

# TRANSLOCALITY AND AFRO-BRAZILIAN IMAGINARIES IN GLOBALISED CAPOEIRA

## ABSTRACT

Afro-Brazilian capoeira exemplifies how communal practices connect multilocally. This article investigates how the fight-game-art forms a translocal culture, uniting practitioners in diverse localities, and connects them to a transnationally created Black Atlantic heritage. The multi-sited ethnographic approach focuses mostly on Salvador, Northeastern Brazil, where the purity of Afro-Brazilian traditions raises polemic. Through critical observation of capoeira's dual development in Brazil, transnationality is asserted as a historical continuity in capoeira communities' imaginaries. To grasp how globalised capoeira maintains its connection to Afro-Brazilian history, the analysis of capoeira's traditionalism is complemented by a description of the formation of capoeira practice in the faraway location of Eastern Finland, where capoeira's creativity and categorization-resistant, holistic nature remain central. Through the densely historicized tradition of capoeira, minoritarian views on transnational connections, on the colonial encounter, and on the effects of transatlantic slavery are shared in multiple locations.

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Keywords: translocal, transnational, Capoeira Angola, Capoeira Regional, Black Atlantic, Afro-Brazilian, multi-sited ethnography

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*Eu sou angoleiro que veio de angola  
Cheguei para vadiar, o iaiá, nessa roda*

I am *angoleiro* coming from angola  
I came to play (to fool around, to play capoeira) in this circle  
(capoeira song)<sup>1</sup>

The globalised fight-art of capoeira is imbued with historical stories that also become 'our history' for participants from multiple backgrounds. At the intersections of such categories as sport and culture, body and

spirit, capoeira often forms a central community of belonging. In the capoeira game, martial movements are combined into a dialogical interaction of two players at a time, accompanied by a circle producing percussion

music and songs that reference the history of Africans and their descendants in Brazil. To ‘come from angola’<sup>2</sup> does not refer directly to the nation-state in West Central Africa, but to an imaginative geography of the art.

In this article,<sup>3</sup> I investigate how the multimodal practice of capoeira forms a ‘translocal culture’ uniting practitioners in diverse localities and connecting them to a transnationally formed, diasporic Afro-Brazilian heritage, deviating from a modern colonial framework. By ‘transnationality’ I refer to historical cross-border processes and their contemporary re-imagination wherein the capoeira communities situate themselves in relation to Brazil, Africa, and elsewhere. In order to understand how these relations are constituted, it is necessary to distinguish the two main lines of capoeira’s modernisation: ‘Africanist’ Capoeira Angola and ‘Brazilianist’ Capoeira Regional. The concept of ‘translocality’ emphasises the mutually constitutive nature of different sites, and attends to the local situatedness of the practice.

My multi-sited research field is primarily focused on traditionalist Capoeira Angola in Salvador da Bahia, Northeastern Brazil, a popular pilgrimage destination for capoeira practitioners internationally and capital of Afro-Brazilian culture (Collins 2015). To comprehend the different translocal formations and their respective imaginative geographies, the research design also follows divergent understandings of capoeira in the Santos area, and their translocation to capoeira practice in a faraway location of Eastern Finland, via George E. Marcus’ methodological trope of ‘following’ (Marcus 1998: 90–95). At all the sites, capoeira’s creativity and holistic nature, resisting categorisations, remain central. Although

capoeira’s local enactments vary across time and space, the connections between sites are at least as important as within them. In this article, I propose that the contemporary translocality of capoeira culture should be conceived of as a continuation of its transnational history.

## TRANSNATIONAL, TRANSLOCAL, AND MULTI- SITED: CONSTRUCTING THE FIELD

Capoeira’s global popularity has grown significantly in recent decades, based on communal networks of practitioners and associations involving different scales of institutionalisation, local group formation, and transnational connectivity. Unlike the Andersonian imaginary community of nationhood (Anderson 1983), the imaginary of the local capoeira groups connects them to distant places and cultural settings, such as Brazilian groups and *mestres* (acknowledged teachers, who ‘master the art’), other filial groups in Brazil and in other countries, and capoeira lore connecting *capoeiristas* with Afro-Brazilian heroes, adversities, and a mythical Africa. When a group of Finnish, predominantly white capoeiristas (practitioners of capoeira), sing in praise of the legendary seventeenth-century freedom fighter, Zumbi dos Palmares, they identify with an alternate knowledge of colonial history—that of maroon rebellions, memories of African kingdoms, and resistance to slavery.

My research data on the capoeira community is produced in field encounters and collaborations, understood from the epistemological perspective of a multi-sited methodology reaching from Eastern Finland via Portugal and Santos to Bahia and back.

Formulated by George E. Marcus in response to the collapse of the life-world / system dichotomy as a background for ethnography (Marcus 1998: 79–104), multi-sitedness is not only research with various sites; nor is it a return to the comparative frame. Contrary to a timeless ‘ethnographic present’, a multi-sited research imaginary looks at how local experience is not only embedded in global connections, but is also itself formative of the global (Marcus 1998 and 2009; Coleman and von Hellermann 2011; Tsing 2015: 17–43).

My own background in capoeira—from first experiences in Brazil in 1996, to taking part in a self-created group in Joensuu, Eastern Finland (1999–2006)—is intertwined with my research routes. In 2002 I departed on five months of field research into capoeira in Portugal, as a side result of which a Brazilian teacher Melqui, today a mestre, was invited to teach in Joensuu occasionally between 2002 and 2006. Thus, my own practice was founded in mestre Melqui’s style of *Senzala dos Santos*, taken as a type of contemporary Capoeira Regional, yet which originally sprang from traditional angola style and evolved through incorporation of techniques of Capoeira Regional. The main branch of my participant observation took place within traditionalist Capoeira Angola in Bahia, in January–April 2005, where I participated primarily in two groups (FICA–Bahia, Semente do Jogo de Angola) and diverse public *roda* events (capoeira rings). The Bahian research data comprises field notes on discussions with several practitioners and teachers from various groups; 250 photographs and video clips; collections of capoeira songs; different texts, journals, and website content produced by capoeira communities; and twelve recorded interviews (30–60 min) with European and Bahian

practitioners and mestres.<sup>4</sup> The interviews were constructed around my broader research themes of ritual experiences of liberation in capoeira for black Bahian and white European practitioners. On returning from the field, I re-encountered one of the mestres in my research, mestre Valmir of FICA, giving a workshop in Helsinki to his future filial group—a transnational field indeed.

By analysing the Black Atlantic traditions in capoeira’s development, I aim to demonstrate transnationality, not as a novelty brought about by globalisation, but as a constant historical condition of a tradition (capoeira) rooted in a specific context (Afro-Brazilian history of transatlantic slavery). This transnational development is reflected today in the rings and capoeira schools of Bahia, a central location in the formation of the concept of Afro-Brazilianity and the struggle for recognition of African cultural heritage. To understand capoeira’s translocations elsewhere, the Bahian ethnography is augmented by a glimpse of intense participation in the creation of capoeira in Joensuu (1999–2006); attention to the capoeira scene in Finland since, with occasional participation; short field visits to capoeira in the Santos area (the State of São Paulo, Brazil, where my interests focused on Afro-Brazilian spirituality in relation to capoeira); and background perspectives from Brazilian mestres and their Portuguese students in the former colony.

The follow-up to the initiation of capoeira activities in Joensuu is based on personal archives and on remembering the participatory experience as one of the partial perspectives of my multi-sited approach (on partiality, Marcus 1998: 5). The remembering process could be described as autoethnographic, whereby the researcher is (1) a full member in the research

group or setting; (2) visible as such a member in published texts; and (3) committed to developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena (Anderson 2006).

One of the key contradictions emerging from my data opposes claims of purity or authentic tradition with cultural mixture and adaptation, entangling these questions with the rough divide of traditionalist Capoeira Angola and sportive Capoeira Regional. Some interlocutors celebrated the creative additivity of capoeira, often considered a trait of Afro-descendant culture, while strongly considering it a national Brazilian property; whereas others antagonistically claim a transnational Africanity as the foundation of a pure, even dogmatic tradition—a paradox often referred to in the field as a difference of *fundamento*, or philosophical and practical foundation of the art. Through my data, I have followed the themes of purity and mixture, Afro-Brazilian historical references, and geographical imaginaries evoked along with different views on capoeira, in order to understand how the contradictions are formed, sustained, and justified in a sociocultural environment so apparently transnational.

With the notion of ‘transnationalism’, I explicate historical cross-border imaginaries in capoeira. Theories of transnationalism emerged out of a necessity to conceptualise social fields that increasingly transcend national borders, often excluded by the totalising connotations of globalisation (Appadurai 1996). As Ulf Hannerz has stated, ‘transnational community’ is not a contradiction in terms: what is personal, primary, small-scale, is not necessarily narrow in space, and what spans continents needs not be large-scale in any other way (Hannerz 1992: 248). In the debate about what is so novel about current forms of transnationalism, continuous

connections preceding the nation-state are often contrasted with contemporary velocity and scale of global connections (Matory 2005: 2–5; Vertovec 2009: 15–21). Here I apply the notion of transnationalism both to the processes of capoeira’s historical development, and to how they are reflected in the geographical references of capoeira’s imaginary communities today.

Research on transnationalism, however, has been primarily concerned with spatially unbound communities and deterritorialisations. The concept of ‘translocality’ has been proposed to draw more attention to territorialised notions of belonging through embodied, local-to-local relations, especially in migration studies and geography (Greiner and Saknapolrak 2013). Theorists of translocalism largely build on a more ‘grounded transnationalism’ concerned with local contexts and the situatedness of mobile actors (Brickell and Datta 2011: 3). In recent anthropological usage, ‘translocal’ has been used diversely: for phenomena both between and within nation-states as an interchangeable term for the transnational (Hovland 2016); to emphasise the similar nature of different sites (Marion 2007); for place-making (Ganapathy 2013); and as a catch-phrase for bringing the global and the local together laterally (Ayora-Diaz 2013). Most interestingly, translocality has also been described as ‘sideways’ knowledge not contained in a modern colonial framework; the spatiality of translocal relations functions without needing the ‘imperial centre for interpretation’ (Johnson 2013). I propose the notion of the ‘translocal’ as viable to describe phenomena such as capoeira, enacting recognizably similar practice in different sites like Bahia (Aula 2012), Russia (Lipiäinen 2015), Canada (Joseph 2008; 2012), and England (Delamont and Stephens

2008). Capoeira practice at any site is mutually recognizable to practitioners from diverse origins, yet always experienced in a socio-culturally situated context wherein contacts across distances to other groups are fostered in local-to-local relations.

Previous research on capoeira has discussed its Afro-Brazilian roots and history (e.g., Assunção 2005; Talmon-Chvaicer 2008), but approaches to the globalisation of capoeira have paid most attention to (Afro-) Brazilian ‘authenticity’, national identity, and non-Brazilian practitioners’ experiences (e.g., Delamont and Stephens 2008; Griffith 2010; 2016; Weslowski 2010). My previous studies suggest that capoeira’s integrative logic appeals to European practitioners’ search for a (spiritual) re-enchantment, found in capoeira’s multimodality and ritual form (Aula 2008; 2012). In this paper, I emphasise the transnationality and processes of translocalisation in capoeira, viewed as an Afro-Brazilian continuity of border-crossing interconnections. My aim is to demonstrate how, despite unequal positions in a postcolonial reality, different capoeiristas participate translocally in a continuum of alternate experience and knowledge of colonial modernity.

Capoeira’s specificity is intimately connected to the Black Atlantic: the trans-oceanic culture and political economy produced in the colonial encounter, intertwining and deeply affecting the continents of Africa, the Americas, and Europe, and the whole experience of modernisation (Gilroy 1993; Matory 2005: 2; Joseph 2012). To understand the contradictory claims of the divergent forms of globalised capoeira today, I contextualise the multisitedness of the capoeira research field in the transnational processes of the Black

Atlantic, visible today foremost in the symbolic references to Brazil (especially Bahia) and Africa (especially Angola). The contemporary translocal level emerges in the local-to-local relations as affinities that local groups share with distant locations (Joensuu–Salvador–Santos–‘Angola’) while forming their own capoeira practice in a local context. This account is not meant to be comprehensive, but to open specific windows to the multiple world of capoeira as it enters the fortress of Europe with its backward ‘zebra kicks’.<sup>5</sup>

## SPORTIFICATION AND AFRICANISM

Capoeira transmits a living Afro-Brazilian heritage. The ritual circle (*roda*) evokes Black Atlantic history and tradition; ancestral heroes, saints and *orixás* (Afro-Brazilian personifications of natural powers) are evoked by singing to protect the game and its players (Downey 2005: 74–86). Stories of slave resistance are recited in songs or introductory speeches, and the movements and rhythms themselves bring a historical resonance to ancient African corporeal games (Assunção 2005: 44–56). The history of capoeira is part of the lore to such a degree that all capoeira students are expected to know the main twists and stories from the past—connected with the way the game is played in the group—and to identify themselves with it in singing. Practitioners sing in the first person about the hardships of slavery, because, as capoeiristas, it is now their history too. Griffith refers to Caroline C. Timbers’ M.A. thesis where she reflects on an experience in the FICA school, where mestre Valmir instructed her to sing, as a white American, the verses *Capoeira veio da África*

/ *Africana eu sou* (Capoeira comes from Africa / African I am). Calling herself an African twisted not only the meaning of Africanity, but also her self-conception and identification with capoeira's history (Griffith 2010: 112–113; on first-person remembrance in capoeira see Downey 2005: 8–83).

Variation in and between capoeira groups is ample, be it in relation to movement style, importance and content of ritual, song and rhythm, or their relation to the game. Differences are often interpreted along the rough divide of sportive Capoeira Regional and traditionalist Capoeira Angola (Vieira 1999; Talmon-Chvaicer 2008: 120–127, 151–156). This division demonstrates the different transnationalisms at play in translocal capoeira culture, where filial groups of similar lineages partake in similar interpretations of capoeira's history, meaning, and references to place.

Historical accounts of capoeira as part of slave culture trace it to the early 1800s; police records offer information on capoeira practice in Brazilian cities during the entire century, as it was mostly considered an illegal street fight (Talmon-Chvaicer 2008: 7–25). The modernisation of capoeira began in the early 1900s, then concentrated around a powerful figure, Manuel dos Reis Machado, known as mestre Bimba (Sodré 2002). He developed a new version of capoeira, claiming to rescue the martial nature of the game that was being lost due to folklorisation of Bahian capoeira, also known as *brincadeira de angola*, that followed the banning and suppression of capoeira practice at the turn of the century, and its subsequent near-disappearance from the southern cities (Assunção 2014; Downey 2005: 59). Mestre Bimba created a sportive education system for his fast and efficient Capoeira Regional—the

regional Bahian fight—while maintaining mystical aspects of the art (Almeida 1986; Sodré 2002)<sup>6</sup>. Capoeira Regional accelerated capoeira's official organisation from the 1930's on, also attracting white, upper class, and female practitioners. Incorporating elements from European gymnastics and Asian martial arts, it became a national sport taught in official 'academies'.

In a counter-movement, the traditional capoeira play in Bahia was labelled Capoeira Angola by a group of renowned mestres, raising Vicente Ferreira Pastinha (mestre Pastinha) as their icon. African heritage in movement, philosophy, ritual, and aesthetics was emphasised. Roughly outlined, the renewed, sportive Capoeira Regional was long seen as the only style fitting into the national modernisation project of Brazil, whereas Capoeira Angola survived as black culture at the edge of extinction (Assunção 2014). It was only after the collapse of the military dictatorship in 1985 that the movement reclaiming Afro-Brazilian cultural heritage and civil rights became stronger. The advocates of Afro-Brazilianity saw contemporary Capoeira Regional as a 'whitened' corruption of tradition and wanted to revive Capoeira Angola (Sansone 1999: 23). Symbolic angola was recalled in song verses such as 'angola is calling me, I'm going to play', thus recognising the Bantu roots of the game. Most of the capoeira players in the nineteenth century had a West Central African origin, of various ethnicities who spoke Bantu languages (Talmon-Chvaicer 2008: 26–60).

In resonance with the idea that in black cultures Africa becomes a symbol bank whence suitable content is drawn in different contexts, 'angola' also implicates something at play in the present (Mintz and Price 1992, quoted by

Sansone 1999). In my data on contemporary groups outside of purist Bahian lineages, most often it signals that a grounded game of the angola style is to be played, with sufficient time to develop the game, unlike in the faster regional games. Angola references in songs also express the groups' belonging to the angola tradition, as is the case with the song cited in the beginning of this paper, that also belongs to the repertoire of Finnish Capoeira Angola groups.

The revitalisation of Capoeira Angola in the 1980s redefined its roots once again. The angola discourse was founded on Africanity and authenticity, although dogmatism on movements, dress, or 'uniform' (wearing shoes and sleeved shirts) and other details was largely new: partly traceable to the institutionalisation of the 1930-40s, partly to the needs of the revitalisation movement, Afrocentrism, and individual styles. At the time, the growing success of Capoeira Regional increased the number of teachers, giving rise to preoccupations with the possible decay of mastery (Lacé Lopes 1999). It seems the urge to distinguish a formal tradition of angola also followed from this situation, whereas the cultural environment of old capoeira, Afro-Brazilian street culture, favoured improvisation. According to sociologist Luis Renato Vieira, the emphasis on capoeira's African roots often leads to a romanticising essentialism of an immutable tradition. The interaction between different African-American cultural expressions has been central to capoeira's development, as during the centuries of slavery, purity of tradition was not a priority (Vieira 1995: 96). Curiously, the very innovativeness and mutability of capoeira, a willingness to incorporate novelties from social surroundings, has, as noted above, also been seen as a trait of Africanity (Matory 2005: 267-268).<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, capoeira's formalisation has been an institutional aim at least since the first manual published in 1907 by an army officer under the title 'Guide to Capoeira or Brazilian Gymnastics'.<sup>8</sup> In Brazil's modern corporeal aesthetics, the normative has been constructed through a governmental ideology of 'whitening' Afro-descendant cultural forms. This modernisation project of the Estado Novo by President Getúlio Vargas in the 1930s promoted a national 'whitening' of Brazilian culture and population to create a new Brazilian race, following a Brazilian interpretation of scientific racism (DaMatta 1984; Downey 2005: 177). Capoeira Regional made the game-fight popular among a larger audience, and it was granted legal status in registered academies by a presidential verdict. Still today, when I registered for classes in the traditional Capoeira Regional school, Filhos de Bimba, in Salvador, I was given a form requesting information on profession, schooling, and family (field notes 2/2015). This signals the importance of defining the *cidadania* or descent citizenship of the capoeira students, of whom the majority seemed to be young black men from peripheral neighbourhoods. Although slavery was officially abolished almost 130 years ago, in the stratified society of Brazil recognition of fundamental citizen's rights for lower class black populations continues a complex struggle (Sansone 2003; on *cidadania* see also Wesolowski 2012; Saaristo 2015).

The sharpness of distinction *angoleiros*, practitioners of Capoeira Angola, constantly make to other forms of the art needs to be understood in relation to the marginalised history of African inheritance in Brazil, where Capoeira Angola remains in the margins. Capoeira Regional has gained support from nationalist discourses, including the status of

official national sport in Brazil (1975), whereas the African input to Brazilian culture has been only selectively accepted as a part of national mythology (Sansone 2003). Contemporary Capoeira Regional or *capoeira contemporânea* also refers to the big corporative groups who practise a formalised capoeira sport (Aceti 2013).

In capoeira's far away locations, where Afro-Brazilian history is not directly present, distinctions of style are not political in the same way. For capoeira beginners in the early 2000s in Joensuu, Eastern Finland, differences in tradition were of minor consideration compared to experiencing the whole different world of an Afro-Brazilian art. In Brazil as well, much of capoeira's development in the twentieth century happened outside the normative categories of 'angola' or 'regional', with groups incorporating traits from both divisions (Vieira 1999; Assunção 2014). For groups not belonging to strict lineages of Capoeira Angola, the term 'angola' may be used deliberately to note a group's rootedness in history, respect for ritual elements, and dialogical intentionality of movements in the game, thus serving to distinguish it from groups practising gymnastics or martial aspects alone; as in a verse from mestre Pinóquio (Florianópolis), who claimed to me to practise just capoeira 'without a surname':

*Hoje é desporto, de regra e competição/ Eu não concordo com toda essa inversão/ A Capoeira tá no jogo do patrão/ Se liga moço, presta atenção/ A Capoeira não é luta do patrão.*

Today it's a sport, rules and competition/  
I don't agree with all this inversion /  
Capoeira is now in the boss' game / Wake  
up fellow, be alert / Capoeira is no fight of  
the boss.

It seems convincing that both the increased economic opportunities and the consequent preoccupation with a decline of traditional skills and knowledge brought about by a transnational capoeira market have created a stronger need to emphasise lineage (belonging to a particular tradition). In the 1990s, in reference to capoeira's globalisation, Lacé Lopez (1999) discussed 'TAP/Varig mestres', exemplified by a fictitious Brazilian capoeirista's turning into a self-nominated 'Mestre Angola' on taking a transatlantic flight to Europe, which presented a world of possibilities for making a living with capoeira. However, for the growing numbers of non-Brazilian capoeiristas, even learning to repeat traditional verses and basic moves presents difficulties (see Lipiäinen 2015). Teaching capoeira in a cultural context completely different from its historical surroundings seems to require some formalisation of tacit Afro-Brazilian learnings (Downey 2008).

There have been many attempts to formalise capoeira, mostly with motives related to the art's former image as a threat to social order. The definition of capoeira as a sport is problematic, as it is with many other practices (Thorpe 2014). Capoeira is often described as a battle-dance, but neither of the Western categories of dance or fight capture its holistic nature. Lowell Lewis labels capoeira a 'blurred genre' (Lewis 1992; Downey 2014: 249–250), and capoeiristas themselves call it a game or play (*jogo*). The hypnotic sound of the berimbau and its repetitive rhythm, together with the ritual frame of the circle (*roda*) and the flow of movement on the ground, around, and upside down, affect the practitioners deeply, also evoking a mystical level of experience that many practitioners describe as spiritual (Aula 2012: 127–131).



Capoeira practitioners also take pride in the mysterious, hard-to-capture nature of their art, not easily conceivable from outside (Browning 1995: 8–126). Processes of institutionalisation are met with resistance also for this reason.<sup>9</sup> The contrarities with institutional processes vary according to capoeira's translocalisations into new places, meanwhile capoeira always evades stable definitions.

One initiative for the professionalization of capoeira teaching was rejected in the Brazilian Senate in 2014, with a wide protesting audience present in the decisive treatment, for it was following too narrow a definition of capoeira as a sport (with cultural decoration). A decade earlier, the most notable effort was led by the national Council of Physical Education (Confef/CREF), which was demanding a formal diploma in physical education from all capoeira instructors on the basis that capoeira is taught in schools (1998–2008). Traditional capoeira schools were finally liberated of the demand on the basis they belonged in the sphere of 'culture', and after a prolonged debate, the legal definition was set to exclude martial arts, yoga, and dance.<sup>10</sup> As recounted by mestre Pinóquio, a local council (CREF) offered expensive courses in physical education without the completion of which capoeira teaching would be forbidden in the southern city of Florianópolis. When the time given for completing the diploma came due inspectors came to mestre Pinóquio's school delivering a prohibition to continue teaching capoeira. He replied by simply taking down the sign 'Capoeira' and replacing it with 'Vadição' (field notes 02/2005).

In the past *vadição* (vagrancy) was widely used as a synonym for capoeira. Vieira has suggested that these kinds of expressions show

how elder mestres identified with an ethos that was diametrically opposed to the predominant moral values. 'Vagrancy', 'malice' or 'deception' did not have a negative meaning, but rather helped to construct a second reality opposed to Western notions of rationality and efficiency (Vieira 1995: 104; 121–124). Behind this was not only the structural violence of colonial slavery, where the subaltern population was subjected to Euro-Brazilian values despite their oppression, but also a subsequent need to identify with a lost connection to ancient African community and to a different cultural logic (Merrell 2005). Among the enslaved in Brazil, the connection with African origins was largely constructed with a novel interpretation of African ethnicities as symbolic nations, in a fashion not so different from capoeira's identification as 'angola' or 'regional'.

## MYTHICAL NATIONS OF THE BLACK ATLANTIC

*Quando eu venho de Luanda eu  
não venho só  
Eu trago ardendo nas costas  
O peso dessa maldade  
Trago entoando no peito  
Um grito de liberdade...*

When I come from Luanda  
I don't come alone  
I bring aching on my shoulders  
the weight of this evil  
I bring echoing in my chest  
the shout of freedom...

Capoeira song extract  
(author: mestre Toni Vargas).

Luanda, the capital of Angola, used to be one of the main ports for transporting enslaved Bantu people from West Central Africa, among whom capoeira evolved in Brazil. Capoeira is a product, and also to some extent a producer, of the transoceanic culture and political economy known as the Black Atlantic. As a strongly historicised cultural manifestation, capoeira expresses subaltern interpretations of colonial history. Capoeira practitioners learn about the enslavement of Africans in Brazil and its huge impact on the country constructed with forced labour. Many songs recount tales of working in the sugar fields, as well as fighting the police during the period of capoeira's illegalisation.

Capoeira is equipped with its own cultural apparatus, including the maintenance of non-academic archives on its cultural history.<sup>11</sup> Many capoeira events include seminars, formal moments for stories by elder mestres, and documentary films or lectures, often connected with academic research as capoeira scholars are usually practitioners themselves. This distribution of knowledge, even though of a fragmentary character, sustains capoeira as a transnational community. Especially in Capoeira Angola, there is great interest in researching the art's history for the purpose of reclaiming Africanity and the Bantu roots of the game, along with promoting rights of the Afro-Brazilian population. Bahian historian and *angoleiro* Fábio Mandingo emphasises capoeira's origins as pan-African:

Capoeira is a pan-African cultural manifestation, a junction of various martial expressions of diverse African groups who came to Brazil, and in the practice of living, came together and formed one body, in the same way as happened with the African

religion ... Similarly in capoeira I think you can see the *ladja* [Martiniquan martial art], the *morangue* [Madagascar and Reunion], diverse traditions of fight, African martial arts that you see inside capoeira. (Fábio Mandingo 02/2005)<sup>12</sup>

The similarities between different martial traditions of the Black Atlantic point not only to common origins, but also to translocal interaction between Africanists, activists, and scholars who have contributed to the shared identifications of these cultural forms. As for capoeira, Maya Talmon-Chvaicer has distinguished specific markers of 'angola' and 'regional', noting how these genres correspond to different politico-cultural views connected to the conceptions of capoeira's origins, the two opposites of which she aptly labels the 'Africanists' and 'Brazilianists' of capoeira (2008: 120–127). Contrary to the nationalist emphasis on the Brazilianity of capoeira as a national sport (Lacé Lopez 1999), or the Africanist endeavour to recognise it as an essentially African martial art (Desch-Obi 2002), capoeira has a translocal nature born in a multiply located process, although with undeniably African roots and routes further developed in Brazil. This is especially visible in Capoeira Angola, where the influences of Eastern martial arts, Western fights, and gymnastics have not been incorporated as in Capoeira Regional or in the many contemporary forms under that label.

Brazil alone received an estimated 40% of all the enslaved Africans shipped to the Americas. There are numerous historical sources on capoeira practice dating from the nineteenth century, and the slave society of the time was a diverse mix of ethnicities, including lighter-skinned slaves, 'mulattoes', and free blacks

(Klein and al. 2010). Persecuted capoeira practice was not limited to a specific group, although most of the capoeiras, as they were called, came from West Central African slave ports (Talmon-Chvaicer 2008: 14–20). After the delayed abolition of slavery in Brazil (1888), the capoeiras tended to have a wider range of backgrounds. Historian C.E. Soares (1997) has shown how, in the late 1800s Rio de Janeiro, capoeira became kind of a ‘gateway’ to the city for many foreigners and outsiders. To Soares, the presence of immigrants—mostly Portuguese—and of white men in the capoeira gangs of the Second Reign in late nineteenth-century Rio was a sign of wealth and complexity of capoeira culture. After surviving decades of fierce persecution, and flexible enough to incorporate a diverse background of elements, capoeira accommodated ‘a Babel of different nationalities’: Italians, Argentines, Paraguayans, Germans, North Americans, Chileans, Frenchmen, and Spaniards: ‘Built by Africans on Brazilian soil, capoeira’s destiny was to be marked by the cosmopolitan nature of the capital city’ (Soares 1997: 710). Although the contours of capoeira in Rio differ from Bahia, Soares’ research serves to show the diversity of early capoeira.

Nevertheless, the maintenance of purity in Capoeira Angola lineages continues to be a central theme through speeches, meetings, and publications. This preoccupation bears an interesting parallel to another realm of Afro-Brazilian culture. Unlike in the African counterparts of orixá or *voudoun* religions, in Bahian *candomblé* the notion of purity is of central importance, both in the maintenance of tradition and in ritual practice (Capone 2010). According to Matory, tendencies to maintain presumed African purity in an evidently syncretic diaspora culture spring

from the interests of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century black transatlantic subjects—merchants, priests, and African literati—who in turn influenced the rising scholarly interest in Afro-Brazilian culture (Matory 2005: 115–148). ‘Nations’ in *candomblé* (denominations such as *nagô*, *jejé*, *ketú* and *angola*) are constituted as transatlantic nations and imaginary communities by constantly recreating symbolic bonds with their supposed regions of origin (Matory 2005: 38–72). Whereas Capoeira Regional references the Bahia region in Northeastern Brazil, ‘angola’ suggests the Bantu origins of capoeira in Africa (see also Sansone 1999).

West-Central African Bantu culture was long undervalued, a tendency traceable foremost to early twentieth-century Brazilian Africanists, influenced by European evolutionism, who considered Bantu cultures inferior to the Yoruba/Nagô (Matory 2005; Assunção 2005: 21–22). In *candomblé* today, the Bantu-rooted nations like Angola and Caboclo are still undervalued (Capone 2010). Matory explains this discriminatory construction of Yoruba superiority in terms of local white invention, beginning in the 1930s (2005: 43–46, 121–127). A later counter-movement in research, such as that in Robert F. Thompson’s work, elevated Bantu as a positive symbol, inspiring scholars from the 1970s onwards. At the time a theory also spread, springing from Angolan traveller Souza de Neves’ accounts, of *ngolo* or *engolo* dance being the Angolan origin of Brazilian capoeira. Assunção, however, critiques T. J. Desch-Obi for sustaining this claim without evidence in his otherwise comprehensive account of central African martial traditions (Assunção 2005: 25–26).

Over the course of centuries, immigration to the Americas by enslaved Africans far

exceeded European immigration (Klein et al. 2010: 16), but there was also mobility to Africa. Important transoceanic exchange occurred between Afro-Brazilian religious leaders and their correspondents on the Gulf of Guinea, before and after abolition, both publicly organised and personal (Matory 2005). Capoeira mestres and researchers have also long travelled to Africa. Capoeira songs still commemorate the participation of the legendary figurehead of Capoeira Angola, mestre Vicente Ferreira Pastinha (1889–1981), in the Premier Festival International des Arts Negres in Senegal in 1966 with a capoeira group. Many Angola groups use zebra symbols in reference to Africa and the Congo / Angola area, which are also connected with the supposed Angolan zebra dance *n'golo* (Assunção 2005: 51–53). Recent contemporary research into Angolan capoeira predecessors includes the project 'The Angolan Roots of Capoeira' by internationally renowned mestre Cobra Mansa, with capoeira historian Matthias Assunção, who travelled in West Africa documenting interaction with various cultural expressions, including *engolo* or *n'golo* (Assunção et al. 2014). Although any genuinely African source for capoeira cannot be supported, influences from diverse practices that converged in Brazil have been well demonstrated by research (Abib 2004; Assunção 2005; Talmon-Chvaicer 2008).

As demonstrated here, although a quest for purity / authenticity is a tendency in Afro-Brazilian tradition, the additive nature of Afro-Brazilian cultural expressions has often favoured inclusion of different elements; creative incorporation is not a national Brazilian invention. In his research comparing capoeira and *candomblé* experience, Merrell (2005) attempts to explain the Afro-Brazilian paradoxes

semantically, claiming a differentiated cultural logic inherent to both traditions. Merrell's arguments build on imaginative philosophical analogies that fail to argue for a separate cultural logic as such, that would explain both of these complexities. Instead, I propose that a more fruitful approach should pay attention to the translocal processes wherein Afro-Brazilian traditions have developed, and continue to transnationalise. It is complicated to claim cultural ownership of a subaltern *melange* like capoeira—paraphrasing A. L. Tsing, 'everyone carries a history of contamination: purity is not an option' (Tsing 2015: 27).

Transnational historical processes of the Black Atlantic are reflected today in alternate knowledge and experience of modern colonial history and society in capoeira's translocal world. In line with Jackson et al. (2004), we can recognise that an increasing number of people participate in transnational spaces, irrespective of their own migrant histories or ethnic identities. These transnational spaces incorporate the 'symbolic and imaginary geographies' through which people attempt to make sense of an increasingly transnational world (Jackson et al. 2004: 2–3). Capoeira indeed may be conceived of as a product or index sign of 'globalisation'. However, the notion carries neoliberal connotations such as commercialisation, (cultural) industrialisation, the dominance of Euro-American cultural configurations and their localisations, and cultural appropriation. All these may be present in the world of capoeira, but there is more to it: a community of belonging based on horizontal relations. The whole globalisation of capoeira has been mostly realised horizontally, without official support programs or large-scale industries (Assunção 2005: 186–192).



*Figure 1. Practitioners from different countries are gathered in a roda in legendary Terreiro de Jesus square. Mestre Boca Rica and Fábio Formigão enter the game (9th January 2005).*

## TRANSLOCAL TENSIONS IN BAHIA

The cosmopolitan city of Salvador, and the larger Recôncavo area surrounding Bahia de Todos os Santos (Bay of All Saints), has the second biggest black population in the world after Lagos in Nigeria, and is the capital of Afro-descendant culture in Brazil (Collins 2015; Sansone 2003). It is a pilgrimage destination for capoeiristas I have interviewed, who come to ‘drink in the fountain’ of capoeira knowledge, and train with Brazilian mestres. Amidst social, ethnic, and political tensions, capoeira groups and academias offer communities of

belonging where different capoeiristas recognise each other as taking part in the same world, recognition enforced by a sense of complicity as capoeiristas (as in the use of specific capoeira names). In the process of community-in-the-making, the training sites of capoeira may be connected to other spaces such as kitchens, dwellings, and orchards, with meeting points for diverse activities, as is the case in my data. In the big weekend workshops, often with many mestres visiting the organising group, a diverse cultural programme is offered, such as seminars and lessons of Afro-Brazilian cultural forms, like percussion and *afoxé* (so-called ‘street candomblé’).

The 2000s have witnessed the growth of the international popularity of Capoeira Angola, bringing value to the whole capoeira scene in Brazil, where foreign contacts and appreciation are capital; according to Roberto DaMatta, the whole of Brazilian society and citizenship is based on personal relations (DaMatta 1984: 63). In Brazil, Afro-Brazilian cultural traditions are often discriminated against and stereotyped as backward (Leite 2015). Thus, international success contributes to national recognition,<sup>13</sup> which facilitates dedication to, and earning a living from, capoeira (Falcão 2005). However, the search for official recognition is limited by attitudes of resistance: value achieved inside capoeira cannot be substituted with institutional merits. Even to pass as a credible researcher, I needed to play in the ring.

This global flow of different nationalities to capoeira is not new, as evidenced by late nineteenth-century Rio. Today Bahia brings together cultural pilgrims, eager to learn an Afro-Brazilian tradition, and ethnic Afro-Bahian capoeira activists reclaiming their cultural heritage of African traditions and resistance to slavery. On the side there are many other locals, such as those trying to make a living out of the tourism industry by capoeira street performances (Esteves 2011). The observations here are based primarily on fieldwork with two Capoeira Angola groups: Semente do Jogo de Angola, a filial group of mestre Jogo de Dentro; and FICA—Bahia (Fundação Internacional de Capoeira Angola) led by mestre Valmir. During my fieldwork (January–April 2005) both groups had foreign visitors, mainly from Europe (e.g., France, Sweden, Finland, Germany, Spain), North America (Canada and the US), and Japan, but also from elsewhere (Israel, Colombia, Korea). These pilgrim tourists who come to train in capoeira usually stay in Bahia for two weeks to three months (Esteves 2011: 84), often

on a modern quest for deeper experience, as expressed by one French woman:

In my capoeira something was missing. I did the movements, but understood nothing of the game... They were saying it's a martial art, of the enslaved; I did not see this. In Europe I did not see this fight. Maybe, what was missing, was this Africanity that I was ... I did not know what I was looking for. Something deeper, what I could not see there. (Salvador, 11/03/2005)

This comment points to challenges of capoeira's translocalisations elsewhere, but also to one's own learning. Enhanced understanding, enabled by individual mobility, also affects translocal community relations between groups in different countries, including those who do not travel themselves. In her ethnographic research at FICA—Bahia, Griffith demonstrates the importance of pilgrimage to Bahia in legitimising one's authenticity as a capoeirista, the FICA standing out for its welcoming attitude and integration of tourists (Griffith 2010: 180–182). For capoeiristas from elsewhere, travel to Brazil is a significant part of the practice (as described of North American capoeira groups by Griffith [2016] and Joseph [2008]). The global inclusion of non-blacks and non-Brazilians also worries some Angola activists, connected with the view that political promotion of black Brazilians' rights needs to be a part of capoeira as the Afro-Brazilian population suffers from poverty and exclusion.

What you see today in Capoeira Angola academies is a much larger number of whites than blacks, isn't it. [The white people] do research, travel, right, they buy stuff, study, sometimes go to Africa and go

to Cachoeira, to Santo Amaro: things that are natural, but that the black community cannot afford to do. (Fábio Mandingo 03/2005)

Exclusion of Brazilians from capoeira, however, does not seem an acute threat, as global capoeira is led strongly by Brazilians (Delamont and Stephens 2008). Brazilian capoeira schools also organise free capoeira classes in underprivileged neighbourhoods. Thus the preoccupations must be understood against a backdrop of colonial history and constant reproduction of unequal relations. Exclusion is a burning problem in the strongly stratified society of Brazil, where the colonial heritage of slavery continues to affect structural opportunities (Sansone 2003). Worries about capoeira's future may not lie in the possible decline brought about by capoeira's global spread but, rather, in the possible reproduction of colonial relations via cultural appropriation.

Currently the hierarchical relation of Afro-Brazilian and European cultural dominance is partly turned upside down in capoeira, although the global capitalist economy also encompasses markets of cultural heritage affecting capoeira networks. In capoeira, a critical stance towards colonial relations is taught also to the privileged participants by mediating African and Afro-Brazilian ancestry in trainings and in the ring (*roda*). The enchanted world of the *roda* offers a uniting space of shared experience. In the songs—that everyone is expected to learn—the singers identify with the agony of enslavement, the urge for freedom and the high respect for the powers of nature, via themes such as slave work, captivity, and faring at sea (Passos Neto 2001; Griffith 2016). Resistance to slavery and the Afro-Brazilian historical references present in capoeira's movements and lore surely touch on a different level the hearts and bodies

of Afro-Bahian capoeiristas familiar with the reality of the slums in Salvador, a direct outcome of the country's former reliance on slavery. Empowering pride in the creativity and resistance of the ancestors is present in learning capoeira.

The phenomenology of capoeira has the power to change people; the way we learn to move and the rhythms also affect perception (Downey 2005), not only of our surroundings but also of ourselves and our social relations. Learning capoeira is not always easy, as the foundations of postures, movements, and its whole logic are often so different from the embodied corporeality of other experiences, such as 'traditional sports' or physical education (Downey 2008); this also holds true to some degree for many Brazilians. For practitioners coming from a different cultural background, imitation is an important learning method, although the formality of repetition may be over-emphasised with foreign apprentices (Downey 2005: 41–45; 2008). Nevertheless, even formal repetition may serve to keep the tradition alive, as reflected philosophically by a Capoeira Angola devotee, while discussing the meanings of liberation from slavery in capoeira:

It could be what you form if you sing 'iê' before starting the *roda*. You say 'iê', even not knowing what it is, but you speak *Iê*. ... So you are singing to African entities. You are calling for African entities. You make moves with your body that liberate African energies, of human beings! Well, in this way of seeing the world. However you... well, it does not depend on what is said, *ha haa*. (Hélio Sousa 02/2005)

This utterance brings forth the fascinating claim that, independently of discourse, bodily practice transports energy; ancestral knowledge, life

experience, or meanings can be maintained even when not understood as such. This is a hopeful perspective on cultural transmission cross-cut by the threats of exaggerated formalisation and appropriation of the subaltern.

According to a view often expressed by mestres, capoeira has the magic to overcome limits and boundaries that separate people. In a mutual learning process, the constant transgression of bodily habits and limitations bonds the practitioners together. The exotic specificity of capoeira, partly invisible to outsiders, contributes to a sense of community enforced by mutual training—sweating to acquire awkward positions and demanding movements, singing, learning traditional jests, and finally producing together a ritual frame in the *roda*, with contribution to the energy of the event expected from everyone (Aula 2009). The *roda de capoeira* is—among other things—a potential moment of union, overcoming the differences that separate people in a complicated society. Transcending the differences, it can be seen that local communities everywhere face financial hardships and loss of self-determination in the global economy. A Finnish interviewee in Bahia identified with local *angoleiros* in a similarly anti-colonial stance, but from a white tourist pilgrim's point of view by making a comparison between learning capoeira and handicraft skills. He described both as 'breathing holes', lifelines inside an oppressive capitalist system. In some way, capoeira does then offer a 'second reality' for *vadiação*, connecting people from distant points of the global economy with common affinities and shared identifications in the aspirations for freedom of cultural 'resistance to slavery'.

Contemporary capoeira thus forms a translocal community culture, comparable to that of translocal competitive dance, the anthropology of which is presented by Jonathan

Marion (2007). Marion understands the ballroom dance community as translocal, with individual studios and competitions being connected with one another in such a way that the relationships between them are as important as the relationships within them. Research sites exist as much in the translocal linkages as in the locations themselves (Marion 2007: 111). Marion's use of the concept still remains somewhat unbound, however, whereas the ethnic, social, and historical differences between capoeira's localities, combined with the dense political history in capoeira, call for a more defined consideration of local enactments. To grasp the divergent interpretations of the transnational Afro-Brazilian history in capoeira, I use the concept of translocality as taking equally into account the relations within-and-between, and the specificity of local conditions of experience.

## SELF-MADE CAPOEIRA IN EASTERN FINLAND

Global capoeira is formed of diverse actors and networks. Teachers with formal lineages to Brazilian groups and their respective mestres travel giving workshops among a cluster of groups with a similar conception of capoeira. Capoeira is mostly practised in sportive associations, often connected with other manifestations of Afro-Brazilian culture, such as samba. In the small country of Finland alone, there are around 20 regularly functioning capoeira groups, found in all the bigger cities and in some small towns.

Numerous capoeira performances were already being offered outside Brazil during the twentieth century (Assunção 2005: 186), but a wider global interest in capoeira coincides with the acceleration in global communication and migration; in Europe capoeira has been



growing since the 1980s (Aceti 2013). Groups and practitioners in Europe are often initiated by Brazilian mestres. However, before capoeira became more common during the 2000s, many practitioners in Europe had encountered capoeira on their travels in Europe or in Brazil, or simply learnt some movements from casual acquaintances. Scarce information on capoeira was shared between peers and learnt from travellers, facilitated by a sense of belonging to a wider community of capoeira. Capoeira communities also start from small groups with a common affinity, identifying with a consistent style and may then look for a Brazilian mestre with whom to affiliate. Such independent capoeira group formation occurred in Joensuu, Eastern Finland, in the early 2000s. The case illustrates how transnational Afro-Brazilian history was present in the practice as something novel, experienced differently from the Bahian context, where history relates directly to the practitioners' life-worlds.

The actively ongoing association Capoeira Nórdica was registered in 2002 by a loose group of friends of which I was part. Most participants did not have a background in sports, but rather in cultural activities, and the cultural difference and historical depth in capoeira seemed fascinating. We had initially started training with a local former exchange student to Brazil, then combined information from various sources in Brazil and Europe. Transatlantic flights and international workshops were not available the way they are today. One of the first written sources on capoeira in Europe was the *Little Capoeira Book* by Nestor Capoeira (1995; translated to Finnish in 2005), also used by the early Capoeira Nórdica in practising classic movement sequences of Capoeira Regional. Before capoeira websites and recorded music started multiplying and handmade instruments

became more available, actual tapings of capoeira music were copied and used for training. Capoeira Angola as a kind of self-organised playfulness in Russia echoes a similar experience (Lipiäinen 2015).

Translocalisation refers to processes where cultural forms, symbols, and practices move in networks that detach them from the previous national or local contexts, widening or multiplying their meanings (Aguilar Ros 2012). In Joensuu, as Brazilian handmade instruments were not available, the capoeira roda was first built in a bricolage setting. There was a djembe drum, an *agogô* iron bell bought from a music shop, any kind of tambourine substituting for a Brazilian *pandeiro*, an imaginative berimbau made of native Finnish juniper with a big tin can as a sounding board to replace the proper calabash gourd, even tentative Finnish language versions made of capoeira songs, inspired by the fact that besides myself other members did not know Portuguese. The history of Africans in Brazil was learnt with songs and movement names, such as *benção* (blessing), an ironic inversion of the blessing the slaves were forced to ask from their masters, turned into a pushing kick in the chest, as the story goes. The inventive practice created a meaningful community of belonging within a translocal framework.

The notion of the translocal completes and widens the approach of transnationalism. As defined by Kupiainen (2004), translocalisation means the processes by means of which migrants build up new forms of locality and communality, based partly on their own cultural backgrounds, and partly on the opportunities and socio-cultural contexts of the host society, interconnecting these different localities. In Joensuu one could say the cultural practice of capoeira itself had migrated to Finland. Afro-Brazilian references were intriguing for the

members, this enchantment connecting with attempts to understand the multimodality and paradoxical nature of the capoeira game.

The previously mostly unknown Black Atlantic heritage was mostly present in capoeira's alternate rhythmic and corporal experience: a world of ambiguity, trickery, and apparent paradoxes (Merrell 2005; Downey 2014). Customary positions were literally turned upside down, and every new conception ('smile to your co-player') was soon to be twisted ('to trip him down without notice'). History as literal references was also present, especially in the names of ancestral mestres and places in the songs. Commemorative rodas were even held for the legendary seventeenth-century black hero, Zumbi, war king of the free maroon society Quilombo dos Palmares, whose fascinating story was retold from utopian fragments in the Joensuu group. Capoeira was experienced as something specific shared by insiders, yet inviting the curiosity of outsiders in public displays. For many of us, it also represented a connection with resistance in the Global South, a countercultural possibility of stepping out of hegemonic perceptions and physically experiencing a cultural critique of colonialism and slavery in the global political economy.

When in 2006 I recounted the groups' initial steps to Nestor Capoeira himself, a visiting mestre in the 'Sol da Meia Noite' event (organised by Força Natural in Tampere, Finland), he was quick to identify with the account. In Brazil, capoeira as a folk tradition is part of street youth culture. Mestre Nestor narrated how he had engaged with capoeira in a similar manner, playing some moves with his friends and slowly starting to accumulate information in various ways that included travelling after capoeira mestres to learn more (see Capoeira 1995). This combination of spontaneity with a rich oral and corporal

tradition defines some of the translocal characteristics of capoeira, despite whether one prefers to explain it with the diasporic African 'additivity' or the Brazilian tendency toward 'mixture'.

In the snowy winter of Eastern Finland, there is no playing capoeira on the streets, which led to a conflict about the definition of capoeira as a sport. As was customary for recreational activities, Capoeira Nórdica applied for access to the municipality's training spaces. Finnish institutional support for youth sports in the early 2000s was quite unprepared for the surge of non-traditional sports, and the application was denied on the basis that capoeira was not a sport. Despite enclosed descriptions of the group's sportive training programs, the municipal sports committee relied on a list of sports by the Finnish Federation of Sport and Physical Education (SLU 1993–2012)—a controversial list throughout its existence. Diverse training spaces were found, then, through individual contacts: school gyms, student resident spaces, and a seminar room equipped with a dressing room and a wall mirror in the faculty where I was studying. Finally, public support was no longer denied and Capoeira Nórdica was offered support from youth services. In comparison, Brazilian capoeira groups have encountered more trouble when being defined as a sport than not, as in the aforementioned institutionalisation conflicts, and often considerable creativity is needed to arrange training spaces. A recurrent translocal tendency, however, is the difficulty for outsiders and institutional actors to recognise what capoeira is and how it should be treated. Translocality thus describes something recognisably in common, with differing local manifestations and enactments following from local dynamics.

Despite a continuing affection for liberty from formal relations, Capoeira Nórdica created

its first affiliation<sup>14</sup> to a Brazilian teacher—nowadays recognised as mestre Melqui—from Guarujá, South-eastern Brazil, with visits to Finland in 2002–2010. Related capoeira groups in the Santos area emphasised their rootedness in time before the angola/regional division in the 1930s/40s, and the intentionality of movements in the game, in contrast to the ‘robot army capoeira’ of the mega-groups.<sup>15</sup> For mestre Melqui, teaching in Finland opened career opportunities in Brazil, the work in capoeira enabling him to study a degree in law. This demonstrates the mutual importance of different translocal sites. During his time in the Joensuu group, he contributed greatly to the affectionate atmosphere, which he described when recalling a summer weekend workshop, with quiet people rushing through the terribly cold streets and entering another world in the training space: one of hugging, music, and laughter. In the workshops the capoeira lore, rich with proverbs and stories, was learnt mainly via translation of songs and verses, such as *buraco velho tem cobra dentro* (old holes have snakes), pointing out the need for caution in playing with older capoeiristas; or the melancholic song ‘Chama eu Angola’ that connects nostalgia for a mythical past with contemporary Angola. The Afro-Brazilian world became a kind of fantasised community; it did not directly represent actual questions of life and death—social survival and fundamental identity issues—as in the deep play of capoeira in Brazilian slums, a harsh reality inherited from the enslavement of Africans.

In the subsequent years Capoeira Nórdica has connected more with other Finnish groups, organising workshops with visiting teachers and arranging for members to travel to workshops in other towns. In the translocal capoeira culture, the weekend events with visiting mestres or teachers and after-training parties, often with Afro-Brazilian music, are important sites for

sharing, learning, and display of skills. As Aceti (2013) notes, capoeira’s global success also benefits from an exotic ‘postcard’ marketing of Brazil. Capoeira Regional, both in its national and transnational forms, is connected to Brazilian nationalist imagery, with regular use of the Brazilian flag and its colours, and references to the idealised tropicalism and exoticism riding on joyful samba, exotic drinks, and noisy parties, all of which were quite visible in Joseph’s account of capoeira in Canada (2008). On the other hand, Capoeira Angola and its philosophy is connected to reclaiming value for African heritage and Afro-Brazilian cultural forms in Brazil and elsewhere. In the United States, it was first embraced as black culture, with some groups even excluding non-black members; whereas now Capoeira Angola as it is transnationalised via the FICA group, has largely dissolved these limits. The rough dichotomy often disappears in practice.

In the transnational world of today, more and more people have mixed descent. In the inherently transnational and multivocal world of capoeira, they can accommodate their own diversity (see also Assunção 2005: 212–213). In a transnational community, identity is strongly linked to another place or places, but can no longer be taken as a stable and fixed unity. Participation in the capoeira community has different intensities for different individuals and varies in time. In some regard, the ‘colonial other’ recreates alterity in those who live on the privileged side of alterity, forming a sort of ‘third space’ (Fischer 2003: 7). Hierarchical relations become twisted in a post-colonial and multicultural landscape of capoeira communities. A transnationally formed Afro-Brazilian history is shared, yet its local interpretations and experiences differ; this is what I call translocal capoeira culture.

## CONCLUSIONS

Afro-Brazilian heritage continues to be part and parcel of the contemporary capoeira experience, uniting practitioners across both time and space. Approaching capoeira as an expression of the Black Atlantic reveals transnational connections at its very core, yet, following Assunção (2014), the transnationalization of capoeira only became intense after the 1980s. With a different usage of the notion, I argue that the historical formation of capoeira has always been diversely and inherently transnational. It is not some inherently African character, or national Brazilian creativity, that provides the basis for capoeira's transnational success but, rather, a complex process of translocalisations not contained by centralised power, constituted both between localities and within local contexts. The translocal capoeira culture is a direct continuation of capoeira's transnational history.

I have described how the holistic art of capoeira connects practitioners in different localities with each other and with a 'transnationally' formed Afro-Brazilian history. The notion of the 'translocal' adds the element of sensitivity to local contexts wherein capoeira's transnational history is experienced and interpreted. Transcending traditional localities also implies the importance of local-to-local relations across distances with different groups and Brazilian teachers who mediate between ambiguous transnational imaginaries and divergent local participants. My multi-sited 'research imaginary' is located in and between capoeira manifestations in Salvador da Bahia, Santos, Joensuu in Finland, and a symbolically mediated Africa. The threads between them display how contemporary ethnographic-level experience in capoeira is embedded in translocal connections and formative of such connectivity in

affinities, relationships, and imaginatively mediated significant distant locations, such as evoking Zumbi dos Palmares in a capoeira encounter in Eastern Finland.

As a translocal culture, capoeira forms an alternate space. As Michael Fischer has put it, cultural creation is a *deep play* where participants in knowledge articulation interact with moral systems of larger societies, and moral systems interrogate one another (Fischer 2003: 11); there we have a third space of capoeira's translocations, where alternate experience has an ethical relation to the larger society. The capoeira lore challenges hegemonic views of colonial history in Europe by creating an affinity to experiences worlds apart from a white European practitioner: in the colonial sugar cane fields, in the Middle passage, in the streets and seashores of Afro-descendant Brazil. The game played out in the ritual circle, the *roda*, dissolves various boundaries from ethnic and colonial to institutional and Western categories of sport and culture, dance and fight, body and spirit. A paradoxical multimodality of Bantu traditions of the Black Atlantic is ever present in capoeira's myriad forms, posing conflicts with social categorisations and institutionalisation processes in different local contexts. Besides the differences, the recognisable distinctiveness of capoeira is maintained. The diversity of capoeira's developments parallels other practices from outside Europe, such as yoga, also enacted in the West in diverse ways, and the transnationalisation of other non-traditional sports (Thorpe 2014). By using 'translocal', I suggest the concept could be applied to phenomena where local groups interact across distances, sharing mutually recognisable similarities at different sites.

Primarily I have strived to demonstrate how capoeira's translocality is a continuation of ancient transnational connections, despite the

specificities of today's accelerated globalisation. I have applied the concept of transnationality to describing how capoeira's imaginary belonging connects participants to Black Atlantic history. Brazil (foremost in Capoeira Regional) and Africa (in Capoeira Angola) are referred to as the mythical home of the art, offering to capoeira communities an imaginary geography (see Jackson et al. 2004). An additional research finding is the way capoeira's central references to Africa and Brazil reflect ethnic identity construction in Brazilian history of the mythical nations when juxtaposed with Afro-Brazilian religious denominations. The discussion of purity and mixture is visible, if not replicated, in geographical nominations such as Capoeira Angola and Candomblé Nagô. In this paper, Capoeira's development in Bahia and in the Black Atlantic demonstrates how a whole different world, brought about by capoeira's Afro-Brazilianity, has been created in transnational relations. With its long-term connections in the Atlantic triangle of Europe-Africa-Americas, capoeira culture puts the current enthusiasm for transnationalism into a long-term perspective, in line with Matory who emphasises transnationalism as a predecessor, precondition, and continual reality of national communities (Matory 2005). Further, the concurrent transnationalisms of capoeira, with their respective imageries, are not one but many.

In the translocal world of capoeira today, historical transnational connections continually renew their significance. Capoeira presents an alternative relation to Brazilianity and the national imagery of Brazil, including the histories of slavery and of society's margins, one that celebrates the cultural innovativeness of the oppressed. In the case of Capoeira Angola, the identifications are strongly connected to African diaspora. Black Brazilians worry

about cultural appropriation as the capoeira market transnationalises, but at the same time, capoeira creates affinities with black histories for participants from different ethnic-cultural backgrounds by spreading awareness of the Afro-Brazilian history of resisting slavery. Ancestry is mediated by participants from different backgrounds in the *roda de capoeira*. Ritual *roda* offers a space of connectivity; the echo of the *berimbau's* string touches hearts and bodies in different continents, evoking a 'second reality'. With capoeira, different experiences of the colonial encounter and transcontinental relations are brought into the ever fragmenting European modernity, already disillusioned about the homogeneity of historical truth and national narratives.

## NOTES

- 1 *Angoleiro* is a practitioner of *Capoeira Angola*. All capoeira lyrics and interview excerpts are translated from Portuguese by the author.
- 2 In this text, Capoeira Angola and Capoeira Regional are spelled as proper names, whereas 'angola' as a general capoeira denomination or as an autochthonic reference to roots is written in lower case.
- 3 I express my gratitude to the research project 'Transforming the Future in Brazil: Ritual and Indigenous Agencies', University of Helsinki, and to the project director Pirjo Kristiina Virtanen; the SCE Doctoral School at the University of Eastern Finland and my supervisor Helmi Järviluoma-Mäkelä; to Eeva Houtbeckers and Janne Rantala for comments and to the fantastic criticism from my anonymous reviewers. Foremost I thank capoeiristas and mestres who collaborated in this research, especially mestres Melqui, René, Valmir, Cobra Mansa, Jogo de Dentro and others; the 2005 fellowship at Quilombo Cecília: Hélio, Jocélia and Mandingo, and all Capoeira Nórdica members in Joensuu past and future.
- 4 Journals, fanzines and blogs are mainly from capoeira-related associations Quilombo Cecília / Quilombo do Passo 37; FICA; ACANNE

- and INCAB. Interviews with Portuguese practitioners and Brazilian mestres from 2002 are used as background material. When solicited by my interlocutors, I use their full or artistic names.
- 5 Basic capoeira kicks are executed backwards with hands in the ground. Zebra is also a favourite symbol for the African heritage and Africanity in capoeira, as will be shown below.
  - 6 Sodré is a capoeira scholar and sociologist as well as a student of mestre Bimba himself; Almeida is known as mestre Acordeon, also a student of mestre Bimba, and a producer of well-known capoeira music recordings.
  - 7 The additive nature of African cultures has been promoted foremost by Mintz and Price as a proof of cultural creativity despite enslavement (Matory 2005: 14–15).
  - 8 Quoted in Burlamaqui 1928; also I was shown a copy by Pedro Abib at an UFBA library. The original edition is missing.
  - 9 For capoeira's cunning aesthetics as a 'weapon of the weak', see Downey 2014.
  - 10 Recurso Especial Nº 1.012.692 - RS (2007/0294222-7).
  - 11 E.g. private capoeira groups' archives; Instituto Jair Moura.
  - 12 Martiniquean *ladgya* bears a close resemblance to capoeira with its combination of head-butts with kicks, and the importance of music commanding the pace and style of fight (Assunção 2005, 63–64).
  - 13 The inclusion of *roda da capoeira* on the list of humanity's intangible heritage (Unesco 2014) was widely noticed in Brazil. In November 2015 the president of Brazil handed to New York-based heir of Pastinha, Mestre João Grande, the Grand Cross of *Ordem do Mérito Cultural* for his work for Brazilian culture.
  - 14 The group, however, has maintained a distance from commitments to so-called capoeira politics involved with different groups and lineages.
  - 15 The *Senzala dos Santos* lineage leads to Bahian angola of mestre Sombra, but due to interests of the students, movements from Capoeira Regional were incorporated during decades of practice (Mestre Sombrinha, interview 12/2010). Today the group has turned back to its roots, as Capoeira Angola has become the most notably growing form of capoeira globally.

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