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GLOBALIZATION, AUTHENTICITY AND LEGITIMACY IN MEXICAN CAPOEIRA

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ABSTRACT

As capoeira globalizes, a growing number of non-Brazilian practitioners have the opportunity to become capoeira masters (*mestres*). In this context, my contribution analyses strategies followed by the first Mexican man and woman to obtain what Lauren Miller calls the ‘ultimate marker of authenticity’. As I have argued elsewhere [Contreras Islas 2021], Mexican capoeira is interesting because it seems to have achieved a more advanced glocalization state than ‘diasporic capoeira’ in the Global North. Thus, examining the life stories of Mexican *mestres* is interesting for comparing the dynamics of authenticity/legitimacy in globalized capoeira across the North-South divide. While my findings corroborate many of Miller’s observations regarding the strategies that non-Brazilian capoeiristas employ to achieve legitimacy, they also point out some crucial differences in issues such as innovation, apprenticeship pilgrimages, and the status of the title of *mestre* as the ‘ultimate marker of authenticity’. These differences may relate to peculiarities of specific capoeira styles, differences in capoeira’s globalization processes or gender issues.

INTRODUCTION

Capoeira is one of the most consistently studied martial arts in academic circles. In the English-speaking world, for instance, the earliest studies on the subject date back to the anthropological work of Ruth Landes [1947], and have increased since the 1990s with publications by Lowell Lewis [1992], Matthias Assunção [2005], Greg Downey [2005], Lauren Miller [2016] and the team of Sara Delamont, Neil Stephens and Claudio Campos [2017], among many others. Capoeira studies comprise an interdisciplinary field in which history, anthropology, sociology, pedagogy and others converge. Recent topics in this field include studies of globalization, migration and mobility in capoeira [e.g., Guizardi 2013; Miller 2016; Gonzalez Varela 2019]. A recurring question in this context concerns the authenticity and legitimacy of globalized capoeira as it expands outside Brazil [Joseph 2008b; Guizardi 2011; Miller 2013]. This article aims to further explore this question.

Following in the steps of Lauren Miller [2013; 2016; with Marion 2018], this contribution analyses the strategies used by non-Brazilian capoeiristas to obtain what she calls the ‘ultimate marker of authenticity’ [Miller 2016: 43]: the title of *mestre*. I hypothesise that such strategies change with the structure of the social field of capoeira in different regions of the globe – for example, between ‘diasporic capoeira’ [Delamont & Stephens 2008] in the Global North and ‘globalized capoeira’ in Mexico [Contreras Islas 2021]. To that end, I analyze the life stories of Cigano and Rosita¹ – the first Mexican man and woman to become *mestres*. By doing so, I aim to expand our current understanding of the dynamics of authenticity/legitimacy in different capoeira styles and contexts while challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about the globalization of the art as it has been studied in and written about by people in the Global North [see: Contreras Islas 2021].

In general, my findings corroborate many of Miller’s observations regarding the strategies non-Brazilian capoeiristas use to gain legitimacy. However, I also find some notable differences regarding the role of innovation, the relevance and destinations of apprenticeship pilgrimages, and the status of the title of *mestre* as the ‘ultimate marker of authenticity’. While some of these findings may relate to characteristics specific to particular capoeira styles and schools, others could arise from differences in capoeira’s globalization processes across the North-South divide [Contreras Islas 2021] or gender issues [Guizardi & Ypeij 2016].

I begin by briefly outlining some of the main points of Miller’s work on authenticity and legitimacy in capoeira. Next, I present my methodology. After outlining the context of capoeira in Mexico, I recount the process by which Rosita and Cigano came to be the first Mexican *mestres*, as well as some of the experiences they have had while bearing this title. In the process, I discuss similarities with and differences from Miller’s observations. Finally, I summarize my main findings and indicate possible avenues for future research.

1 Capoeira practitioners are given a nickname or ‘nom de guerre,’ by which they are known within the community. Cigano and Rosita have allowed me to use their actual capoeira names throughout this article.

AUTHENTICITY AND LEGITIMACY IN CAPOEIRA

Authenticity and legitimacy are prevalent issues in the capoeira community, as attested to by the frequent clashes between capoeira Angola and capoeira regional and the mutual suspicion that practitioners of both styles often express toward the so-called capoeira *contemporânea*. Likewise, there are recurring discussions about the criteria a person must meet to legitimately teach capoeira, for instance, when a professor or *contramestre* breaks away from their group to begin independent work [Delamont, Stephens & Campos 2017: 96-97].

The globalization of capoeira has fuelled discussions of legitimacy and authenticity. In a global market where a product’s (perceived) authenticity is highly valued [Joseph 2008b], aspects such as skin colour or nationality can directly influence the potential income of capoeira instructors [Stephens & Delamont 2006]. Within such an ‘economy of authenticity’, the rising number of competent non-Brazilian capoeira trainers poses questions about their work’s legitimacy. As a Mexican capoeira *contramestre*² formed in an independent group³ run by Mexican *mestres*, I am interested in understanding the processes by which non-Brazilian capoeiristas obtain markers of authenticity to legitimize their work.

For Miller [2016], authenticity and legitimacy are related. Both comprise value judgements of a practice, a person or a work of art according to normative ideals specific to a given social field. However, authenticity is especially relevant when judging from the margins of the social field, i.e., for people who do not have in-depth knowledge of the practice. For example, ‘novices abroad [will] evaluate a teacher’s authenticity based on whether he or she fits their stereotypical notion of a capoeirista’ [Miller 2016: 43]. Legitimacy, on the other hand, refers to the evaluation of ‘insiders [who] understand the rules of the game’ [Miller 2016: 43].

It follows that, as practitioners move deeper into the social field of capoeira, stereotypical markers of authenticity (e.g., being an Afro-Brazilian man) would lose relevance to scientific (e.g., lineage) and charismatic (e.g., dedication to the practice) criteria. However, one should not underestimate the potential of stereotypical markers to affect legitimacy, which is arguably negotiated in a field of tension between all three criteria. Table 1 summarizes Miller’s proposed markers of authenticity/legitimacy in the case of capoeira.

2 Literally: boatswain. Title given to the assistant of a *mestre* and second highest rank in the capoeira hierarchy.

3 I.e., a group not affiliated with Brazilian ‘franchises’ [Miller 2016] nor led by Brazilian *mestres* [see: Contreras Islas 2021].

Table 1: Markers of authenticity/legitimacy in the social field of capoeira, as proposed by Miller [2013; 2016].

Markers	Definition	Examples
Stereotypical	They encompass aspects of an 'ideal' capoeirista. They include mainly physical characteristics, which are obtained 'by birth'.	Race, gender, nationality, religion or socio-economic background. The stereotypical capoeirista is a black, heterosexual Brazilian man of low socio-economic background and a candomblé practitioner [Miller 2013].
Charismatic	Refers to 'an individual's non-marketable proclivities that facilitate popularity within a local scene' [Miller 2016: 124]. They include personality traits and 'virtues' that may be acquired.	Dedication to practice, volunteering, openness to exchange information, interest in history and culture, learning Portuguese, learning to play instruments, going on apprenticeship pilgrimages, etc.
Scientific	They refer to established institutions within the social field, which practitioners recognize independently of subjective judgements.	Belonging to a group, being a disciple of a recognized master (lineage) or having obtained a high rank, especially professor/treinel, contramestre or mestre.

Markers of authenticity operate as forms of cultural capital since having/acquiring them can change a person's positioning in the social field. Furthermore, according to Miller, receiving the title of mestre (either by the community or by a renowned mestre) would be the ultimate indicator of legitimacy in capoeira.

Cigano and Rosita were the first Mexican man and woman to become mestres in 2013 and 2017, respectively. Furthermore, they received the title from the renowned Mestre Acordeon despite lacking most of the stereotypical markers of authenticity⁴ and leading an independent capoeira group in Mexico City. Since 2013, Cigano and Rosita have formed two generations of Mexican contramestres – most of whom have never been to Brazil, nor trained regularly under the supervision of a Brazilian mestre. Based on Miller's theory, the latter argues for Cigano and Rosita's life stories being relevant to understanding the authenticity/legitimacy dynamics in the context of Mexican capoeira.

METHODOLOGY

In September 2020, I conducted in-depth interviews with Mestre Cigano and Mestra Rosita. In that context, I asked them to speak freely about the path leading them to become mestres and their experiences since then. The interviews were conducted and recorded on the Zoom platform due to the social distancing measures in place at that time. The recordings, with a total duration of two hours and twenty-one minutes, were analyzed with the qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti to identify issues related to the question of authenticity/legitimacy. While the categories in Table 1 served as an initial guide for this analysis, other categories were generated inductively from the data (e.g., references to innovation as a possible marker of legitimacy: see below).

⁴ Cigano is a white Mexican man in his late fifties, and Rosita is a light brown-skinned Mexican woman in her mid-forties. Both are university educated, both belong to the middle class, and neither is of African descent.

The analysed and thematically categorised interviews served as a base to write 'life stories' [Ferraton 2007]. The elaboration of life stories requires that the data expressed in the interviews be corroborated in additional documents like letters, diaries, photographs, audio, videos and even objects [Hernández Sampieri et al. 2014]. In this case, the documentary review was based primarily on audio podcasts of the online radio programs Divagar Radio [Chávez González et al. 2017-2018] and Vadiar Radio [Chávez González et al. 2018-present], as well as academic [Pérez 2013; González Varela 2019] and non-academic [Flores Ochoa 2000] bibliographical sources that have dealt with the history of capoeira in Mexico. Finally, I also drew on my experience as a Mexican capoeirista formed by Rosita and Cigano, approaching it from an autoethnographic perspective [Blanco 2012].

I reviewed the life stories and the final version of this article jointly with Rosita and Cigano. Both approved its content and consented to use their real capoeira names. This paper's results and discussion maintain these life stories' narrative and critical spirit. Before presenting the results, however, it is worth briefly characterizing the context of capoeira in Mexico to situate my study.

THE CONTEXT OF CAPOEIRA IN MEXICO

At first glance, capoeira in Mexico is not so different from what other scholars have observed in the United Kingdom [Delamont, Stephens & Campos 2017], Canada [Joseph 2008a] or even Brazil [Lewis 1995; Downey 2005; 2008]. A capoeira lesson, for example, follows a 'familiar' structure that includes an aerobic warm-up, followed by the practice of isolated movements that are gradually assembled into more complex

sequences and finally performed in pairs. The exercises are performed to recorded capoeira music, and teachers will use minimal verbal explanations. The same applies to the structure and dynamics of the capoeira *rodas*,⁵ which follow the spatial and temporal patterns observed by Lewis in Brazil [1992: 87, 115], with minimal variations. Additionally, just as in Europe and the USA, capoeira in Mexico is practiced mainly as a middle-class 'hobby'.⁶

However, there are some particularities of the Mexican capoeira-scene that differentiate it from the scene in Brazil and in the regions of the Global North. A list of these particularities would include:

- a) A 'lack' of Brazilian mestres
- b) The existence of strong 'independent' local groups
- c) Intense cultural hybridization
- d) A tendency to organise capoeira events with Mexican guests

In the following I will briefly elaborate on each of these points.

a) The lack of Brazilian mestres

From the beginning, the people who brought capoeira to Mexico were not Brazilians, but Mexicans, Argentines and Japanese [Contreras Islas 2021]. The first documented capoeira workshop in Mexico was held by Argentinian Mariano Andrade (now Contramestre Manhoso) in Mexico City 1992 [Flores Ochoa 2000: 15]. In 1995, Mexican Víctor Montes (now Contramestre Tequila) opened the first 'franchise' of the group *Terreiro do Brasil* in Guadalajara. Finally, in 1998, Japanese Instructor Japão began teaching in Xalapa under the group *Cativeiro*. In fact, before 2000, no Brazilian mestre had permanent residence in the country and today they remain a minority compared to native teachers – which contrasts with the situation in Europe and the United States, for example. There are diverse possible explanations for this 'lack' [see: Contreras Islas 2021]. For example, it has been mentioned that the Mexican market might be less attractive to Brazilian capoeiristas than the economies of the Global North. Consequently, most mestres would use Mexico only as a stopover on their way to the United States [see González Varela 2019: 118-119]. In this sense, the situation of Brazilian capoeiristas would be similar to that of Mexican workers migrating

5 The ritual circle in which capoeira is played.

6 This situation is similar to Europe and the United States but contrasts with Brazil, where capoeira has historically been associated with the working classes [Köhler 2015]. While it is true that more and more middle-class Brazilians have taken up capoeira as a hobby in recent decades, there is still a certain stigma attached to its association with the lower social classes. However, not being dominated by Brazilian instructors, the Mexican market has made it easier for some local capoeiristas to adopt the practice as a profession – as is often the case in Brazil. For some Mexican capoeiristas, capoeira has been seen as a professional practice that complements or replaces the educational or professional careers of its practitioners.

to the North in search of better opportunities. To a certain extent, it would account for a coloniality of the imaginary linked to the North-South divide, according to which the North is associated with ideas like 'future' and 'development' [see: Contreras Islas 2021: 64-65]. Regardless of its possible causes, this 'lack' might have contributed to:

b) The existence of strong 'independent' local groups

'Independent' groups are local (i.e., Mexican) groups which are not affiliated to Brazilian 'franchises' [Miller 2016] nor led by a Brazilian teachers. This does not mean that 'independent' groups have cut all relation to Brazil or to Brazilian teachers. On the contrary: most 'independent' groups regularly invite Brazilian teachers, and some of them have close bonds to one or more renowned mestres residing outside of Mexico. However, they do not become 'subsidiaries' of the Brazilian groups: they make their own decisions and carry out most of their work autonomously. The first independent group in Mexico was *Banda do Saci*, founded by Mariano Andrade in 1996. After *Banda do Saci* became an Angola group in 1998, some members broke away to form *Longe do Mar* – the first Mexican contemporânea group, today led by Mestre Cigano and Mestre Rosita. The autonomy of the 'independent' groups and the 'lack' of Brazilian mestres, in turn, might have accelerated the process of:

c) Cultural hybridization

Capoeira in Mexico shows more advanced processes of cultural hybridization than those reported in regions of the Global North [Joseph 2008b, Lipiäinen 2015]. This hybridisation ranges from the inclusion of *temazcal* ceremonies⁷ at capoeira events [González Varela 2019], to the composition of capoeira songs alluding to the Day of the Dead [Contreras Islas 2021]. A striking and eye-catching example of this hybridisation can be seen in the design of the *Longe do Mar* website banners, which freely combine Mexican folk art motifs with capoeira themes [Figure 1].

Finally, in recent years, the capoeira scene in Mexico has shown a tendency to organize:

7 A *temazcal* (from Nahuatl *temazcalli*, 'house where one sweats,' from *temaz*, 'sweat,' and *calli*, 'house') refers to a pre-Columbian ritual and, at the same time, a steam bath of medicinal and aromatic herbs used in the traditional medicine and daily life of the people of central Mexico.



Figure 1: Banner with Mexican folk art motifs, taken from the website of the capoeira group Longe do Mar [<https://capoeira.org.mx/>] on 10 July 2022.

d) Capoeira events with local guests

For Joseph [2008a], capoeira events can be seen as immersive experiences of an imaginary Brazil, re-created by local capoeiristas. Similarly, Miller [2016] has noted that assisting with local capoeira events is a relevant form of domestic apprenticeship pilgrimage for practitioners who cannot afford the costs of a trip to Brazil – as is the case for most Mexican capoeiristas. Furthermore, due to the ‘lack’ of Brazilian teachers, local capoeira events are the only chance for Mexican capoeiristas to train with Brazilian teachers. However, in the last decade, the Mexican capoeira scene has seen a growing tendency to organize events where the prominent guests are local capoeira teachers. Figure 2, for instance, shows the poster of one event organized by the Longe do Mar community in Tijuana, where the guest is a Mexican capoeira professor who leads the ‘franchise’ of a Brazilian group in Mexico City. The increase in such events may be due to several reasons. First, there is the growing number of Mexican capoeiristas who have become profes-

sores, contramestres and mestres in recent years [Contreras Islas 2021]. A second reason is economic, since the costs of hosting events with Mexican guests are lower, as there is no need to pay for international flights or guests who charge in dollars. Finally, the difficulty of planning international travel due to the coronavirus may also have accentuated this trend. For example, the uncertainty generated by the pandemic has been the main reason for Longe do Mar’s annual *Encuentro Nacional de Capoeira* (National Capoeira Encounter) to have only local guests at its 2021 and 2022 events.

Based on the four particularities, one can hypothesise that ‘traditional’ markers [Miller 2013] might play a lesser role in Mexican capoeiristas’ judgments about the authenticity of their instructors – at least in comparison to the European or North American context [see, e.g., Campos

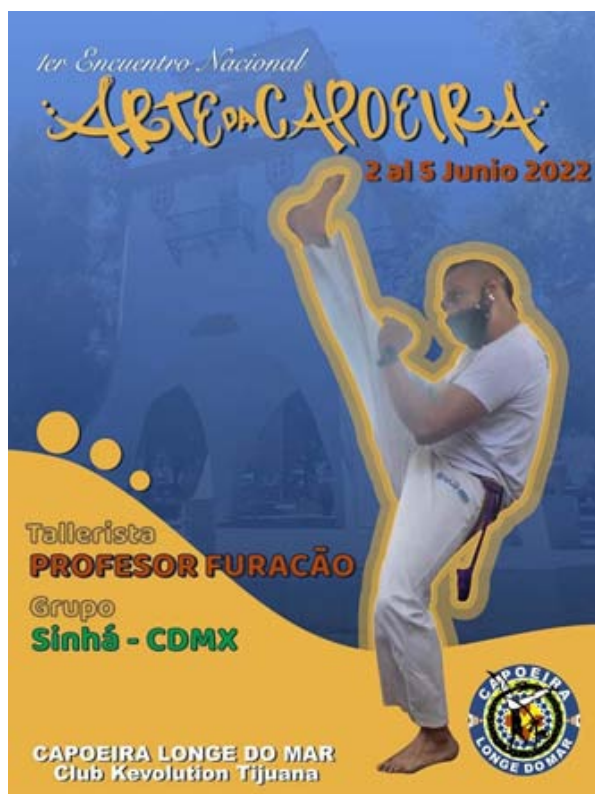


Figure 2. Promotional poster for the First National capoeira Meeting organised in Tijuana by the Longe do Mar community. Mexican Professor Furacão, head of the Grupo Sinhá headquarters in Mexico, is featured as a guest. Source: Longe do Mar social networks.

et al. 2010). Consequently, the weight of ‘scientific’ and ‘charismatic’ criteria would be more significant. Among other factors [e.g., González Varela 2019: 119], this may have incentivized the professionalization of Mexican capoeiristas and the proliferation of independent groups such as Longe do Mar [Contreras Islas 2021]. To evaluate this hypothesis, we will begin by analysing the life stories of Rosita and Cigano becoming the first Mexican mestres.

BECOMING A MEXICAN MESTRE

Cigano and Rosita were pioneers in learning and teaching capoeira in Mexico City. When they began training in 1992 and 1995, respectively, neither had any clear reference point for capoeira, which they came to by chance while studying dance. For example, Cigano, recounting his arrival at Mariano Andrade’s workshop, recalls: ‘I had never seen capoeira before. The flyer showed something that had nothing to do with capoeira: it was an illustration of African dance. So, I signed up blind’ [Cigano, personal communication, Sept. 29, 2020].

However, the fascination he felt at that first encounter was enough to

make him the leading promoter of his teacher’s work. Cigano devoted himself to looking for places where Mariano could impart lessons or workshops. Likewise, he actively promoted his master’s courses among his social circle: ‘I hardly ever had a close friend who hadn’t gone to try a capoeira class’ [Cigano, personal communication, Sept. 29, 2020].

Rosita was introduced to capoeira by Cigano while working together in a dance troupe. However, she recounts that it took her a year to accept the invitation, mainly because ‘back then it wasn’t easy to access information about capoeira. There was no such thing as the Internet, like there is now, where you can Google it. And the word sounded like anything, like an exotic dish’ [Rosita, personal communication, Sept. 22, 2020].

Cigano’s and Rosita’s lack of reference points for capoeira may have prevented them from evaluating the work of their master (who was neither black nor Brazilian) based on stereotypical criteria. In retrospect, however, the mestres make certain judgments about the ‘authenticity’ of the capoeira they practised back then. For instance, Cigano recalls his first roda saying that ‘it became a very strange thing that must have had nothing to do with capoeira’ [Cigano, personal communication, Sept. 29, 2020].

That first experience with ‘inauthentic’ capoeira did not discourage Cigano. Far from it, it motivated him to accompany his master to the First International Capoeira Encounter organized by Mestre Acordeon in San Francisco, California. During this apprenticeship pilgrimage, he became friends with Mestre Ombrinho and Mestre Cabello. He states that talking with experienced capoeiristas enriched his experiences at Acordeon’s event. Furthermore, their friendship opened doors for him to continue navigating the social field of capoeira. For example, Cabello introduced him to Mestre João Grande, who Cigano then visited in New York. The latter is a clear example of the cycle of legitimacy acquisition described by Miller [2016: 44] being fulfilled.

Cigano’s and Rosita’s dance training may have helped them acquire charismatic forms of movement, increasing their visibility within the social field of practice. Simultaneously, learning capoeira movements and techniques helped them stand out in the dance scene. Thus, a positive feedback loop emerged in which the practice of capoeira is presented as ‘something worth continuing to do’ [Cigano, personal communication, Sept. 29, 2020].

Despite this, neither of them had the goal of becoming capoeira mestres. On the contrary, as Rosita says, such a goal was ‘totally out of their imaginations’ [Rosita, personal communication, 22 September 2020]. If anything, their goal was to build a community:

My dream was to have a capoeira community where I could do capoeira and share what I liked and how I wanted to do capoeira. I always worked for a community. I never worked for myself to work my way up through the ranks or anything like that. [Rosita, personal communication, 22 September 2020]

Ironically, this focus on having a community to practice with, may have

helped Rosita and Cigano to become mestres:

I felt that it was more of a recognition for my capoeira community than for me. I felt that making me a *mestra* was an endorsement of all the community's work; that it was more of a recognition for the community than for me personally. [Rosita, personal communication, September 22, 2020]

Miller [2016] has identified this orientation toward community rather than personal growth as another of the charismatic markers that help foreign capoeiristas gain legitimacy in capoeira Angola. The life stories of Rosita and Cigano suggest that this might hold for capoeira contemporânea as well.

In Cigano's case, this intention to validate the community is even more evident, as Mestre Acordeon explicitly stated his intentions to make him a mestre to prevent a possible affiliation of Longe do Mar with an international capoeira 'franchise':

Mestre Acordeon, who has been visiting us for several years, tells me: 'They're telling you all these things because they're going to want you to affiliate, [but] I think you should stick with your project ... Because they're going to impose their ideas on you, and I'm going to see you doing the same capoeira that I see everywhere, which is not worth it. I'd rather give you a degree in capoeira that gives Longe do Mar legitimacy'. [Cigano, personal communication, 29 September 2020]

By making Cigano a mestre, Mestre Acordeon wanted to protect and legitimize the innovations of Longe do Mar, which has a long history of generating original plastic, scenic and musical work inspired by capoeira [Contreras Islas 2021]. However, Cigano reflects how making him a mestre was also a way to put a limit on those innovations:

In a way, [Mestre Acordeon] has recognized our adventures and has always been very optimistic and has encouraged us to do *maculelé* and *puxadas de rede* that have nothing to do with the folkloric choreographies of Bahia. But, on the other hand, he insists on our role as preservers. So, my role is not just as a contemporary artist but as a museum curator. [Cigano, personal communication, 29 September 2020]

This tension between innovation and tradition is characteristic of capoeira; however, it works differently in each style. For example, while practitioners of capoeira Angola tend to be more traditionalist, De Brito [2016] points out the tendency of practitioners of the regional style to receive innovation with enthusiasm.⁸ One might even add that in this case, this seems to be part of the criteria that drives Mestre Acordeon to legitimize the work of the Mexican mestres. No similar situations were reported in Miller's work, perhaps because her research focused on capoeira Angola. The capoeira practiced at Longe do Mar, however, does not strictly belong to either of these two styles but is part of what Assunção [2005] calls capoeira contemporânea, an eclectic style developed mainly in the cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro beginning in the 1970s. Mestre Acordeon could be considered one of the most important representatives of this style, even though he was a student of Mestre Bimba (creator of the regional style). So one might wonder whether innovation could be a charismatic marker of authenticity specific to the fields of capoeira regional and contemporânea.

To this extent, the stories of Rosita and Cigano broadly corroborate Miller's thesis about the process of acquisition of legitimacy by people who lack stereotypical markers of authenticity. The strategy of the first Mexican mestres was based on the incorporation of charismatic cultural capital that gradually crystallized into scientific markers of authenticity. The proximity to Brazilian mestres such as Cabello, Ombrinho and Acordeon has played a fundamental role. Another critical factor has been the constant openness to exchange with the international capoeira community by organizing and participating in events. However, it might be relevant to point out that this exchange has taken place mainly (though not exclusively) with mestres based in the United States – thus making apprenticeship pilgrimages to Brazil secondary.

In this regard, Cigano comments: 'one can either go to Mestre Acordeon's academy, for example, in Berkeley, or to Mestre João Grande's academy in New York, or to Israel to train with Edan, who also seems to have an incredible experience. So, there is no single pole' [Cigano, personal communication, 29 September 2020]. Cigano's is an interesting observation. It speaks to a possible change in Brazil's status as the quintessential destination for apprenticeship pilgrimages as globalization of capoeira advances. This change would generate new destinations or 'poles' for local or regional pilgrimages, as described by Miller and

8 Historically, this tension originated in the first half of the 20th century, framed by Getúlio Vargas' nationalist project. In this context, Manoel dos Reis Machado, better known as Mestre Bimba, introduced a series of reforms to the capoeira of his day to make its teaching more accessible and to professionalize the mestre's craft. These reforms contributed to Vargas' recognition of capoeira as a national sport and its legalization in the 1950s. However, some intellectuals and capoeiristas of the time accused Bimba's project of 'whitewashing' capoeira. Accordingly, they set about rescuing and codifying the style previous to Bimba, which they called capoeira Angola. In that context, 'Capoeira Angola remained 'traditional' capoeira by way of a claim to African cultural heritage, while capoeira Regional was linked to the notion of 'modernity' [De Brito 2016: 98]. Within this dichotomy, however, there are nuances. Particularly since the birth of capoeira contemporânea, one can speak of traditionalist tendencies in capoeira Regional, for instance, in groups that actively seek to maintain the style taught by Mestre Bimba (e.g., Filhos de Bimba). Likewise, capoeira Angola has varying degrees of openness to innovation, as noted by González Varela [2019].

Marion [2018]. In this sense, it is remarkable that Cigano and Rosita preferred to send their first generation of *contramestres* to train in Berkeley with Mestre Acordeon rather than on an apprenticeship pilgrimage to Brazil. However:

After that *formatura*,⁹ [mestre Acordeon] told me that he wanted the next *contramestres* to be trained in Mexico because he did not want to give the impression that he had to train our people. Instead, he wanted Longe do Mar to train its own people. [Cigano, personal communication, 29 September 2020]

This gesture on the part of Mestre Acordeon once again attests to the legitimacy he accords to the work done by these Mexican *mestres*, and the impact that the training of non-Brazilian *mestres* can have on the global dynamics of mobility in the capoeira field.

Another important factor that does not figure in Miller's considerations is the value of 'independence' and 'innovation' as possible markers of authenticity. According to our interviewees, Mestre Acordeon granted Rosita and Cigano the degree to legitimize their community's work and to prevent it from being taken over by international groups. The latter is interesting, for it is poetically reminiscent of capoeira's origins as a resistance struggle, in this case, the resistance of hybrid cultural forms to the pressure to affiliate with Brazilian 'franchises'. The title of *mestre* becomes a resource to maintain this 'independence', reproducing the tension between tradition and innovation that characterizes the dynamics of capoeira.

BEING A MEXICAN MESTRE

One might ask how a foreign capoeirista's experience changes once they have earned the 'ultimate marker of authenticity'. In this regard, Cigano points out:

At least in San Francisco, if I gesture that I'm going to take an instrument, they give it to me. Immediately. [...] In the games, unless the others are *mestres*, I put my hand on the one in front of me, and I'm in. [Cigano, personal communication, 29 September 2020]

From such experiences, Cigano concludes that 'the legitimacy in the eyes of the tribe is totally real' [Cigano, personal communication, 29 September 2020]. When asked about the basis for such legitimacy, he commented:

I think it may have to do with the degree of respect in the community for the teacher who trained me. Perhaps to disrespect someone nominated *mestre* by Mestre Acordeon is to disrespect Mestre Acordeon. [personal communication, 29 September 2020]

⁹ A public ceremony where one or more capoeiristas obtain the title of *contramestre* or *mestre*.

Cigano's narrative coincides, thus, with Miller's observations. However, Rosita's experience is different. On the one hand, she acknowledges that she was invited to 'events where she had never been invited'. But on the other hand, she perceives that she has to 'struggle a little bit' to validate her position as a capoeirista. For example, she pointed out that it is not so easy for her to get a place in the *bateria* (the musical ensemble) or the main voice to sing in the *roda*. She adds that this experience is persistent 'at events that are not in her community', and being a *mestra* has not improved it.

When asked to describe further the experience of 'struggling a little bit', Rosita noted: 'sometimes it's very tiring, because sometimes I'm already exhausted... But I have to go play because no other woman is playing, or I have to sing because no other woman is singing' [Rosita, personal communication, 22 September 2020]. Note how the interviewee emphasized being a woman as a determining factor in the structure of this exhausting experience of struggle. Further on, Rosita emphasizes that this experience of 'struggling' has been a trait in her path as a female capoeirista, especially at events where most of the invited *mestres* and *contramestres* are Brazilian men. In other words: Rosita feels like she has to play because no other women are playing, like she has an obligation to represent her gender within the male dominated field of capoeira. Rosita accepts that, to some extent, this 'struggle' is part of a self-imposed attitude, which she has consciously adopted since she began practicing capoeira.¹⁰ Therefore, it was part of her experience with the practice long before she became a *mestra*. However, after receiving the title, she feels it 'a little bit stronger, like a responsibility' [Rosita, personal communication, 22 September 2020].

This gender-differentiated treatment may reflect the patriarchal structure that still pervades capoeira. Other authors [Joseph, 2012; Guizardi & Ypeji 2016; Owen & Ugolotti 2019] have documented the difficulties of women gaining recognition within the social field of capoeira. According to Miller [2016], this could relate to the stereotypical image of the capoeirista being a heterosexual man [see also Stephens & Delamont 2014]. However, Rosita's case questions the status of a *mestre's* title as the 'ultimate marker of authenticity'. At least in her case, gender seems to outweigh it. In any case, the title of *mestra* has resignified Rosita's experience of struggle as a responsibility to other women capoeiristas.

FINAL REMARKS

The life stories of the first Mexican *mestres* largely corroborate Miller's observations regarding the strategies non-Brazilian capoeiristas use to achieve legitimacy. When stereotypical markers are absent, this process operates as a positive feedback loop between acquiring charismatic and scientific markers of authenticity.

The comparison between Rosita and Cigano also confirms that acquiring legitimacy is more difficult for those who are farther away from the stereotype of the 'authentic' capoeirista. In Rosita's case, this situation

¹⁰ The interview does not clearly state her motivation for adopting such an attitude, but it could be interpreted as a quest for fairness or justice. She mentions, for example, how tiring it is to 'fight' for a position 'that anyone [in the community] should have an equal chance of attaining' [Rosita, personal communication, 22 September 2020].

is reflected in a constant struggle to position herself as a legitimate mestra. Furthermore, her struggle is compounded by a feeling that she is fighting for other female capoeiristas in the capoeira community. Therefore, one could ask whether Rosita's struggle could be relevant for other non-stereotypical capoeiristas, regardless of gender. For example, do gender-diverse Brazilian and foreign capoeiristas with high scientific markers of legitimacy experience a struggle and a sense of responsibility similar to Rosita? How do these experiences change across the North-South divide? And what could their experiences tell us about authenticity and legitimacy in the capoeira field?

A remarkable difference from Miller's observations would be the role of the independent work of a capoeira community in achieving legitimacy. According to Cigano, one of Mestre Acordeon's motivations for making him a mestre was that he did not want to 'get to see a capoeira that you see everywhere else' [Cigano, personal communication, Sept. 29, 2020]. The latter is fascinating considering the tension between tradition and innovation that has marked discussions around authenticity within the practice [De Brito 2016] and invites further examination of innovation as a possible charismatic marker of authenticity among regional and/or contemporânea groups. In this sense, one might ask, for example, whether this appreciation of innovation is common in other mestres of the styles mentioned or is more a personal tendency of Mestre Acordeon.

Another interesting difference from Miller's [2016] results derives from Cigano's observation of a globalized field where Brazil is no longer the 'only pole' for apprenticeship pilgrimages. Accordingly, one might imagine the emergence of new practice centres that appeal to capoeira enthusiasts outside Brazil. In Cigano's estimation, such centres already exist. While I doubt that the new 'centres' will never replace Brazil (particularly Bahia) as capoeira's equivalent to 'Mecca', they might change the dynamics of mobility and tourism in the capoeira field. With this in mind, it might be interesting to develop a typology of the different 'centres' or 'poles'.

Following Miller and Marion [2018], the emergence of these new 'poles' could be related to different types of apprenticeship pilgrimages. Based on a vast corpus of ethnographic data on various body practices, they develop a typology including local, regional, major, opportunistic, and even virtual pilgrimages. Furthermore, they provide at least three general reasons why practitioners undertake such pilgrimages:

1. To access a higher level of education than is available locally
2. To understand the culture in which their practice originated and to test their skills with local practitioners in the practice's homeland
3. To increase their cultural capital or acquire markers of legitimacy (e.g., certificates)

Finally, the authors point out that 'the exact role and configuration of apprenticeship pilgrimage will be different in each social field' [Miller

& Marion 2018: 150]. Miller and Marion's analysis, however, does not explain how specific new 'poles' arise, why some rise to prominence, or how these processes affect the overall community of practice [cf. Miller & Marion 2018: 154].

How does a specific destination (whether local, regional, or virtual) become 'attractive' to capoeiristas? Here are some conjectures based on my exploration of the situation of capoeira in Mexico and the particular experiences of Rosita and Cigano. For example, some 'poles' could become 'attractive' due to a legendary mestre settling down there (e.g., Mestre João Grande's academy in New York). Such 'legendary poles' would be attractive to most capoeiristas, regardless of style and group affiliation, and become 'poles' for major pilgrimages. (In fact, the academy of Mestre João Grande is an attractive destination for American or Mexican practitioners, many Europeans, and even Brazilians themselves). In contrast, other destinations might appeal specifically to practitioners of certain styles (e.g., Mestre Acordeon's academy in Berkeley for regional and contemporânea practitioners) or members of certain groups (Mestre Chuviquinho's academy in Boston for Sinhá members). Other 'poles' would attract people interested in acquiring 'certifications', like Mestre Edan's professionalization courses in Israel and Europe.¹¹ Given that such certification and professionalization practices are not widespread in Brazil, they are attractive to capoeira teachers in those regions but also 'major' or 'opportunistic' pilgrims in the sense of Miller and Marion [2018]. Studying how these different poles emerge, consolidate, and diversify could be a subject for future research.

Finally, I would like to point out that Mexico has entire generations of professores and contramestres, who have never been to Brazil, and were trained exclusively by non-Brazilian mestres. As far as I am aware, there is no literature in the field capoeira studies that reports a similar case – though they might probably exist, for instance, in Israel. I believe that analysing the life stories of these generations of capoeira practitioners could open up new perspectives on how the dynamics of authenticity and legitimacy evolve. It may also shed light on aspects of capoeira's globalization process that have been little explored.

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¹¹ Mestre Edan, of Israeli origin, is known in the capoeira contemporânea scene for offering annual practical courses for masters in Europe and Israel. A promotional video of these courses is available on YouTube at the following link: <https://youtu.be/QmJpwrCAGbw>

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