capoeira as a resource. Having said this, the *roda* remains a live, organic and always shifting performance. While it draws on a system of knowledge that organizes its interactions and form, it is also always embedded in a context where

other factors influence its course. Only on rare occasions did I observe *rodas* where the factors linking participants outside the *roda* (their relation of economic exchange, their affective bonds) had absolutely no repercussion on the course of the performance (as was the case in the *roda* discussed above). For example, even though most practitioners agree that money should not have any special influence on the *roda*, some mestres make sure, during workshop *rodas* like the one described above, that there is at least one moment where those who paid are able to play so that they would not leave disappointed and unsatisfied. The mestres sometimes use their authority to stop the organic flow of the *roda* and impose rules that do not follow from the internal synergy of the *roda*. They may force advanced students to play only with beginners so as to make sure that even those who have less skills would still have the chance to play. These explicit rules, imposed so as to regulate access according to factors that are foreign to the *roda*'s traditional organization, artificially alter the performance. They often create frustration amongst some students who condemn them as disruptions of the organic flow of the *roda* and its own internal logic. Yet the fact that these rules sometimes need to be imposed indicates that the *roda* is usually reserved to a certain number of practitioners. Select players constitute a kind of aristocracy whose performance in the *roda* sets standards of quality for other aspiring players to compete on the same level.

The existence of this space of performance where the community gathers to play capoeira according to norms dictated by the most highly skilled and experienced members ensures that the cultural practice maintains its integrity insofar as it is precisely their deep [embodied] knowledge of these traditions that ensure their access to the *roda*.

But what knowledge exactly are we talking about? Now that we have established that the *roda* has a strong intrinsic organization that establishes boundaries with its contextual environment, we can examine more closely the specific system of knowledge that organizes it. The *roda* is driven not so much by economic or affective capital, but by another type of capital, a specialized cultural capital displayed via embodied skills and attitudes. In the *roda*, this specific value system takes precedence over the logic through which it is constituted as a resource. I would suggest moreover that this system of knowledge not only maintains the cultural integrity of capoeira, but also links the *roda* to the memory of those subaltern peoples who created the practice, as it is preserved and reproduced through bodies in movement. Access to the *roda* is conditional upon the players' ability to perform this specific embodied knowledge; this is why it is possible to say that the *roda* also ensures the continuity of capoeira's residual valuations. In this sense, I argue that the *roda* is the place where the capoeira resource is regenerated: the cultural content at the heart of the resource is activated, performed, and reproduced in the *roda*, in such a way that the integrity of capoeira's 'identity' and by the same token, the quality of the 'resource' are maintained.

### **6.3. THE LOGIC OF THE RODA: A PHILOSOPHY IN MOTION**

While every *roda* is dependent on a particular synergy that is created *in situ*, there is also a vast repertoire of embodied knowledge that circulates in the community and establishes bridges with past performances, thus perpetuating the memory of the practice.

A cursory overview of the embodied knowledge set in motion in the *roda*, while it cannot do justice to the complexity of the legacy involved, will nevertheless point to a specific cultural logic to suggest that capoeira's circulation as a resource does not cancel out older functions of culture like the transmission of knowledge, values, meanings, and in some instances and for some practitioners, an entire life philosophy. Embodied participation in the *roda* transforms not only the body but also the mind of practitioners and teaches them to become capoeiristas, that is, to become part of a collective memory.

### **6.3.1. Roda kinaesthetics: from the body to the mind**

To start this discussion, it is important to remember the kinaesthetic elements of capoeira's definition that I have developed in the introduction (see section 0.1.2). In particular, I described the *ginga*, the basic movement of capoeira and the one giving the practice its distinctive kinaesthetic trait of permanent movement. In the *roda*, capoeiristas need to constantly '*ginga*' (it is a noun and a verb) in order to disorient the opponent as well as to avoid potential attacks. From the *ginga*, all the attacks and defenses of capoeira arise; its versatility and incessant motion make all the snares, deceptions and tricks of the game possible. In turn, the *ginga* is the embodied manifestation of the more abstract concept of *malandragem*, the art of using sideways deception rather than straightforward, confrontational force to dominate one's opponent. The ambiguity on which *malandragem* relies is recreated by the movements of capoeira, which most of the time have more than one purpose or hide their main purpose under another guise. This is why mestres relentlessly encourage their students not to merely mechanistically reproduce a 'token'

*ginga*, but rather to develop their own *ginga* by departing from the basic step with improvised variations. In the words of Mestre Squisito: “to combine consciously [the *ginga*’s infinite] possibilities, so as to be as unpredictable as possible, is to have the best technical command of the *ginga*.” (quoted in Downey 2005, 121). Predictability is indeed a terrible quality for a capoeirista, insofar as the game itself is fundamentally based on the ability to trick and deceive one’s opponent. For example, most ‘attacks’ in capoeira (I use the inverted comas because it is never clear, as I will soon show, if a movement is an attack, a defense, or simply an aesthetic flourish) are not techniques that require brute strength or that directly hurt the opponent; they rather consist in tricks that catch the other player unaware and underline his vulnerability (without necessarily acting on it). A typical illustration of this type of strategy would be a situation where ‘player A’ pretends he is going to do one particular kick, even starts doing it in order for ‘player B’ to dodge it by turning his body in the opposite direction. At this exact moment, player A changes the direction of the initial kick and, with perfect timing, now aims directly at the open face of player B who was protecting his other side. Player A will usually stop the kick before hurting player B’s face, but he will have clearly tricked his opponent and shown his superiority.

There is a close correlation, then, between the movements of capoeira and the more general principles behind the game at large, such as deception, cunning, and trickery. The bodily movements performed in the *roda* are in fact physical vehicles for the more abstract mind games that drive the interactions. For example, one mestre once explained to me how he had developed a new movement. He had been practicing a new

*floreio* (a category of movement whose primary objective is to embellish the game, often by using acrobatics), and realized, while executing it in the *roda*, that this new movement was so beautiful and impressive that it never failed to unsettle his opponent's concentration. He then understood that he could also use this new movement as an attack. On the one hand, he could take advantage of the momentary distraction of his opponent to strike a blow. On the other hand, he could dissimulate his very intention to attack by feigning preoccupation with the aesthetics of the movement while in fact this latter could be transformed into a kick. This example, especially as it was told to me with a subtle but cocky smile of satisfaction, contains the whole essence of *malandragem* – ambiguity of intentions, indirect attack, opportunism, cunning, and wit. More importantly, it illuminates the close links between body and mind in the *roda*.

Playing in the *roda* not only requires a highly trained body, but players also need a highly trained mind to understand and put into practice the ambiguous principles driving the *roda*. The physical training in capoeira is not complete if it is not accompanied by a mental transformation, a process which occurs, I argue here, in the specific – *in situ* – situations of the *roda*. This is why the *roda* is not only a place where physical interactions occur but also a space of performance where traditional embodied knowledge is learned, transmitted, and perpetuated. My argument builds on a growing literature in both dance and sociology which has established that the body is a hinge between the subject and society, or more exactly, that it enables individual experiences of social meanings that unsettle fixed and binary frameworks between the biological and the cultural (Crossley 1995; Csordas 1993, 1994; Ness 2004; Shilling 2003, 2007; Turner

1996). The body is a medium through which one can acquire a knowledge that exceeds physical skills and relates to the social and cultural realms: moving one's body in certain ways may teach the mind new values and attitudes that are not independent of the particular social context in which they are learned. Here, the notion of *habitus* may come to mind, insofar as French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu developed this concept to understand, amongst other things, diverse processes of integration and reproduction of social norms via practices. Given this concept's influence in social and anthropological traditions of thought, and in order to clarify my own assertions, I will briefly comment on the reasons why the concept of *habitus* cannot fully explain the phenomena I am pointing to in this chapter.

With his theory of the *habitus*, Bourdieu (1972, 1980b, 1992) sought to bridge the dichotomy between structure and agency by showing how individual subjects become social agents by integrating an 'overarching' structure in their quotidian activities, daily habits, and gestures that they reproduce non-consciously. While the concept of the *habitus* efficiently points to the social dimension of quotidian corporality, it nonetheless more difficultly applies to the corporeality within the *roda*, which is constituted through a taxonomy of movements that practitioners, consciously and intentionally, learn both to execute and to properly apply in situations of the embodied game. According to anthropologist Greg Downey (2010), who explicitly discusses the learning processes of capoeira through the frame of the *habitus*, the active nature of capoeira training contrasts

with the non-conscious reproduction of the *habitus* that Bourdieu often emphasizes<sup>107</sup>. Bourdieu himself admits that the *habitus* “confers disproportionate weight to early experience” (1980b, 90), suggesting it is usually something that people are brought up with, and rarely something they actively learn as adults. This is why I tend to agree with Downey (2010), who rightly questions the applicability of Bourdieu’s *habitus* in capoeira and rather puts forward a biocultural and neuroanthropological approach in order precisely to qualify the concept in view of the processes he has observed in capoeira. Specifically, he criticizes, like many other scholars have, the concept’s overarching, generalizing, and homogenizing character.<sup>108</sup> Indeed, his observation of the multiple learning curves and learning types in capoeira lead him to convincingly conclude that there is no such thing as a unified “single, simple generative principle [the *habitus*] that creates practice” (2010, S32). There are not, in capoeira, any “objective structures” systematically reproduced, as Bourdieu (1980b, 96) claims the *habitus* – those “structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” (1980b, 88)<sup>109</sup> – does. Students of capoeira rather reproduce, unevenly and messily, a repertoire of

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<sup>107</sup> This important distinction may explain why only a few capoeira scholars have used the concept of *habitus* extensively and reflexively, with the notable exception of British anthropologists Neil Stephens and Sara Delamont (2006, 2013, see also Rosario, Stephens, and Delamont 2010). In particular, they co-authored an article with their main informant, a capoeira *mestre*, in which they discuss the strategies he uses to “enculture” his student in what they refer to as “the *habitus* of capoeira” (Rosario et al. 2010). In this notion, they include elements as diverse as a capacity to play good capoeira with *axé*, to move their bodies fluidly, flexibly and beautifully, in the *roda* as much as on the dance floor, to “appreciate Brazilian culture” and to “develop social cohesion”. In fact, they use the notion of *habitus* so broadly that I would argue that it becomes a bit of a catch-all category that risks losing its critical efficacy.

<sup>108</sup> Such critiques asserting that the *habitus* is too overpowering and over-determining are so widespread that Bourdieu (1999, 7) himself, at the end of his life, was compelled to try responding to them. Despite the sociologist’s response to his critics, I tend to agree more with the critic than with Bourdieu.

<sup>109</sup> « *structures structurées prédisposées à fonctionner comme structures structurantes* » (Bourdieu 1980b, 88).

movements characterized, over the centuries, by its capacity to escape unification, categorization, or any systematic order.

If Bourdieu's pioneering discussion of the *habitus* importantly legitimizes the body and practice as locations of social meanings, the focus of his attention on social reproduction is a second reason why his concept seems less appropriate to the context of the *roda*, a performance of liberation from the outside social structures. Bourdieu's concept seeks to explain hegemonic social reproduction, or how institutions are reproduced and manifested in the bodies of individuals (1980b, 96–100). In contrast, capoeira is a practice that precisely defies external structures and stands against the reproduction of dominant social norms. The movements in capoeira are linked, as I will soon demonstrate, to a cultural system of resistance created by those who fall outside these institutions that are, according to Bourdieu, most often reproduced in *habitus*. Capoeira movements are linked to a cultural system of values that practitioners may approach, independent of their social position, provided they go through a training process that Downey (2010) calls “enskilment”. I thus reiterate Downey's recommendation, in the case of capoeira, to open up the *habitus* to exploration in order to underline “the baroque, diverse, and surprising channels through which culture in training takes hold of us all” (2010, S36), especially insofar as it converges with other dance ethnographers' arguments on the relations between dance and culture. For example, dancer, choreographer and anthropologist Cynthia Novack (1990) starts her ethnography on contact improvisation by clearly stating that, contrary to a popular assumption that body movements constitute an unmediated and universal language, dance and bodily

movement are in fact constructed: they are aesthetic and social. Similarly, dance and media scholar Samantha Carroll (2008, 183–84) insists that dance, particularly social and vernacular dance, functions as a form of public discourse where individual expressions can be articulated within a community space structured around shared ideas and values, which corresponds much more to Bourdieu’s notion of “embodied cultural capital”, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, than to his concept of the *habitus*. Such theses inform my reading of the *roda* where, I argue, capoeiristas acquire through their bodily movements a knowledge that is linked to the specific culture and sociality of the capoeira community.

The work of French anthropologist Marcel Mauss ([1935] 2007) complements this approach with a description of the specific nexus between bodily movement and human behaviour. As early as 1935, Mauss put forward the concept of ‘techniques of the body’ to demonstrate that one’s embodied movements are conditioned by a transformation of one’s mind and intellect. According to this theory, the movement of the body responds to one’s mental disposition, which is shaped by the social meanings acquired through bodily perceptions. This ongoing cycle of knowledge between body and mind is evoked by performance studies scholar Barbara Browning (1995, xi) who starts her book by attesting that it has taken her years to articulate in writing some things that she has learnt in Brazil through her body. While the body offers a crucial perceptual apparatus that allows an immediate yet discontinuous grasping of the world, the mind may assist in articulating these experiences in organized narratives, and is in turn shaped and transformed by this process. Even closer to our topic, Greg Downey (2005) further

builds on this tradition in a fascinating monograph in which he puts forward an original synthesis of phenomenological and anthropological theories to discuss how the experience of learning capoeira necessarily shapes the capoeiristas' mind. He asserts: "The connection between posture and character, between learning capoeira and a growing propensity for *malandragem*, arises from habits and styles of moving" (119). Consequently, achieving physical mastery of capoeira requires a transformation of the player's mental disposition and behaviour: "one can change one's body only by transforming one's character at the same time, behaving consistently in new ways" (131)<sup>110</sup>. Downey's comment echoes Mestre Pastinha's seminal philosophy, as quoted by anthropologist Leticia Reis: "the good capoeirista is he who lets himself be moved by his soul" ("*o bom capoeirista é aquele que se deixa movimentar pela alma*") (2004, 212). This maxim, undoubtedly conceived as a lesson of greater philosophical reach, nevertheless is reminiscent of Mauss's theory. It reasserts the inseparability of body and mind in the game of capoeira.

The transformation of the mind via bodily movement in the *roda* may become clearer by describing some of the specific values instilled in players. For the sake of clarity and concision, I will lump the multiple values and mental dispositions acquired in the *roda* under the umbrella term *malícia*, a close cousin of *malandragem*, much

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<sup>110</sup> Downey's (2010) subsequent piece qualifies these assertive observations. He admits that some particularly prodigious apprentices are simply good at imitating their mestre's bodily movements without necessarily going through any mental transformation. Conversely, other students have much less motor capacities and benefit from a much more restricted repertoire of movements, yet they can overplay the best 'imitators' because they have 'incorporated' the essential wit and cunning of the game. Although this is an important nuance that accounts for the messiness and unevenness of the 'enskilment' process, these exceptionally good imitators' cases should not discredit the argument which applies to a significant number of students who do indeed go through the mental transformation described.

discussed both by players and capoeira scholars (see amongst others Capoeira 1992; Delamont and Stephens 2009). *Malícia* is a fundamental principle of the capoeira game, yet it is hard to define precisely because it has to be learnt and is best understood in the *roda* via embodied channels. For example, Mestre Nestor Capoeira, who also holds a doctoral degree in communications from Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), dedicates 30 pages to describe this important principle of the game of capoeira, yet ultimately advises: “it [*malícia*] is not something that we can rationalize. [It] is not something that we can understand using our mind and our intelligence” (Capoeira 2002, 15). The kinesthetic embodiment of movements in the *roda*, amongst them the *ginga*, is the only way to deeply understand *malícia* and become *malicioso*. As Downey (2005, 131) comments: “One becomes *malicioso* by doing the *ginga* because to do the *ginga* correctly, one must become more cunning, treacherous, playful, supple, artistic, quick witted, and aware of the body”. While keeping in mind that the best way to understand *malícia* is through embodiment, we may nevertheless attempt a description.

To start with, *malícia* cannot be translated exactly as ‘malice’: the English term, negatively connoted, does not contain the playfulness that is fundamental in the Portuguese word. For Barbara Browning, *malícia* is indeed the crucial element that gives capoeira its distinctively playful and ironic character. She translates “the subtle art of *malícia*” as “street smarts, or cunning” and adds: “[*malícia*] is the art of irony, Exú’s domain<sup>111</sup>, and the *roda* is the circle within which all words have doubled meanings.

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<sup>111</sup> Exú is the *orixa* divinity who can establish communication between the human and the divine worlds in the religious ceremonies of candomblé. For this reason, he is always the first *orixa* invoked. Associated with the crossroads, Exú is two-faced: he holds the power to open and close doors, making him both a potential ally and/or an enemy. But he is also essential: because Exú governs choices and opportunities, he

Even no means yes” (1995, 107). Downey, in turn, defines it by referring to the “constellation of qualities” it denotes, “a combination of wariness, quick wit, savvy, unpredictability, playfulness, viciousness, aesthetic flare, and a talent for deception.” (2005, 123). Finally, anthropologist Margaret Wilson (2001) gives a good pragmatic definition of *malícia* as it applies in the *roda*:

it is the ability to make a situation appear one way when it is actually another, to laugh when one is hurt, pretend one is in pain when one is not; the ability to unbalance the emotions of others while giving away nothing of oneself. In the *roda* of capoeira [...], much of the strategy revolves around the players' attempts to deceive each other, feint one move when they intend another, offer a handshake that masks an intended attack, tease other players as a way to confuse them. This is *malícia* and no capoeira player will be considered good unless he or she understands it. (2001, 26)

While I listed these definitions of *malícia* in order to underline its fundamental importance for the capoeira game, I also insist, conversely, on the importance of the *roda* in grasping *malícia*: it is the specific kinesthetics of the *ginga*, its unpredictability, its constant motion, which *produces* the opportunities for players to use *malícia*, to trick one another, to surprise and be surprised. As a practitioner, it is only after playing with multiple expert players, after having been tricked, deceived, and confused by their unpredictable movements, after looking them in the eyes and seeing their smile of satisfaction while they were clearly playing with me and taking advantage of my ingenuity; only after all these face-to-face interactions in the *roda* could I start grasping

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is thought to be responsible for the transformation of abstract energy into the vital movement of life (Daniel 2005, 71).

what *malícia* really is. And yet there is more to it, and some things I know about *malícia* I could only learn in the streets of Brazil.

### **6.3.2. Malícia and street life: Brazil re-framed**

If *malícia* is best learned in the *roda*, it is also, importantly, a knowledge that exceeds it and is closely tied to a specific street life in Brazil. Downey asserts: “Malícia, earned in the *roda* as in a hard life, is the antidote to naïveté [its antonym]; it is an essential skill for surviving in the ‘street’.” (2005, 123) He further explains that the process of learning, experiencing and constantly performing the *ginga* instils into the capoeirista a knowledge of *malícia* that exceeds the movement as such and concerns values, attitudes and strategies proper to specific sectors of Brazil’s broader social life. Brazilian scholars in various fields of the social sciences (anthropologists Roberto DaMatta ([1979] 1991) and Lilia Katri Moritz Schwarcz (1997), literary critic Antonio Candido (1993), as well as sociologist and communication scholar Muniz Sodré (1983)) have all identified *malandragem* (that I conflate here with *malícia* for the sake of my argument) as an important and unique component of Brazilian society. The strategies described under this umbrella term ‘*malandragem*’ govern not only the *roda* but prevail in the streets of Brazil. They are deployed, according to Da Matta’s perceptive analysis, by individuals from marginalized groups who need to navigate structural challenges in Brazilian society. From this perspective, what a practitioner learns in the *roda* allows him/her to understand the workings of a Brazilian mode of sociality from the point of

view of its marginal citizens. Wilson (2001) eloquently describes this relation, albeit in the specific context of capoeira angola in Salvador:

street survival [...] is a vital part of capoeira angola ethics: the players in Salvador are mostly poor, dark men and much of capoeira developed among slaves. Such oppressed groups had, and have, almost no chance of achieving middle class status in Bahia society. [...] The ability to deceive and limit one's trust in others are vital strategies of street survival. *Malícia* and *malandragem*, as they are used in capoeira angola, help make survival possible. (27–28)

While it would be a digression to examine in details why *malandragem* is the crux of a unique Brazilian sociality<sup>112</sup>, I need to briefly summarize Da Matta and Candido's seminal arguments on this topic. Their work in anthropology and literary criticism respectively, takes *malandragem* as a theoretical frame to analyze the structural functioning of Brazilian society. Da Matta argues that *malandragem* is a specific mode of mediation that allows Brazilians, particularly those in marginalized populations, to navigate the structural predicaments they face within Brazilian society, which discriminates on a racial and class basis. For those who face the predicaments of a social ladder blocked by prejudice (or by the “prejudice of having no prejudice”, as discussed in Chapter One (see pages 82-83)), *malandragem* is a strategy of social justice deployed at an individual, not ideological, level (Da Matta [1979] 1991, 236). It allows individuals to navigate an unfavorable social terrain by using what Da Matta calls “the Brazilian art of using ambiguity as a tool for living” (1991, 64). Similarly, Candido's classic essay “Dialética da malandragem” (1993), describes Brazilian society in terms of a dialectic

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<sup>112</sup> I have partly done this in my MA thesis, see Robitaille 2007.

relation between order and disorder where subjects, like the literary characters that he analyses in particular, “dance between the licit and illicit without we being able to say which one is which, because all end up circulating from one to another with the greatest organicity” (1993, 45), my translation). The strategies that Candido identifies as ways to mitigate order and disorder are akin to *malandragem*, even if he does not explicitly categorize them under this specific category. The essay’s title nonetheless gives the key to Candido’s argument, which posits *malandragem* as the mediating agent in the dialectic that characterizes Brazilian society. In a world where everything oscillates between order and disorder, licit and illicit, the *malandro* reigns.

Da Matta and Candido’s seminal analyses of Brazilian society, here only cursorily reviewed, nevertheless confirm that *malandragem* is a crucial social mechanism that exceeds capoeira as such. It permeates a diversity of social spaces, from the smallest daily rituals analyzed by Da Matta (*jeitinhos*, for example<sup>113</sup>) to social phenomena of larger scale like soccer or politics. For example, Da Matta (1982) argues that the specificity – and superiority – of Brazilian soccer compared to the European game lies precisely in the art of *malandragem*, that he describes in this context as “an authentically Brazilian defense strategy, which consists of letting the opponent pass one by, freeing oneself from their attacks by a simple – but precise – movement of the body” (1982, 28). Sport sociologist Antonio Jorge Soares (2003, 151–152) makes a similar argument: “Our style of play contrasts with the Europeans’ because of an ensemble of qualities like

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<sup>113</sup> The *jeitinho* is a Brazilian social practice whereby an individual may obtain a contextual favor by resorting to blackmail, humor, or one’s personal contacts and social network. The *jeitinho* has been analyzed as a specifically Brazilian way to resolve situations or conflicts which otherwise have no apparent solution (see Barbosa 1995; Da Matta [1979] 1991; Merrell 2005, 230–231).

surprise, shrewdness, cunning, and lightness”, all of which he attributes to the Afro-Brazilian players. Interestingly, both authors also make reference to politicians when outlining the qualities that characterize good Brazilian soccer players: Da Matta asserts, for example, that “the good soccer player and the wise politician both know that the golden rule in the Brazilian social universe consists precisely in knowing how to get by.” (1982, 28). The pervasive presence of *malandragem* in a variety of everyday situations of Brazilian social life further indicates that it is a crucial prism to understand certain important aspects of Brazilian society.

It is important to insist that this new perspective, although it offers practitioners tools to understand Brazilian social life, differs substantially from the ‘Brazil frame’ discussed in Chapter Four, specifically in terms of its relation to power. The Brazil frame, we have seen, is heavily influenced by the Western gaze, which relies on the assumed superiority of the West in relation to the exotic other – here Brazil – that it constructs. It is made up of a series of images and symbols constructed from a position of power. By contrast, *malandragem* provides an understanding of Brazilian social reality that stems from the marginalized citizens whose position of inferiority heavily influences their particular outlook on social life. Historically, the figure of the *malandro* – the Brazilian ‘rogue’ – originated amongst the Afro-Brazilian populations who, in the urbanizing 19<sup>th</sup> century, were confined to the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. They dwelled outside the respectable society that the elites envisioned for the country, and thus had to survive through countless more or less illicit actions, from petty theft to seducing restaurant owners for food. It is in these groups’ quest to forge a space of opportunity that

*malandragem* as a tactic was born. And even though the *malandro* was later elevated into a kind of folk [anti-] hero and integrated in widespread versions of national identity, the legacy of the first *malandros*' precarious conditions of marginality and their ensuing moral ambivalence remains. *Malandragem* thus offers a perspective on Brazil which is not filtered by the Western gaze, but rather seen through the eyes of its marginalized populations. For this reason, I argue that understanding Brazil through an embodied experience of *malícia* (in the *roda*) 're-frames' Brazil, thus minimizing the importance of the 'Brazil frame' discussed in Chapter Four.

*Malandragem* allows one to access Brazil from below, from a "street" view, to use De Certeau's (1990) famous image. Playing capoeira teaches practitioners *malandragem* and *malícia*; that is, it provides them with a specific inverted vision of things. Indeed, Barbara Browning (1995, 116) recalls one lesson that her mestre in Salvador, Bahia, liked to teach: in capoeira, he said, the important thing is to be able to see the world upside down. There is a very literal signification behind this lesson, insofar as capoeiristas do spend a lot of time in headstands, walking on their hands, or with their heads touching the floor. Yet, as Browning extrapolates, her mestre also meant that players should be able to see the ironies in life: the history of capoeira, she explains, "offer[s] another perspective on social inequity – from the underside" (117). In general terms, *malícia* allows individuals or population groups who are in subaltern positions to cope with the predicaments of their socio-economic condition. Similarly, in the game of capoeira, it allows the players who find themselves in situations of inferiority to laugh at and play with their difficult circumstances and try to reverse them. This is the essence of

a crucial lesson that Mestre Lagartixa repeatedly passed along to his students while I was doing my fieldwork. His constant advice to them was to not fear being caught in a vulnerable position. Instead, he prompted them to learn multiple ways to invert every one of these situations so that they would not *remain* in this position of inferiority. He taught them that once they began to see a vulnerable position not as a bad place but rather as a trigger to move, an opportunity to invert the situation and enrich the game by fuelling the interaction, then the power relations would shift. *Malícia* gives players the ability to turn precarious situation into opportunities to move forward.

*Malícia* is the quick-witted-ness that allows someone with nothing to find a way to stay afloat and to survive, whether in the *roda* or on the streets. In capoeira, it is one important tactic that players use to unsettle the power dynamics in the *roda*: the old mestre who no longer has the youngster's physical strength can "defeat"<sup>114</sup> his opponent by using *malícia* to trick him; or the skinnier player can dominate the muscled player if the former has more agility and skills. In fact, *malícia* particularly benefits those players who are disadvantaged a priori; it gives them resources to trick, surprise, and grasp opportunities to reverse unfavorable power dynamics. This particular function of *malícia* with respect to power leads Downey to rightly draw on anthropologist James Scott and suggest that *malícia* is a "weapon of the weak". He argues that "experience in the *roda* teaches a player that the game – like life, I was told *repeatedly* – is an unequal struggle. [...] the development of capoeira is often recounted as a series of asymmetrical conflicts

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<sup>114</sup> There is seldom any clear winner or loser in the game of capoeira. There are so many dimensions to the game that it is hard to even assess who won in any absolute terms. Having said that, it is sometimes possible to determine roughly who had the upper hand, who best dominated the other, who was more in control of the game.

in which *malícia* helped defeat superior forces. Cunning was the great equalizer” (2005, 123). *Malícia*, or cunning, is crucial in the *roda* insofar as no rules are imposed to ensure fair play (as is the case in other martial arts or combative sports): practitioners of all levels may participate indiscriminately; all are competing to get to the center space and play, which creates the types of tensions and competition outlined in the previous sections. Yet only those with *malícia* will be able to access the *roda*’s center without being bypassed by other players; only those with *malícia* will be able to keep up the game with players of different strength and styles. This point is crucial to understand the logic of the *roda*: it is *malícia*, the “great equalizer”, that governs the *roda*; not economic capital, not affective capital – *malícia*, the weapon of the weak.

### **6.3.3. A philosophy in motion, legacy of the first capoeiristas**

It is possible to see in *malícia* the legacy of the slaves who created capoeira in colonial society. In fact, many practitioners draw on historical explanations when they interpret the presence of such strategies in the game of capoeira. They suggest that the character and living conditions of the first practitioners shaped the kinesthetic of capoeira such that the game offers a window into the past. It is important to acknowledge that these capoeiristas’ accounts constitute constructed versions of the past informed by official historical narratives, by contacts between capoeiristas and intellectuals, as well as by folklore and popular myths of origins: this interpretation of *malícia*’s presence in capoeira draws on a memory of slavery that should not be taken as historical truth. However, while the interpretations of this past draw on constructed narratives, the *roda*

as performance complements these constructions and allows an experiential rendering of the past: as Downey argues, “in the *roda*, the past is intentionally summoned through ritual, music, and song, all done to the spontaneous unfolding of the game, so that the past will affect how the game is lived.” (2005, 116). Here we need to remember Diana Taylor’s (2003, 16) definition of performance as “system of learning, storing and transmitting knowledge”. The *roda* is never only *in situ*, it draws on a vast repertoire that it activates and transmits. From this perspective, the specific strategies of *malícia* and *malandragem* that capoeiristas embody and perform in the *roda* exceed the individual who is using them (they are collective memory), they exceed the particular *roda* (they stem from a broader social context), they even exceed the present moment (they have been transmitted across time and over centuries). They give access to an entire system of knowledge, to an entire worldview.

In an original essay, French philosopher Camille Dumoulié (n.d.) evokes the presence of the worldview I argue is contained in the *roda* by calling capoeira a “philosophy in motion”<sup>115</sup>. Capoeira is not only a physical game, nor only a mind game (as chess would be, for example). Rather, it is the performance of a worldview, of an entire way to approach the world, an entire perspective on life. It is the embodiment of a coherent system of knowledge that helps make sense of the world – one which was created from the position of inferiority of enslaved populations. As Dumoulié reminds us:

capoeira was created by slaves as a response to white oppression. [...] It expressed a “worldview” and experience of life, an ethics and philosophy antagonistic to white culture. Prior to becoming a sport or martial art, this

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<sup>115</sup> Similarly, Mestre Nestor Capoeira calls it a ‘practical philosophy’ (2002, 20).

fighting dance is a philosophy in motion, a thought of the body that ran counter to the white system of thinking. (n.d., 1)

Though I am not totally comfortable with his choice of the word ‘white’, I nonetheless think Dumoulié rightly points to the important fact that the *roda* is the performance of a coherent and complete worldview. It is the legacy of a group of people who had nothing *but* their bodies to express and make sense of the collective condition they were experiencing<sup>116</sup>. It is through this philosophy in motion that capoeira is connected to the memory of slavery, because it gives a material form to strategies of the weak. The *roda*, the site of the performance of capoeira, is a system of storing collective memory. The kinaesthetics of the *roda* materialize this philosophy and perpetuate its central elements.

To “be a capoeirista” is to be a small piece of this greater system of collective memory, a select membership which relies on one’s ability to embody specific legacies of past practitioners, both in and, maybe even more importantly, outside of the *roda*. Indeed, if the capacity to use *malícia* becomes immediately obvious in the *roda* where this knowledge is essential and the lack thereof limits access to the coveted center space, the real membership to this collective memory goes to players who are able to apply capoeira’s lessons to life at large. As they progress in their apprenticeship of the artform, students gradually learn that capoeira is an outlook on life that they should never let go of. As one mestre quoted by Wilson (2001, 25) said: “If a person leaves capoeira when he

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<sup>116</sup> Here, I do not mean to reduce slaves to bodies. Each nation that came from Africa to Brazil carried a complex cultural baggage that went beyond their mere body. However, because in Brazil they were brought together artificially from different parts of Africa, they had to find a common language and medium to endure, articulate and conserve the memory of this collective condition that was uniting them: the condition of being slaves and sharing the lowest position of the social order. It was probably in an effort to find a common language that they translated this collective experience in an embodied form.

leaves the *roda*, he is never a *capoeirista*”. I have myself often heard mestres distinguish between those who ‘train capoeira’ and those who ‘are capoeiristas’. Consider, for example, Mestre Pantera’s comment on a big gig he had for a television show. When the person responsible for public relations asked him to find 50 capoeiristas for the special number they were putting together, he recalls that: “I told her: ‘you can’t find 50 capoeiristas here [in Montreal]. You can find 50 persons who practice capoeira. But 50 capoeiristas, you won’t find.’ But she didn’t understand this...” Being a capoeirista, he suggests, involves more than mastering a physical technique and requires the use and control of mental techniques as part of a specific embodied knowledge. In this sense, capoeira teaches players a specific mindset that shapes who they become. Now, insofar as this system of knowledge is the embodied legacy of the initial practitioners transmitted over time and that it constitutes the memory of the practice, this pruning process that separates those who train capoeira from full-fledged capoeiristas ensures capoeira’s integrity despite all the contextual changes that surround its development. The *roda* where practitioners learn to become capoeiristas thus ensures that capoeira remains a repertoire of cultural memory because residual valuations are constantly re-enacted and preserved in the moving bodies of its best practitioners. The *roda* is a space of performance where the traditional cultural logic of capoeira maintains the practice’s core identity.

## **FINAL REMARKS**

While a much more extensive study of the *roda* would be necessary to tease out the exact mechanisms of the embodied transmission of cultural memory, it is fair to assert that the *roda* preserves capoeira's traditional system of knowledge insofar as it is the place where a specific embodied knowledge is performed, perpetuated, and reproduced. The *roda*, where one learns *malícia* and *malandragem*, is an important regulator (and barometer) of capoeira's transformations precisely because the performance keeps capoeira aligned with the traditional knowledge as well as the embodied and cultural capital that have governed *rodas'* organization over time. The selective access to the *roda* preserves the quality of the interactions that occur within the boundaries of the *roda* circle and, therefore, preserve the quality of the cultural content.

Moreover, the *roda* limits the impact of external elements that otherwise inform the newest valuations that capoeira acquires in its circulation as a resource. Namely, we have seen that the knowledge of *malícia* and *malandragem* provides an embodied understanding of Brazilian sociality that nuances the fields of representations of Brazilian culture that otherwise inform, even transform, the new meanings to capoeira. By allowing practitioners to understand *malandragem* in the applied context of the games inside the *roda*, the performed and embodied knowledge resists other reifying semantic frames that inform capoeira's new valuations in the transnational context. Through the *roda*, a practitioner acquires an embodied comprehension of Brazilian sociality and culture, that is, the particular perspective 'from the street level' that escapes the fixity of other systems of representation that are privileged in the global culturescape (see Chapter Four). As

such, the *roda* maintains the integrity of the practice's identity and the traditional elements that have constituted its essence. In fact, the *roda* is so important to capoeiristas that many practitioners consider that capoeira itself would disappear if the values of the *roda* were eroded.

Over a certain period during my fieldwork, the attendance rate at the weekly *roda* plummeted. The students ceased showing up, and those who did attend did not contribute much energy to the event, leaving disrespectfully before the end and, consequently, allowing the *axé* to slowly die out. After a few months of laxity, the mestre, supported by his senior students, tried to bring things 'back to order'. During an entire week, he spoke extensively, after each class, prompting his students to be more engaged with capoeira, namely by attending the weekly *roda*. He lamented a perceived lack of motivation on the part of his students, which both harmed the group as a whole and impaired his own desire to keep organising the *roda* for them. He justified his demands with comments such as "the *roda* is our reward – we train all week to get to play in the *roda*! It makes no sense to train if we never play in the *roda*." One of that week's lectures in particular came to the dire conclusion that if there were no more *roda*, if people stopped putting their energy into the *roda* and did not learn how to sing and play music in order to generate that particular synergy, the *axé* that lifts the *roda* and instils life to capoeira, then, there would be nothing left here anymore; in his words, capoeira would simply die in the *roda*'s absence.

This small episode reveals the importance of the *roda* for the cultural practice that capoeira is. Mestre Pantera's words nicely confirm what I have demonstrated throughout

this chapter: the *roda* is essential to preserve the memory, integrity, and identity of capoeira. Pantera urges his students to take care of the *roda* because he feels, or knows, that without the *roda* the entire ecosystem of values he has created around capoeira's cultural content would slowly lose its *raison-d'être*, its appeal, and would probably eventually vanish if there was no *roda* to regenerate and transmit this embodied cultural capital. Cultural practices can only be transformed into resources to the extent that they have a cultural content that may be mobilized. If the *roda* is not there to perpetuate this cultural content, the capoeira resource becomes increasingly empty. Pantera knows, more or less consciously, that the *roda* enables his students to fully understand what capoeira is, to really process the lessons he teaches them during the classes, to be transformed into capoeiristas through their motion in the *roda*. If the *roda* dies, capoeira dies, he says; but insofar as it is precisely capoeira which is the resource, then the resource, too, dies. In other words, the *roda* guarantees the very life of the resource at large because it guarantees that the cultural content at the heart of the resource keeps being transmitted; it prevents the potential exhaustion and the complete depletion of capoeira's cultural content. The *roda*, where capoeira fully materializes and regenerates, allows the cultural form to remain alive and it prevents the cultural resource to be undermined by its circulation.

## CONCLUSION

This dissertation took capoeira as a case study to understand the value-making potential of cultural practices as they circulate transnationally in market-driven economies. It examined the interplays between the multiple fields of values generated through capoeira's circulation: as much the economic value generated through its commercialization as well as other political, symbolic, social, and historical values, whether they are traditionally attached to the practice in Brazil or stem from new transnational contexts.

Given its particular history, capoeira stands out as a particularly relevant object to investigate the potential tensions that arise when a complex kinaesthetic cultural practice is commercialized. Capoeira is a multifarious artform born from the harshest conditions of human subjugation and it was initially developed as a medium of resistance and solidarity amongst the most disadvantaged subjects of Brazilian society. This intricate social, historical, and cultural baggage contrasts, at first sight, with the apparent straightforwardness of the profit-driven structure that assisted its fast and successful global expansion. This apparent contradiction makes capoeira's commercialization seem particularly paradoxical; and yet to a certain extent, capoeira's rich history is also an important trigger of North-Americans' interest, which thus also contributed to the practice's very commercialization, commodification, and transnational expansion. My initial intention to investigate capoeira's commodification set out to resolve this paradox. My research sought to find out how capoeira could maintain some of its initial social, cultural, and historical value despite its transformation into a commodity which

emphasised its exchange-value in a market dynamic. My initial hypothesis suggested that considering commodification as a process happening on a spectrum, where different degrees were possible, left space for other values to prosper. I nonetheless expected that a greater degree of commodification would proportionally lead to a greater degree of ‘inauthenticity’; that is, to the impossibility for other values to thrive and be projected.

My full research made me reassess this hypothesis. My initial standpoint, which considered the creation of economic value as a threat to the other values, was influenced by critical cultural theories, which tend to negatively assess forces of capital, in addition to seeing them as overpowering. My study of capoeira, however, suggested that the potential to create economic value with cultural knowledge and expertise was in fact the motor of a greater sustainable system of interacting values, fueled by individual entrepreneurship but also socially experienced and collectively perpetuated. My final analysis suggests that the potential to generate economic value actually is not a hindrance to the production and transmission of other values, but rather, it is their prerequisite. Had mestres not been able to commercialize capoeira, as seen in Chapter Three, none of the other processes described in the subsequent chapters would have occurred. The possibility to build markets for their cultural expertise and their embodied knowledge enabled the creation of a greater field of action where multiple uses of capoeira could unfold.

All in all, my dissertation suggests that the transnationalization of capoeira through its commercialization is the *necessary condition* to the further uses of capoeira as resource in North-American markets. When I initially examined the mestres’ community

and their transnational organization, it was in order to identify how these individuals produced economic capital and sustained their livelihood with capoeira enterprises. I undertook to describe these mestres as cultural workers and neoliberal subjects. However, it turned out to be impossible to describe their organization, and even their economy, by resorting solely to a rational, economic logic. I also had to acknowledge the presence of traditional mechanisms of community formation. While these traditional principles, I argued, are indeed maintained because they assist the consolidation of the mestres' markets, they simultaneously perpetuate the historical values of this community of practice. In other words, although I set out to study the way mestres made money and commodified capoeira, I found that traditional values of solidarity and reciprocity were also mobilized and reproduced. The very creation of economic value through the creation of a market base where mestres sell capoeira runs parallel to (and even depends on, in the case of the *batizado* economy) the perpetuation of traditional relations of hierarchy and mechanisms of community formation that characterize the cultural practice and constitute its cultural and historical value.

I uncovered similar entanglements between economic and cultural purposes when I observed the circulation of many versions of 'Brazil' through capoeira in Chapter Four. I found that even though a partly reified and stereotyped imaginary of Brazil was used by mestres to consolidate, even to grow their capoeira enterprise and thus increase its economic value, this same cultural economy enabled the circulation and transmission of historical, social, and linguistic aspects of Brazilian culture. The market base where 'Brazil' was used expediently and increased capoeira's economic value was also as a

diasporic community where North-Americans were in cultural immersion and where Brazilians immigrants met and gathered. In other words, the commercial reproduction of a stereotyped version of Brazilian culture via capoeira's marketization did not prevent practitioners to approach and grasp the greater cultural value of capoeira through processes that did not depend on those reified and discursive fields of (mis)representation.

These findings provided important insights on the relation between all fields of value at play in capoeira's circulation: they suggested that the creation of economic value did not cancel out the presence of a non-commodified cultural transmission. Despite these notable nuances, some important dimensions of capoeira had not yet been conveyed in my analysis. My research disregarded the complex experience of capoeira as an embodied practice, giving too much importance to external elements. I thus sought to expand my theoretical framework with dance and performance theories in order to call forth the tension between the phenomenological and the semiotic dimensions of my analysis. This complementary perspective shed light on the diversity and fluidity of valuations that capoeira may take depending on the medium and form under which it circulates.

Paying attention to the experience of embodiment that capoeira provides as well as its affective value allowed arguing that capoeira has an agency of its own. Turning to affect theory offered a new, original standpoint in studies on capoeira, and it highlighted what I discovered to be a major element of capoeira's raw power, which captivates practitioners and compels them to actively engage in the activity. Furthermore, I found

out that, surprisingly, the affective and intangible experience of embodiment is not only an essential, defining element of the cultural practice in and of itself, but it is also the very source of creation of value, *including economic value*. Paradoxically, it is only when I sought to move away from an analysis that highlighted the external forces that determine the practice and tried to restore capoeira's agency, that I actually uncovered what creates its economic value. The relation of contingency and interdependence between the multiple fields of value animated by capoeira thus became unequivocal. It is because capoeira carries and reproduces affective capital, because, as I proved subsequently, it perpetuates an embodied, collective memory, because it animates communities of friendship and solidarities, that it is such a powerful resource, able to generate so many benefits. Conversely, it is also because capoeira carries a potential to be commercialized in a neoliberal marketplace, in an economy of cultural difference, in a political economy of emotions, that it has been able to transmit, perpetuate, extend and even generate all these other values, traditional and new, in the North-American context.

This novel synthesis of diverse theoretical frameworks provided me with new insights: I was able to demonstrate that it is crucial to take into account human agency (whether it manifests itself in individual entrepreneurial decisions or collective economies) when studying the field of culture, because culture is a field of action. What culture is and how it is valued depends on what its holders do with it. My study showed, moreover, that this conception of culture as a field of action is inherently linked to the extension, under conditions of neoliberalism, of market values to the social and cultural fields. Indeed, the market allows subjects to maintain the agency that characterizes and

fuels their cultural actions: when successfully navigated, it ensures their financial stability while it also provides a structure for communicative, social and cultural exchanges and encounters. The flexible structure of the market also accommodates human relationships and affective bonds that are constitutive of cultural practices such as capoeira. Their presence in turn generates a collective agency that I found to crucially counterbalance the dynamics of economic capital that otherwise characterize the marketplace.

Seeing culture as a field of action highlights the agency to the subjects involved, both those who commercialize and transmit as well as those who consume and experience said culture. As such, my investigation further confirms the importance and relevance of adopting such a conception of culture, initially suggested by cultural theorist George Yúdice (2003). Moreover, by insisting on the neoliberal marketplace as the defining context within which the *mestres* exert their agency, my study shows how fundamental it is to take into account the political economic structure that regulates the field of action where subjects performatively use, act, and reproduce ‘culture’. In this sense, my perspective contributes to further refine earlier Cultural Studies’ celebratory accounts of resistance and the subaltern groups’ capacity to find agency in the marginalized conditions – criticized because it often could only account for a rhetoric of resistance that disregarded the political economic structural predicaments that maintained the marginal people in their subaltern position.

To summarize, capoeira’s transnational circulation has generated a coherent system of interacting values where the balance between individual and collective interests, between personal decisions and social processes, all contribute to the

sustainable interplays between economic, social, cultural, historical, and human values generated through capoeira's circulation. My case study of capoeira in North-America has demonstrated in details the process of *creation of value* through the transnational circulation of a cultural practice. Moreover, the findings of this study suggest that the flexible structure of the market both enables the transnational circulation of cultural practices and provides significant leeway for individuals to successfully combine a need to be economically viable and a desire to perpetuate, live, and transmit the cultural value, knowledge, and memory embedded in the otherwise commercialised culture. Now, it is important to remember that the system I have described is in constant evolution. I could not conclude without reasserting the scope of my research, which focussed almost exclusively on mestres from what I called 'the second generation'. The context and processes are already different for Brazilian mestres who immigrate now and try to use capoeira as a resource in a marketplace and a community of practice that are constantly evolving. It will be interesting to follow what happens as the community grows, with an increasing presence of mestres from the third and fourth generations, including some whose knowledge has been acquired and learned outside of Brazil. In fact, the interplays between the national and transnational communities, even though both remain interrelated, outline an interesting zone of tension on which I want to direct attention for further lines of inquiry.

### **Suggestions for future research**

Capoeira is now undeniably a transnational phenomenon, with a community of practitioners spanning borders and nationalities. Admittedly, the global circulation of the practice partly reaffirms its national affiliations through its specific marketing, the cultural economy of difference built around it, and the presence of an important network of Brazilian mestres who are still for the most part heading the community. However, the global spread of capoeira, its steady expansion across new geographical spaces and new demographics also partly challenges the Brazilians' privileged position and their so-far unquestioned symbolic ascendancy. This incipient shift in authority combines with yet another undeniable fact: capoeira is now a resource of great value. This conjuncture leads to believe that one crucial issue that will influence capoeira's development in the future and potentially shift its valuations will be the multiplication of claims as to who has the legitimacy to use of this resource. Recent measures taken by the Brazilian government already lead me to believe that Brazil will try to benefit from the symbolic value generated through capoeira's transnational circulation. Indeed, if Brazil can no longer disregard the transnational existence of capoeira, it may nonetheless take concrete actions to maintain and even further assert the national affiliation of capoeira.

The new valuations of capoeira that stemmed from its transnational circulation have repercussions on the practice's value in Brazil. The recent recognition of capoeira as cultural heritage by the National Institute of Artistic and Historical Heritage (IPHAN), on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008 (IPHAN 2008a) and some preparations in view of its candidature for inclusion in UNESCO's prestigious list of Intangible Cultural Heritage (planned for

2013<sup>117</sup>) both suggest new emerging valuations for capoeira as it is taken up in various cultural policy efforts by the Brazilian government. It would be interesting to study what forces converge to enable and compel the Brazilian state to treat this transnational diasporic practice as national cultural patrimony. The Brazilian government's recent actions on capoeira suggest that Brazilians – both the government and practitioners – are aware of capoeira's value as a resource and they too are trying to expediently mobilize it. In fact, I suggest that the recent policies supporting, consolidating, and promoting capoeira are clear signs of this phenomenon, that I want to briefly comment on because it stems directly from the processes described in this dissertation and opens to fascinating new research.

With the presence of famous singer Gilberto Gil as Minister of Culture from 2003-2008, the Brazilian government of president Lula has proactively promoted capoeira both within and outside of state borders, creating nation-wide programs and funding projects as well as displaying capoeira on the world stage through performances and film productions. The most conspicuous action taken to reassert the national belonging of capoeira is certainly its official recognition as cultural heritage. This nomination officially “demonstrate[s] the great relevance of the recognition of the Afro-Brazilian heritage, as a formational matrix *of Brazilian nationality and identity.*” (Adinolfi 2008, 2. Emphasis added). Arguably, the very recognition of capoeira as heritage and the overall national emphasis on capoeira in Brazil is nonetheless also a

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<sup>117</sup> A public online petition circulated in support of a so-called “Campaign of support for the candidacy of the capoeira roda to the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity”. See <<http://www.peticaopublica.com.br/PeticaoVer.aspx?pi=IPHAN>>

reaction to capoeira's globalization. In the document announcing capoeira's registration as heritage, IPHAN clearly states: "[...] the practice of capoeira is nowadays widely spread in Brazil and around the world, and it would not come to anybody's mind that its existence depends on preservation initiatives. However, paradoxically, its prestige has transformed itself into a menace to the mestres formed in the canons of tradition – that is, the 'old capoeira' – transmitted orally, or even in a more institutionalized form in the academies, in which the graduation of mestre is still being granted in the *roda* and in which the knowledge is still oral, participative, and based on presence." (Adinolfi 2008, 16) From this perspective, declaring capoeira a heritage and all the measures that surround such a nomination are an effort to preserve the practice from the allegedly transforming forces of the market, of cultural appropriation, and of inauthentic transmission that the government presents, arguably magnifies, as inevitable outcomes of the practice's transnational circulation.

While this recognition may be the symbolic capstone of a re-nationalization process of capoeira, it has nevertheless been preceded and accompanied by multiple programs and policies that all point to the potential status of, and intention to use capoeira as a resource in Brazil as well (although more likely to be used as a resource to foster citizenship and contribute to development (as developed in section 2.3.2) than for entrepreneurial purposes). In the course of its mandate, Gil's administration indeed took multiple engagements towards the capoeira community: namely, it helped create reference and archival centers, as well as promote research; it set the base to inventory the practitioners and map their presence on the national territory; it funded programs

using capoeira to foster citizenship and social inclusion; and finally, in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, it sought to integrate capoeira in the regular school curriculum (see IPHAN 2008b; Adinolfi 2008). To mention only one specific example, Capoeira Viva is an umbrella program put into place in 2006-2007 in order to support and fund projects by individuals or non-profit-making organizations in diverse areas of socio-education, investigation, as well as media production and diffusion. The objective of the program, according to IPHAN, is the consolidation and systematization of knowledge on capoeira and of its diffusion<sup>118</sup>. Arguably, however, Capoeira Viva not only consolidates and systematizes knowledge on capoeira, as IPHAN claims, but it also contributes to *create* a specific knowledge. A quick look at the selection of research projects indeed leaves no doubt as to the specific narrative that is privileged and thus produced through them. Only one of all the projects funded, a book on an old mestre living and teaching in New York City since the early 1990s, accounts for global dimensions of capoeira, while all the other investigations on the list are of historical nature, inquiring the roots of capoeira in different regions of Brazil. They seem to conveniently assert the deeply-rooted national character of capoeira and map its historical presence on the national territory.

While many such initiatives built up to capoeira's official nomination by putting in place a structure of recognition, others rather accompanied this nomination as recommendations meant to ensure the survival and protection of the newly proclaimed

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<sup>118</sup> All the information I have concerning the program Capoeira Viva comes from some online research I did, in great part on the Ministry of Culture's website. Namely, I accessed the site <http://www.cultura.gov.br/site/2007/10/26/segunda-edicao-do-premio-capoeira-viva-2007> in July 2010, but the link is no longer active.

patrimony. This is arguably the case of the Grupo de Trabalho Pró-Capoeira-GTPC, a working group put in place in 2010 by IPHAN in conjunction with other institutions under the Ministry of Culture in order to set a structure for the development of a “National Program of Protection and Incentive for Capoeira”. This group, clearly using the rhetoric of intellectual property, suggests that proprietary claims to capoeira should not be excluded in the near future. With so much value created and circulating around capoeira, and with the geographical span and extension of the community growing, it would not be surprising to see the issues of legitimacy crystallize around proprietary claims, especially with more non-Brazilians acquiring capoeira expertise all over the world.

Brazil’s desire to maintain its legitimacy over capoeira may also explain another interesting measure recently announced, although not yet enacted. Amongst the six recommendations that accompanied the official text of capoeira’s nomination as national cultural heritage by IPHAN, one made provision for legal support for capoeiristas outside Brazil (namely the possibility to grant them diplomatic passports), under the premise that it would facilitate their transit across borders and thus further their activities of cultural diffusion (Adinolfi 2008, 19). This measure deserves attention for multiple reasons: first, it confirms the value, for the Brazilian government, of the cultural work that mestres carry on abroad and which this dissertation has described; second, it reveals an innovative approach to cultural policy which tries to encompass the transnational dimension of the cultural practice involved. Even more importantly, vesting mestres in the global diaspora with special status and rights as so-called ‘cultural ambassadors’ can be seen in

continuity with the efforts deployed at national scale as they confirm Brazil's ongoing attempts to maintain some sort of governance over capoeira even beyond the state's borders. Providing mestres with diplomatic passports that recognize their cultural work for the nation interpellates mestres abroad as subjects of a nation; it includes them under the umbrella of a national project that claims their own practice for its value as national symbol and resource.

It is still too early to assess the implications of all these measures, programs, and policies on capoeira and its community, both nationally and transnationally. Interestingly, the mestres' reactions seem to differ depending on their location: while mestres in Brazil seem to receive these support measures with a relative optimism, mestres outside seem more sceptical about the benefits of government's interference with their own work. This might point to some emerging differences within the very community based on those who are able to most benefit from using capoeira as a resource in the North-American markets, and those who, in Brazil, cannot yet fully reap the values thus created. More research will need to be done to assess how the cultural policies formulated in Brazil will impact the capoeira community and also how the North-American capoeiristas will negotiate their place in view of the recent reassertion of the Brazilian character of capoeira. One thing is certain: that so much effort would be deployed by the Brazilian government to recognize, support and promote a artform still mostly practiced amongst the lower social classes and relatively stigmatized confirms what this dissertation has established: that the mestres have created an important resource out of their knowledge

and expertise of capoeira, valuable enough to compel the government to put in place programs and policies that seek to capture and benefit from its value.

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**Appendix A: Lithograph - “Negros which will be flogged”**



Lithograph by Frederico Guillerme Briggs, 1840, which indicates the harsh punishment (“Negros which will be flogged”) inflicted on capoeiristas. (as reproduced in Assunção 2005,77).

**Appendix B: Early representation of capoeira – Rugendas’ engraving**



“Jogar capoeira ou danse de la guerre”, engraving by J.M. Rugendas (1835).  
Widely referred to as the first visual representation of capoeira.  
(as reproduced in Assunção 2005,76)

Appendix C: Carmen Miranda in *The Gang's All There*



Carmen Miranda in the famous scene from the movie *The Gang's All There* (1943).

**Appendix D: “Blame it on Rio” – Brazilian Carnival in London**



A scene from a Brazilian carnival party in London, as advertised in the article “Blame it on Rio: London’s Biggest 6 day Brazilian carnival Returns”, on the social and cultural news website scoutlondon.com (reproduced from: <http://www.scoutlondon.com/2012/02/16/blame-it-on-rio-londons-biggest-6-day-brazilian-carnival-returns>)

## Appendix E: Muscular bonding



“Muscular bonding” in a capoeira class of our fieldwork.  
Photo by SD Sports Art