The Meaning of *Gingar*¹⁾ for Women within Capoeira Angola

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One may not be your friend if demanding your silence or hindering your growth.²⁾

This text proposes some reflections about the possibilities of the presence of women inside the capoeira, taken here as a phenomenon of specific characteristics, in order to update the discussions about one of the most comprehensive Afro-Brazilian cultural expressions that is now present in over one hundred and sixty countries.

Whereas the complex universe of capoeira remains linked to masculine representations, we seek to understand what changes are debated and/or operationalized in the context of gender relations. This is because capoeira today involves networking in new cultural contexts that is a consequence of concomitant and different forms of delivery and internationalization.

Being a territory ostensibly heteronormative, we can say that sexism (misogyny, lesbophobia, homophobia, transphobia ...) prevents capoeira from accomplishing its goals of freedom. Likewise, we identify within its realms, disputes between gender representations (with intersectional implications to ethno-racial class and sexual diversity debates), which are now involved in new discursive dimensions of the establishment and maintenance of segregating practices. The segregating practices have also an influence in the restructuring of power relations in the midst of the capoeira economy, maintaining the imbalances that result in a concentration of power and privilege in capoeiragem to only a few men. Activism was mostly linked to the various "missions" socially "attributed" to Capoeira, including the struggle against poverty, violence, racism, and more recently, sexism.

Some issues are currently able to update cultural studies in light of its capillarity, and we emphasize the intercultural perspectives, especially those set out in provocations of the new epistemologies of the twenty-first century. One such example are intersectional studies of the categories race, gender and sexuality, especially when located in studies on ancestry, body and belonging, among others. Ranging as the category of greatest tension, what interests us here arises from an understanding that amid capoeiragem some of these issues are often taken as true taboos. We speak beyond the displacement of ordinary emphasis of the symbolic universe of Africanities⁴⁾ versus Brasilities (Brasilidades). We bring to the center of the discussions, also within the different ideological currents of Angola and Regional styles, the many

There are many fields of knowledge that currently include capoeira as a topic for investigative purposes. Many are also the possibilities for new approaches and studies, especially with interdisciplinary perspectives that enable expanded notions about capoeira's complexities as a multi-referential, intercultural, polysemic, and polilogical³⁾ field of knowledge. Here, a major challenge relates to stress the cadence -- according to those who practice it -- or the elements that structure the fundamentals; capoeira is in its own metaphor a circle (roda) in movement, endowed with resourcefulness, and therefore renewals. Being an area of intense exchanges, it is at the roda that values are traded, strategies are made / unmade / remade, assigning significance to communication processes that structure, through the oral tradition, the collections of times that merge and interpenetrate in that sphere.

Ginga (swing) is a fundamental footwork that allows the preparation of the movement variations of capoeira.

WALKER, Alice. In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose'- Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983 – p. 36

³⁾ GALEFFI, Dante (2011)

⁴⁾ In a lecture, the professor and linguist Ieda Pessoa de Castro reccomended the use of the term africanias instead of africanidades (africanities), by taking into consideration the fact that these are African references from outside the African continent. She emphasized that africanities are references that we look at and think over from within the African continent.

beliefs deposited in capoeira as a space of interconnected areas: culture, sports, education, body arts, physical culture, music, theater, martial arts, among others, which demonstrate the diversity, difference and multiplicity of new categories for struggle that are currently incorporated in capoeira.

From within the richness of this debate, it is worth explaining that the choice of the term Africanities is made to better communicate the African cultural foundations in Brazil. On this issue, we highlight here an important message registered in the electronic magazine "Africanias.com - Científico Cultural" at the University of Bahia / UNEB:

> Following a definition of Nina Friedemann in "Cabildos negros, refugios de africanias en Colombia" (Journal Montalbán, Caracas: Catholic Andrés Bello University, 1988), we can understand africanias as the cultural lot submerged in the unconscious iconography of enslaved black Africans who perform noticeably in music, dance, religion, poetry, in their way of being and seeing the world, their language; and that, over the centuries as a means of resistance and continuity in oppression were transformed and became matrixes to a new cultural and linguistic system that identifies us as Brazilians."

Such discussions are welcome in this work because we believe in the relevance of discussions on the African matrixes of capoeira, drawing attention to the mythical and ontological bases that highlight the existence of another worldview (Weltanschauung) that, for the new experiential practices marked by the suppression of freedom, reinterpreted and re-elaborated themselves through the possibilities of dialogue and negotiations. This is where the swing and sway is taken as a meta-language with ability to articulate, in an ad-artistic, ad-linguistics way, recursive aspects of a struggle that is carried within the context of many others. It is in the scenario of these struggles that we want to draw attention to the place destined and occupied by women.

Taking into account the multiple expressions of violence, we want to start highlighting the dismay already produced by low expectations around the formation of these with regard to learning capoeira. These reassert the continued belief in women's fragility and hence in the (de)limitation of the areas

to which they are allowed to reach and transit. This may enable us to reaffirm the existence of a dominant masculinity, whose hegemonic standards establishes valuing conducts of concrete and imaginary practices of a heroic compulsory virility, regardless of conceiving it framed or not within the dynamics of social and political order in the big circle (grande roda). These dynamics demonstrate a community that, originally considered an exclusive space of poor black men with low levels of formal education, has become a more heterogeneous space. Marked by the strong presence of non-black people (in many places they are not even present or at most, they are an absolute minority), the new community presents the most diverse socioeconomic and professional profiles, a result of rising education levels among the total population, in new dynamics marked by the increasing presence of women. In this case, if the number of black men in capoeira has been reduced as capoeira moves towards new social spaces induced by the rise of a capoeira economy (mainly including the territories outside Brazil), the meager presence of black women is now subject of much debate. In almost unbelievable ways it is already discussed affirmative strategies of permanence of black people inside capoeira, including, especially black women.

Conducting a study on contemporary sport as a privileged form of body organization, VAZ (2011, p.849) draws attention to the little transgressive character of capoeira. This is described as a practice that reproduces aspects of the standard male and patriarchal world, stressing that they serve to exalt "elements such as virility, sexism, performance, excess". Thus, although agreeing with the author's argument, we want to collaborate to emphasize here the feminine transgression when entering all-male spaces, especially in the case of a space commonly considered as marginal, being therefore the target of difficult stereotypes to be faced by the idiosyncratic model of our race relations.

Drawing attention to the fact that sport and physical practices are not exempt from "gendering speeches", emphasizing women's participation in chosen modalities or even expressed masculinities in different modalities and their competitions, the author reinforces his understanding of the ways in which

the body gains prominence, taking into account the case of performances, namely:

(...) body experiences - and therefore crossed by language and culture - and are expressing less and less fixed identities, accompanying and simultaneously determining the negotiations around gender, nationality, ethnic, generational discourses, among many others.

About capoeira, perhaps because there is still no unanimity on its sporting character, the studies on gender and capoeira are incipient. The researcher Maria José Somerlate Barbosa, in her article Women in Capoeira (BARBOSA, 2005), drew attention to the difficulty of perceiving the women's influence on capoeira, both for failure to register as well as because this is admittedly a space "almost exclusively of male domain." However, the same author proceeds by drawing attention to the existence of a belief about the origin of capoeira that identifies with the practice of NGOLO, or Dance of the Zebras, a former female rite of passage performed during efendula, recorded by Krab (2001) as the girls move on from puberty into the condition of women, therefore, when they are considered to be ready for marriage and procreation. Although here we have an apparent place of subordination, or "indirect interest" as preferred by the author, we want to reflect about this place, taking into account that this is another cosmogony, as one in which the "majesty" of these young women situates the action body deification as evidenced, rendering them above all, disputable. We must also remember that according to the information we have of Ngolo, at the end, the women are the ones who establish the choice among suitors.

Our intention here, rather than seek historical references to capoeira as an expression of African cultures in Brazil, is to also deal with the female presence through mythological, symbolic and analytical aspects of the organizational structure of capoeira, focused on the participation and comments on their ways to represent, fight and adopt its own aesthetic that allows for the dismantling of the elements of subalternities linked to gender. As we begin focusing on some mythological aspects we seek to value the prospective memory that, composing our oral col-



Fig. 1 Street demonstration during the International Women's Day (March 8, 2016). Photo: Rita Barreto https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10153992990134921&set=a. 10151081405424921.456538.704539920&type=3&theater

lection, emphasizes the very place of Africa in the imagination of *capoeiristas*. With equal weight we highlight here another myth circulating in *capoeiragem*, which can also help to accentuate this phenomenon. This is the berimbau legend, which tells the adventures of a girl who, having disappeared after the action of a "bad man" had her body transformed into the berimbau.

Thus, after we recognize the historical experience of these women is that we can stimulate the rewriting of the history of capoeira in Brazil through the specificities obtained in the trajectories of female figures like Maria Doze Homens (Maria of Twelve Men), Maria Para o Bonde (Maria Stops the Tram), Rosa Palmeirão (Rosa Huge Palm), Satanás (Satan), Nega Di Calça Rala (Black Woman of Sparse Trousers), Julia Fogareiro (Julia Stove), Pau de Barraca (Tent Pole⁵⁾), Ana Angélica (ou Angélica Endiabrada, Devilish Angelica), Cattu, Almerinda, Adelaide Presepeira (Adelaide Braggard), Chica, Menininha, among others. Transiting in public spaces of the streets, and working in various professional activities, these women experienced the sanctions on the breakdown of moral propriety, therefore acting with and "like" men, they were believed to be

⁵⁾ In Brazil, there is an expression 'Chutar o pau da barraca (to kick the tent's pole)', which means to get really angry and ready to take extreme measures



Fig. 2 Photo taken during the event "Chamada de mulher (2013)". From left to right: Mestra Gegê, Mestre Cobra Mansa, Mestra Paulinha, Mestra Janja, Cibele Alvarenga, Mestre Poloca, Tião Carvalho.

http://ficamundo.org/projetos/mulheres-na-capoeira/

dangerous, "de cabelinho na venta⁶", therefore, unworthy to occupy the domestic spaces or being under male protection and guardianship. Actually Carneiro (2003), drawing attention to the "theoretical failure and political practice to integrate the different feminine expressions built in multiracial and multicultural societies," highlights the ignored legitimacy of resistance practices of black women to expand the recognition of the woman category whose abstraction also plays a secondary academic feminism, dependent on simplifying analytical categories. Thus, the author also suggests the need for imprinting both the knowledge and the fight against gender inequality and intragender:

(....) [we] affirm and give visibility to a black feminist perspective that emerges from the specific condition of being a black and generally poor woman, we finally outline the role that this perspective has in the fight against racism in Brazil.

The need to expand studies of the diverse female presence in the context of Afro-Brazilian culture is key to strengthening the studies that present themselves as contemporary feminism. These are articulated in network, which analytical foundations expose the fragility and risk existing in exclusive representations without transversalities of the female presence in socio economic, territorial, generational, religious, body, among others.

Thus, even in spite of the impact produced by the release and contemporary reinterpretations of "A cidade das mulheres (City of Women, 2005)", few studies have shown interest in these in the context of cultural knowledge, and yet those that did, chose to emphasize the priestesses of terreiro communities, sheltered in norms and their own spiritual values, instead of the "exposed" ones, or those who had in street spaces and in public settings, their ways of resisting by being women. Treated as pá virada (bad tempered) women, mulheres de cabelo na venta, as desasnadas (the less stupids), as mulheres-homens (manish women), mulheres valentes (valiant women), azedadas (the sourish), such treatments show that they were, in some way, involved with the streets and in these, with the prohibitive and complex universe of capoeira. Both in journalistic editorials and in the case of prisons, we are pointing to the need for studies that support their special features (although not exclusive), because they are in a living space with physical violence, the courage, the antics and tricks that positioned capoeira on the threshold of order / disorder. The streets as a busy space for gains and the ganhadeiras (those who gain) were often fought against "at blows' razors, clubbing and kicking against whom they represent a threat".

Unlawful ones, treated by SAFFIOTI (1989) as "male supremacy", those women advanced over the binary representations in gender relations, changing the landscapes of recent urban centers, conciliating various activities and attitudes in the acquisition and defense of spaces to be and to circulate. As working women, they performed household chores as well as various other economic activities performed on public roads (or from them), as sellers, loaders, florists, seafood collectors and fisherwomen, florists, *fateiras* (those who cleaned animals' viscera in public slaughterhouses), seamstresses, embroiderers, prostitutes, among others, exposing them to situations of permanent tensions, increased by the breakdown of moral propriety in the form of being a woman.

And what to say of these women nowadays? How to proceed in building a multi-referenced and polilogical research field that incorporates in an intersectional way, these terrains of multiple temporality and cognizant performances, ontological and epistemo-

⁶⁾ Hairy nosed is an expression that is usually applied to women who display behaviors usually attributed to men.

logically supported on the roots of our Africanities, whether or not being African-descendant? To what extent their benchmarks of distinct struggle are able to update in the field of social movements, other policy approaches, integrating body makings? What conducts bring up to date before the eyes of new patriarchates, their conditions of disorderly, rowdy, fearless, or in other words, women "da pá virada"?

Well, even today capoeira is practiced within specific communities (groups, fitness centers and capoeira organizations), and no longer having as priority the space of a "marginal" occupation of the street, which is linked to the occupation of certain territories, where an updated *ethos* on street culture is perceptible, or carrying a potential to be as such. Thus, women move between secure and insecure spaces, the latter being the result of different forms of domination and subordination, including in this context broader taboo issues involving them in interpersonal relationships, or romantic relationships.

So we can have an idea of the use (and abuse!) directed to the female body inside the capoeira, specially worth of mention the treatment that certain specialized medias around the late 1990s, gave to the female presence in capoeira. It was the recommencement of yet another attempt to set up a specialized media that voiced the universe of capoeira. This was a period marked by the emergence of several magazines devoted to (the) capoeiristas, which recurrently exposed women's bodies to the presumed hormonal auspices of boys and men, in ways that infered messages prone to be translated into sexual abuse issues. Arose in the field of media representation, the objectification of the body of the capoeira woman that integrated other stereotypes of exploitation of this topic, by presenting youth television celebrities on the covers of these magazines, or by valuing caricatures of female characters whose fame was assigned through the appeal to the sexual exploitation of these, especially in the case of a universe hitherto undervalued to the practice of capoeira.

However, if we think the capoeira between the traditions that insert Brazil in the context of the so-called African diaspora, we can think about both the vilifying ways of body insertion, as well as, the female representation in these. These traditions based on the very place of older people as essential links with ancestries. More than a body exposed to use, we emphasize a body that conducts senses of belonging, of the transduction of memories that connect in the present, the past. A body that assigns meaning to referrals of future changes. By this way of interpretation, we adhere to Eduardo Oliveira assertion that points out to the centrality of the body in the ethical dimension of ancestry:

The constructed body is erected as a sign of identity of the African tradition: it is a black body, an architect in itself. However, the context in which all this happens, the sign of Africanity is another de-constructor rather than a regime builder. See: based on the general idea of Africanism, which here functions as a floating signifier, this idea disrupts one's body from the modern Western rationality (vertical, static, linear, rigid, teleological, that focuses on the cognitive) to claim the body of the African ancestry, which emphasizes the horizontal, the folded, the low-body and the movement. (...) It calls for more improvisation and program than for repetition and scheme. Oliveira (2007a, p.119)

In an interview with one of these magazines, when I was inquired about the presence of women in capoeira, I remember having said that even then it no longer caused strangeness and, similarly, it was possible to state that no group could do without their presence and achievements. In that article, which inaugurated a column dedicated to capoeira woman, there was a paradigmatic construction untested until then, presenting the treatment and understanding of women's voices as capoeira practitioners.

I was also struck by the image chosen to give "expression" to such a novelty. The drawing of a young woman and her athletic body, identified by a type of clothing that marks her as non practitioner of Capoeira Angola (practitioners of this school wears different garments from that depicted in the image). This means that even though the magazine knew that I belonged to another formative field, the magazine chose as visual representation a standard, hegemonic and salable image.

In this edition, this woman-illustration is young, wears garments adopted by modern capoeira with

which it is possible for women and men the opportunity to play capoeira with parts of their bodies uncovered. In moder capoeira shirts and T-shirts can be eliminated as much as the footwear, all of these which are indispensable to *angoleiros*, capoeira angola practitioners, a capoeira style in which I was initiated since 1982. Here too it is important to highlight the stereotypical image of a standard masculinity in a way of incorporating an imagetic construction capable of acceptance, that can be observed in the figure below.



However, the 1990s have also demarcated the beginning of employing the internet in the formation of new "communities" of capoeira that, with its many "virtual rodas (virtual circles)", opened and expanded spaces made up of debate between these and the former. It was from these spaces that the capoeira community began to express their discontentment about such appealing procedures. This led publishers to understand capoeira as a knowledge field in need of documentation, studies and debates inorder to contribute to the expansion of the historical knowledge, philosophical and aesthetic understanding of its features as an art-fight, which processes have been constructed in dashed manouvers. After a few "denunciations" the editors then could "risk" and experience the launch of the following numbers that presented in the cover, a picture of Mestre João Grande, what generated great repercussion, which led to the fast disappearance of the issue in newsstands. Moreover, in addition to the many surprises that such cover produced, its impact

could be immediately extended to other goods and articles, with considerable sales, both in several Brazilian regions as much as abroad.

From within these reflections is that we assert the need for research that provide follow up approaches that are structural, and that analyze the presence, the placement and the visibility of women in capoeira. Also are welcomed approaches that are epistemological, and that verify the modes of production, management and transmission of knowledge from the point of view that incorporates a critique of sexism within the capoeira universe. Finally, of similar importance are the speech analysis, the practice and the representation of women in / from / with capoeira, identifying gender metaphors and their consequences, which directly links to the difficulties of access women to the position of master. If today some names are listed in the past history of capoeira, we are yet to know to what extent these women have achieved respectability among the capoeiristas.

We also want to promote the changes needed to the sharing of these spaces, in order to the benefits for both the small roda (the small circle of the capoeira practice) and for the great conscious roda (the great circle of the life circle), of which, as discussed above, any group or capoeira organization can do without. It includes the presence (knowledge) and actions (doings) thereof and in all areas of today's knowledge focused on Capoeira. In this process, would be revealed the universes and performances from those female figures such as Palmeirona, Júlia Fogareiro, Catu, Maria Pernambucana, Maria Cachoeira, Maria Pé no Mato, Maria Homem, Odília, Maria 12 Homens, Júlia Endiabrada, Júlia Satanás, among others. It would also initiate a reparation process based on the affirmative action of the historical value of those women in the recent structuring and occupation of concrete and symbolic spaces for women, with special attention to the trajectory of black women.

Capoeira Angola, that has restructured itself since the 1980s onwards in a context of a cultural resistance that reaffirmed blackness, to combat racism and struggle for national democracy, demonstrates through the mistrust and rejection of the hegemonic routes, the revolutionary dimension of black corporeality, with the incorporation of *folgar* (play) and *vadiar* (loiter) (Araujo, 2015). In this moment, the *pastiniana* philosophy (the philosophy of Pastinha, the founder of capoeira angola), in its great legacy will provoke debates to evidence the above among the several generations of *angoleiros* and *angoleiras*

Here, we dare to begin featuring a kind of supra community, which are collectives of *capoeiristas* today spread throughout Brazil and in other countries. These collectives that go beyond the insulation of groups and capoeira organizations, bringing together women from various groups and organizations, turning the organization of specific events of capoeira practices also into the opportunity to create permanent forums of complaints, debates, confrontations, in-person and virtual meetings, strongly reflecting the organizational models of groups. On the other hand, these also promote the approach or entry of *capoeiristas* to various spheres of feminist formulations, enabling a new reading on the power relations inside capoeira.

A strategy that today is observed, as a result of discussions and collective actions, concerns the promotion of women to master positions, and how these places have been disputed within the groups. In several occasions women have reached these positions, when they take it upon themselves to this promotion through a collective recognition of their value and effort.

However, the treatment of women in the capoeira universe expands its awareness beyond dealing with the issue of violence, when it also serves as an exchange of experiences translated in other disputes. In the example below we can get a sense of the changes that these encounters have led, for example, in the impact of complaints made in the manifesto by the Collective Mandinga Woman Group (Bahia) against a calendar known as "As Bonecas da Capoeira" (The dolls of capoeira)". Launched in Europe, this calendar exposed a small number of women on a deserted beach using the berimbau in sexual exploitation scenes. Among other things, the manifesto condemns the exploitation of the image of Brazilian women abroad as prostitutes.

Capoeira events (thematic meetings, national and international conferences, women's conferences, trips and recreational activities, travel, etc.) also appear as essential supports to the exchanges needed to strengthen this community. Recurring themes in all of them, as culture, autonomy, preservation, distortion, violence, spirituality, motherhood, childhood, youth, racism and racial discrimination, African-*Brasilidades*, aging, community, were found at the base of the various actions undertaken by these collective.

It is noteworthy that among these, the understanding of ancestry of people and /or of Capoeira Angola is not relinquished to an African presence that orients a shared imaginary and resubmits ancestry in totemic constructions of a mythologized or invented belonging. It is this African presence that permeates, no doubt, the factual swing and sway of capoeira (Araújo, 2004). Importantly, the various international meetings represented an important field for the exchange of this information, presenting as a result the strengthening of the *grande tronco* (large trunk), i.e. that of the *pastiniana* lineage.

The above and shared understanding within an international dimension of what the symbols of capoeira communication are, once positioned in this genealogy, they advance in charges about capoeira itself as "an instrument of struggle against all forms of oppression". And the recognition and acceptance of this consecrated source of transformation allows pursuing the occupation of spaces in a qualified and autonomous way.

We are talking about a reality that involves women characterised as mostly white, urban, middle class, of between 20 to 30 years old, with university education (similar to at least one of their parents), with access to cultural goods and to opportunities offered by the contacts with other cultures, languages and artistic experiences. Taking into account that most of the people joins the capoeira groups by seduction and network through very close people, we will be able to understand the concentration of the features and age of the women in question.

Here the most important thing is that we can assert the goal of safeguarding certain principles of educational systems of Afro-Brazilian traditions which, among other affinities have as characteristics the fact of being an endogenous, global system, taught by all, everywhere and all the time, integrated with the production of a daily collective, through learning, participation, and experience.

If, on the one hand, we recognize here possible explanations to the fact that most women play leadership roles in the organizational structures of these groups, unfortunately these qualities do not ensure them evincing and leadership in other spheres of these same groups, especially those related to the transmission of capoeira knowledge. Thus, there still remains a very small number of women promoted to master and counter-masters position. This is because it is known the demands they face in other activities of their daily lives. We recognize that their trajectories are hampered both by no equity in the promotion requirements, but also because of the unequal sharing of care for children during the capoeira practice, even when the father is also part of the same group.

However, after entering into and occupying spaces through their complaints, the *capoeiristas* started to invest in their education and empowerment. At the same time they started to demand that masters change their behaviors, being communication through the internet (web) an effective channel for this.

Of course we can think of the weight that this female segment has, not only in the organization of these communities, but also in terms of its composition as an increasingly demanding segment. A proof of such fact is that nowadays in some events of Capoeira Angola (not just in women's events), the presence of professionals hired to take care for and develop educational activities with children, where the community deals with children during capoeira practice time, without separating areas for adults and children. Instead, the care of children become a shared responsibility and demands about are made about their specific needs.

We see then that topics such as pregnancy, responsible parenthood, construction of gender roles, the capoeira group's role in the education of children,

pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS), domestic violence, autonomy, etc., gain presence at these meetings, nationally and internationally. Importantly, even with a significant number of men participating in women's meetings, this does not mean that we are dealing with the absence of conflict.

It is true that we also find among the *capoeiristas* an awareness of the fact that there are some women (very few!) taking on leadership positions, which is something considered very important. It is relevant not only for breaking a historically constituted condition but also because many women feel prevented (and, therefore, do not even try) to learn capoeira because they believe (and reject) the forms of male domination, usually present in the relationship between the instructors and students, or between them and the other members, men and women inside the capoeira universe.

It is important to highlight that these inquiries transcend the merely physical embodiment and become verbalized through important elements that interconnect aspects of personal satisfaction with personal stories of life. Spirituality, tradition, and female leadership are some of the aspects that also engender their searches in the grande roda. Finally, we realize that many of these women mingle aspects of the bodily conditions that constitute the foundations of Capoeira Angola with the definitions of their own personal strengths and difficulties. However, what can be understood as individual facility shall be considered an aspect of difficulty when incorporated into the collective ethics and values. Ginga here is used as a metalanguage in itself because one learns through it that only in motion the changes are and will be evinced.

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