"Be careful with the german!":
The transnationalization process of *capoeira*, cultural negotiation, and new possibilities of subjectivity

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As a capoeira teacher and anthropologist, my research on the topic of capoeira has always been divided between practicing, observing, and analyzing. My role as a "native/anthropologist" helps me to occupy different positions in my ethnographic immersions. In this article, these possibilities will be applied on multifaceted and fluid modes of subjectivity to challenge some of the naturalized ideas about capoeira and its African Brazilian colonial discourses.

At a certain point during my time in Germany, I was about to begin a *vadiação* with a non-Brazilian student when the master, who was controlling the *Roda*, improvised a song saying, "Be careful with the German guy, he is better than he looks!" The song was directed at me, to warn me about my game partner's skillfulness, who had been identified by the master as the German guy. Afterwards, during an informal conversation, the same student vented his frustration in being called "German." He confessed, "It seems that I will never be recognized solely as *capoeirista*. Just the other day, a master told me I was doing pretty well for a German guy."

The identity place of the "German," which emerged so vehemently that day, ended up being a recurrent theme during my fieldwork. A kind of performative otherness emerged with the capoeira practice in Germany. The provocation of the master's warning to "be careful with the German" was kindly accepted, but presented me with dissenting voices beyond the normative speech surrounding capoeira in Brazil. This was a warning sign outlining contemporaneous symbolic transformations in the world of capoeira. The "be careful" of the capoeira song could also have presented the dual connotation of "beware of" and "pay attention to" the identity in question.

Important questions emerged from this ethnographic experience: How has this cultural identity of the "German" been developed in the practice of capoeira and what are its meanings? What kind of contexts and borders are produced by the capoeira displaced from Brazil to Germany? Considering "German" as a different identity marker, how does the process of manipulating or negotiating with this identity establish the subjectivities through the practice of capoeira in Germany and, how has this process developed?

In order to answer these questions, this study investigated some of the *capoeiristas*' experiences in generating discourses about themselves and capoeira in Germany. Methodologically, a qualitative and ethnographic approach was prioritized.

Therefore, both participant observation (Oliveira, 1996) and an analysis of visual materials (Head, 2008; Simonian, 2006) were important tools for exploring the problematized themes. These methods were chosen to account for context more thoroughly, by utilizing the research subjects' discourses.

I considered it important to allow the most significant topics to emerge from the research subjects, our dialogues, and my fieldwork experience (Agar, 1980; Kottack, 1995; Latour, 1994). I tried to avoid exaggerated rationality as much as possible by refraining from pre-establishing categories or, and thus aimed to minimize bias in this ethnographic journey. In this way, the present paper unfolds alongside the subjects' narratives, while centering on the experiences that they described as part of their field of reference and identity (Latour, 1994).

Because identity issues are enmeshed with constant efforts to negotiate spaces among multiple possibilities (Deleuze and Guattari, 1996), the research process itself seems to carry more information than the final goal (Ginzburg, 1989). In this sense, information like skin color, race, gender, age, marital status, schooling, and the socioeconomic class was used every time the research subjects mentioned them. Consequently, there is no pre-established pattern of demographic information to be followed.

According to historian Carlos Eugênio Líbano Soares' (2001), capoeira arose due to the forced cohabitation of people from different African ethnicities who were brought to Brazil as slaves. It is important to add to this the historical context in which capoeira came to be objectified and practiced. This was the time of slaves under the colonialist vision, which was shaped by the dichotomized logics of oppressor and oppressed, a time when any and all dichotomized differences could co-exist. As such, Colonial Europe established a powerfully dichotomizing model, which had the ideological purpose of dominating and controlling, of presenting all types of different subjectivities and dichotomies. The focus given to the displacement of the capoeira to Germany, which was already presented by Soares to some extent (2001), brought to light this peculiar relational aspect of cultural negotiation.

 In contrast, strategies of self-affirmation and claims of an African ancestry became the main argument used to legitimize the marginalization of subjectivities. According to Mbembe (2010), the nativist and instrumentalist ideologies appear to reframe the prejudiced status with something more positive. Many nationalist discourses, defending the "rescue" of the ancestral traditions of peoples oppressed by the colonial system, came to light on the African continent, urged by the necessity of untying a subaltern relationship with the Western European culture.

Initially therefore, Capoeira was objectified as a slave practice, which arose in Brazil during the colonial Era. Such a construction, which uses an ethnocentric and prejudiced approach, puts not only capoeira, but all practices identified as "black", in

a place of backwardness and savagery. At the same time, it erases or disqualifies its Indigenous and mainly European connections[1]. Secondly, following the strategies of self-affirmation described above, capoeira practitioners went from being uncivilized rioters and outlaws from the colonial era to entering, from the 1930s onwards, paths of cultural revival whereby they could be considered legitimate guardians of Brazilian Afro-descended traditions.

Despite all the achievements of movements hoping to give Black culture the value it deserved, briefly referred to above, Bhabha (1994) provokes us to think that there is still a long way to go. The author declares that to have a better perception of the development caused by colonialism, we need a language that goes beyond the polar opposites provided by the colonial system. The dichotomies between Black and White, guilty and victims would need to be overcome by a space of translation, assuming a reality related to the phenomenon. The so called "post-colonial movement" emerges as a proposal to trespass the dichotomous barriers naturalized in the construction of knowledge on non-Western cultures created by colonialism. Although the dichotomous bases have been criticized and opposed, they continue to exert a strong, almost ontological influence in the academic production about capoeira, especially regarding the traditional/modern dichotomy and its presupposition of originality and purity[2].

According to postcolonial theory, the African Diaspora allowed the development of an interstitial space, which became a *modus operandi* for the mutual and mutable recognition of cultural differences. With the intention of escaping the essentialized definition that the term "capoeira" has obtained - in large part from academic productions -, as well as to absorb this culturally negotiatied perspective into

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[1] Through the modernizing and dichotomist view with which European travelers, such as Rugendas (1835) described some of the practices observed in their expeditions, we could notice the effort to qualify the practices as Black, Indigenous and White, disregarding its relational end, therefore, hybrids aspects.

[2] We could cite here as example the recent works of historicitian Mathias Röhrig Assunção (2015) that is currently seen as an authority on Capoeira studies. In his book *Capoeira: The History of an Afro-Brazilian Martial Art,* the author follows the path of Capoeira since the XIX century up to nowadays. It seems to me that the rich material presented by the author shows us in a very clear and concise way its hybrid characteristic, the result of agencies and translations carried out in a complex and diversified way by practitioners, intellectuals and academics at different historical moments. As result Assunção comes close to realize the threshold aspect of what he calls Afro-Brazilian martial art, but, for some reason, prefers to bet on the importance of deepening the origins debate. *Adaptação em Moviemento: o processo de transnacionalização da Capoeia na França* (2008) is another important work to be considered. In it, his author Daniel Granada da Silva Ferreira looks over the adaptation and transformation processes of capoeira in France. I think however, that the term **adaptation** adopted by the author does not consider a more relational content of this phenomenon. For this reason, I believe the term **cultural negotiation** from Bhabha (1994) to be more fruitful to account for these transactional movements because of its political-theoretical purpose, even if not assuming the non-equality between the parts negotiating, to perceive the articulation and interdependence of antagonistic or contradictory elements. Finally, the anthropologist Sarah Lempp in her book *Über den Black Atlantic: Authentizität und Hybridität in der Capoeira Angola* (2013) brings an important confirmation that indeed there are many more works about the Capoeira Angola than about Capoeira Regional, justifying that those are within a research tradition that seeks for **purity** over Brazilian popular cultures.

the capoeira context, I adopted the term *capoeiragem* to refer to my way of observing and understanding the phenomena in question.

It is necessary to clarify that this is not a new term in the world of Capoeira, as it is widely used to refer to an older form of the game, which had no explicit norms and was practiced in the streets, parks and squares. The proposal adopted intends to rescue this term, revoking the premises that establish it as something that represents the past, as well as granting it a more contemporary airs. Therefore, "*capoeiragem*" is a more representative term for the proposal defended, because it brings about ideas of action, subversion and fluidity, thus contemplating the relational, hybrid and liminal aspects of the observed phenomena.

This paper also agrees with Bhabha's challenge when he states that despite the advancement of scholarship on colonialism, a lot more research is needed to better understand its consequences. Based on Walter Benjamin's (2003) concept of history, Bhabha defends the impossibility to return or to find the origins of black diaspora practices. This return is not possible because the past is not linear, but rather an intersubjective construction produced by personal or collective experiences, which Benjamin called "the time of now" or "*jetztzeit*".

One interesting point borrowed from Walter Benjamin is that there is not only one linear history that can be followed, but an infinity of possibilities to organize the past according to each political, social, and cultural context. Hence my focus on capoeiristas' experiences could only make sense, even if in a fragmented and transitory way, by exploring the cognitive connections established among the agents through and by themselves within a temporary and geographical moment in which their experiences are being lived. Such connections involve spaces for cultural negotiation to what Bhabha calls an in-between (2013, p. 20). A hybrid site that emerges from the overlapping of signifier and signified, producing cultural meanings.

The possibility of bringing together theory and practice, of allowing space for the dynamics of intercultural and intersubjective relations, makes it possible to attribute contradictions and, sometimes, paradoxical aspects that colonialism perpetrates within the environment of capoeira. The game of manipulation, appropriation and resignification of discourses are understood as relations of power that cross the borders influencing spatiality and temporalities. We believe, therefore, that because the universe of capoeira was built under colonial bases, it is essential to produce research that takes into account the relations established by hegemonic European symbolic power.

Considering all the qualitative information gathered from interviews, which were crossed with migration flow data to/from Brazil, and the historical contexts in which these capoeiristas where immersed, I divided the experiences into three temporal and spatial groups. First, in the 1970s and 1980s, when the first Brazilian

capoeiristas arrived in Europe to join musical tours, a time when emigrations flows to Brazil was still hegemonic. Second, in the 1990s, when there was an exponential increase in *capoeiristas'* immigration from Brazil to teach capoeira in Europe, a time during which capoeira was established as a complex international "field of power". Third, following the migration phenomenon of "circularity" in the 21st century, capoeira began to be presented transnationally, whilst its networks and circuits of events reinforced capoeira's continuity.

Questions surrounding the construct of cultural identity and its possible subjectivities were dealt with during the analysis of all the ethnographic material present in these three periods. I concluded by proposing the idea of *"Capoeiragem In-Between"*; a *modus operandi* particular to the world of capoeira and made possible by the African diaspora. *Capoeiragem* In-Between can be understood as a tool for maintaining temporal and spatial displacements to this day. The process, once used by the colonial oppressors to merge different African ethnicities with those of Lusophones and Amerindians, now engenders opportunities for practitioners around the world to merge borders and manipulate symbols, giving them further meaning.

1. The First "Gingas" in Europe – the propagation of the idea of Brazilianess and the notion of the capoeira circuits

As a starting point, it is important to understand the legitimate discourse surrounding the practice of capoeira as an offshoot of the African Diaspora in Brazil (Soares, 2001) – a forceful dislocation *en masse* of African populations to the Americas that produced what Gilroy called a Black Atlantic of cultural hybridity [2002]. The Black Atlantic, and the hegemonic colonial power it possessed, imposed a black, slave, and subaltern identity upon different African populations throughout the American continent.

With the advent and end of WWII, a decisive change in this colonial scenario occurred. A new global order and the weakening of colonial control established a more positive space of subjectivity for African populations around the world. During this period of political unrest, actors fought various different agendas for the recognition and valorization of black cultures around the world. Some attempts were more cultural and subjective, like the Jamaican Rastafari, while others were more political, like the nationalist movements for independence in Africa and the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S.

Miecio Askanasy, a Jewish Polish-German journalist, followed the migration tendency to Brazil and, following WWII, moved from Wien to live in Rio de Janeiro from 1940 and 1950. There, Askanasy saw touristic folkloric performances, met talented artists, researched them, and finally became the first agent of a troupe of

Brazilian dancers, musicians, and singers that migrated to Europe. In 1951, the now entrepreneur organized a performance called *Brasiliana*, in which most of the artists were black, and its theme was African Brazilian rhythms. The troupe went on a year-long tour that covered the main European capitals.

Image 1 – *Brasiliana* arrives in Europe in 1951. On the right is Miecio Askanasy. Source: Mestre Martinho Fiúza's personal collection.

According to Assis and Sasaki (2001), in the 1970s, academics still considered Brazil a "receptor of migrations," and therefore saw the afore-mentioned performances as isolated cases not worthy of much attention. Notwithstanding, an important link was forming, one that connected different temporalities and spatialities, and that paved the way for the internationalization of *capoeira*. Miecio Askanasy's experience of displacement from Europe to Brazil allowed for a particular perspective to form, that of the European socio/cultural view of Brazil. I believe that this encounter invented a dichotomized image of Brazil/Germany which remains a very powerful identity model to this day.

Meste Martinho Fiuza, born in 1952 in the countryside of Bahia, would be the first capoeirista to settle in Europe, in the early 70s, thanks to the dance spectacle called *Brasil Tropical*. The festival was organized by Edvaldo Carneiro e Silva (Mestre Camisa Roxa) – one of the best known disciples of Mestre Bimba[3] – and managed by Miecio Askanasy.

> On March 12, 1973, my birthday, we left the old dance group "Furacões da Bahia", travelling from Salvador to Rio de Janeiro. We spent about three days there and on the 15th we took a ship to Europe. For the 15 days from Rio de Janeiro to Lisbon we presented capoeira and dance

performances on the ship. By doing these shows we got a good discount on the tickets. We performed in Brazil between 1970 and 1973 sometimes without receiving any payment, so the help we were given was mainly to make new clothes for the shows and tickets. Our manager (Miecio Askanasy), who already had another dance group called "Brasiliana", did not want to risk by banking everything. (Information obtained through interviews, July-November 2013).

The manager had a concert agency in Munich, where everything was organized and with whom he maintained correspondence while on tour, which began with a six-month contract to perform in the former German Democratic Republic. At the beginning of April that same year, the shows began. First at the *Frederichstadt-Palast* Theater in Berlin, then in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia. It was almost a show a day across both capitals and smaller cities.

Image 3 – Group *Brasil Tropical* during a performance in Europe in 1975. Mestre Martinho Fiúza is on the left playing *berimbau*. Source: Mestre Martinho Fiúza's personal collection.

The Brazil Tropical show travelled through different, and sometimes antagonistic, symbolic systems, such as South and Southeast Brazil and then Eastern and Western Europe. This created visibility and recognition both in and out of Brazil, but also generated some points of resistance.

> Some people say that the problem with capoeira in Europe was that it was started by the dancers. That's the biggest nonsense they could say, because who of these masters would do what we

did? We performed almost every day, 30 shows per month, making Brazil known everywhere in Europe, from East to West. At the time we did shows on big TV channels. How many of them would be willing to do this? Because we did. Showing, practicing and teaching capoeira. (Interview notes between July-November 2013)

A situation of disputes began over which image of Brazil - and which of its identity symbols, such as capoeira – was to be presented abroad. It is clear that the pioneering and enthusiasm of these artists turned the parafolk image of Brazil into a tool with which to embrace *Brasilidade* throughout Europe. This set out the path for those that would come later, not only for *capoeiristas* but for any artists that followed from Brazil to Europe.

Many *capoeiristas* took advantage of the visibility *capoeira* had gained through Brazilian cultural performances, and of the support it gained through black culture in Europe, to invest in independent endeavors along the main metropolises. According to Nestor Capoeira (1995), in 1979 there were at least ten *capoeiristas* teaching and performing capoeira all around Europe.

The first to establish themselves in Germany chose, since the beginning of the 1970s and during the 1980s, the most expressive German cities that were already great centers of migration at that time. So Munich, Hamburg, and Berlin were where the first masters of capoeira settled in Germany. Together with master Samara in Amsterdam, they developed an annual circuit of capoeira event based on solidarity and brotherhood. Therefore, *O Evento de Páscoa* of Mestre Samara was created in Amsterdam, as well as the so-called *Nosso Encontro* in Berlin that took place during the *Himmelfahrt* organized by Mestre Saulo, in addition to the Summer Festival under the tutelage of Mestre Paulo Serqueira.

All the events took place in spring/summer, in three very different cities representing the diversity and cultural and political complexity of Germany. There was a certain environment of reciprocity whereby people circulated through all the summer events, which created partnerships and shared experiences.

According to Mestre Saulo it was necessary for *capoeiristas* to find each other, to exchange experiences, even to practice and train. In Rio de Janeiro he had circulated the academies of capoeira and ended up doing the same thing in Germany. Since there were no other capoeira groups in Berlin, he travelled to the events of other masters who were also adapting to life in Europe. Thus, the displacement of capoeira to Europe enabled the establishment of connections and exchanges of different cultural references, styles of capoeira and even social status, something that could never have taken place in Brazil itself.

Nestor Capoeira (1995) also explains that, in the 1970s and 1980s, the *capoeiristas'* main source of income did not come from teaching classes, but rather from performances. This is as true today as it was of the circuits of workshops and events that were formed in those times. Particularly during the summer, a period of vacation and mobility, capoeira students circulating between those gatherings attracted larger audiences, financial profits, and visibility for each master or teacher's work.

During this first period, *capoeira* became one of the greatest performative symbols of Brazilian culture in Europe. At the same time, the representation of capoeira as an "exotic" spectacle relied on what Peirano (1999) called "radical alterity", presenting *capoeiristas* as artistic performers of a national identity. Such exoticization was manifested in the pre-establishment of positions in the relationship between the European spectator and the black Brazilian artist, in a kind of affirmative artistic action, politically engaged, which clearly intended to improve upon the 'othering' relationship established in Europe during the era of human zoos. This representative practice engendered a space legitimated by neocolonialism and denounced by Spivak (1989), as a situation where the subaltern appropriates a language, in a performative way, as an Other, taking on this position of Alterity with the intention of being consumed. *Capoeira* attenuated this polarization, but the relationship between artists and audience was still limited to their assigned roles.

In the beginning of *Brasil Tropical*, Miecio Askanasy controlled the entire social and business networks of the tours, limiting artists' opportunities to build a relationship with their international audiences. Nevertheless, as time passed, *capoeiristas* formed peripheral relationships with German spectators, especially through classes, henceforth beginning to gain more autonomy. They would meet during tours and keep contact, as the audience would invite artists to return to give more workshops, lectures, and performances.

Some more progressive segments of German society would gradually grow closer to Brazilians; they were no longer mere spectators, but enthusiastic practitioners and admirers of Brazilian cultures. Brazilian cultures were divulged through capoeira and also, radio, documentaries, interviews, television news, etc. But the increasing interest and closer relationships brought about new pressures, expectations, and conflicts. This "mirroring game" became progressively more acute.

Capoeira for Export – Brazilian immigration and the *Capoeira as a international disputed field in the 1990s*

The historical image of Brazil as "migration receptor" until the 1980s (Assis & Sasaki, 2001) began to crumble with the frequent news of the deportation of Brazilian

immigrants in developed countries. In other words, the 1980s and 1990s was a phase of emigration for Brazil. Between 1985 and 1987 alone, around 1.25 million Brazilians moved to the First World (Assis & Sasaki *apud* Sales, 1994). As a result, emigrations from Brazil were not considered isolated cases, but a tendency worth investigating.

In the 1980s, which Sales (1994) called "the lost decade" due to an economic crisis and industrial stagnation, intense immigration led to strict border control in Europe. The laws that limited permanent visas and the entering of Brazilians brought about a negative climate and an image of undocumented immigrants, criminality, and marginality for Brazilians abroad.

Mestra Maria do Pandeiro witnessed this hostile process. In the period since 1987, she visited many European countries as a backpacker and ended up settling down in Bremen, a port city in the North of Germany. She was almost deported but managed to stay thanks to a feminist group that fought with her for a permanent visa. This is an interesting example of negotiation and resistance, as the feminist group argued that Mestra Maria do Pandeiro had to stay because they needed a female capoeira teacher, and therefore, strategically utilized the historical city's image of equality principles.

Bremen is the second oldest nation-state city in the world; it has developed an image of cultural freedom and customs autonomy due to its participation in the Hanseatic League. These and other social, cultural, and historical characteristics contributed to Mestra Maria do Pandeiro's success. She formed emotional bonds with the city and founded the *Grupo Dandara of Bremen* in the 1990s.

The graduation[3] rules of *Grupo Dandara* are interesting because the group self-identifies as belonging to *capoeira angola*.[4] In order to represent the students' various levels, Mestra Maria do Pandeiro uses belts for adults and *cordas* for children. The master was inspired by the typical dresscode of *capoeira angola* (a belt and a shirt tucked inside the pants) and adapted it to create graduation rules.

In an event of hers that I attended in 2012, the graduation ceremony was followed by some students staging a cultural performance. The performance was based on the Grimm brothers' nineteenth-century childrens' story *The Town Musicians of Bremen*, but with a twist: the characters lived their adventures in the *Sertão* (desert backlands) of Northeastern Brazil. The master explains,

> This is not the first time we use this theme, but now we decided to send them [the characters] to Brazil. There, a *coronel*[5] captured a

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[3] In the event called *batizado* (lit. Christening), *capoeiristas* participate in workshops, fights, and demonstrations. In the end, the masters and teachers decide whether a student deserves to graduate, i.e., pass to the next level. Typically, the levels are represented by the colors of their *cordas*, which are ropes worn as belts.

[4] The style of *capoeira* legitimized as the most traditional one. [Legitimized by whom?]

[5] In the *Sertão*, *coronel* is not necessary a military colonel, but rather a man who has political and financial power.

donkey and made him work. The others asked for the help of Lampião's gang[6], who freed him from the *coronel*. The donkey was so thankful that he decided to stay, while the other animals wait for him in Bremen to this day. (Online interview, 2013)

The Town Musicians of Bremen is about a donkey, a dog, a cat, and a rooster that suffered bad treatment and exploitation in a countryside farm, and decided to migrate to Bremen. In the nineteenth century, Bremen was an independent city, mostly Protestant, where the commerce through the second largest port in Germany offered an alternative to feudal restrictions. The fable reflects values of diversity and presents the urban center as a place for freedom and autonomy.

Image 4 – Scene being painted by students. Source: fieldwork (Fernandes, 2012)
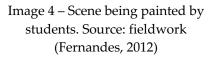

Image 5 – Painting of the musicians of Bremen with Lampião's gang. Source: fieldwork (Fernandes, 2012)

Mestra Maria do Pandeiro's experience represents a period of transition in the context of migrations and the establishment of *capoeira* in Europe. According to Nestor Capoeira (1995), as well as the interviews given by Mestre Martinho Fiuza, Mestre Paulo Siqueira, Mestra Maria do Pandeiro, Mestre Saulo and other masters during the events I attended during my year of fieldwork, in the end of the 1980s, there was an increase of *capoeiristas* moving from Brazil to Europe and a conflicted relationship between different groups and styles began to intensify. Even though we risk making

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[6] Virgulino Ferreira da Silva a.k.a. Lampião (1898-1938) was the leader of a gang of *cangaceiros* (people from the social movement *Cangaço*) that practiced looting and pillaging. Impoverished Brazilians often viewed him as a hero for murdering police officers, who were commonly abusive.

certain generalisations about the complex period in question, it is pertinent to point out some reservations to better understand the restructuring of capoeira in Europe at the time.

I defend the idea that the vertiginous increase of capoeira practitioners during the 1990's led to a proportionally more complex and hierarchical structure of power seeking legitimacy. On the other hand, the military government in Brazil from 1964-85 lay the foundations for a hegemonic Traditional/Nationalist discourse in *capoeira*. According to Vieira and Assunção (1998,p8) *"No discurso nacionalista, a origem remota e brasileira da capoeira, assim como a sua unidade e difusão por vários estados (sempre com as mesmas características), são fundamentais para legitimar a qualificação da capoeira como luta ou esporte 'nacional'"*[7]. In this sense, the capoeira was becoming more mainstream and influenced by sports and martial arts.

Capoeira became increasingly competitive, both in the matter of the game itself and as a traditional etno/national product. This increasing association with sport generated a greater systematization at all levels, such as the obligation to use uniforms, or the implementation of several methodologies and teaching techniques, as well as greater hierarchy of practitioners and the implementation of increasingly complex rituals.

It is a very consensual point of view that during the 1990s the number of capoeira practitioners grew substantively, therefore rendering differences in the field more and more conflictive. What was once just one European circuit of capoeira events based on the encounter between differences, turned into several circuits established by the homogeneity and affinity of styles and rituals. Additionally, contact with Brazilian masters and groups, which were infrequent in the 1970s and 1980s, became constant and central.

It seems that, in line to what was happening in Brazil, the practitioners in Europe started to repositioning themselves to the detriment of the hegemonic traditional/nationalist discourse giving greater importance to the issues of heritage and ancestry. Another important fact is that the exponential increase in the number of practitioners produced a scarcity of Brazilian capoeira teachers. The capoeira practitioners increasingly demanded a teacher to establish residence, especially in large European cities, where the circulation of Brazilian *capoeiristas* was large but did not provide continuity. They were *capoeiristas* that were just passing through for academic or professional pitstops in Europe. With this, a whole new generation of new teachers were encouraged in different ways to migrate from Brazil to Europe.

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[7] "In the Nationalist discourse, the remote and Brazilian origin of Capoeira, as well as its unity and spreading through different States (always with the same features), are fundamental to legitimize the qualification of capoeira as a 'national' martial art or sport" [translated freely from Portuguese version]

In this new model, the presence of legitimate masters from Brazil was almost obligatory at events, because they were presented as the rightful representatives of each lineage and style. People who were previously introduced as random "guests of honor" became mandatory, and the European capoeira practitioners began a process of affiliation and incorporation of these practitioners into capoeira groups from Brazil. This established a set of international networks with Brazilian capoeira groups and European practitioners, each recognized for particular methods and rituals that created symbolic barriers and hindered their cohabitation in circuits. Below, I present a scenario of the characteristics established in the 1990s which are still important today.

In the end of November 2012, I decided to go to a capoeira event in the Southwest of Germany. At the time, I did not know the group or the master in question. I was merely informed about the event through a capoeira friend that lives in the city where the event would take place.

When I arrived in the city, one of my friend's student offered his house for me to stay in while I was in the city. Each time I visited my friend, I was kindly welcomed and invited to teach at least part of a class, in which I was treated with respect as an important guest. After sleeping at my friend's student's house, I went to the gym where the event was organized. It was not the martial arts gym where training usually took place. The event was located in a small town far away from the city, a place that looked picturesque and very calm.

At the entrance, there was a Brazilian young man who had been living in the master's house for quite some time; he administered the students and teachers at the event. We exchanged greetings and he asked for my name to check the guest list. After the pleasantries, the young man could not find my name on the list. At first, I felt a certain indignation, since I had confirmed my presence with the Master beforehand. However, I soon realized that this would be an excellent opportunity for me to assume the role of an anonymous student.

In the end, I decided to pay the participation fee and participated in some beginner's classes to be around students as much as possible. One of the guest masters called everyone to the center and demonstrated two movement sequences. The movements were not new to me, but some details were different, such as the positions of arms and legs. For instance, for a certain circular kick, the legs were not aligned vertically and directed at the opponent as I had learned, but rather in a perpendicular position. The master constantly corrected me until I had learned the movement correctly. I tried to act naturally and to perform as instructed.

The experience described above highlights some of the political and subjective factors that were decisively incorporated into the symbolic field of capoeira, rendering it a multiplistic and sometimes antagonistic space. During that time, my capoeira experience was not validated, because the master's movements were executed

differently from what I had learned, evidencing a system of legitimation that involves the negation or devaluing of "other" experiences and knowledge.

Such internal disputes in *capoeira* increased the need to mark differences more vehemently. The case described above exemplifies how new methodologies involving more control over performance and subjectivities are carried out. Elements such as game style, clothes, the position of instruments in the *roda*, rules, expected behavior, etc. became increasingly important in this process. By this token, the capoeiristas aimed at the strengthening and cohesion of the group or style to the detriment of tolerating and respecting individual differences. Capoeira practitioners therefore began to differ more strongly from one another through the development of a particular identity, based on specific forms of rule, teaching methodologies, control and discipline.

Another essential aspect of this phase of *capoeira* was, as already mentioned above, its use in nationalist and cultural traditionalist discourses for legitimacy. In the case of Germany, this situation became more complex due to a strong aversion, promoted by the shame of the Nazi regime, to systemic oppressions stemming from nationalism. Many *capoeiristas* in Germany decided to practice capoeira as a way to escape the rigid and undemocratic stereotype of Germans as Nazis that emerged after WWII. Regardless of style and lineage, most Brazilian *capoeiristas* of the time used this identity stereotype of Germans as the Other, and the opposite of Brazilian culture. This generated discontent and desolation, especially for those who had hoped to climb the social ladder in *capoeira*.

Assunção (2008) has noticed this contradiction in discourses of *capoeira* as a contemporary Brazilian symbol, and at the same time a product for exportation. Assunção's insight can be better understood through Spivak (1989, p. 269), who identifies culturalism, secularism, nationalism, and internationalism as the four great legitimized codes of cultural imperialism in India. As we were able to observe, the *capoeira* scene includes a paradoxical relation between the four, through which a kind of particular subjectivity emerges and is sanctioned as an accepted identity.

In the following sections, we will interrogate this *capoeira* notion of "Brazilian national cultural identity" and some subversive subjectivities that emerged as a "ligne de fuite". In an attempt to unravel the paradox, the focus will be on the process of negotiation and legitimation of subjectivities by the practitioners, as well as the process of identity construction.

Connecting Worlds: *transnationalism, hybridity, circuits and new spaces of subjectivity in the 21st century*

The previous section explained how, from the 1970s to the 1990s, capoeira was established in Europe in a nationalist model that divided *capoeiristas* between Brazilian teachers and masters on one side, and non-Brazilian students on the other. The construction of this modern dichotomic otherness was directly influenced by a hierarchical and racialized colonial worldview. Even though this model continues to this day, its argumentative power has been losing force. Nowadays, there is a growing number of non-Brazilian teachers who are fluent in the bodily and behavioral language of *capoeiragem*. They administer capoeira groups and associations throughout Germany.

Particularly in the 21st century, the Brazilian/non-Brazilian opposition has been challenged. German practitioners ceased to be mere consumers of "Brazilian culture", to become translators and producers of *capoeira*. This is not to say that non-Brazilians had no agency before this change; rather, their agency or modes of subjectivity were not recognized, and Brazilian *capoeiristas* would often take credit for the non-Brazilians' good results.

One reason for this change is the 40 years of migration that encompassed many generations of *capoeiristas*, some of whom were non-Brazilian teachers and masters. Therefore, the practice and teaching of capoeira in Germany went through phases that influenced its symbols and meanings. These influences work transnationally; the cultural flows are no longer limited to nationality: they cross many places where *capoeira* is practiced, including Brazil.

Now we will present the social and symbolic connections through the capoeira universe of Momitto and Vaqueiro to flesh out the ways in which national characteristics are transcended, thus provoking a mix of elements considered distinct. An analysis of their experiences can offer important evidence of aspects emerging from new elements of differentiation. These aspects give a hint on new strategies to construct alterity in a context of transnationalism.

In 2006, Mohamed Alvez, known as Momitto – a Latinization of the nickname Momo, which is short for Mohamed – migrated from Tunisia to Germany to study Information Technology. In Freiburg, he was introduced to Latin American culture through salsa classes with Ecuadorian teacher Bráulio Rosero, known as Lio. After some time, he came to learn Spanish by listening to Latin American music, and he began to teach salsa to pay for his studies. "The salsa classes were good because I didn't have to work full time anymore, so I had more time to study." (Momitto, informal conversation, 2013)

Eventually, he learned about *capoeira*, a transition that for him was "a natural development." Momitto is one of the highest-level and most active graduated students of Ivam da Silva a.k.a. Contra-mestre Arrupiado, from group Terreiro Capoeira. Arrupiado is a Brazilian from Goiânia who came to Freiburg in 2004, influenced by his brother that had already migrated to Europe, to work as a fitness teacher, which is his main profession.

Momitto says he does not self-identify as Tunisian anymore, but rather as Latin American. He frequents places that play Latin American music in Freiburg and meets many people through *capoeira*. This "Latin American" Tunisian in Germany was one of the key subjects of my research due to the easiness and skillfulness with which he manipulates various cultural identifications.

Image 6 – Momitto and Contra-mestre Arrupiado at the gym where the latter teaches *capoeira* and fitness. Source: fieldwork (Fernandes, 2013).

Image 7 – Logo of *Terreiro Capoeira*. Source: fieldwork (Fernandes, 2013).

Momitto's *latinidad* (in Spanish) or *latinidade* (in Portuguese) can be understood by what Ella Shohat calls "hyphenized identity"[8] (Shohat, 1992). *Capoeira* was inserted in a legitimized "Latin American" space in Freiburg, thus providing a fruitful link between practice and theory. The research on migration and identity in Freiburg by Garcia (2012) proved useful to investigate conditions for identity possibilities in contexts where *capoeira* appears, while situating these experiences in particular times and spaces. The number of youngsters walking in the center of Freiburg might be surprising. Most of them are college students crowding the old town streets and the

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[8] Hyphenized identity refers to identity constructions caused by the ruptures of multiple dislocations – geographical, cultural, linguistic, and psychological – as well as by gender, ethnicity, socio-economic class, etc.

buildings of the Albert-Ludwig-Universität. Freiburg has an eco-friendly image and is known for its high quality of life, as well as cultural diversity. This diversity mostly originated from the university's international students.

Freiburg is also one of the warmest and sunniest cities in Germany, thus closer than other cities to tropical weather. Perhaps also for this reason, but mainly due to the internationalized university, Latin Americans are historically well represented in numbers, in its political and cultural organization, and even activism (Garcia, 2012). In the 21st century, there is a boom of Latin American culture, as the Spanish language and "Latin" music are in vogue – particularly *salsa, merengue,* and most recently *bachata* (*idem*).

These seem to be the most relevant aspects that lay the groundwork for *capoeira's* practice in Freiburg. As Momitto's, Lio's, and Arrupiado's stories evidence, *capoeira* is interpreted through the lens of Latin America and fitness, and this interpretation engenders possibilities for the construction of new subjectivities.

Christoph Johann Maier a.k.a. teacher Vaqueiro had his first contact with capoeira at the age of eleven when he was trying to find an alternative martial art. Vaqueiro explains,

> I remember that at that time I practiced Judô, but I was always interested in others martial arts. I didn't like that competitive atmosphere of Judo because I was always fighting in Championships. It was at that time that I read something about capoeira in a Fitness Journal; it had the phone number of the *Tanz Studio* of Martinho Fiúza. I got in contact with them and one week later I was doing my first class. It was amazing and I loved the first time. (Online interview through social network, 2016)

As explained above, Mestre Martinho was the first *capoeira* teacher to establish himself in Germany, and for a long time, his group called *Contemporâneo* was a reference for *capoeira* in Munich. Vaqueiro was very interested in what he saw, especially the music, which is absent in judo. He was also captivated by the more laid back and relaxing atmosphere, in which everybody was interested only in *vadiar*[9] and testing what they had learned in class. According to Vaqueiro, *capoeira* opened his eyes to the beauty of his own Bavarian traditional culture and region, and henceforth he began to value more the Alps, the Bavarian Forest, its rivers, and lakes.

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[9] *Vadiar* means "to hang around" but it is frequently used to describe a more relaxed play of *capoeira*, in contrast to the environment of competition and fight in other martial arts.
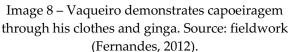
Image 8 – Vaqueiro demonstrates capoeiragem through his clothes and ginga. Source: fieldwork (Fernandes, 2012).

Image 9 – Logo of Ligando Mundos. It incorporates elements from the Bavarian and the Brazilian flag. Source: fieldwork (Fernandes, 2012).

Capoeira directly influenced Vaqueiro's academic choices and personal life. He graduated in Literature and specialized in Portuguese, so now he teaches German and Portuguese, as well as *capoeira* classes. In 2012, Vaqueiro left the Contemporâneo group (Mestre Martinho capoeira group) and founded his own with some students, called *Ligando Mundos* (lit. connecting worlds). Even though this kind of separation is often tense, Vaqueiro and Martinho demonstrated great respect for each other: in interviews, the former showed reverence and gratitude to his instructor, and the latter manifested recognition for his pupil's talent and discipline, as Vaqueiro was the only disciple Mestre Martinho Fiúza has ever authorized to teach independently. Vaqueiro explained that the logo of *Ligando Mundos* is the Bavarian flag, a *berimbau*, a white dove, and elements of the Brazilian flag: the *Cruzeiro do Sul*[10] and the white stripe. The image symbolizes a connection between different worlds, and the composition hybridizes elements that *a priori* would not be connected.

My first contact with Vaqueiro was in August 2012, at a summer event of Ligando Mundos in Starnberg. While walking to the gymnasium where the event would take place, we had our first talk and his fluency in Brazilian Portuguese surprised me. Later, I was also astonished by his dexterity in playing berimbau and capoeira in the opening roda.

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[10] *Cruzeiro do Sul* (Crux) is a constellation. In the Brazilian flag, the five stars form a cross and represent the States of São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, Bahia, and Espírito Santo.

Vaqueiro calls attention to symbolic, corporeal, and subjective aspects that are different from the ones analyzed above. The symbolic uniqueness comes from, for example, inserting both Bavarian and Brazilian symbols into the logo. The corporeal and subjective particularity comes from mastering the language and ginga that represent brasilidade in capoeira. Born and raised by fishermen in Bavaria, Vaqueiro can make combinations of the local with the capoeira that are very specific, but not fixed. I have noticed innovations in every event of his that I attended.

Capoeiragem In-Between – *the transnationalization of cultural identities*

In the 21ˢᵗ century, we face new challenges to scholarship on migration and cultural identity. Contemporary flows are more complex and therefore they present characteristics that old approaches can no longer explain. The new immigrants benefit from multiple social relationships that transcend geographical, cultural, and political borders. According to Sasaki and Assis (2000), the researchers Glick-Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton were the first to suggest the concept of transnationalization as an adequate word for this moment of international migration flows.

It is essential to study migration in a holistic and relational way, in which local subjectivities relate to each other in more organic and imbricated forms. The nature and intensity of these changes, both in the original and in the host society, become increasingly accelerated and narrow links between them and other places. The complexity of contemporary flows invites us to rethink terms such as nationalism, ethnicity, and race by considering the blurring and varying combinations between them.

This section aims to review the exhaustion of the hegemonic model that constructs alterity in *capoeira*. This model probably reached its peak and began to fall along with German nationalism in WWII. This type of nationalism is a taboo in Germany to this day, and this is one of the reasons why the transnationalization of capoeira found ideal conditions of possibility and gained force in Germany. It seems that Germans have a strong predisposition for relationships that supersede closed-up identities, which allows a fertile ground for the liminal universe of *capoeira*.

The loosening of national symbolic ties encourages socio-cultural networks to go beyond the binary "us" versus "them." Before this, the hegemonic logic of closed circuits of events emphasizing the difference and internal coherence of their masters, teachers, and students in *capoeira*, from the 1970s to the 1990s, did not establish many connections. This model was characterized by key factors such as the search for

legitimation and ancestry, ritualistic and behavioral affinity, style, and teaching philosophy.

The networks formed by circuits of events are fundamental for the construction of identity and subjectivity, for the organization, and for *capoeiristas'* experiences. In general, one aspect that called my attention was the plethora of ways in which the "circuit logic" is established and perpetuated. One of the incentives for this model seems to be its principle of reciprocity, similar to *kula*.[11]

Every time a master or teacher invites someone to an event, the reciprocity is implicitly expected for future workshops. Otherwise, animosity emerges and may cause the separation or reconfiguration of the networks. The breaking of reciprocal networks may also require retaliation: masters, teachers, and students boycott the offender's event. As a result, the offender's group loses financial profit and prestige.

Therefore, taking a close look at event guests will provide hints as to the organizing group's characteristics and values. These modes of subjectivity formation are related to the master or teacher's self-image about themselves and their work. At the same time, a rupture in reciprocity may cause changes to their self-image, both in relation to the capoeira universe and the surrounding society.

The networks of sociability in capoeira practices have been gaining increasing importance as great delimiters of alterity over the last few decades. The particularities of these networks determine the conditions for possibilities and the shared expectations of each circuit. Nevertheless, since these arrangements are dynamic and most of the relationships are unstable, the sense of belonging is fluid and temporary. The denaturalization of seemingly stable symbols of identification and differentiation, similarly to the denaturalization of nation and nationality, enable new arrangements in the process of subjectivity construction.

The concept nation to define identities and cultures today seems to be exhausted. The expansion of Brazilian *capoeira* into other countries, such as Germany, created transnational conditions for new forms of subjectivity. We may question then: with all changes, can we still talk about tradition, ancestry or origin in the universe of *capoeira*?

Based on my experience and analysis, I argue that the foundations of *capoeira* are in its liminality aspects. As a practice of cultural negotiation, it is established and legitimized as a relational and symbolic shuffling space. Its basilar aspects contain a *modus opperandi* I call *capoeiragem,* that paradoxically, as a frontier, produces and mixes cultures. This characteristic of adaptability legitimized by the African diaspora has

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[11] *Kula* is one of the main ideas in Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922). It is a custom that involves a complex system of exchange and reciprocity, forming a closed circuit among populations in various islands of New Guinea. This form of sociability generates feelings of belonging while maintaining internal differences.

kept the *capoeira* universe alive in Brazil and in the world. If we can effectively speak of an ancestral tradition in *capoeira*, it is due to its *modus opperandi* as a producer of hybridity, implemented by the colonial oppressor with the goal to reduce and control subaltern differences.

Final Considerations

The present article pointed out a new phase in the process of symbolic and subjective transnationalization of *capoeira*. Particularly in the 21st century, borders that used to be naturalized were blurred, hence engendering articulations once unthinkable. These creative associations emerge from the accumulation of practical experiences in the different contexts where they occur thanks to *capoeira*. For this reason, it is important to take into consideration the characteristics of places where the analyzed phenomena occur, and the crisscrossing they enable.

This study detailed how each city acts as a force that interferes in the process of subjectivity construction and reconstruction. These interferences enable modes of subjectivity formation in which subjects position themselves neither as natives, nor as foreigners, but instead as a hybrid. The hybrid subject is at once creator and creation of liminal spaces, thus reaffirming *capoeira* as an in-between universe. Germany offers a mosaic of regional differences that are not only cultural but also, political and social. Due to its historical fragmentation, Germany gathers an ensemble of independent regions that have their own legislation, dialects, and customs.

Martinho Fiúza, Paulo Siqueira, and Saulo used to circulate in the artistic circles of Rio de Janeiro and Salvador, and this way they acquired the cultural capital that gave them access to a neocolonial globalized culture, which was fundamental for them to adapt in Germany. Black Power clothes, jazz music, and other habits that were disseminated at the time facilitated the masters' migration to big German cities such as Munich, Hamburg, and Berlin. Not different from Momitto's, since his association of *capoeira* with a "Latin American identity" was only possible because of the particularities of Freiburg. In other words, these strategies would not have had the same space of legitimation in other contexts.

At the same time, Mestra Maria do Pandeiro interlaces parts of the imaginary of the city where she has lived for twenty years, with legends of Lampião and the Brazilian backlands. The colorful belts in her group's graduation ceremonies also connect elements from different worlds or socio-cultural structures. Through Mestra Maria do Pandeiro, various cosmologies suffer a process of friction, thus engendering over time an interstitial space that is the space of subjectivity formation where she

reinvented herself. I associate this space with Bhabha's (1994) concept of in-between-ness since it is located between worlds and logical structures that were conceptualized differently, without connections *a priori*, neither temporal nor spatial.

Mestra Maria do Pandeiro is many "Marias" at once. The master used to work as a juggler, and then embraced opportunities to make her own path. She is an explorer of new spaces of subjectivity construction where the woman becomes a protagonist, an active sculptor of multiple possible selves. This tendency paved the way for women to reach higher positions in the historically masculine scenery of *capoeira*.

Liminal creativity is a key aspect to observe the newly shaped multiplicities and constant self-reinvention that show many facets of subjectivities to be embodied. For instance, Momitto and Vaqueiro produce hybridity by combining experiences between their original and host countries. Momitto reinvents himself when he disfigures the implicit rules of authenticity that are usually assigned to contrasting identity fields.

Vaqueiro is another example of a person who develops other possible modes of subjectivity in capoeira in the 21st century. He invents new borders, concurrently subverts these limits, and becomes himself a bridge to them. The logo of his group, which links Bavaria to Brazil, is an example of liminality that his own subjectivity produces. This in-between situation connects various cultures and territories – since Bavaria is a region and Brazil is a country.

Momitto and Vaqueiro's narratives bring light to the uncomfortable feeling or confusion that can be spotted in phrases like, "S/he doesn't even seem to be German," "You appear to be Brazilian," or "You play capoeira pretty well, for a German." These enunciations are common among Brazilians who try to make sense of non-Brazilians who are fluent in *capoeiragem*. The discomfort and tendency to classify others reflect old ideologies of alterity that dictate what it means to be Brazilian, and these stereotypes are naturalized in *capoeira*.

The idea of *brasilidade*, which is usually understood as made in Brazil, becomes de-territorialized through the practice of *capoeira* in Germany. As a result of the separation between "Brazilian culture" and the Brazilian territory, *capoeiristas* articulate new models of subjectivity. However, they keep fundamental characteristics such as *gingado* and the Portuguese language.

When considering language, the role of translators in *capoeira* must be explored. Translators occupy a prominent place in the process of cultural negotiation not only in events but also in everyday classes and interactions. They help to organize everything, seek sponsors, rent training centers, etc.; in this way, many *capoeiristas* rely on translators inside and outside the social circles of *capoeira*. When the translator is a *capoeirista*'s partner (e.g., spouse), the relationship between members is even more complex because emotional, and sometimes, legal factors are involved, as some partners obtain permanent visas through marriage with Germans.

The contemporary developments tpresented here have led us to a better perception of what we call "*Capoeiragem* In-Between". This space is legitimized over time as representative of a culture produced by the African diaspora in Brazilian territory, culminating with the inclusion of *capoeira* in the list of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2014. Furthermore, *capoeiragem* is not only exhausted by the cultural scrambling of different African ethnic groups in Brazil, but also by hegemonic forces and other crossings that occur and determine important changes in this universe.

Portuguese colonization and migration to Germany demonstrate the importance of taking such influences into account so that we can better understand the directions that the practice of *capoeira* has taken. Rather than worrying about ancestry or origins, the present approach uncovers a fundamental, liminal, and intense cultural negotiation. This way, the new compositions and meanings for the universe of *capoeira* can be better understood.

On the other hand, it is possible to understand capoeira heritage through its *modus operandi*, which both establishes and subverts cultural boundaries. *Capoeira*'s mode of operation interweaves symbols and codes, thus creating hybridizations of their own dichotomies. Finally, I hope to have promoted a critical and reflexive debate on the colonial influences that produce inequalities that were naturalized during the process and are still present in both academic and native discourses about *capoeira*, pointing out some other possible ways to consider these issues.

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