Tensions Around the Definition of *Capoeira* as Black Cultural Expression: Rebuilding the Bridges Between Brazil and Africa

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Summary

In this article I highlight that *capoeira* has been considered a form of resistance in many interpretations that assert it as a "Black" cultural expression -- not just a "Brazilian" one -- and refuse the limitation of *capoeira* within the field of "sport" or "fight". Be it associated with riots and fights for the liberation of enslaved African descent enshrined in maroon communities (*quilombos*), or associated with the most recent manifestations of African descent organized into groups, *capoeira* became a symbol of black resistance in Brazil, and from there, inside the African Diaspora. Despite the fact that such understanding has become more influential from the 1980s onwards, there remain disagreements and tensions around the definition of *capoeira*, to which contributes the increasing number of practitioners who are situated in varied national, social and cultural contexts.

I - Introduction

In 1981 Vicente Ferreira Pastinha, known as Master Pastinha, died in Salvador. Shortly before his death, he was the head of a school of *Capoeira Angola* located in Pelourinho, the historical downtown area. After decades of experience dedicated to the practice and dissemination of *capoeira*, he had become a well-known figure. Although not the only *Capoeira Angola* master, Pastinha gained notoriety for his initiatives of systematic documentation of the *capoeira* teaching and learning, which included the publication of a book (PASTINHA, 1988; BARRETO, 2015).

However, despite having achieved great prestige, Master Pastinha lost the space where his *capoeira* school was installed in the historical center and died very poor and in precarious circumstances. During this period, many *Capoeira Angola* groups with regular activities in Salvador were affected, and many *capoeiristas* who learned from Mestre Pastinha and others abandoned the practice of *Capoeira Angola*, or joined the *Capoeira Regional* [1]. The evidence seemed to confirm that such style of *capoeira*, as vagrancy, which emerged in the first decades of the twentieth century in Bahia would actually disappear and become part of the *capoeira* memory.

The struggle in defense of *Capoeira Angola*, and against its disappearance, led to the creation of a *capoeira* group in 1982 (*Grupo de Capoeira Angola Pelourinho* - GCAP), giving rise to what was to become a broader movement placing the *capoeiristas*, or the *capoeira* practitioners, on the political scene (Araújo, 2015). I was among the first members of that group and participated directly in the group's activities until late 1990s. The initial phase of this movement occurred through the interventions of this group, led by Mestre Moraes and his disciple Cobra Mansa, whose activities took place on two fronts: on one hand, seeking to attract new practitioners in order to make *Capoeira Angola* better known; on the other hand, vehemently denouncing the deleterious implications of the apparition of the *Capoeira Regional*, which directly influenced the misfortunes of *Capoeira Angola*.

The practical activities were carried out in a public space - *Forte Santo Antônio Além do Carmo* - holding regular classes and a weekly *capoeira* circle open to the public. In terms of mobilization, even with a small number of people, the organization of events propitiated access to the media in order to disseminate their ideas, and brought together old

1) There are two 'styles' of capoeira: Angola and Regional. These styles historically developed fro different orientations that led to subtle variety in terms of movements, body expressions, musical rythms, indumentary customs, and teaching traditions.

masters of *Capoeira Angola*, on commemorative dates, such as the anniversary of Master Pastinha and others. The provocative way utilized to expound upon several issues raised controversy and contributed to broaden the effects of the activities of these few activists. The defense of *Capoeira Angola* was mainly effected through discourses that attacked the racial configuration of *Capoeira Regional*. These discourses sustained that the creation of *Capoeira Regional* by Master Bimba implied in the elimination of some (social and aesthetic) features that linked *capoeira* directly to slavery, to Africans and their descendants, those features that led to its stigmatization and persecution during the nineteenth century. As a reaction to this attempt to redefine values, it was very important to assert the black and African origin of *capoeira*, through valuing some specific characteristics of *Capoeira Angola*.

These defense arguments were supported by research and studies on the history of *capoeira* in Brazil, and in particular, about the history of slavery and blacks, and this was an important activity within that group of *Capoeira Angola*. Although, the study of these subjects was not part of our basic training, the *capoeira* group finally became also a study group. The results of this research were presented at internal seminars and open to the community.

The evidence produced by the studies about black slavery in Brazil, in particular about the black culture, slave resistance and about *capoeira* during the nineteenth century were important in this debate. There was an ample documentation proving that *capoeira* practitioners were arrested, punished by whipping, and that the practice of *capoeira* became a misdemeanor and it was then criminalized (ASSUNÇÃO, 2005; SOARES, 1994).

In the face of evidences that the association between play and fight, a practice accompanied by musical instruments that were striking features of *capoeira,*the practice resurfaced in Salvador in the early decades of the twentieth century (SCALDAFERRI, 2015).These features were present in *Capoeira Angola*, although this tradition was disappearing during the 1980s, while the style of C*apoeira Regional* begun to gain hegemony among the practitioners of *capoeira*.

In a context marked by the emergence of other cultural organizations such as the Afro-music groups known as *blocos afro*, which also asserted their African roots and blackness, we sought to create links with these and other organizations of the black movement in Salvador (CROOK & Johnson, 1999). Among the *blocos afro*, two of the most important were created in the 1970s: the Ilê Aiyê in 1974 and Olodum in 1979. Our approximation to these and other black cultural and political organizations of Salvador occurred gradually and the process reached its apex in 1988, when many debates and actions occurred in light of centenary of the abolition of slavery in Brazil.

In the next section, I will provide a brief reflection on the notions of nation, nationalism and black culture in Brazil, which is necessary to understand the meanings of the "re-africanization" of the *capoeira* process which started in Salvador in the 1980s, which thematic complexity has been highlighted in previous studies (GUIMARÃES, no date; PINHO, 2005). In the next session, we focus on the specific characteristics of *Capoeira Angola*, highlighting its internal heterogeneity and complexity, with the purpose of deepen the discussion about the black culture.

II – Nation, Nationalism and Black Culture in Brazil

In order to understand the meaning of the "re-Africanization" process that began in Salvador in the 1980s, we must place it into a wider context, in order to highlight the overlap between projects that represent Brazil as a nation, and the forms of political and cultural mobilization of blacks. This context, even if briefly addressed in this article, will elucidate the background for the emergence of a movement to which we belonged in Salvador, set forth in Brazil from the 1970s onwards. It was innovative because it conjugated the redefinition of cultural practices formerly considered to be Brazilian, as black or Afro-Brazilian practices, that evolved along with denunciations of prejudice, discrimination and inequality. Moreover, the celebration of the African origins of these cultural practices was much more

present in Bahia, while the political mobilization by civil and social rights occurred mainly in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, prevailing a relative separation between these two black traditions (GUIMARÃES, no date).

It is known that, after centuries of colonialism and enslavement of Indians and Africans in Brazil, during the nineteenth century, when emerged a number of changes that aimed at building a modern nation, the existing social structure was profoundly unequal. On one hand, there was a white minority that included the ruling elite, whose main cultural references were European. On the other hand, a great majority made up of mestizos, blacks and indians composed the so-called Brazilian society. Between 1822 (the year of Brazil's independence from Portugal) and 1888 (when slavery was officially abolished) two legal and different value systems coexisted in Brazil, one of them valid only for "Brazilians", and another valid for the "Slaves". The latter, the period that followed the abolition, and that marks Brazil's entry into modernity, formally assured the Brazilian citizen status for Africans and their descendants who were once enslaved, but also brought new and greater difficulties.

In dealing with the relationship between black identities and citizenship in Brazil, Guimarães (2013: 1) states that in modern Brazil:

"*there are some critical moments in which racialization – the designation of human groups as races – were the basis for social identities from which political ideals such as economic redistribution, national belonging and social equality were built. During these periods, the idea of race became a self-defined identity, rather than an identity imposed by others from outside.*"

The periodization proposed by Guimarães indicates the existence of four distinct periods, namely: the abolitionist movement, black protests in the 1930s, the democratization process in post-World War II, and the democratic movement against the military dictatorship in the 1970s. According to the author, in each of them it is clear that the intersection of nation, social relations, class and race influenced both the categories used to label people, and the definitions of the ways to overcome inequality.

Regarding the post-abolition period, it is noteworthy that the most valued positions in the free labor market, which has grown in the years that followed the end of the slave regime (1888), in São Paulo, for example, located in the Southeast, were occupied by foreign immigrants (largely European).They started to arrive to work in the country from the second half of the nineteenth century, while blacks faced unemployment and the degradation of their living conditions. Studies such as Nogueira (1988) ratify that European immigrants who arrived in São Paulo with few financial resources and social capital experienced a strong upward mobility in five decades, while in the same period the situation of blacks remained stable and even worsened.

It is worth remembering that in this time period, the theories that ensured the existence of a race hierarchy, defining 'race' according to biologically scientific theories, which arose in Europe in the late nineteenth century, became influential in Brazil and served as justification for the maintenance of the slavery system. Those theories grounded on the alleged racial inferiority of Africans and blacks, and served to explain this lower social position in the Brazilian society. As occurred in other Latin American nations, elites saw themselves as white, but were perceived by Europeans as blacks, which led to a constant self-esteem crisis (TELLES; FLORES, 2011). The refusal from middle classes and intellectual elites in these countries in what regards to the fact that they were mestizo was described by Ramos (1957) as the "social pathology of the white Brazilian". In general, countries like Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay and others, ethnic and racial subcultures were incorporated as "popular" in nation-building projects. An extensive literature shows that interbreeding was central in this national project, which has overcome the pessimism and the racism that was significant in the nineteenth century (WADE, 2005; PINHO, 2004).

When the emergence of the first political and cultural organizations formulating specific demands for "blacks" in Brazil during the 1920s and 1930s, for example in São Paulo, blacks competed with

other ethnic groups, mostly made up by foreign immigrants, including Japanese nationals. From the perspective of several of these groups, the African and slave origin, on one hand, left as a legacy the moral, intellectual and cultural unpreparedness for integration of former slaves into the modern industrial world. On the other hand, those origins served to explain the social position of blacks, marked by prejudice and degradation of their living conditions.

After the World War II, the positive recognition of the cultural background specific to the black people gained more space in black organizations, particularly the African origins, but these were referred to as Afro-Brazilian culture. The presence of traits that were considered more or less untouched, or the survivals of the African cultural elements, the "Africanism", continued to be rejected by black leaders. For example, in São Paulo because these were considered as "exoticisms" or "superstitions", maintained within the popular culture and associated to uneducated layers of the Brazilian society. And Salvador, located in Bahia, in the northeastern region of Brazil, was already known at that time as a city where there was a strong presence of these "Africanisms", which is proved by the great number of *Candomblés* (Pierson, 1971).

During this period, there have been criticisms of the theories that defended the racial inferiority of blacks, which were grounded on the results of the first studies based on the scientific research on "race relations" in Brazil, conducted from the 1940s onwards. By stressing that the historical and social factors, instead of racial ones, explained the current problems of people of African descent, as well as blacks and mestizos, several studies have produced evidence of the disadvantages of blacks in relation to whites inside the Brazilian society. Hence, disagreement arose as to whether such disadvantages should be interpreted as a class or a race problem (COSTA PINTO, 1998). The interpretation that denied the existence of a "race problem" in Brazil prevailed, and few studies have argued that the racial prejudice and discrimination explained the disadvantages of blacks in Brazil. It is noteworthy, however, that even these studies have reiterated the failures, defects and limitations of blacks themselves, which hindered their integration into the modernity, producing what might be called "deficit theories " (BASTIDE; FERNANDES, 1955).

In the 1970s, when the prevailing nationalist model was questioned, the focus of black leaders shifted to the existence of racial inequalities between blacks and whites, which would result in lesser access of blacks to social opportunities. From that point onwards, the process of ethnic and racial formation started to focus on the foreign context, which included a reassessment of the historical and current ties with Africa, no longer limiting itself to the strengthening of the Brazilian nationality. This shift in the national perspective is explained both by international changes - such as the increased circulation of ideas that facilitated the dialogue among blacks around the world – as well as domestic, especially due to the Brazilian national identity crisis caused by the postwar crash in the system of "replacement imports of capital goods" and the decrease in its relative cultural isolation.

It is in this context that the "black culture" claim emerged with a strong international connotation, built from the dialogue with other regions such as the United States, the Caribbean, Africa and Europe, very close to what has been referred to as the Black Atlantic (GILROY, 2000), and no longer of an Afro-Brazilian culture.

In short, in order to understand the practical changes and the ways to define *capoeira* that have occurred over time, as well as in different moments of the Brazilian history, it is essential to consider the changing conceptions of Brazilian nationality mentioned above.

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In the nineteeth century, Rio de Janeiro was the city where *capoeira* was more widespread. Soares (1994) analyzed documents found in police archives in Rio de Janeiro, in the second half of the nineteenth century, a period in which *capoeira* was still not a widespread practice, but was mainly used by Africans as a "significant channel of slave resistance." The "*capoeiras*", or *capoeira* practitioners, acted in the streets of Rio de Janeiro, individually

or in groups called "*maltas*", and were subjected to constant repression by the police.

In addition to slave resistance, produced in response to the violence and harassment these have suffered in the cities, there is evidence that the "*capoeiras*" sought their own cultural identity. The "*maltas*" competed for spaces in the city and used symbols such as colors, clothing, and their own forms of communication, in order to mark the differences between them. The intensity of these disputes can be exemplified by the creation of two major *maltas*, gathering smaller ones, called *nagoas* and *guaiamuns*. The *malta nagoas* (derived from Nago) was more associated with the Africans, and the symbol color was white, while the *guaiamuns* (name of a local crustacean) was more associated with mestizos, and the symbol color was red.

For Soares, the emergence of *guaiamuns and nagoas* was the most important event of the history of *capoeira* in Rio de Janeiro in the second half of the nineteenth century and it is related to changes that occurred in the slave society. Upon the end of the slave trade to Brazil, the internal displacement of a large contingent of slaves to the coffee region, and the intensification of Portuguese immigration, changedthe composition of the population of the city of Rio de Janeiro: the reduction in the number of Africans, and the increasing number of Portuguese, free blacks, poor whites, mixed races and *crioulos*. The *maltas* have become more heterogeneous since people of all these categories began to integrate them, losing their markedly African character of the first half of this century.

The rivalry between *nagoas* and *guaiamuns* persisted until the late nineteenth century and represents, according to Soares, the cleavages that previously existed between African slaves and those born in Brazil. And even with the change in composition of the *maltas*, which was intensified in the second half of the century, this opposition continued to be affirmed symbolically through the conflicts between *nagoas* and *guaiamuns.*

The *maltas* participated in the political life, supporting distinct currents, royalist or republican, conservative or liberal.They tried to maximize the benefits they had achieved in an attempt for not losing their autonomy. It is also noteworthy that, in the 1870s and 1880s, the Republicans were the ones who supported the full force clampdown on *maltas*, which explains the support of *capoeiras* to monarchists. The inception of the First Republic in 1889 marked the beginning of the most violent persecution of *capoeiras* that put an end to four decades of *maltas*' interventions, destroyed with the deportation of *capoeiras* to the island of Fernando de Noronha.

The fact that the numerous unsuccessful attempts by the police to withdraw these *maltas* from the streets between 1850 and 1890 were documented, and that only at the beginning of the republic, as a result of illegal and arbitrary methods the *maltas* were destroyed, proves that *capoeira* was deeply rooted in cities. In addition, it illustrates the difficulties faced by former slaves, blacks and mestizos in Brazil, in the period that followed the abolition in 1888. Without the slave status or citizen, the descendants of Africans were at the mercy of all sorts of arbitrariness, a situation that has worsened with the onset of the republic (BASTIDE; FERNANDES, 1955).

These evidences suggest that the origin of *capoeira* occurred in urban areas, not rural, based on experiences and relationships woven during slavery, in cities such as Salvador, Recife and Rio de Janeiro (SOARES, 1994). However stating that *capoeira* emerged in urban areas from the slave condition does not imply in the rejection of the thesis claiming that *capoeira* originated in Africa, being correlated to dances and acrobatic games from the Bantu region (ASSUNÇÃO, 2005). The two interpretations are compatible as it is reasonable to assume that African slaves, who integrated the population of Brazilian cities, would also use African sources or references in order to create new forms of expression. *Capoeira* resulted, therefore, from a synthesis of information from several parts of Africa made by African slaves in Brazil, which merged with other elements from the local reality.

The resurgence of *capoeira in the beginning of the twentieth* century occurred in another region of Brazil, the Northeast, and another major city, Salvador, located in the Recôncavo Baiano. Documentation of *capoeira* in Salvador in the nineteenth

century is scarce (DIAS, 2015; ABREU, 2005).The oldest pictorial record is Rugendas frame, which depicts a scene similar to *capoeira* movements entitled "San-Salvador" in 1827 (ASSUNÇÃO, 2005). The documentary sources on *capoeira* increased in the twentieth century, and during the 1920s - 1930s, there were constant news in the newspapers as well as oral accounts. In these records, *capoeira* was referred to as "vagrancy" (*vadiação*), i.e. as a leisure activity, which practice took place in the workplace, on Sundays and in the markets during the popular and religious festivals (DIAS, 2015). The *capoeira* practitioners were basically men, laborers, as stevedores, porters, doormen etc. The game, or play, occurred in places such as the waterfront and in popular neighborhoods on Sundays, when the *capoeiristas* gathered in "barracks" (*barracões*) (SCALDAFERRI, 2015; ABREU, 2003). The photographic records of Pierre Verger in the 1940s help to confirm that *capoeira* was practiced in the streets, but accompanied by musical instruments like *berimbau* and tambourines, something that had not occurred in the nineteenth century (BARRETO, 2008).

Capoeira Regional was created in the late 1930s by Master Bimba (Manuel dos Reis Machado), and became popular as a national, Brazilian fight. Master Bimba deliberately aimed at attracting a more diverse audience to *capoeira*, in terms of class and race/ethnicity, such as white and middle-class college students. Furthermore he introduced changes in the practice of *capoeira* in order to increase its combative fight like character, and lessen its playful aspects, the mimics and plays about which he disagreed. He created also a teaching methodology with sequences of movements and proposed a new name for *capoeira*: Bahia Regional Fight (SILVA, 2015; ASSUNÇÃO, 2005).

From these innovations introduced by Master Bimba, *Capoeira Regional* has become more combative and the efficiency of strikes or counter-strikes gained more importance. The game became faster, with movements being carried out for most of the time in an upright posture (high game). The musical part lost importance and, although it has not disappeared, it became a secondary part in *capoeira*.

As the *Capoeira Regional* was popularized as a genuinely Brazilian fight and, therefore, not as an African or black cultural practice, this has gradually become the major reference for what *capoeira* ought to be, which may be exemplified by the assertion that 'capoeira is just one'. In this perspective, there was no recognition of many styles, languages, approaches to the *capoeira* appropriations. Consequently, adhesion to the concept of *capoeira* as a national sport started to become unavoidable to masters and *capoeiristas.* That concretely resulted in attempts to define normative patterns and to require the affiliation of teachers and *capoeira* groups to *capoeira*' Federations' and 'Confederations', similar to what happens with other sports (MAGALHÃES FILHO, 2015; BARRETO, 2005).

In summary, the statement that '*capoeira* is just one' meant for *Capoeira Angola* practitioners that the only choice left was that of abandoning such style, described as old and outdated, that exemplified a conception of "Africanism" and that was destined to disappear. The only alternative for many practitioners of *Capoeira Angola* in order to maintain its practice was in trying to insert it in the very lucrative world of tourism activities. Within that context, *capoeira* presentations are known for being part of folklore shows that in general present several expressions of Afro-Brazilian culture in a decontextualized way (SANTOS, 2005).

III – The combination of the playful and the agonistic in *Capoeira Angola*

As noted in the previous section, in order to understand the emergence of a movement of advocacy for the *Capoeira Angola* in the early 1980s, we must place it in the broader context marked by changes in the conception of the Brazilian nationality, which made it possible to accept that, aside from being Brazilian, or Afro-Brazilian, *capoeira* was also black. Hence, it is important to turn your attention to the specific characteristics of *Capoeira Angola* in order to deepen reflections on black culture, and in particular highlighting its internal heterogeneity and complexity.

Over the past three decades, the number of *Capoeira Angola* groups has increased, and so did the number

Photo: Pedro Campos. Photography of Mestre Pastinha playing Capoeira with his students. Archival collection of MAFRO/UFBA Nº E19. Original photo enlarged by Renato Marcelo de C. Assis. In: FREITAS, J. M. (Org.). Uma coleção biográfica: os mestres Pastinha, Bimba e Cobrinha Verde no Museu Afro-Brasileiro da UFBA. Salvador: EDUFBA, 2015. P. 324.

of practitioners. This increase highlighted the internal differences, whether in political positioning, or on the understanding of the characteristics that define the *Capoeira Angola* and the practitioners of this style, the *angoleiros*. For example, the elevation of Master Pastinha's name as the main representative of *Capoeira Angola* was questioned by groups that had other masters by reference. Hence, the options in terms of clothing and composition of the orchestra of musical instruments have become a subject of discussion.

In the case of the *Capoeira Angola Pelourinho Group* (GCAP), the clothing worn by *capoeristas* was a yellow shirt and black pants, very similar to the ones worn at Master Pastinha's school. The reference to the formation of the disciples, in terms of the movements, characteristics of the game and the orchestra of musical instruments, under the responsibility of Master Moraes was Master Pastinha. And the teachings were legitimated by Master Moraes' assertion that he reproduced what he had learned with Mestre Pastinha without introducing innovations. In that way, the tradition of *Capoeira Angola* and the school of Master Pastinha was kept alive by new generations of male and female capoeira angola practitioners (*angoleiros* and *angoleiras)* that were being trained. The position taken by these defenders of a "true *Capoeira Angola*" group was criticized later and it became clear that the defense of *Capoeira Angola* would lead to the imposition of a single model that would be accepted by all groups. The result exposed the existing differences between masters and *Capoeira Angola* groups, and variations within that style, which are evident in theory and practice (MAGALHÃES FILHO, 2012).

Capoeira Angola features continue to be reaffirmed in the daily lives of the groups that were created, but some of them use the yellow and black colors in clothing, some not, and in general the footwear was maintained for the practice of *capoeira.* Moreover, it is common to value the orchestra of musical instruments, as well as chanting *ladainhas*, *chulas and corridos*[2], and the maintenance of the recreational aspects of *capoeira,* although there are variations in the position and quantity of instruments, and the names given to tunes executed by the *berimbau*. The result is that, in aesthetic terms, visually, *Capoeira Angola* continues to distinguish itself strongly from the *capoeira regional* practiced nowadays, but there are differences between the *Capoeira Angola* groups.

Some of these groups have grown exponentially, and they have created centers in different Brazilian cities and in other countries, while many instructors have been trained and have moved from their places of origin to work elsewhere. *Capoeira Angola* also spread nationally and internationally. In this scenario, issues related to the formation and maintenance of *Capoeira Angola* groups rose to prominence at the expense of ties with other cultural groups, or broader

2) *Ladainha*, *chula* and *corrido* are styles of song that set the rhythm, the style of play and the energy of a game in a capoeira circle. *Ladainha* (litany) is a solo song usually sung by the senior member of the orchestra who also plays the lead *berimbau*. It opens the activities of a capoeira circle, calling for the attention and respect of the participants and audience. Chula and *corrido* are sequences of call and response songs typical of the traditional African singing. The difference between them is that the chula usually follows the *ladainha* and introduces the participants in the singing, by paying a tribute to Masters, God or any other respectful figure to which it is dedicated. The *corrido* is the basic song style that structures the activities of the capoeira circle.

social movements, something that happens from individual initiatives. There is great internal diversity in terms of color, class, nationality etc.

Topics that were irrelevant to the debates in previous decades gained importance, such as gender relations within the *Capoeira Angola* groups. Women had prominent performances in *Capoeira Angola* groups created from the 1980s, and in some cases they became important leaders. Debating the issue of women's presences in *capoeira* entered the agenda, especially in the reflections during the International Women's Day. However, recurring situations in which the behavior of masters,instructors, as well as, other participants of the groups, was openly sexist towards women --black or not --has resulted in increased criticism from many women who participate in these groups.

Another noteworthy aspect is the growing recognition that the combination of aesthetic, instrumental and improvisational elements, makes *capoeira* a corporeal practice of great complexity, which can be seen in studies in different fields of knowledge, and initiatives that insert *capoeira* within sports, education, as well as, in several artistic contexts. In order for such recognition to occur, it was crucial that *Capoeira Angola* continued to be practiced, keeping as its main characteristic the combination of entertainment and agonistic elements (ARAÚJO, 1994).

The previous section demonstrated that the *capoeira*'s characteristics practiced in the nineteeth century have changed during the twentieth century, when the playful components have become more present in the game and the accompaniment of musical instruments was introduced. The fight was already rhythmic (the dance-fight) and it became a game that combines fight and dance. This combination of fight, dance and game presented challenges for the categorization of *capoeira* because in the Western world, these three activities have been defined as separate categories. In academic institutions this separation is repeated in different areas of knowledge concerned with the study and practice of fights and games associated with the competition, and dance associated with art. The same separation remains in official institutions as well as in public policies.

In the *Capoeira Angola* currently practiced, the game switches between slower and accelerated moments, and the movements are performed in a standing position, but also with one's hands resting on the floor (low game). The musical part is very important and in *capoeira* circles, it determines the pace of the game. In *capoeira*, games (*jogos*) have varying lengths, and the player's attitude is to disguise the intention of attack against the opponent, using different movements, that are marked by stylistic concerns. In this style, "malice" is very important and it is present in the motion, music and singing, rendering more evident that *capoeira* is a set of different forms of deceptive discourse (LEWIS, 1992).The most important one is that which takes place through corporeal movement executed by two *capoeiristas* in the capoeira game.

The strokes used for attacking are not executed directly and the defense movements limit body contact, enabling the interaction to occur fluidly. The "malice" in the game implicates in deceiving the opponent by creating expectations that will not be met by breaking an existing standard. The competition and malice are in the foremost in the game, and yet the existence of cooperation is needed. Within the musical aspect, cooperation prevails over competition. In *Capoeira Angola* there is a wide repertoire of tactics that are used by the *capoeiristas* who want to dominate the opponent resorting to mischief, such as manipulating the context (time and game speed), intimidation, ridicule, use of facial expressions, emotional control, the simulation of flight, among others.

From this opposition between competition and cooperation, it is possible to understand why in the agonistic style of the *Capoeira Regional,* the musical component is not emphasized because the main interest is the fight, while in *Capoeira Angola*, playful style, music plays a central role (LEWIS, 1992). From this perspective, it is clear that the balance between competition, the most striking feature of the game, and cooperation, which predominates in the music, has remained more present in *Capoeira Angola*, and decreased in the *Capoeira Regional*. Thus, there has been an increase in the chances of *capoeira* becoming a violent and deadly combat,

and no longer an elegant dance. Currently, in the C*apoeira Regional* circles, it is common for participants to stand up, witnessing a rapid succession of games in which players adopt an openly aggressive attitude, striking blows against the opponent, which defends and does the same. In these circles, there are frequent fights and widespread violence.

It is possible to establish a correlation between malice, as a basic element of *Capoeira Angola* and social interactions. The movements performed in the game of *capoeira* in order to convince the other person of something that will not materialize, hide and show, like a game of concealment and discovery, similar to social interactions, especially with regard to non-verbal communication (GOFFMAN, 1985). The relationship between what happens in the *capoeira* circle and in other contexts of everyday life is emphasized by practitioners themselves, as an aspect that was present in the systematization made by Master Pastinha. The correlation between malice and social interaction follows along the lines of previous reflections presented in this text.

A characteristic movement of *capoeira,* which is part of this malicious repertoire is the *ginga* (swing movement). Without being a strike per se, the ginga movement is done while the *capoeiristas* are standing, following the music's rhythm, and serves as a preparation for the strikes and counter-strikes. From its use in *capoeira,* the term came to be used in other contexts associated with flexibility, malleability and rhythm, which are pointed out as remarkable in the peculiar body movements of Brazilians.

In Rosa (2010), a study that deals with the presence of the swing movement in three practices cultivated in Brazil - *capoeira*, samba and scenic dance- , it is stated that the term "swing" refers to "a particular form of syncopated body movement, centered on Afro-Brazilian matrix", whose aesthetic "is linked to a series of principles such as polycentrism and polyrhythm, which circulate within the Black Atlantic universe". In all three cases, Rosa analyzed the way in which "the swing disciplines bodies to produce and transmit a particular way of understanding and interacting with the world, with others and with oneself". The study presented a genealogy of the swing in each of these practices, highlighting its relationship with the performances of blackness. According to the author, the swing, as a syncopated movement has helped both in decolonization and in the re-colonization of individuals and communities located in Brazil.

Dealing specifically with the *Capoeira Angola*, Kurtz (2014) highlights the "body oratory" of *capoeira* in the sense that the bodies are used to establish dialogues.This expression was coined by the dance researcher Thomas DeFrantz who used it to refer to communication systems found in the actions of the black music and dance. For Kurtz, this form of body language is a central mode of transmission of knowledge in the Afro-Brazilian communities. Body oratory articulates, or choreographs an "embodied pedagogy of resistance," i.e., through their practices *angoleiros* are communicating embodied knowledge on how to resist the dominant values of a society that continues to devalue and marginalize the low socio-economic status of Afro-Brazilians.

The centrality of the playful aspects of *Capoeira Angola*, and the fact that it is seen as a form of leisure and entertainment, does not mean that its practice is regarded as something of minor importance for *capoeiristas*. Rather, it is widely recognized that what is learned in *capoeira* is for everyday life, not just in terms of the use of the strikes for self-defense, but in the broadest sense of the values that guide the *capoeiristas* conduct. As Lewis (1995) reminds us, the understanding that the leisure or game worlds may become central in the lives of people (practitioners, consumers etc.) forced analysts to revise the opposition between leisure and work, in which leisure was devoid of the instrumental character that defines the work. And revising this dichotomy between leisure and work has led to criticism of the aesthetic theories of embodiment that relied on the distinction between instrumental and non-instrumental.

In interpretations that rely on mediations, such as Lewis (1995), the combination of instrumental and non-instrumental elements featuring *capoeira* has placed this body practice in evidence. Utilizing Leder's distinction between two forms of embodiment, one in which the body is missing (process of using the body for action in the world, the body becomes invisible in relation to the work being

performed), and another in which the body is present (the body is at the forefront; in cases of illness), Lewis will focus on mediation between presence and absence of the body, not in opposition. According to him, in situations where the activities are carried out by one's own body, such as dancers and athletes, an intermediate situation between presence and absence prevails. And *capoeira* is an extreme case of mediation because "it is openly aesthetic and instrumental, and is also improvised" (1995).

IV – Conclusions

The transformations that have occurred in *capoeira* throughout history are related to more general changes in the Brazilian society, and in other parts of the world. The opposition between *nagoas* and *guaiamuns* marked the nineteenth century, reflecting the conflicts and internal rivalries to the black and mestizo population, which ended with the violent persecution of institutional character in Rio de Janeiro. In the twentieth century significant changes have occurred, summarized in three moments that place Salvador in the center of events: the resurgence of *capoeira* as a combination of fight and game, which became known as *Capoeira Angola*; the creation of C*apoeira Regional*; and the revitalization of *Capoeira Angola*. In order to understand these changes, one must take into account the trend that prevailed until the 1960s, of including African and black cultural practices as national. The prevailing nationalism in the black social movement that was being formed at that time, especially in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, led to an interpretation that devalued the oldest cultural practices, and the strong association with Africans, many of them present in Bahia, particularly in Salvador. Only with changes in the conception of the Brazilian nationality which took place from the 1970s onwards it became possible to accept that, aside from being Brazilian, or Afro-Brazilian, *capoeira* was also black.

By focusing on the recent history of *Capoeira Angola*, I have highlighted the internal heterogeneity and complexity, both in terms of composition and characteristics of the groups, and in terms of the specific characteristics of *Capoeira Angola* as a corporeal practice. Over the past three decades, *Capoeira Angola* groups have attracted people of different classes, colors, gender and nationalities, and issues of gender, education and environment became part of the agenda of these groups. Moreover, there has increased the acceptance that there are variations within that style, which are evident in theory and practice, and result in different interpretations and preferences of instructors and group members on the specific characteristics of *Capoeira Angola*. The existence of these internal variations results in tensions and disputes that are part of everyday life in relationships between the different groups, and are also internal to each of them. The complexity of *Capoeira Angola* as a corporeal practice has been even more evident when considering the combination of entertainment and agonistic elements.

It is important to consider this evidence that *Capoeira Angola* is a heterogeneous and complex black cultural expression, and it has specific characteristics, within the broader discussion on black culture. The "black culture" expression has become popular in Brazil in recent decades, and institutional spaces to design and implement public policies in this area have been created. However, the recognition of the complexity of the Brazilian culture does not seem to withstand, or facilitate the admission of black cultural practices, especially when they have become symbols of the national culture, such as in the case of *capoeira.*To that extent, critical interpretations to group initiatives and cultural organizations that redefine "national" cultural practices as "black" contribute to reinforce this trend.This critique emphasizes that these redefinitions resort to racial essentialism and defend the existence of pure forms in black culture (PINHO, 2010; AGIER, 2001).

However, we defend that in the recent history of *Capoeira Angola* strict conceptions had not prevailed, based on notions of purity, but a field marked by heterogeneity and complexity has been created. This is much better described by interpretations such as Hall, who taught us that:

"... In black popular culture there are no pure forms. All these forms are always the product of partial synchronization, of an engagement that cross cultural boundaries, of the confluences of more than

one cultural tradition, of the negotiations between dominant and subordinate positions, of the subterranean strategies of recoding and transcoding, of critical significance and of the act of signifying from pre-existing material"(Hall, 2003).

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